The three cultures of medieval Iberia—Christian, Jewish, Muslim—and the relations among them have occasioned considerable interest over the past decades. The role of women musicians in these three cultures has long been of interest to me, from both academic and performance-oriented viewpoints. From the perspective of ethnomusicology, much of my research has focused on Judeo-Spanish Sephardic song, largely a women's tradition with roots and influences going back to the three cultures of medieval Iberia. As a performing musician working with medieval music, as well as Judeo-Spanish and related Mediterranean traditions, I have found the role of women musicians in medieval Spain a natural and intriguing area of study. This essay is intended as a general overview of women's role in medieval Iberian and closely related song, exploring their own activities and attitudes as musicians and composers, as well as images of and attitudes toward them in contemporaneous poetry and other writing.

The study of medieval women's music presents several challenges. First, and most difficult, is the general paucity of musical notation for women's songs of the time. While within the music of medieval Christian society it is possible to apply the widespread practice of *contrafactum,* and set poems to contemporaneous melodies which fit their prosody, this is not possible for the Jewish and Muslim communities of the time, as they did not generally notate their music. Texts are problematic as well: even in the case of the Occitan troubadours, the women troubadours of Provence, not all the women can be identified with certainty. The numerous poems in a woman's voice in Galician-Portuguese and in Old French, some of which do have musical notation, are not necessarily "woman's songs" in the sense of being composed by women

and/or constituting a woman's repertoire. On the other hand, documentation of medieval women's involvement in music, formal or informal, is fairly extensive, as are attitudes toward women musicians in public and private settings, in all three cultures of medieval Spain.

As an ethnomusicologist, I add some speculation drawn from oral tradition to complement the available documentation, though with the caution which is obviously required. My work as a performer of medieval music and oral traditions gives me another perspective on the image of women in the songs and on what it means to a woman to sing them. While there are obvious pitfalls in applying a late twentieth-century sensibility to a medieval repertoire, this point of view also follows current anthropological ideas toward the scholar's involvement as a person in the culture s/he is studying. On a different, practical level, my performing activities enable me to apply the medieval technique of *contrafactum,* in this case setting medieval women's poems without accompanying notation to appropriate contemporaneous melodies, and to try out these settings by performing them to audiences with various degrees of knowledge of the repertoire. Fortunately, voluntarily singing in public today doesn't raise the sort of malicious speculation about my possibly related professions as it did for my Iberian colleagues of eight centuries ago.

On the other hand, there are several different kinds of publics, and women's musical roles varied according to the contexts in which they were expressed.

Women Singers and Their Roles

References to women's active involvement in music and poetry go far back, to the Old and New Testaments and the Apocrypha; to ancient Greece; to writings by Juvenal, Martial, Pliny, St. John Chrysostom, and others. Besides such obvious and regularly cited sources as the poetry of Sappho, one can profitably comb chronicles, epics, narrative poems, exempla, and men's poetry; iconography yields further information; and there are several allusions—mostly negative—to women singers by religious authorities in all three communities.

Women were instrumentalists as well as singers. In all three cultures, they were—and throughout the Mediterranean still are—associated with percussion instruments. This association has been continuous, from Myrion playing the tambourine at the parting of the Red Sea, through Juvenal's description of Spanish singing-girls with castanets, and Laidoer of Seville's statement that women invented percussion. The celebrated *Canções de Santa Maria de Alfonso X include several miniatures of women musicians of the three cultures,
and the Archipresbiter of Hita not only refers to women musicians but even specifies certain of their instruments as being inappropriate for songs in “arábigo” style. In the Parve Wara a Galician woman is described as singing “strange songs,” accompanying herself on a percussion instrument. Today, in Galicia, as well as in areas of Leon and Salamanca, and parts of Portugal, the double-skinned square frame drum has retained its function as a woman’s instrument, and in Portugal its Arabic name (adufo, from al-daf). Playing plucked and bowed stringed instruments could be valued accomplishments for medieval women musicians, but references to women playing wind instruments are rare, and even in oral tradition today often have negative social connotations related to phallic imagery.

All three cultures, Christian, Jewish, and Muslim, shared an ambivalence toward music itself, and also an ambivalence toward women; so, not surprisingly, an ambivalence toward women in music. The issue is not so much whether women sang as where and under what circumstances they did so. The title of Cristina Segura’s essay “Public women / bad women, honest women / private women” neatly sums up the situation: the home and, for Christian women, the cloister were the only real private spaces, the only places where an honest woman would really be found. But even within these spaces the dichotomy between “public” and “private” was further refined. A wife and mother joining in singing hymns around the table, a woman fulfilling a religious duty by singing life-cycle songs, a nobleman’s daughter singing to the harp to charm his guests—all could be defined as “private,” and permitted—even mandated—by men. These were very different propositions from a woman singing to a general public, especially to earn her living, where it was generally assumed that prostitution was her other profession.

