MEDIEVAL MINSTRELS AND FOLK BALLADEERS: AN ANALYSIS OF “ORFEO” IN CELTIC MUSIC AND LITERATURE

A thesis submitted to the
Kent State University Honors College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for University Honors

by
Rosemary Heredos

May, 2016
TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES ........................................................................................................... iv

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ...................................................................................................... v

CHAPTER

I. LITERARY AND ORAL SOURCES: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE ENGLISH ORFEO ................................................................. 1

II. SIR ORFEO: THE LEGEND AND THE LAI .................................................. 4

III. ORAL TRANSMISSION: MEMORIAL IMPLICATIONS OF SIR ORFEO AND THE MIDDLE ENGLISH ROMANCES .................. 11

IV. GODE IS ÞE LAY, SWETE IS ÞE NOTE: SIR ORFEO IN MUSIC AND PERFORMANCE ............................................................... 15

V. KING ORFEO: HISTORY AND ANALYSIS OF THE BALLAD ........... 22

VI. KING ORFEO: THE TUNES ........................................................................... 27

VII. KING ORFEO: THE TEXT ............................................................................ 30

VIII. KING ORFEO: THE PROCESS OF PERFORMANCE ............................. 34

IX. ICHIL 3OU TELLE OF SIR ORFEWE: EXPERIENCES OF A MODERN MINSTREL ........................................................................... 38

X. CONCLUSION ...................................................................................................... 41

BIBLIOGRAPHY ............................................................................................................ 43
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Chanson de Trouvère: Thirteenth Century Melody.......................... 17

Figure 2. King Orfeo (Child 19): Melody I from John Stickle, Baltasound, Unst........ 27

Figure 3. King Orfeo (Child 19): Melody II from Kitty Anderson, Shetland............. 28
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When I enrolled in a Medieval Literature course at Kent State in Spring 2015, I had no idea I would read *Sir Orfeo*, the fourteenth-century Breton lai that would become the focus of my literary and musical studies for the following year. I was instantly struck by the lovely sound of the Middle English poetry and the beautiful expression of emotions that still resonate today. When I realized that this genre would have been sung by minstrels in the Middle Ages, I resolved to make a reconstruction and performance of *Sir Orfeo* the focus of my Honors Thesis. My lifelong love for and performance of folk music had introduced me to the Scottish ballad “King Orfeo,” and the project quickly grew to include a comparison between the medieval lai and the ballad. This project has truly been life-changing, and I am grateful to the KSU Honors College for providing the opportunity and support for such a rewarding research and performance experience.

I have many other people to thank for their help with this project. Professor Susan Sainato taught the Medieval Literature class which first introduced me to *Sir Orfeo*, and I will remain forever grateful for her engaging and enlightening lectures. I owe many thanks to my current vocal instructor, Professor Jay White, who has taught me so much about the art of singing early music and conveying a story through music. To my family, especially my parents, James and Patricia Heredos, and my grandmother and grandfather, Hugh and Peggy Mullen—thank you for your constant love and support of my dreams. Thank you to Dr. and Mrs. Sanford Marovitz, who chose me as the recipient
of the Sanford E. and Eleonora Dimitsa Marovitz Honors Scholarship, and whose generosity made this Thesis project financially possible. And finally, I wish to express my gratitude to my oral defense committee: Professor Timothy Culver, Professor Don-John Dugas, Professor Susanna Fein, and my Thesis advisor, Professor Ted Albrecht, whose knowledge, wisdom, and guidance in classes, as well as in this project, have proven invaluable time and time again; I consider myself extremely lucky to have studied at KSU under such outstanding figures in your respective fields.
CHAPTER I
LITERARY AND ORAL SOURCES: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE ENGLISH ORFEO

The Breton lai *Sir Orfeo*, a Middle English romance preserved in the Auchinleck Manuscript (National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates 19.2.1), was produced in London in the 1330s, and is likely based on an earlier, lost, Old French work, the *Lai d’Orfey*. The genre of the Breton lai, which originated in France, became popular in England by the fourteenth century. *Sir Orfeo* is, therefore, a Celtic interpretation of the Orpheus myth, in which the King of the Fairies replaces the role of Hades in the abduction of Orfeo’s wife. Like the French lais of the twelfth-century poet Marie de France, which preserve the metrical and folkloric traditions of minstrel music, the rhythmic quality of the Auchinleck *Sir Orfeo* suggests musical influence. The poetic telling of this legend may be analyzed as both literary and oral in tradition, and the three different versions of the lai found in the Auchinleck MS (early fourteenth century), the British Library MS Harley 3810 (early fifteenth century), and MS Ashmole 61 found in

---


2Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury, “Sir Orfeo: Introduction,” *The Middle English Breton Lays* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), 15. The editors note that “references to a musical lay of Orpheus can be found in several Old French texts: the twelfth-century romance, *Floire et Blanceflor* refers to ‘le lai d’Orphey’ (line 855); the *Lai de l’Espine* mentions ‘Le lai lor sone d’Orphei’ (line 181); and the Vulgate *Prose Lancelot* indicates the existence of a ‘lay d’orfay.’”
the Oxford Bodleian Library (late fifteenth century) are the result of a mixture of memorial evolution through minstrel performances and the scholarship of scribes, or perhaps even literate minstrels. Ties to this medieval story can be found in the two sixteenth-century fragments of a Scottish poem called “King Orphius” and later in a folk-ballad, “King Orfeo,” the text of which was catalogued by American scholar Francis James Child (1825–1896) in his English and Scottish Popular Ballads, published between 1882 and 1898. This ballad remains alive through the performances of many folk singers in Scotland and the Shetland Islands, and exemplifies the power of oral tradition, which remains an integral component in the culture of the folk music and storytelling of the British Isles.

By examining both the similarities and differences between these medieval manuscripts and later Scottish and Shetland sources, scholars and performers are able to trace an oral tradition that occasionally manifests itself in the written word. The folk singers of Europe, and particularly of the British Isles, continue to display these strong oral traditions that often have medieval ties. Through close examination of the texts and extant musical sources that are contemporaneous to each era, it is possible to reconstruct a historically informed performance of a medieval romance that could plausibly find audiences at classical concert halls and at folk or medieval festivals alike.

