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Introduction

This is a collection of medieval tunes from 12th -14th Centuries. It is a very small selection from the thousands of tunes written down in this period. It has been compiled mainly as a source of instrumental pieces, though singers may also find it useful. We have tried to select some of the more 'catchy' melodies, to emphasise that music of this period is not necessarily difficult to perform or to enjoy, and that there's a lot more to it than 'chant'. We have also tried to list as many sources as possible for finding further music.

Almost all of the pieces are originally songs (as very little instrumental music was ever written down) but we have found that most of this selection can work well on instruments alone. Playing a tune on whatever instruments were available is the most likely period practice - pieces were not 'scored' for particular instruments till the renaissance. Most of these tunes work well with a simple accompaniment (drones, parallel octaves, fourths or fifths, 'shadowing', simple counter melodies, percussion, etc - but avoid modern guitar-type 1-3-5 chords!). The tune could be played by a single self-accompanying instrument (fiddle or other strings, harp, bagpipe, etc.) or two or three contrasting instruments (e.g. plucked + bowed + wind). Or, of course, they can be sung, with or without accompaniment. Our experience is that they are not good pieces for large ensembles or recorder consorts - as is the case for almost all medieval music.

Relative Pitches

There was no notion of fixed pitch in the medieval period. A melody may have been notated as starting on D but this was an indication of the mode (the disposition of whole and half tones in a scale) and not a specific note as played on a piano. The melody would be sung at whatever pitch was convenient. The songs included here have been notated in a pitch suitable for the instruments on which we play them. They can be transposed to any pitch that is comfortable for your voice or that lies well on your instruments. Few of the melodies have a range of more than a ninth.

Tempo

None of the melodies in the manuscripts have any indication of tempo. The limitations of a singer are probably the best guide to tempo. They obviously would not have been sung faster than is possible to sing - though you cannot rule out an instrumentalist getting carried away - but a tune also can get too slow. A useful rule-of-thumb is that a line of text should be sung in one breath. If you cannot sing the line without taking a breath it is probably too slow.

Lyrics

In most cases we have included only the first stanza of the songs. This is to save space and avoid upsetting anyone over copyrights. The bibliography has references that should help you find the rest of the words. Complete versions (sometimes with translations) can often be found on the internet usually by searching on the first few words of the song; you may find more accurate transcriptions than we were capable of doing. It is also worth noting that it was a period practice to invent new words to fit an old tune, so feel free to supply your own.

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Troubadour and Trouvère

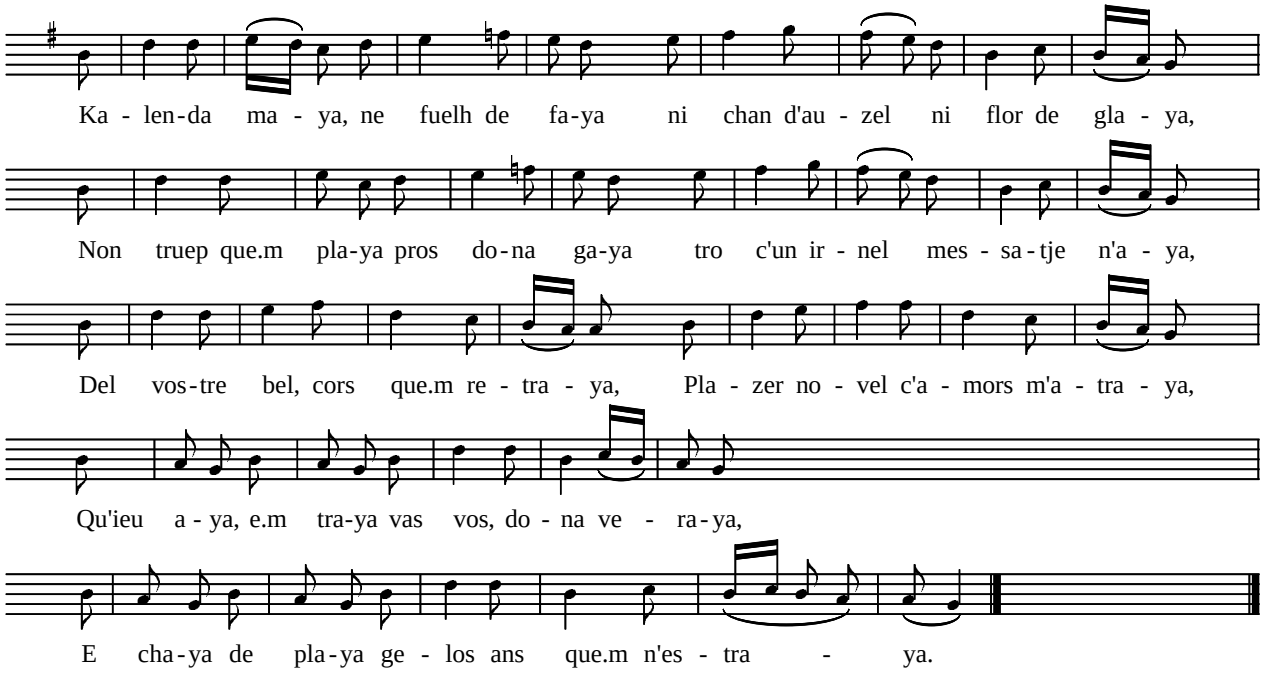
These tunes come from the 12th and 13th centuries, from what is now France. The Troubadours were from the south (but also from parts of NW Italy and Catalonia) and wrote songs in Old Occitan. About 3000 songs, but only 300 with music, have been recorded in manuscripts. The Trouvères were from the northern areas and wrote in Old French. They flourished slightly later than the Troubadours, but used the same forms and similar style. There are thousands of Trouvère songs recorded in manuscripts.