In the medieval romance Libro de Afolmaris,24 the noble-born Tarshia makes sure everyone knows that singing in the market place is only a temporary resort, and that she has not embraced other means of livelihood associated with it, i.e. prostitution: “no so jaglareia de las de buen mercado” (“I’m not one of those jaglers who can be bought,” line 460). Similarly, in the Libro de Alexandre, Queen Calcinia is at pains to specify that “no vin’ ganar habebes, ca no soe jaglareia” (“I’m not here to earn any money, I’m no jagleress,” line 1731).

Basically, men set the contexts in which women’s music-making was legitimate—or, in certain cases, even mandatory. These judgments were, not surprisingly, influenced by the degree of benefit to the men themselves: for example, the prestige they gained by having an accomplished daughter or slave. Women adapted themselves to these limits with varying degrees of cre-
cians. The latter were divided into two main groups: the șahīm, the educated cians who played for their courtly patrons in the presence of guests, and the jawārī, slaves who performed in lower-class settings and whose musical duties often included some level of prostitution.\textsuperscript{16} We know many of their names and, in some cases, a little about their characters. Probably the best known of the aristocratic women poets was Wallīda, an Umayyad princess and sometime of a social iconoclast, a leader in walking in public without her veil. Women slaves were divided into two main classes: domestic and recreational.\textsuperscript{17} The most attractive and accomplished slaves could instruct such famous poets as Ibn Hazm, and command spectacular prices. As Nadia Lachiri puts it, “singing was a requirement for the education of the female slaves, to satisfy men not only sexually but also aesthetically and intellectually.”\textsuperscript{18} Slaves came from Christian Iberia, Calabria, Lombardy, France, or from North Africa; and a fair amount was written about their respective merits and disadvantages. For example, a late twelfth/thirteenth century ruler from Málaga recommends girls from Mecca for their singing, and from Ethiopia for their flute playing but not their fiction. He also offers nonmusical advice: Bebezor or Toscana for voluptuousness, diligence, obedience, and health; Turks for strong children; Ethiopians for nursing; and Nubians for obedience and nursing (with the caution that they tend to die very young). Corsicans, he observed, knew how to regain their virginity: a useful skill which oral poetry tells us was shared by other groups as well.\textsuperscript{19}

Jewish women poets are the most elusive of all. Qasmān lived in twelfth-century Granada, and was herself the daughter of a poet, probably the famous vizier Samuel ibn Naghra HaNaqid (993–1046); she wrote in Arabic.\textsuperscript{20} The unnamed wife of the famous tenth-century poet Duniaš ibn Labrī left one poem, the only Hebrew poem by a Hispano-Hebraic woman—and even its antecedency as a woman’s poem is far from certain. Much later, across the Strait of Gibraltar, the Moroccan Jewish Freida Bn Avtham composed miskatim, Hebrew hymns.\textsuperscript{21} Women, or rather young girls, musicians are deceptively described in medieval Hispano-Hebraic men’s poetry, but it is unlikely that those lace-picking maidens among the wine and flowers were Jewish.

Women Poets and Their Points of View: The Christian World

Though the trovairits are from across the Pyrenees, the troubadours worked on both sides, and the lack of a documented parallel Iberian tradition for the trovairits makes it important to comment briefly on the poetry of the later. For similar reasons, the French chansons d’amour will also be mentioned.

The trovairits poems are neither oral tradition nor adaptations of it; they are deliberate compositions. For Matild Kénaïa Bruckner, the trovairits— unlike the troubadours— "combine within a single female speaker the aristocratic and the popular female persona.\textsuperscript{22} Trovaiirits poetry has often been characterized as being in a generally freer, more direct voice than troubadour poetry. The trovairits call their men into question—as, in fact, do the Muslim women poets; there is a certain sense of pride and control in much of their writing. False modesty was not among their character traits. The Comtesse de Dio, the only trovairits for whom we have a manuscript melody, enumerates her own attractions: "Volez mi deu moe prentz e moe parange / e ma beutre e plus moe fins oracose" ("My worth, noble birth, beauty and lofty thoughts should carry some weight").\textsuperscript{23}

Joan Ferrante has analyzed some concrete aspects of trovairits rhetoric.\textsuperscript{24} She finds that, compared to the troubadours, the women poets make more use of direct address to their lovers; they use more verb forms expressing the past and more negative expressions; they use more wordplay and rhymes; and sometimes attack the conventions of the courtly game. Bruckner cautions against "tenderentious and naive ideas about the trovairits' spontaneity and directness" ("Trovaiirits," 207, n. 7), calling for a subtle examination of the index of sincerity in the trovairits corpus. Referring to Jean-Marie de Hau's observation that the same expressions which may seem "tiresomely conventional" in a troubadour poem may be interpreted by the same critics as "spontaneous" in a trovairits composition, he points out that our own constructions of male and female voices influence our perception of sincerity in male and female poems ("Trovaiirits," 222). Elsewhere, Bruckner also points out that both the male and female Occitanian courtly poets "operate in a lyric whose fiction would have us believe its claims to speak truthfully from the heart" (SWT, 262).