The performance portion of this project includes a lecture recital in which I will sing the first two hundred lines of the Sir Orfeo lai in Middle English (based on the Auchinleck Manuscript text), the melody of which was derived from an anonymous thirteenth-century trouvére tune (see Ch. IV). I will also accompany myself on harp with
various improvised chord progressions to enhance the storytelling aspect of the performance. The second half of the lecture recital will include a performance of the Child ballad “King Orfeo,” which I will sing, with interludes on Irish penny whistle (see Ch. VIII). By recording the process by which I reconstructed the *Sir Orfeo* lai and arranged the Child ballad, I hope to enable other musicians interested in medieval and folk music to perform these—and other lais and ballads—throughout their careers.
CHAPTER II
SIR ORFEO: THE LEGEND AND THE LAI

The story of Orpheus and Eurydice is ubiquitous in literature, music, and art, following a familiar basic plot: Orpheus, who with his lyre has the ability to charm all beings through his playing, must journey to the Underworld to reclaim his wife, the nymph Eurydice; with his music, Orpheus is able to soften the heart of Persephone, who convinces Hades to allow Orpheus to lead Eurydice back to earth on the condition that he not turn and look upon her until they both reach the upper world. In most ancient sources of the story, such as the works of Roman writers including Virgil (70 B.C.–19 B.C.) and Ovid (ca. 43 B.C.–ca. 17 A.D.), Orpheus turns back at the last minute, tragically losing his wife for the second and final time. In the early Middle Ages, the tale of Orpheus served several allegorical purposes. Boethius (ca. 480–ca. 524) interprets Orpheus as a human soul striving to rise out of darkness. But when Orpheus loses his resolve and looks back at Eurydice, Boethius compares his mistake to the human temptation to sin.\(^1\) In *Metamorphosis Ovidiana* (ca. 1330)—a source roughly contemporaneous with the Auchinleck Manuscript—French writer Pierre Bersuire (ca. 1290–1362) compares Eurydice’s death by the serpent’s bite to Eve’s fall, and characterizes Orpheus as Christ,

---

the shepherd leading a lost soul out of hell.\textsuperscript{2} By the eleventh century, Latin accounts of the tale depict Orpheus successfully saving Eurydice. Also at this time, various chivalric romances portray Orpheus as a minstrel-knight and Eurydice as his lady-love, a couple that exemplifies idyllic courtly lovers. Such stories were likely “passed down by the Celtic-speaking inhabitants of Brittany in the form of musical compositions evidently accompanied by oral narratives.”\textsuperscript{3} These newer traditions led to the birth of the \textit{Sir Orfeo} in the form of a Breton lai.

The Auchinleck Manuscript text of \textit{Sir Orfeo} reimagines the Orpheus myth as a Celtic folktale, in which “Orfeo was a king/In Inglond…. His fader was comen of King Pluto. And his moder of King Juno.”\textsuperscript{4} Orfeo, like the Greek and Roman hero, is a musician: the world’s finest harper. His wife, Dame Heurodis, is stolen by the Fairy King, who takes her to his kingdom in the Other World, and Orfeo must rescue her by winning the favor of the Fairy King with his harping. Significantly, unlike the earlier Greek and Roman mythologies, this Celtic version depicts Orfeo as ultimately victorious. Due to his virtuous character and virtuosic harping, he is able to reclaim both his wife and his kingdom, and the tale happily finishes as it comes full circle:

\begin{quote}
Now King Orfeo newe coround is,\hspace{1cm} Now was Orfeo crowned anew,  
And his quen Dame Heurodis,\hspace{1cm} And Heurodis, his lady too;  
And lived long afterward,\hspace{1cm} And long they lived, till they were dead,  
And seþþen was king þe steward.\hspace{1cm} And king was the steward in their stead.
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{3}J. A. Burrow and Thorlac Turville-Petre, \textit{A Book of Middle English} (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 112.

\textsuperscript{4}Ibid., 115.
Harpours in Bretaine after þan Harpers in Britain in aftertime
Herd hou þis mervaile bigan These marvels heard, and in their rhyme
And made herof a lay of gode likeing A lay they made of fair delight,
And nempned it after þe king; And after the king I named aright,
Þat lay ‘Orfeo’ is yhote; ‘Orfeo’ called it, as was meet:
Gode is þe lay, swete is þe note. Good is the lay, the music sweet.  

(Sir Orfeo, lines 593–602)

This rounding effect is typical of a Breton lai, and perhaps stems from the oral history of the stories. A bard would remind his listeners where the tale began by circling back to material from the beginning at the conclusion, comparing the return of the king with the return of the musical, mirthful days of yore. Indeed, Sir Orfeo is notable for its intense focus on the art of a minstrel, which creates a meta-performance, with both the narrator (the minstrel who sang the lai) and the hero, Orfeo, being harpers and singers of high degree who would have performed the very types of lais we find in the Auchinleck and other manuscripts. In fact, Sir Orfeo opens with a useful list of the types of lais one might hear, which may aid the modern musicologist and performer in reconstructing this genre of performance:

We rede þoft and finde þywrite, We often read and written find,
And þis clerkes wele it wite, as learned men do us remind,
Layes þat ben in harping that lays that now the harpers sing
Ben yfounde of ferli þing are wrought of many a marvelous thing.
Sum beþe of wer and sum of wo Some are of weal, and some of woe,

5Burrow and Turville-Petre, 131. All subsequent quotations of the Sir Orfeo lai are taken from this edition.

6J. R. R. Tolkien, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight; Pearl; Sir Orfeo (New York: Ballantine Books, 1975), 190. This is an excerpt from a poetic translation by J. R. R. Tolkien, which he completed as an exercise for himself, but intended as a scholarly interpretation for academics that was also accessible to non-scholarly “lovers of English poetry.” It was published posthumously, and edited by his son, Christopher Tolkien. Because this translation is both true to the original story and poetically pleasing in modern English, all translations following will be taken from Tolkien.
And sum of joie and mirþe also,  
And sum of trecherie and of gile,  
Of old aventours þat fel while,  
And sum of bourdes and ribaudy,  
And mani þer beþ of fairy.\(^7\)  
and some do joy and gladness know;  
in some are guile and treachery told,  
in some the deeds that chanced of old;  
some are of jects and ribaldry,  
And some are tales of Faërie.\(^8\)

(*Sir Orfeo*, lines 1–10)

