



The Sense of Sound: Musical Meaning in France, 1260-1330 (New Cultural History of Music)

Emma Dillon

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Among the most memorable innovations of music and poetry in thirteenth-century France was a genre that seemed to privilege sound over sense. The polytextual motet is especially well-known to scholars of the Middle Ages for its tendency to conceal complex allegorical meaning in a texture that, in performance, made words less, rather than more, audible. It is with such musical sound that this book is concerned. What did it mean to create a musical effect so potentially independent from the meaning of words? Is it possible such supermusical effects themselves had significance? *The Sense of Sound* offers a radical recontextualization of French song in the heyday of the motet c.1260-1330, and makes the case for listening to musical sound against a range of other potentially meaningful sonorities, often premised on non-verbal meaning. In identifying new audible interlocutors to music, it opens our ears to a broad spectrum of sounds often left out of historical inquiry, from the hubbub of the medieval city; to the eloquent babble of madmen; to the violent clamor of charivari; to the charismatic chatter of prayer. Drawing on a rich array of artistic evidence (music, manuscripts, poetry, and images) and contemporary cultural theory, it locates musical production in this period within a larger cultural environment concerned with representing sound and its emotional, ethical, and social effects. In so doing, *The Sense of Sound* offers an experiment in how we might place central the most elusive aspect of music's history: sound's vibrating, living effect.

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