The trouvaiirits songs in a woman's voice\textsuperscript{25} vary from the loveballads Chansons pour son amours (Guyot de Dijon), where the speaker holds on to her absent lover's shirt at night like a security blanket,\textsuperscript{26} to a number of poems cataloguing the advantages of one's lover over one's husband. Marie de Diegoua, a rare specific name given as a woman composer in Old French, states that a "bele parueil" should have a "joli cuer" in all seasons and weather.\textsuperscript{27} Children are barely mentioned in any medieval Romance language women's poetry. Among the trovairits, the only poet that does mention children does so negatively: "mas far infanz cuitz qu'es grau penitenta" ("I think making
babies is harsh pesaros," SWT, 27:18; "Trobairitz," 204). The only other poems that mention children are both from Spain, and separated by five centuries. One is by the unnamed wife of the tenth-century poet Dunash Ibn Labîlî, the other, dated 1403, is Mayor Azais' farewell poem to her husband. These are both discussed in more detail below.

The corpus of Galician-Portuguese secular poetry has stimulated a good deal of discussion about what was and wasn't composed by women. The often "anzemic" cantiga de amor (songs of love) and the scathing cantigas d'escarnho e mal dizer (songs of satire and insults), with their politically incorrect insults to women and their insults to priests (the latter perhaps less politically incorrect today), are the work of male poets, but the authorship of the cantigas de amigo is not so easily established. Ria Lemaire suggests that in the cantigas de amigo corpus authorship moved from women to men, reflected in an increasingly passive outlook for the woman.19

There are six Galician-Portuguese cantigas de amigo with music, by Martin Codax, and several hundred without. Kathleen Ashley refers to the "widespread misinformation" that the theme of most of these poems is a young girl yearning for an eternally absent beloved.20 Whether or not it appears in the majority of songs, it is certainly a central theme, and one that could as easily express a male poet's easy egotism as a woman's poetic creativity — or, as Luis Perez Garza would have it, her "indispensable, primordial, . . . cosmic . . . union with the sea, which becomes a conversation."21 This cosmic vision is rivaled by Hermani Cidade's, of the poems as "fresh and fragrant natural flowers surrounded by live sap of the national earth, amid a multitude of conventionally cut paper flowers."22

In comparison with the sophisticated observations of the trovairistes, these loverly girls at first appear insipid and passive. Their mothers, however, whom they regularly address, often have more character: "Daughter, he's just leading you on, with his so-called songs, which are worthless" ("Sei, filha, que vos trag'enganada / con sos cantazes, que non valen nada").23 A different sort of mother appears in a poem by Ju sto Bolclor: this one is annoyed with her daughter because the latter has prevented her from taking a lover ("Mas me treguedes, ai filha: "por vos perdi meu amigo," Nubes 404.4). Pero de Veir gives us another mother-daughter dialogue, which has a timeless ring about it:

"Daughter, why do you look so miserable these days? — I can't walk around singing ALL the time!" (Veio-tes, filha: "Non posso, madre, sempre cantando," Nubes 355, refrain). Not all the girls devote their time to moping. One, for example, takes her lover's amatory agonies with a grain of salt, saying that he goes on weeping and claiming to be dying of love, but nevertheless continues to show up in perfect health: "en nunca lle van vejo morte prendes, / pero o ar vejo nunca enantendo" (Nubes 189, refrain).

Although none of their poetry has survived, one should mention the notorious solitaires of Galicia, including Maria Balleira, who is the subject of several cantigas d'escarnho, and is mocked by Pero de Ponte for never "looking" her "trunk."24 No "fresh and fragrant flower" or "cosmic union with the sea" for her; on her deathbed, it appears that the only sin she would confess to, that which most weighed on her ("Io que mi mais peia"), was that of being old.25 The adjective "old" is part of the "anti-retrato descortês" (uncoyly anti-portrait).26 Even today, in many Galician and Portuguese villages a sort of charivari occurs when an older woman marries. In any event, La Baltra's own glint-in-the-eye sense of humor may be illustrated here by a male poet, but it is no stranger to the medieval Galician-Portuguese lyric: the comic elements identified by Roger Walter probably represent the tip of the iceberg.27 In fact, I have had ample occasion to observe during fieldwork over the past few years, that the women, especially the older women, of Galician and Portuguese villages, do not lag behind the men in singing, excising or appreciating bawdy verses and stories.