While some scholars debate whether this prologue was originally intended to open *Sir Orfeo*, the version quoted above was reconstructed by A. J. Bliss because the prologue is missing from the Auchinleck Manuscript; Bliss reasoned that, based on textual similarities to *Lay le Freyne* (also in the Auchinleck), both *Freyne* and *Orfeo* were likely translated from French by the same author, although *Sir Orfeo* is probably the earlier of the two. Bliss therefore believed that the prologue (quoted above) was likely intended for, and certainly fits with, *Sir Orfeo*.\(^9\) These ten lines are revealing because they depict the wide array of stories the genre of the Breton lai might encompass. Thus, the Orpheus myth has already, by the early fourteenth century, assumed the form of a Breton lai with a distinctly English hero that is entirely distinct from its Greek, Latin, and more recent French sources.\(^10\)

In addition to the religious aspects of temptation and sin discussed by Boethius and Pierre Bersuire, the ideas of the spiritual power of music and the purity of the harp

\(^7\)Burrow and Turville-Petre, 114.  
\(^8\)Tolkien, 169.  
are central to the story and the fourteenth-century perspective that made the tale of Orfeo so attractive. Laskaya and Salisbury note that “the harp is the central image of the poem … [and] was a powerful metaphor in classical and medieval culture … [of] spiritual life, the power of grace, heavenly music, and the harmony of the spirit.”\textsuperscript{11} Although Orfeo brings “ten hundred kniȝtes wiþ him” (line 183) to the orchard, the might of men cannot save his wife from abduction by the fairies; instead, the power of Orfeo’s music and eloquence charm the fairies and allow him to save Dame Heurodis.

Throughout \textit{Sir Orfeo}, many folkloric motifs appear which are common to the Breton lai. For example, Dame Heurodis falls asleep under the “ympe-tre” or the grafted (apple) tree in the orchard, which indicates an impending visit from fairies and often danger.\textsuperscript{12} Such a recurring motif allowed all audience members, regardless of their level of literacy and knowledge of the classical tale of Orpheus, to anticipate the trouble that would befall Dame Heurodis, which heightens the tension of the story. Also, the motif of the forest as a place of the supernatural and “otherworldly abduction” appears in \textit{Sir Orfeo}, following a long tradition employed in earlier Arthurian and Celtic romances.\textsuperscript{13} The serene orchard where Dame Heurodis first meets the King of the Fairy displays a false security, as it serves as a gateway to the wild, untamed forest of fairyland, which despite its beauty, seems so cruel to Dame Heurodis that she claws at her face with her


\textsuperscript{12}For example, Sir Launfal falls asleep under a tree and is visited by two maidens who bring him to the fairy world (lines 226-282). Laskaya and Salisbury, 216.

nails out of sheer torment.\textsuperscript{14} Heurodis’ mental and physical decay is later paralleled by Orfeo, who in his grief forsakes his kingship and all other women and lives in the wilderness of the forest, his body “oway duine” (“wasted away”). But when he plays his harp, the cruel wilderness softens:

\begin{verbatim}
Into alle þe wode þe soung gan schille
And all the wild beasts that there are
In joy approached him from afar…
And when he his harping lete wold
No bird or beast would near him abide.
\end{verbatim}

\textit{(Sir Orfeo, lines 272–74, 279–80)}

In this manner, the healing (and possibly magical) quality of the harp in its ability to tame even the most wild of beasts (a quality suggested in lines 25–38 of the lai), is established within the narrative in anticipation of Orfeo’s meeting with the Fairy King. When Orfeo sees his wife riding with other fairy maids, he follows them into fairyland, proclaiming himself a minstrel who wishes to play for the Fairy King. Once again, a magical or divine quality of the harp is implied, as Orfeo’s harping pleases and tames the cruel will of the Fairy King, who eventually allows Orfeo to claim Dame Heurodis as his prize for playing, and bids them “be bliþe” (line 471). Indeed, Roy M. Liuzza compares Heurodis’ “resurrection” by the music of voice and harp to the preservation of oral poetry within a medieval manuscript, because “the written word, in medieval linguistic thought,

\textsuperscript{14}Saunders, \textit{The Forest of Medieval Romance}, 135.
must be revived by the reader/performer." Thus, the role of the performer is ever present, even when examining the written sources of a medieval romance.

---

CHAPTER III
ORAL TRANSMISSION: MEMORIAL IMPLICATIONS OF SIR ORFEO AND THE MIDDLE ENGLISH ROMANCES

In the early twentieth century, Milman Parry made notable scholarly contributions to the burgeoning study of oral tradition in epic poetry, positing that performers of oral epics utilized certain formulas of word groups in repetition and variation under the same “metrical conditions” to improvise poetic retellings of a story. This method, although applied here to bardic improvisation, could be compared in sound to the type of motivic composing used by Richard Wagner, which uses certain melodic or rhythmic sequences to repeatedly express particular characters or ideas. Furthermore, the very nature of this formulaic improvisation can also be compared to modern jazz improvisation in which a set chord progression (e.g., 12-bar blues) serves as a structured skeleton for practiced musicians to weave a variety of melodic and rhythmic patterns. Parry’s successor, Albert Bates Lord, delved deeper into this topic, examining not only the Homeric epics, but also those of Yugoslavia and even Old English medieval epics. In his analysis of the relationship between literature and orality, and the path a poem might travel through manuscript and memory, he observes that:

A written text was thus made of the words of song. It was a record of a special performance, a command performance under unusual circumstances … though it

---

is written, it is oral. The singer who dictated it was its “author,” and it reflected a single moment in the tradition.²

Although the idea that each performance of a Middle English romance was different is certainly logical, the brevity of this form compared to the extensive epics that Lord discusses necessitates further examination. Murray McGillivray, for instance, does not believe that the Middle English romances were the result of the purely formulaic improvisation that Lord outlines, but the result of memorization of a text—a text that was performed from memory by a minstrel, but could also be written by a scribe from memory.³ After a scribe recorded the words of a single performance of a poem, the singer continued to perform, and the story and the music continued to evolve within the minstrel’s terms of “multiformity,” and audiences continued to listen. But the perspective of the literate world (i.e., those who had access to the written record of the performance), began to shift as they “came to think of the written text not as the recording of a moment of the tradition but as the song. This was to become the difference between the oral way of thought and the written way.”⁴ So, while the study of medieval romances was for decades focused on the existing manuscripts, the idea of performing these works and examining the role of the minstrel in the “creation, transmission and performance” of Middle English romances has become more popular in

---

²Lord, 124.


