

Medieval Music and the Art of Memory

By Anna Maria Busse Berger



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This bold challenge to conventional notions about medieval music disputes the assumption of pure literacy and replaces it with a more complex picture of a world in which literacy and orality interacted. Asking such fundamental questions as how singers managed to memorize such an enormous amount of music and how music composed in the mind rather than in writing affected musical style, Anna Maria Busse Berger explores the impact of the art of memory on the composition and transmission of medieval music. Her fresh, innovative study shows that although writing allowed composers to work out pieces in the mind, it did not make memorization redundant but allowed for new ways to commit material to memory.

Since some of the polyphonic music from the twelfth century and later was written down, scholars have long assumed that it was all composed and transmitted in written form. Our understanding of medieval music has been profoundly shaped by German philologists from the beginning of the last century who approached medieval music as if it were no different from music of the nineteenth century. But *Medieval Music and the Art of Memory* deftly demonstrates that the fact that a piece was written down does not necessarily mean that it was conceived and transmitted in writing. Busse Berger's new model, one that emphasizes the interplay of literate and oral composition and transmission, deepens and enriches current understandings of medieval music and opens the field for fresh interpretations.

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Review

"It is extremely rare to find first-rate traditional mastery and a first-rate speculative imagination combined in a single scholar. Professor Busse Berger is that rarity. *Medieval Music* has a narrative that flows with compelling assurance and conviction. This book will rock medieval musicology to its foundations and permit the erection of a much firmer, more interesting, and more realistic structure to take the place of the old."

From the Inside Flap

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"This complex and stimulating book is notably rich in its interdisciplinarity. Rather than remaining trammelled by a false dichotomy between the oral and the written, Berger takes the lead with Mary Carruthers and others to probe provocative questions of memory, memorization, and mnemonics. The best, and most appropriate, single word to describe *Medieval Music and the Art of Memory* is 'unforgettable.'"--Jan Ziolkowski, coeditor, with Mary Carruthers, of *The Medieval Craft of Memory* and editor of Dag Norberg's *An Introduction to the Study of Medieval Latin Versification*

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