Later on, a number of poems in a woman's voice, "en boca feminina," appear in the fifteenth century. Jane Whetnall finds in this corpus characteristic elements of diction and style reminiscent of those discussed above with relation to the trovairistes, and often in contrast to typical courtly lyrics which "seem always to be the mouthpiece of women as helpless victims of circumstance."28 Even though these lyrics are in all likelihood men's compositions, points Whetnall, they may well reflect "a deeply felt traditional association between height-ened colloquial diction and the female predicament." She outlines three main categories for early fifteenth-century feminine lyric: the despedida (leave-taking), the mal maridad (unhappily married), and "less specific complaints of forsaken women," adding up to an overall theme of abandonment and isolation.29

Whetnall also discusses Mayor Azais' poem Ay mar bom, espaina, mentioned above; its lyrics evoke the maritime loneliness of the cantigas de amigo, but this time in a concrete setting of marriage and public identity.30 An unusual feature is its evocation of the couple's child: "... que la trattéia / a bor a Maris / que deo pequeta" ("... to bring him to see Maris, whom he left [when] so small").31 The context is Mayor's husband Rui González' departure with Henry IV's embassy to Samarkand (1405); González writes a despedida for her as well, but, while his is in "the hybrid dialect that passes for Galician in Castilian literary circles,"32 Mayor's is in Castilian. Whetnall sug-
gests that this reflects women writing in the vernacular, regardless of courtly literary trends, an observation which to me provides a link with traditional women's poetry, reflected in the maintenance of vernacular Judeo-Spanish by Sephardic women throughout centuries of diaspora in various countries. Deyermond's discussion of the poem adds other dimensions, including its ambivalent imagery, for example "sola" referring to a ship's sail or to the thread of the Fates, and the "changing moods of the sea..." mirrored in the changing tones in which she addresses it ("Patterns") 87. Miguel Ángel Pérez Prego discusses the element of marriage, rather than an extra-marital relationship, and the poem's religious elements, appropriate for this relationship. 88 Whenfield's study of the poem as a songtext also implies Mayor Arias's familiarity with the literature of her time. 89

The Queen of Mallorca (La Reina de Mallorca) is cited as the author of a fourteenth-century Catalan love poem. Martín de Riquer identifies her as one of the two wives of James III of Mallorca, either Constança, who died in 1346, or Violant, whom he married soon after. In this poem, the Queen speaks of missing her lover not only for the passionate aspect of their relationship, but also "to speak with him of all kinds of things" ("El rayonar e tota res"). Like the Contessa de Día, she has a satisfying sense of her own worth: "I am the best lover of all" ("sus totas, say mis amant").

The Jewish World

Medieval Jewish women poets are difficult to discuss because so little of their writing has come down to us. Quntina described herself in one poem as a gardener ready for harvest without an attendant gardener; apparently when her father heard or read this he married her off without delay. 90 In one of his own poems, he invites his friends to come to his garden "to pluck lilies perfumed like aromatic azure..." surrounded by flowers... to sing of good times" ("A coger lirios que huele una mirra aromática... y rodeado de flores... para cantar el bien tiempo"), 91 seeming to suggest that he can use all the botanical metaphors he likes and just sing about good times, while she tries one and is immediately married off and silenced. Deyermond points out the similarity to other poems, including one attributed to the rabbi Amram: "I want to prepare my meadow before someone else mows it for me" ("Vuélle pelas men pat claure.I mi tonda"). 92

One of the very few poems to mention children, as noted earlier, is the one tentatively attributed to the wife of the tenth-century Hispano-Hebraic poet Dunash ibn Labrat. As if foreshadowing Mayor Arias's poem almost half a millennium later, she alludes to her husband's departure: "will her lover remember the graceful doe / on the day of parting / as she held her only child in her arms" ("Vas khotam y'mano 'al simula / uviro'lo halo sama r'mida"). As Deyermond points out, the two poems share the reference to a child, and, as well, clothing and accessories as part of the poetic message. 93

The image of women in men's Hispano-Jewish poetry is also more elusive than in their Spanish or Arabic counterparts. In Hispano-Hebraic men's poetry, these images tend to be stylized; 94 some have double meanings, representing the divine love between God and Israel. The Portuguese Jewish troubadour Vital signs for the "múd fremoshita d'Elvas," the lovely one of Elvas, who may or may not be Jewish, she is a "dona" ("lady") or perhaps the proper name "Dona"), whose "peyo branco" ("white breast") he has managed to glimpse. 95 Todros Abulafia reminds us of the characterization by ethnicity mentioned earlier; he chooses the cantigas d'amor and when he writes that Spanish girls "clothes are filled with crap and crud," but gives a backhanded compliment to Arab girls who have "charm and beauty" — and are "adopted at firstcry." 96 Later on, the poet piously renounces the earthly perspectives of the poet who "claims that a gazelle stole his heart / when he is actually pierced in the kidneys," informing us that "my heart thought over my wicked deeds and shame newly covered my face." 97 Rosen points that medieval Hebrew literature reflected "a tradition that idealized women in order to silence them; that mythologized women in order to maintain their inferiority." 98