⁴Lord, 125.
recent years. Karl Reichl recently pointed out that the variation between Thomas Chestre’s lai of *Sir Launfal* and the Middle English *Sir Landevale* (a translation of Marie de France’s earlier French *Lanval*) imply “both aural and oral processes at work in the course of transmission and adaptation” of the lai. Although the performance of a romance was almost certainly oral, the fact that so many of the Middle English Breton lays were rooted in the French lais of Marie de France and other poets suggests at least one textual “father” of each story that was memorialized, performed, and subconsciously altered by minstrels. Various performances could have been notated by scribes, and that written variant could have then been performed by another minstrel, thus beginning a new cycle of transmission.

This multi-faceted history of the Middle English Breton lais, including *Sir Orfeo*, has generated a great deal of scholarly speculation owing to the minimal number of primary sources. This scholarly speculation, in turn, suggests that an interdisciplinary approach is needed in the study of the performance of oral narrative. In the twenty-first century, a performer must consider the existing manuscripts as well as the oral tradition that still manifests itself today within the folk music of many cultures. The modern minstrel therefore must take on the roles of historian, literary scholar, ethnomusicologist, storyteller, and singer.

---


6 Ibid., 143.
Throughout this project, I undertook these roles in various capacities. As a historian, I researched the culture of the Middle Ages in which Breton lais, and particularly the story of Orpheus, were so popular. Regarding the text of the lai itself, the role of historian overlapped with the role of literary scholar as I compared the three manuscript sources (the Auchinleck MS, the MS Harley 3810, and MS Ashmole 61) to determine how these texts, through their differences, might serve as a testament to the oral history of the *Sir Orfeo* lai.\(^7\) From a musicological perspective, I could then research likely musical influences in the Middle Ages and reconstruct a suitable melody for the lai. Also, the work of Scottish ballad collectors in compiling texts and musical sources aided my arrangement and performance of the nineteenth century “King Orfeo” ballad. Perhaps most importantly, I then brought the lai and the ballad to life through storytelling and singing (as well as playing harp and penny whistle). The basis of knowledge I had acquired as a historian, literary scholar, and ethnomusicologist was then practically applied in performance for an audience. The following chapters will detail the processes of crafting my unique performances of *Sir Orfeo* and “King Orfeo.”

\(^7\)McGillivray, 21.
CHAPTER IV

GODE IS ÞE LAY, SWETE IS ÞE NOTE: SIR ORFEO IN MUSIC AND PERFORMANCE

Although the lai of *Sir Orfeo* was certainly musical in its performance, no tune survives that would have accompanied the text found in the Auchinleck Manuscript. However, as performer Benjamin Bagby asserts, although “we can never know if our performances precisely duplicate the art of a particular medieval bard… it is possible to reconstruct highly plausible performance models which allow our venerable ancestral stories to live again.”¹ Indeed, regarding his reconstruction and performances of *Beowulf* and the Eddic poems, Bagby maintains that:

[I]t is generally accepted—based largely on descriptions of performance situations—that medieval epic poetry was the domain of tribal or itinerant bardic entertainers… [and] we would have no reason to expect such [written musical] sources to have been written at all. The milieu in which these poems were originally transmitted, sung, and acted out was that of a uniquely oral culture, and professional singers passed on repertoires and techniques from generation to generation without the hindrance and expense of writing. As is almost always the case with medieval song, the use of musical notation is linked to the world of the scriptorium and the noble or ecclesiastical collector, not to the world of the practicing musician.²


²Ibid., 184.
Therefore, the modern performer of medieval song must look to manuscripts and historical references to performance practice in order to gain insight into the sound and practice of medieval musicians. With such epic poetry, a melody that is contemporaneous to the text and that encourages “the use of a specific modal vocabulary consisting of a few limited elements which are constantly repeated and varied” can provide the means of a historically informed performance and “merge into one organic process which functions uniquely in the service of the story.”

Like the Scandinavian and Old English texts Bagby has extensively performed, the Middle English Sir Orfeo exhibits opportunities for a modal melody to enhance the rhetorical and poetic devices present in the text. Because no known melody connected to the lai is preserved, a contrafactum, or a melody derived from another musical source, is required to bring it to life. Linda Marie Zaerr used the late-thirteenth century English lyric “Edi beo thu” for her reconstruction of the Sir Orfeo lai, reasoning that its melody allowed for the syllabic flexibility necessary to setting a lai to music. In developing my own performance of the lai, I looked to the French trouvères of the Middle Ages, from whom many melodies survive. Given the various references within French romances to a musical “Lai d’Orphey,” which was the likely source of the Auchinleck Manuscript version of Sir Orfeo, a troubére tune was a logical choice as the type of melody that could

---


have accompanied the story throughout its oral history. I chose the following thirteenth-century melody for my setting:

Figure 1.

Chanson de Trouvère: Thirteenth Century Melody


From this melody, I derived two melodic phrases (mm. 1-4 and mm. 21-24), into which I set the rhyming, four-stress couplets of the lai. Like Zaerr’s melody, mine is in triple

---


meter and exhibits capabilities for syllabic flexibility within the texture of the phrase. It also begins with an ascending fifth from D to A, a large leap that Zaerr notes can be “particularly compelling” within a sung narrative. Indeed, the first line of text I sing is “herkneþ, lordinges þat beþ trewe” (hearken, lording who are true), and the opening ascending fifth illustrates the call to attention implied in the word “hearken,” which is renewed with each reiteration of the figure. Unlike Zaerr’s tune, which displays a distinctly Ionian mode or, to modern ears, a major key, I chose a tune in a different mode with a more minor flavor, which better fits the melancholy and tragic affects displayed in the opening portion of the lai involving Dame Heurodis’ abduction. The dorian mode and the open fifths found in both the realization above and my own embellishments are stylistically appropriate to a lai that was performed throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, while also allowing for modern audiences associations of major-minor connotations.

This melody serves as the mode of narration and allows for the necessary syllabic flexibility of setting such an extensive poem. The melodic repetition in turn grants the performer freedom to utilize “the wide and flexible spectrum of vocal utterance,” which, as Bagby notes, could include “plain speech, heightened speech, sung speech, spoken song, simple syllabic song, melismatic song, as well as … whispering, moaning, groaning, hoarse speech, barking, shouting, and, yes, even a scream when it’s called for in the story.” In my own performance of Sir Orfeo, I follow the general rule that

---

7Zaerr, Performance, 116.

dialogue and particularly dramatic moments in the narration are spoken recitation, while overall the narration is sung. Different “voices” for different characters are created through both the color and pitch of my speaking voice as well as the texture and voicing provided by the harp accompaniment. For example, as Orfeo is noted for the sweetness of his harping and eloquence, the harp accompaniment becomes more full-voiced and uses multiple octaves of the harp strings when he speaks, signifying the range and depth of Orfeo’s musicianship and love for his wife. But for the Fairy King, the harp accompaniment is reduced to dark, single pitches in the lowest octave of the harp to illustrate the cold, cruel loneliness he inflicts upon Dame Heurodis when he abducts her.

