



Songs, Scribes, and Society: The History and Reception of the Loire Valley Chansonniers (New Cultural History of Music)

Jane Alden

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A new kind of songbook emerged in the later fifteenth century: personalized, portable, and lavishly decorated. Five closely related chansonniers, copied in the Loire Valley region of central France c. 1465-c. 1475, are the earliest surviving examples of this new genre.

The Loire Valley Chansonniers preserve the music of such renowned composers as Guillaume Du Fay, Johannes Ockeghem, and Antoine Busnoys. But their importance as musical sources has overshadowed the significance of these manuscripts as artifacts in their own right.

This book places the physical objects at center, investigating the means by which they were produced and the broader culture in which they circulated. Jane Alden performs a codicological autopsy upon the manuscripts and reveals the hitherto unrecognized role of scribes in shaping the transmission and reception of the chanson repertory. Alden also challenges the long-held belief that the Loire Valley Chansonniers were intended for royal or noble patrons. Instead, she argues that a rising class of bureaucrats--notaries, secretaries, and other court officials--commissioned these exquisite objects. Active as writers and participants in poetry competitions, these individuals may even have written some of the chansons' texts. The unique integration of image, text, and music found in chansonniers extends their appeal to a broad readership. But for the nineteenth-century scholars who rediscovered these manuscripts, the larger literary and visual resonances were not of primary interest. Alden documents the tangle of motivations--national identity, populist politics, and the rise of the musical masterwork--that informed the earliest writings on these books. Only now is their multifaceted structure the inspiration for a new generation of readers.

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