An unusual collection of Judeo-Catalan wedding poems from the late fourteenth century, though composed by men, may give us a somewhat more realistic glimpse into the women's world. 99 Their main theme is advice for the newlyweds, and the poems incorporate Hebrew quotations from the Old Testament, especially the Song of Songs. To the groom, the rabbi's advice is "honor your lady, eat slowly, think of her well-being and — don't fall asleep — at least during the first year you're married." It recommends a playful approach to love, without any force, and offers practical remedies for impotence. 100 For the bride, the advice includes to be "clean as crystal," to "make him play the drum," to spin, weave, and sew, to bear children, and not to wear too much makeup. 101 Another poem, a twist on the melamaré theme, quotes the Leviticon (19:29) prohibition against sending one's daughter into prostitution: marrying her to an old man will lead to this, says the song, so don't do it. The old man in the poem announces to his bride that of the legally required provisions he can offer her room and board, but not conjugal relations. She replies by expressing an earnest wish to become a widow swiftly, and he finally
suggests providing her with a strong young man. The poem is more a warning, an exemplum, than a narrative of fact, as underlined by the admonitory refrain. On the one hand, one wonders whether a young Jewish bride would have had the temerity to speak her mind in this way; on the other, it is tempting to speculate on whether the poet’s verses were inspired by complaints from his own wife.

The Muslim World

For the Hispano-Arabic women poets, Cristina del Moral discusses differences in male and female Arabic poetry, concluding that the main differences are in content rather than style. The women’s poetry contains fewer descriptions, and rather than focusing on horses or swords may describe the woman herself. War and wine, prevalent in men’s poetry, make no appearances, but the women do use satire, and occasionally deal with religious, political or financial situations. There is also a tendency to acclaim the woman as a person. In general, del Moral finds that the women’s poems are more sincere and somewhat less conventional, draw less attention to the external and the physical, are less artificial, and use fewer rhetorical devices — findings which echo Ferrante’s and others’ observations on aristocratic women’s poetry. Reflecting Brockner’s observations, del Moral also points out that the Hispano-Arabic women poets across the classes display a facility in their use of language, reflecting the existence of the highly educated Andalusian slave-girl musicians. Deyermond points out the differences in their choice of images, some, such as the goose, following logically from their surroundings, others, such as the moon, reflecting differences in taste (“Patterns,” 88–89).

If absence of false modesty is a feature of some trovairiste poems, self-esteem (that late-twentieth-century desideratum) was even less of a problem in some of the Hispano-Arabic women’s writings. Wallída bint Al-Mustaffa, the notorious Umayyad princess, had two verses embroidered on her sleeves: the right said, “I am made, by God, for glory, and I walk, with pride, along my own road” and the left, “I grant my lover power over my cheek . . . and offer my kisses to whoever desires them.” The embroidered motto is echoed in the aristocratic Iberian world of the fifteenth century, in the =inamwoman a lady or a knight wore as a personal adornment, with a drawing and a brief, ingenious accompanying verse (mats or latax), or the faqqa embroidered on a woman’s sleeve (Pérez Priego, 14–17). In a poem to her lover, Wallída cheerfully refers to him as “a peon, a prostitute, an adulterer, a wittol, a cuckold and a thief”

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(“Pederasta, puso, adúltero, cabrón, cornudo y ladron,” Garaulo, 145). Still, she did produce less eyebrow-raising sentiments, and remarked that Allah kept her from actual adultery — which did stop her contemporary Muyil’s from making catty poetic remarks about her sex life. Another woman poet, ‘Arba bint Ahmad, wrote in answer to a marriage offer, “I am a leoness and will never reply to a dog, I who have closed my ears to so many lions” (“Una leona soy . . . nunca contrataría a un perro, yo que tantas veces los oidos cerré a leones,” Garaulo, 58). ‘Arba bint Handalín Al-Shaykhyya caps her lover’s “have you ever laid eyes on my equal?” with “and have you ever found anyone who could overshadow me?” (“¡Has visto a alguien sembrante mi...” “¡Y has encontrado a quien me haga sombra!” Garaulo, 70), reminding us of the Countessa de Dí’s self-valuation, in A dama de mir, so satisfyingly lacking in false modesty.

The Arabic-speaking women also show a distinct difference in register between the educated women’s poetry and the kharjas, which, like the cantigas de amigo, have been proposed as remnants of oral women’s poetry transmitted or re-worked by men. Like the cantigas de amigo, the kharjas seem, to me at least, rather suspiciously centred on longing for men’s company, more erotically expressed. This is also a feature of North African and Middle Eastern women’s oral poetry, but the latter’s originality seems rather lacking in the kharjas. Mary Jane Kelley cautious against the romantic reading of the kharjas in much the same spirit as Brockner’s cautious about trovairiste poetry and Walker’s and Ashley’s about the cantigas de amigo. Kelley’s appealingly provocative conclusion is worth quoting: “the female voice is subjected to masculine control on three levels: the original male authors wrote the words, the manuscript poets used them to express a male point of view, and the literary critics turned the verses themselves into sexually appealing virgins whom they possess by means of the reading process.”