I pitch my speaking voice at its lowest for the Fairy King’s dialogue to signify his otherworldly origins and the threat he represents to the queen. For Dame Heurodis’ voice, the highest octaves of the harp are used to signify her sweet, quiet nature and her plaintive sorrow as she tells Orfeo that they must “delen ato” (part from one another). This, of course, serves as a sharp contrast to the violent crying and tearing at her face that the narrator describes earlier, and conveyed through coloring my voice with more strident and shrill tones. But when Heurodis describes her journey to Fairy Land, she is transported back to the initial seduction of its beauty, and the harp and voice become warmer until the illusion is broken by the Fairy King’s threats. All of these interpretations derive from the text, and also from aural precedents set by informed
historical performers of Old English and Middle English works, such as Zaerr and Bagby.\(^9\)

For this project I chose to perform only the first two hundred lines of *Sir Orfeo* due to time restrictions of a lecture recital involving discussion of later evolutions of the Orfeo story, but I have also considered what a full performance of the lai would entail. Although Zaerr uses the same melody derived from “Edi beo thu” throughout the entirety of her performance of the 608-line lai, a case could be made for using multiple melodies within a similar tonality or mode to illustrate contrasting characters, actions, and emotions throughout the story. For example, Bagby improvises several different melodies within the notes of his six-string recreation of an Anglo-Saxon harp to convey different moods throughout the tale of *Beowulf*.\(^10\) I would consider choosing a different melody to illustrate Orfeo’s displacement as he journeys through the wild, and then return to the first melody as Orfeo returns home, giving aural credence to the textual circling of the lai as it closes. The Lyon and Healy Troubadour Harp I used for this project is much larger than an instrument that would have been used in the Middle Ages, and another future addition to my version of *Sir Orfeo* will be a period-authentic Gothic harp. As a performer, I seek to make the story as accessible as possible to a modern audience, whether they might be scholars or casual listeners. Although I will certainly continue to perform *Sir Orfeo* in its original Middle English, I may also, for certain audiences,

---


perform a version in modern English (perhaps the Tolkien translation, which so beautifully preserves the meter, rhyme, and overall language of the lai).
American scholar Francis James Child published his monumental collection of folk songs, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, between 1882 and 1898, gathering what evidence he could acquire in written records of the texts of these songs. Although he was not a musician himself, throughout the course of the project Child included any records of tunes that he encountered throughout his research.\(^1\) Just after Child’s death, the generation of musicians who were pioneers in collecting folk melodies founded the (English) Folk Song Society in 1898; this society drew the attention of musicians such as Cecil Sharp, Ralph Vaughan Williams, and Percy Grainger, who contributed melodies they had acquired from oral sources they discovered while field-collecting for *The Folk Song Society Journal*.\(^2\) Both this journal and Child’s collection serve as the two main resources for tracing the history of the “King Orfeo” ballad.

The nineteenth ballad in Child’s collection, “King Orfeo,” is a Celtic musical retelling of the Orpheus myth, which exhibits clear connections to the medieval Breton

---


\(^2\)The Folk Song Society, which was founded in 1898, published the first volume of *The Folk Song Society Journal* in 1899, and continued publishing until 1931, at which time it merged with the English Folk Dance Society. The resulting organization, *The English Folk Dance and Song Society*, is still in existence, and still publishes a journal today.
lai found in various forms in the Auchinleck, Harley, and Ashmole 61 manuscripts, as well as the sixteenth-century Scottish “King Orphius” poems. The ballad, “King Orfeo,” was collected in the Shetland Islands in the nineteenth century, and its numerous textual, melodic, and rhythmic variants display the result of the oral minstrel tradition through the centuries.  

American scholar Bertrand Harris Bronson, who published several volumes of his research regarding the tunes and singing traditions of the Child ballads, was astonished by the existence of the “King Orfeo” ballad. He marvels “that a tune should, in the middle of the twentieth century, be overheard along with this whisper out of the Middle Ages was as little to be supposed as that we should hear ‘the horns of Elfland faintly blowing.’” Indeed, the text of “King Orfeo” bears many similarities to the fourteenth-century Auchinleck Manuscript version of Sir Orfeo in both plot and rhyme scheme. Child was familiar with the various European sources of the story, from the Greek tale of Orpheus and Eurydice to the various medieval romances recorded in the Auchinleck, the Ashmole 61, and the Harley 3810 manuscripts. In his notes for “King Orfeo” in The English and Scottish Popular Ballads, Child wrote an extensive summary of the text found in the Auchinleck MS, although he curiously makes no reference to Boethius’ The Consolation of Philosophy, which contains a sixth-century allusion to the Orpheus myth. Boethius’ work was translated by King Alfred in the ninth century and is likely the first introduction of the myth to the culture of the British Isles. As an oral

---


4Bronson, 75. Bronson quotes from Tennyson’s The Princess (1847).

history leaves no written documentation, the only traceable evidence that could document the evolution from the three medieval manuscript sources to the Child ballad are fragments of two different versions of a late-sixteenth-century Scottish poem called “King Orphius,” which maintain the basic aspects of the story, but change several important details, such as Dame Heurodis’ name to Lady Isabel, and Sir Orfeo of England to King Orphius of Portugal. The textual source of this ever-evolving story was found by Child in an article about the folk music and culture of the Shetland Islands, published in a British magazine called The Leisure Hour in 1880. Throughout the twentieth century, however, the evolution of the ballad can be observed in its most modern sense through the written works of Child and Bronson, and through audio recordings of the ballad sung by numerous folk musicians throughout the twentieth century, such as John Stickle, Archie Fisher, and Fiona Hunter of the Scottish band Malinky. Folk artists carry on the rich oral tradition of the Orpheus story through their own unique musical interpretations and variations in text found within the many performances of the “King Orfeo” ballad.

