TROUBADOURS,
TROUVÈRES
AND JONGLEURS

The vast majority of music in the beginning of the Middle Ages was written and performed for the religious services of the Roman Catholic church. Toward the end of the Middle Ages, however, a substantial amount of secular music, or music that could be sung outside of the church, appeared. This music was performed by groups of musicians known as troubadours, trouvères, and jongleurs.

The troubadours and trouvères were active in France, the troubadours to the south and the trouvères to the north. They were medieval poet musicians that catered to the upper class, or the nobility. These musicians presented original and new material that was vastly different from the music sung in the churches of the day, and their names, troubadour and trouvère even meant "finder" or "inventor." Poems of the troubadours and trouvères ranged from simple ballad love songs to political and moral tunes, from war songs to laments to dance songs.

Jongleurs were a class of musicians who wandered from town to town and were very versatile entertainers. Many played instruments, sang and danced, juggled, showed tricks and animal acts, and performed plays. To the common folk of the Middle Ages, the jongleurs functioned as a sort of traveling newspaper, passing on gossip and news to each new town. The jongleurs, however, were viewed as vagabonds and lived on the fringe of society.

To medieval court life, secular music was very important. It provided entertainment before, during, and after dinner – and also accompanied dancing. It was also important to the ceremonies that welcomed visiting dignitaries and helped strengthen the spirits of warriors departing on the Crusades.