Parallels from Oral Tradition

While it is a tricky business at best to try to draw conclusions about medieval poetry from an extant oral tradition, it may provide some useful material for speculation. The Galician-Portuguese poems, for example, find their echo in today’s village women from the same areas, surely a topic for eventual closer investigation.

In Muslim and Jewish Mediterranean cultures, there are several traditions whose texts provide a realistic contrast to the more courtly lyrics written down
in medieval manuscripts. Yemenite women’s songs combine old and new imagery: “I opened my breasts for you,”46 “I’d like to be a cigarette to be held against your fingertip;”46 “I wish for you, husband of two, that a serpent . . . coiled around you . . . will bite you . . . and at twilight you’ll die” (Caspil, 5); “I’d like to be a judge, . . . decree . . . my husband grind the chili pepper” (Caspil, 5). A new bride weeps for her mother: “O one who bore me, if only one roof we could share . . . I would gladly be your maid servant forever” (Caspil, 8). Old and new are also combined in Palestinian women’s songs: “the dove sings for you . . . your groom lured someone to build a shower for you and put a loft in every room.”46 Or “Old Tanoucha has brought the ingredients to make me a new virginity — how would we survive against men without these tricks?”46 A young Bedouin woman sings: “if he doesn’t bring me a fridge I won’t make him dinner; if he doesn’t bring me a television I won’t put on my makeup.”46 Judeo-Spanish wedding songs from Morocco combine practical, erotic, and religious sentiments in a curious echo of the medieval Judeo-Caralas poems: in one, the husband’s wallet and the bride’s faith in God are mentioned almost in the same breath; another expresses satisfaction with the trousseau, defying her women in-laws to find fault with it, then goes on to describe an erotic dream.46 Rosen remarks on the erotic character of the bride’s speech in medieval Hebrew wedding poems, but that this gift of speech, connected with religiously prescribed provocation, later becomes a curse as the bride becomes the nagging wife.46

Conclusions

In all three cultures of medieval Spain, women musicians were viewed ambivalently, depending largely on whether they performed publicly or privately, according to a male definition of public and private. Many women’s poems in all three cultures seem to use a more direct language than do men’s poems; at the same time, some women scholars have cautioned against a romantic reading of them. In many cases it is unclear whether songs in a woman’s voice were indeed composed, or even based on, songs by women; but both the cartas de amigo and the khayyus seem to contain elements which suggest a man’s vision of what the ideal “little woman” should be. While much has been said about the “popular origin” of these two genres, and, as well, of the French refrains which may originate in popular woman’s song, the real women’s oral tradition of the time is lost to us, and contemporary oral tradition can offer only guesses, all the more tantalizing for their wit and humor.

In terms of musical performance, one can only speculate. While there are a number of general indications for vocal technique in medieval writing, there is nothing to substitute for actually hearing the voice itself. In oral tradition, there is a wide variety of musical styles and vocal techniques; examining traditional women’s practice in Iberia and other Mediterranean areas provides intriguing ideas of how one might proceed with the medieval women’s repertoire, taking into account both groups’ available oral tradition, lost medieval sounds, internal differences, such as socioeconomic class, context, and generation, to name just a few. Women as instrumentalists almost require a separate study. In the Muslim world, there was a class of highly-skilled courtesans who, among other musical skills, played plucked stringed instruments; bowed and plucked stringed instruments were also played by women at certain levels of Christian society. In all three cultures, and indeed throughout the Mediterranean to this day, women were and continue to be experts in hand-held percussion instruments; this is another particularly interesting area, as accompanying rhythmic patterns are not annotated in medieval manuscripts.

Music notation is missing for many medieval poems besides the relatively small repertoire which can be identified with women; and it is only recently that it has become fairly common to transcribe songs from oral tradition. We know from working with the latter that many central aspects of performance cannot be notated, at least not adequately, with available notation systems, and the same is very likely true of the medieval repertoire. To bring these sung poems back to life, one option several performers have used is to recite or dedain them. This, in my opinion, is not a particularly effective solution. One alternative, which more performers have begun to use recently, is musical amusification, which was a standard technique at the time. In fact, it was common long before then, and is still a widespread technique, in many cultures and over many eras. Several studies have examined its use in medieval Christian, as well as in traditional Sephardic settings.72 Experimental recordings of trovairic poems to troubadour melodies have included the pioneering Caritat de Traverarr3 and some later productions.73 Elsewhere, I describe my own experiments setting some of the sung poems mentioned above — that of Danah’s supposed wife, the Judeo-Caralas series, and the Portuguese Vidal’s lyrics — to music of their respective regions and areas.75 While in no case can one guarantee that these are the melodies which were actually used, if care is taken in selecting time, place and matching prosody, one can at least posit a strong possibility of the poems’ having been sung to them. In terms of performance style and technique, we have no assurance that any current or recently documented tradition corresponds to one of close to a millennium ago — but
to me, at least, Mediterranean oral tradition seems a more likely model than eighteenth- and nineteenth-century based Western art music aesthetics and techniques.