Besides its rich history in medieval romance, “King Orfeo” is also clearly influenced by Celtic folklore and musical traditions. Joseph J. MacSweeney observes

---


8Stickle’s 1952 recording of “King Orfeo” appears in Peter Kennedy and Alan Lomax’s collection The Child Ballads, while Archie Fisher’s later recording from 1970 can be found on his album Orfeo. The band Malinky recorded their version of “King Orfeo” on their 2005 album The Unseen Hours.
that the seventh and twelfth verses of “King Orfeo,” which iterate, “At first he [King Orfeo] played da notes o noy/ An dan he playe da notes o joy” evoke the Celtic (particularly Irish and Scottish) characteristic of the three pillars of music: goltraighe (weeping), geantraighe (laughter), and suantraigh (soothing or sleep). As Orfeo plays “da notes o noy,” or the “notes of grief,” he exemplifies the pillar of goltraighe, while “da notes o joy,” represent the pillar of geantraighe. Later as Orfeo plays “da göd gabber reel,” he may again illustrate the ideal of geantraighe, but as this music “meicht ha made a sick hert hale,” it may also represent the soothing—if not the sleep-inducing—aspects of suantraigh. MacSweeney also notes that “King Orfeo” bears some resemblance to the Scandinavian ballad “Harpens Kraft” (“The Power of the Harp”), which also features a man saving his wife from the clutches of a supernatural being (in this case a merman or water spirit) through the power of his harp playing. Indeed, the power of the harp is a fairly common theme in both Scandinavian and Celtic folk ballads; for example, Child 67, “Glasgerion” (variant B), illustrates Glenkindie’s powerful harping that allows him to magically offset natural order and win favor with the king and, most importantly, his lady:

He’d harpit a fish out o saut water,  
Or water out o a stane,  
Or milk out o a maiden’s breast,  
That bairn had never nane.11

9Joseph J. MacSweeney, “King Orfeo,” 322.  
10Ibid., 322.  
11Child [1898], II, 139.
Child observes the similarity of Glenkindie’s harping to that of Orpheus, but allows that the pipe, flute, or the human voice can be “equally potent” instruments within ballads from non-Scandinavian cultures. Furthermore, the symbolism of the wind instrument, which in the Middle Ages (in England or Scotland) could have had sensual or vulgar connotations (as opposed to the pure spirituality of the harp), had been entirely altered by the nineteenth century. With the legal limitations upon Scottish culture, imposed after the Battle of Culloden in 1746, the Scottish language, tartans, music, and Highland bagpipes—an important aspect of the Jacobite armies’ uprising—were banned, and the bagpipes became symbolic of the repressed, yet true, Scottish culture. Even today, the highland pipes are “firmly associated with Scotland.”

These historical and social implications offer possible explanations for Orfeo’s piping in the highly Scottish atmosphere of Child 19, as opposed to his harping or lute-playing as seen in other European mythologies.

---

12Child, II, 137.


CHAPTER VI
KING ORFEO: THE TUNES

Child did not notate a melody for “King Orfeo,” but merely compiled the information about the ballad’s text and about the singer from whom the text had been collected (i.e., Andrew Coutts, an elderly man in Unst, Shetland). However, British ballad collector Patrick Shuldham-Shaw recorded the following melody in 1947, which corresponds to Child’s text:

Figure 2.

King Orfeo (Child 19): Melody I from John Stickle, Baltasound, Unst

Then they played the good old gab-ber reel, Scow an Earl


---

This is the most popular tune for the ballad (as sung by Stickle, also from Unst, Shetland), and it offers a characteristic Scotch “snap,” or Lombard rhythm, with the C sixteenth note snapping quickly to the D dotted-eighth in the first measure, and the same with the G sixteenth to the F eighth note in the third phrase. Archie Fisher inverts this and creates a continuous lilting pattern of a dotted-eighth followed by a sixteenth, which is occasionally altered to account for word stress (e.g., “An dan he played da göd gabber reel”).

Bronson includes a second melody in his book that was brought to light in the 1950s by singer Kitty Anderson, also of Shetland, whose version was collected by Francis Collinson of the School of Scottish Studies:

![Figure 3. King Orfeo (Child 19): Melody II from Kitty Anderson, Shetland](source)


This melody is quite different from Stickle’s, most obviously in its final cadence on the fifth scale degree of A, rather than the tonic D, which to the Western, classically trained

---

ear sounds unfinished. This last phrase, however, bears some resemblance in texture to the first phrase of Stickle’s melody. Both tunes exhibit a descending second phrase and the memorable octave leap in the third phrase, followed again by a falling line that begins with a characteristic leap of a minor third at the beginning of the descent. As Bronson observes, Anderson’s tune “seems to reflect the first [Stickle’s tune] in a disconnected image.”

3 No professional recordings of this melody have come to light, although an amateur version appears on Youtube, indicating this melody still survives in the collective memory of balladeers (no doubt aided in recent years by the wide circulation of folk music recordings on CD and public internet platforms such as Youtube). 4


4A video posted on Youtube by user “More Than Music...” features Kitty Anderson’s melody, and offers some interesting explanation of his choice of text and the theme of the “power of music” found within the ballad. More Than Music, “King Orfœo / Skoven Årle Grön ( Child Ballad 19 )” (Youtube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dDjfQ06276g, accessed May 1, 2016).
CHAPTER VII
KING ORFEO: THE TEXT

I have chosen to focus my analysis and performance upon the text of “King Orfeo” as notated by Child in *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Vol. 1 (1882), and I will note where Child’s version varies from other sources when appropriate. The following text appears as I perform the ballad:

*King Orfeo*

Der lived a king inta da aste,¹
Scowan ürla grün
Der lived a lady in da wast.²
Whar giorten han grün oarlac³

Dis king he has a huntin gaen,
He’s left his Lady Isabel⁴ alane.

---


²Wast: west. Child, 390. Child maintains that Mr. Edmondston, the gentleman “from whose memory this ballad was derived,” thought that there were missing stanzas after the first that had not been sung by Andrew Coutts, which would relate to the king in the east wooing the lady in the west.

³These two italicized lines are repeated with every verse of the ballad, and thus form a sort of burden, or refrain. The language is related to Norn, a North Germanic dialect that directly descended from Old Norse, and was spoken in the Shetland Islands and Orkney; the phrases we see here have been somewhat influenced by Scottish Gaelic and the Shetland dialect. As Child notes, “the Scandinavian burden was perhaps, no more intelligible to the singer than ‘Hey non nonny’ is to us.” Child offers the Danish “Skoven årle grön (Early green’s the wood)” and “Hvor hjorten han går årlig (Where the hart goes yearly)” as likely translations. John Stickle can be heard singing “Scowan Earl grey/ For yetter kangra norla” on his recording, and indeed, he thought of it as something of a nonsense lyric. Malinky offers another slightly altered version that bears more resemblance Scottish Gaelic (“Scowan erlæ grae/ Far yorten han grun oralæ”).
When the king cam hame at noon
He spiered for Lady Isabel

‘Oh I wis ye’d never gaen away,
For at your hame is dōl an wae.’