As an ethnomusicologist, my chief lament is that we'll never hear these women sing, never know what they sounded like, how differently they sang from their male contemporaries, how differently from each other—from one community to the next, or from shepherdess to trovairessa, from unschooled Andalusian slave—or how differently from their counterparts in Mediterranean oral traditions which still survive. We'll never know what they really sang in their circumscribed "safe" spaces, in each others company.

As a performer, however, I continue to work on preparing ways to revive the unrevivable.

5

Feminine Voices in the Galician-Portuguese cantigas de amigo

Esther Corval
(Translated by Judith R. Cohen with Anne L. Klench)

The distinctive voices of women in Galician-Portuguese poetry constitute one of the most important literary phenomena to emerge in the Iberian Peninsula during the medieval period. Because of the large number of poems involved (there are over five hundred of these cantigas de amigo, "songs of the friend/ lover")—and because of their ebullience and poetic homogeneity, this corpus forms one of the main representatives of the medieval tradition known to scholars as "woman's song," whose defining trait is the presence of a female speaker. Men are the authors of these cantigas, even though they adopt a woman's voice. In terms of identifiable female poets, writers, and patrons, the Hispanic context provides little evidence: there is no documentation of women troubadours akin to the Occitan trovairessa, nor are there writers such as Clémentia de Pisan (fifteenth century), nor does much direct evidence survive of noblewomen acting as patrons of secular cultural life, like Eleanor of Aquitaine and her daughter Eleanor, wife of Alfonso VIII of Castile. The documented beneficence of Queen Urraca of Castile was directed primarily toward the religious sphere. Yet the male-authored cantigas de amigo create a dynamic notion of femininity whose multiple and even contradictory roles, voices, and emotions contrast with the uniformity and monotony created for the female figure in the male-voice cantigas de amor ("songs of love"). As we shall see in the following pages, the cantigas de amigo provide numerous examples of poetic inventiveness within the literary and rhetorical patterns of the genre, which is thus continually revitalized.¹

The two love genres of Galician-Portuguese lyric poetry, cantigas de amigo ("songs of the friend/lover") and cantigas de amor ("songs of love"), centre on similar love themes. The object of this love is the woman who has stolen the
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64. Paula Higgins, "The Other Minnesingers: Creative Women at the Court of Margaret of Scotland," in Reckoning the Means, 181.

65. Marshall, Symbols, Performers, and Sponsors: Female Musical Creators in the Late Middle Ages, 166; Martin Packer, "Margaret of Austria (1480-1530)," in Women Composers, 83-91.


68. Brown, "Women Singers," 62-63; for a full account of Isabella's patronage in context, see Pierre, "Renaissance Women."


72. Plumley, "The Woman's Song in Middle English," 137.


74. Gerbert de Montreuil, Le Roman de la Poetales ou de Guerres de Nivern, lines 157-158.

75. Ibid., The Songs of the Da Vinci, 55-58.

76. Ibid., 122.


78. All translations from the Decameron are my own.


11. Outside the Insanas Pizarras, there were some thirty poems attributed to various troubadours, as well as the French chansons d’amour, and some English, German, and Irish poems. See the essays in VF.

12. The manuscript was also practiced by the Hispanic-Heretic poets; the ñakba, often in a woman’s voice, sometimes included several words in the Romance vernacular, though in Arabic or Hebrew characters. See, among many other studies, James T. Morrow, "The Arabic and Romance ‘Hasqas’," Viator 6 (1975): 95-123; and Marjorie Feníc, Las jarcias musulmanas y los ensambles de la lírica valenciana (Mexico City: Colegio de México, 1973). For a collection of detailed essays, see Poesía estrófica, ed. F. Corominas and A. Saez-Badules (Madrid: Universidad Complutense, 1994).


14. See Ramón Menéndez-Pidal’s classic study Poesía júgarisca y juglaría (Madrid: Aula, 1943), 3-42.


16. Ibid., 198.


19. See Piñol, "Las actividades de las esclavas según Ibn Butlilas (XII) y Al-

Sagasti de Milaga (xx-XIII)," in La mujer en el Andalús, ed. María José Vírgo (Madrid: Universidad Autónoma, 1985), 401-10.


26. "It’s chansons que vous chanterez. / Par vos amis, par embarras. / La main, qu’est-t’ton amour m’aurait, / La main doit en corser couchee, "Par mes mains aux assauts!" ("The tunic he had worn / He sent for me to embrace. / At night, when his love spurs me / I lay down beside me, / All night, against my naked skin. / To touch my knee") 27:51-60 in Songs of the Women Troubadours, ed. and trans. Egídio Doss-Quiloby, Joan Vinka Grillmair, Wendy Pfeffer, and Elizabeth Aubrey (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1991), 141.

27. "Maur m’obligeant quant je voul reviendrai / Yeux... / Car on est trop ac doict ben rejouir / Bel de pucelle, et joli cuer avoi;" 15:7-8 in Doss-Quiloby et al., 116.