His nobles untæ him did say
My lady was wounded, noo she’s deid”

‘For da king o’ Ferrie we his daert,
Has pierced your lady to da hert.’

Noo they’ve taen her life frae me
But her corpse they’ll never hae

The king, he’s ca’d his nobles a’
Tae waltz her corpse intae the ha’

But when the lords were fa’n asleep
Oot o’ the ha’ her corpse did creep

And aifter dem da king has gaen,
But whan he cam it was a grey stane.

Dan he took oot his pipes ta play,
Bit sair his hert wi dōl an wae.

---

4In the Greek legend of Orpheus, the musician’s wife is Eurydice, while in the Auchenleak MS she is called Dame Heurodis. Child’s text uses “Lady Isabel,” while later singers, such as Fiona Hunter of Malinky, use “Lady Lisa Bell.”


6This, and all the following italicized verses, do not appear in Child’s collection, but were taken from the singing of Fiona Hunter of Malinky, who in turn learned the ballad from the singing of the Scottish balladeer Alison McMorland. Malinky, The Unseen Hours, Greentrax Recordings CDTRAX276, CD, 2005.


8Child indicated here a break in the song, perhaps allowing for a lapse in Andrew Coutts’ memory. Malinky adds five verses here, based on Kitty Anderson’s version of the ballad, which I’ve added in italics.

And first he played da notes o noy,\textsuperscript{11}
An dan he played da notes o joy.

An dan he played da göd gabber reel,\textsuperscript{12}
Dat meicht ha made a sick hert hale.

‘Noo come ye in inta wir ha,
An come ye in among wis a’.

Now he’s gae in inta der ha,
An he’s gaen in among dem a’.

Dan he took out his pipes to play,
Bit sair his hert wi döl an wae.

At first he played da notes o noy,
An dan he playe da notes o joy.

An dan he played da göd gabber reel,
Dat meicht ha made a sick hert hale,

‘Noo tell to us what ye will hae:
What sall we gie you for your play?’

‘What I will hae I will you tell,
An dat’s me Lady Isabel.’

‘Yees tak your lady, and yees gaeng hame,
An yees be king ower al your ain.’

He’s taen his lady, and he’s gaen hame,
An noo he’s king ower a’ his ain.

\textsuperscript{10}Sair: sore, lamentable. Child [1898], V, 371.

\textsuperscript{11}Noy: grief. Child [1898], V, 362.

\textsuperscript{12}Child notes in his glossary that the word “gaed” (also “gade,” “gad,” and “gaid”) is “gae” or joyful, while a “gabber reel” is a “sprightly air,” perhaps originating with the Icelandic “gabb,” or “mockery.” Child [1898], V, 337.
This text, which is a mixture of Shetland, Scottish, and Scandinavian dialects, bears a striking resemblance to both the story and the language used in the medieval sources of *Sir Orfeo*. While there are notable differences, such as Heurodis’ name changed to Lady Isabel, and Orfeo’s harping turned to piping, the same basic story remains intact: Orfeo’s wife is abducted by the fairies and is saved by her husband’s musical prowess. The fact that the ballad is still performed today is a testament to the continuing appeal of the Orpheus story to minstrels and balladeers, who kept the oral transmission of the work alive and fluid through performance between the centuries of its written documentation.

---

I have performed folk music, particularly that of the British Isles, for most of my life. The process of creating my own performance of the “King Orfeo” ballad was quite similar to other ballads and folk songs I have learned. This instance, however, was greatly augmented by the depth of my research into the Middle English roots of the Orfeo story. For my performance, I chose to use John Stickle’s melody in the key of A minor—a whole step higher than Bronson notates (see Figure 2)—as a foundation, and then embellished, elaborated, and improvised over these notes in a process I outline below.

For me, crafting a performance of a folk song always begins with two steps: finding a text, and listening to various recordings (and if possible, live performances) of the song. The basic text was easily obtainable in Child’s collection, although as I listened to recordings, I heard other verses that I added to my version of the ballad to aid in telling the story. The various recordings I studied displayed a wide range of accompaniments, from Fisher’s orchestral grandeur, to Malinky’s lively, syncopated guitar-strumming, to Stickle’s (and many others’) unaccompanied renditions. I have always enjoyed performing certain folk songs unaccompanied in their most traditional form in my performances, and decided this would best suit my performance of the “King Orfeo” ballad. The ballad focuses on the power of Orfeo’s piping, and I wished to draw attention
in my arrangement to this difference from the harp that is so central to the medieval lai. Although I do not play the bagpipes, I have played the Irish penny whistle since the age of seven, and this folk instrument is often used in Scottish traditional music as it is capable of the same type of ornamentation as the Highland pipes. My performance features a prelude and several interludes played on the penny whistle, which serve to separate the dialogue of different characters as well as depict Orfeo’s playing at the court of the Fairy King.

Ornamentation in Celtic music is an art best learned by ear. The fast grace notes, passing tones, or “bent” notes (an effect achieved through sliding by quarter tones from one note to the next) can be modified for almost any melodic folk instrument, including the penny whistle, the bagpipes, the fiddle, and even the human voice. The many forms of ornaments that may encompass a folk musician’s arsenal are generally applied intuitively within performance, often resulting in a slightly improvised art that differs to varying degrees each time a song is performed in a manner very similar to the minstrel performances of the Middle Ages.

Although the melody of the “King Orfeo” ballad is highly repetitive throughout all twenty-two verses, I attempt to portray the variety of voices and emotions present in the story through my singing and whistle playing. For example, I add more notes and ornamentation to the melody whenever Orfeo speaks, or when the narrator describes his playing, in order to suggest his impressive musical prowess. For any narration describing Lady Isabel’s abduction and the lonely despair felt by Orfeo, I eliminate any unnecessary notes and all ornaments to paint the starkness of their separation. I also stress important
words, such as “döl,” “wae,” “noy,” and “joy” by giving them more weight or rhythmic emphasis, and sometimes lengthen certain words through melismatic ornamentation. The Scandanavian burden “Scowan ürla grün/ Whar giorten han grün oarlac,” need not be a nonsensical lyric interlude as it was to Stickle, but can offer an opportunity for the audience to reflect on the affect and action which has just been proclaimed in the preceding line of each verse; therefore, this refrain should sound slightly different with each reiteration, and the same rules of ornamentation may be applied in relation to the accompanying verse words.