30. "Voice and Audience: The Emotional World of the cantigas de m 형," in VF, 33-46, esp. 36.


32. "Frechas e fragrantes flores naturais circuladas de vides eiras brilas nacional, entre multilido de flores de papel, de convencional recorte;" citado in Wolters, 11, 9.


mande?” (“In my fiancé’s house... I look in his wallet and at his money... how fine is the meaning... her face is the Creator who seeds it?”) (Alvar, 318); “Adonde nunca delante vo lo prendió, sueña y curada no regla que desee?” (“My new trousers I’ll set out before you; mother-in-law and sister-in-law, you can find no fault [have nothing to say]?”) (Alvar, 251); “notaba un sueño... con amor me lo fue folgando” (Alvar 226-241).

Alvar gives these texts as separate items; however, in my fieldwork recordings of Moroccan Sephardic women, they are usually sung sequentially. Proceeding the “I dreamed” (señaló) as the phrase “con amor, madre, con amor me lo fui a domando” (“with love, Mother, with love I will go to sleep”), echoing a song centuries earlier from the Concistorio Musical del Palacio; “con amor, ni madre, con amor me lo adormí” (“with love, my Mother, with love I went to sleep”), cited in Margot Frank Alonzo, Estudios sobre lírica antiguo (Madrid: Castalia, 1979), 107.


74. See, for example, Joyce Tiedt and the Ensemble Helioscope, The Romance of the Rose (New York: Koch Compact Discs 3-7109-2251, 1995).
75. Cohen, “Bridges.”

Chapter 3

We would like to express our gratitude to Joseph Snow for rescuing us from error and smoothing over some rough spots. Any defects which remain are, of course, our own.

1. To cite only some of the most representative books, see George Dobr and Michelle Perrot, eds., Historia de las mujeres, vol. 2, La ciudad media (Madrid: Tauris, 1993); in the Galician context, M. Carmen Póllos, A voces das muliñas na Galiza medieval (Santiago de Compostela: Universidade de Santiago, 1993); Esther Corral Díaz, As muliñas e as contiñas medievais (Sada: Do Castro, 1996). For an analysis of the genre, see, among others, Giuseppe Taravi, A poesía lírica gallego-portugues, and ed. (Vigo: Galaxia, 1988); Yacov Beltrán, Cancion de amor: Cantigas de amor (Barcelona: PPU, 1982); Mercedes Beza López and Bilar Lorenzo Gradín, A cantigas de amor (Vigo, Xerais, 1989); Esther Corral Díaz, “Las cantigas de amor” in Literatura gallego-mediaval e la Galicia Literatura Provenzal Galiza (Comarca: Xulena, 2000), 111-17.

2. In the líricos, for example, another of the genres related to the Hispanic woman’s song, a very similar image is transmitted. See Klich and Cohen in this volume.

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4. Gonzalo de Baños de Vinhal refers, in two of his cantigas de amor, to two specific people: Don Enrique, Alfonso’s younger brother, and Alfonso’s nursemother, Juana de Pointins, widow of King Ferdinand III (60.3 and 60.16).
5. See Thurn, A poesía, 144, and Corral, As muliñas, 143-56.
6. There is no lack of odd and dashing interpretations; for example, Francisco Nofredo Mures, La narratividad de la poesía galego-portuguesa: Antología narrativa, 2 vols. (Fase: Reichenberg, 1987), seen in the author (“thirty literally literal” sec. 2.5, below) of the cantigas de amor and the amizas of the cantigas de amor two stages of court love, which according to him, are implied subliminally in the texts of love poetry (1-201).
7. See, for example, the following sections from two poems by Lourdongo:

1. The young girl [musa, musa] was lovely / and in her sweet voice / sang and said ...” (88.16-19).

A musa en paredia, / en esa voz musa / cantou o día un musa

(The young girl [musa, musa] was lovely / in her sweet voice / sang and said...) (88.16-19).

Also, Pero Viviani, 116.4. For munidina, cf. 88.16-17, above, and 136-4. Pastor in one of the key words for classifying the composition within the genre of the poesia, and is found in Aires Núñez, 145.7. J. Pérez d’Abadín, 75-7; Pedr’Antigo, 116-19. J. Aires, 65-58; D. Diana, 25-125, 35-190, and 35-155; Lourdongo, 88.16. Domina in Aires Sanches, 9-10; García de Guadix, 70-5; Portocarrero, 128-4; Vigo in J. Zorrilla, 83-6. Dana-singe in 89.3; above; Portocarrero, 128-3; Aires Núñez, 14-9.

6. See also Ria Lemaire, Poèmes et passions: Contributo a uma semiologia do sujeito / dans la poésie lyrique médiéval en langue romane (Amsterdam: Eeklopi, 1985), 96.


10. Both also appear in the refrain “e chor’eu, bela,” “and I, lovely one, am weeping?” (Portocarrero, 128-9.)

11. The antoigas d’escarno (“scorns of mockery”) mention women’s bodies ex-