Most importantly, the story must be told with clarity and animation. In addition to the various voices and ornaments to differentiate characters, I use several gestures for visual representation of each character. For Orfeo, I hold my hand high to represent his kingship and goodness. I perform a highly stylized mime of an archer shooting an arrow as I sing the verse “For da king o Ferrie we his daert,/ Has pierced your lady to da hert.” When Orfeo plays his pipes, I gesture to the penny whistle, holding it low for “da notes o noy,” and then holding it high for “da notes o joy.” As I next sing of the “da göd gabber reel,” I bring the whistle to my chest, ready to play (which also serves as preparation for the whistle interlude that directly follows that verse). The ballad continually describes departure and return: Orfeo returning from the hunt, bringing Lady Isabel’s corpse into the hall, Orfeo leaving the hall to search for her, Orfeo entering the hall of the Fairy King, and finally Orfeo leaving to bring Lady Isabel home. I therefore indicate the door of the performance space whenever the ballad describes someone leaving, and gesture to the
interior of my performance space whenever entering a hall or returning home is described.

Carefully crafted ornamentation, gestures, and changes in vocal timbre can significantly augment the text and melody of a ballad, enabling the singer to tell the story in her own, unique manner. I have given examples of my artistic choices for my own performance; these choices may change as I continue to perform the ballad and gain new insight into the characters and episodes through further research and practice. Future singers will continue to build on the traditions of the many performers I have discussed and continue to find new ways to tell the story of “King Orfeo.”
CHAPTER IX
ICHIL 3OU TELLE OF SIR ORFEWE: EXPERIENCES OF A MODERN MINSTREL

As I have constantly observed over the past year, an interdisciplinary approach is necessary for a project of this scope, and the importance of equal study of documents and performance practice cannot be stressed enough. I would never have been able to craft a performance of Sir Orfeo if I had not researched the history of the lai and understood the nuances of each character from intensive study of the Auchinleck Manuscript text. I am likewise indebted to Bagby and Zaerr for their theoretical and practical works. I had sung the “King Orfeo” ballad prior to this project, but had never understood the medieval history and evolution of the story, which completely changed my interpretation of the song. Once all of this scholarly research had been accomplished, I was far better equipped to approach the artistry of performance.

My most important observation as a performer of Sir Orfeo pertains to studies in memorialization and oral transmission. I did not intend to memorize the text of the lai for my performance, and indeed I kept the text in front of me during my lecture recital. But even so, as I rehearsed I began to have most of the lai memorized simply from repetition, and scarcely needed to read from the page. The memorable rhyming couplets of the Auchinleck Manuscript text were rooted in oral tradition, and they easily translated back to memory. As a singer of classical music, I always find that memorization takes a great
deal of time and effort, but this lai flowed naturally and easily almost as soon as I began rehearsals. When I perform *Sir Orfeo* this summer, I will sing entirely from memory. Before this project, I was amazed at the idea that a medieval minstrel could memorize a multitude of lais and epics, but after performing *Sir Orfeo*, I know this idea to be practical and very possible for both for medieval and modern minstrels. I will continue expanding my repertoire and reconstruct many other Breton lais.

I learned to play harp for this project, and accompanying my recitation and singing of the lai heavily influenced the way I ultimately performed *Sir Orfeo*. When I first practiced speaking the Middle English text, I began to experiment with different voices for each character, but much of the drama and emotion I was eventually able to evoke was absent. But when I added in the singing and harp accompaniment, the text slowed as each word was given a pitch, and many nuances fell into place. For example, when the prologue lists the different types of lais (some tell of war and woe, some of joy, mirth, etc.), I was able to separately depict each affect musically with slight pauses in between, and avoid a boring “laundry list” of lais. At the end of my performance (lines 195–200) I slowed the tempo even more to vocally imitate Orfeo’s moans of grief, sliding slowly down the pitches of the scale. There is no way to achieve this when speaking, and this nuance was only realized when I began singing the lai. This emotion is written in the text, but needs music to be fully realized.

This project enabled me to position myself at a unique vantage point as a combination of a historian, literary scholar, ethnomusicologist, storyteller, harpist, and singer, and if I had neglected any of these roles, I would not have been able to
successfully perform *Sir Orfeo* and “King Orfeo.” My future research will continue to influence my performances of Breton lais and ballads.
CHAPTER X
CONCLUSION

Researching the similarities and differences between the fourteenth-century
Breton lai *Sir Orfeo* and the Shetland folk ballad “King Orfeo” catalogued by Child in the
nineteenth century has enabled me to draw several conclusions. First, although the
process of memorization and performance of minstrels may account for some of the
evolution over the many centuries between the Auchinleck MS and Child’s *English and
Scottish Popular Ballads*, there are clearly other cultural influences (Scandinavian,
Scottish, etc.) completely unrelated to the Breton lai that also inform the ballad and its
contemporary singers. Second, the process of oral tradition remains an integral part to
the folk and traditional music of many cultures, and is exemplified in the variety of
recordings of “King Orfeo.” Finally, the ability to compare a folk musician to a medieval
minstrel, combined with the expanding research and performance of scholar-bards such
as Bagby and Zaerr, offers opportunities for the revival of other medieval epics and
romances within this folk tradition (as opposed to the purely classical and scholarly
world). Through the process of my own reconstruction and performance of *Sir Orfeo*, I
have used techniques informed by the practices of Bagby and Zaerr, as well as articulated
a method that might easily be imitated by classical and folk musicians who possess
similar interests in these medieval stories and objectives. This process has also added to
my own repertoire, and I plan to continue performing *Sir Orfeo* and other Breton lais, as well as “King Orfeo” and other Child ballads, as I further my academic career in a master’s degree related to early music research and performance. I also hope that other musicians will use my research to craft their own performances of Breton lais so these wonderful stories can be more easily accessible to modern audiences. Folk music remains alive and strong in the British Isles, and Breton lais could easily be programmed for such audiences. These medieval stories must not be forgotten by all except Middle English scholars, but rather should be experienced by audiences with the vitality that only live performance can bring.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES


RECORDINGS


SECONDARY SOURCES