Nearly all the troubadour (and many of the trouvère) songs were notated without any rhythm. It is likely that most of them would have been performed freely (though this is hotly debated) and possibly unaccompanied (even more hotly debated) but some are of a more popular style which can imply rhythm and use of instruments. It is known that instrumentalists made arrangements of popular songs, so it seems reasonable to play this music. One way to transform a troubadour or trouvère tune to an instrumental is to arrange it in the estampie form (see below). We have included a late troubadour tune 'Pus astres' and our own estampie arrangement of it as an example.

Generally, the structure of most troubadour and trouvère songs is strophic, that is, a series of strophes sung to the same music. As stated earlier we have only included the first strophe.

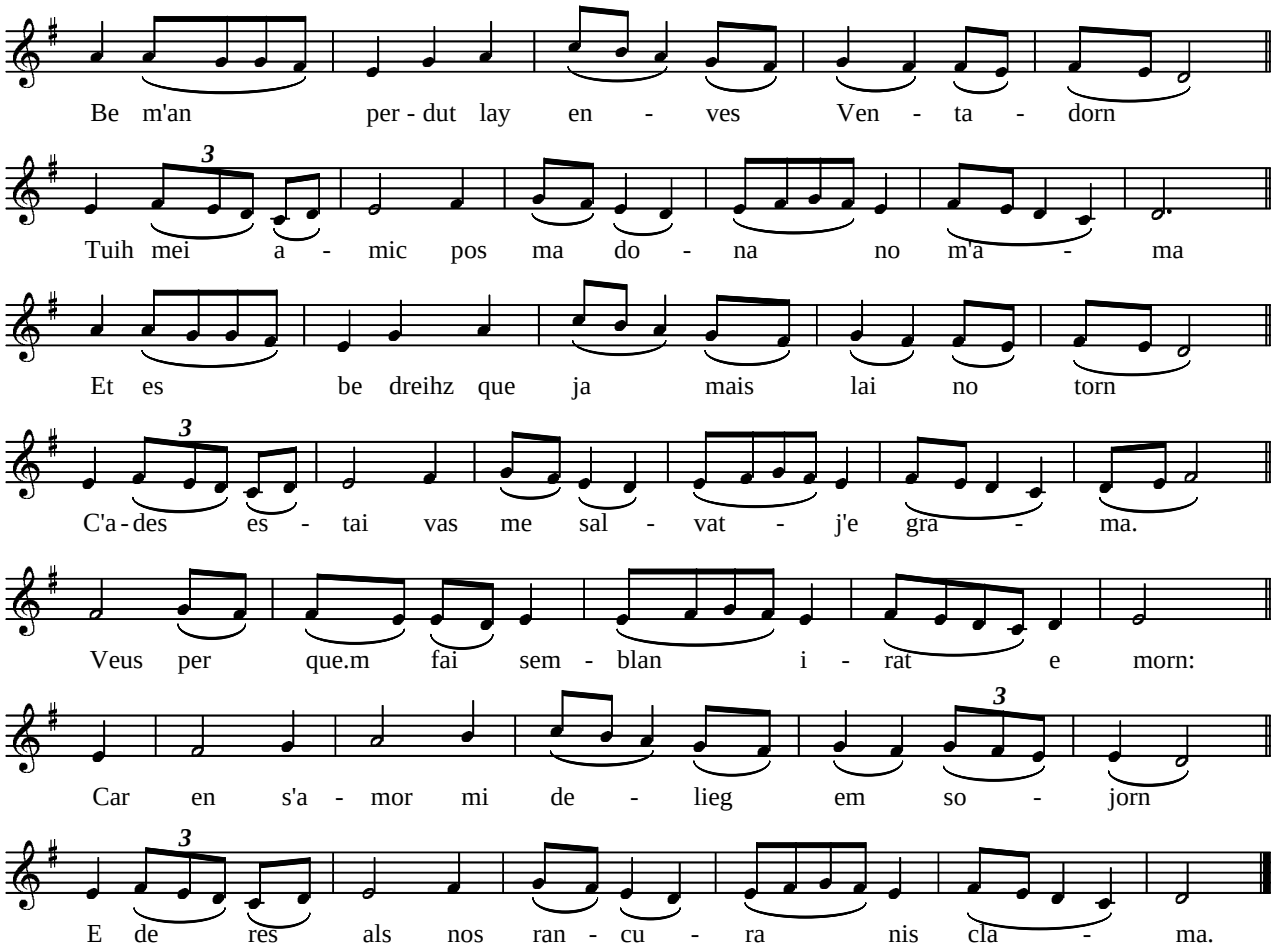
Kalenda Maya

One of the better-known troubadour tunes. It was composed by Raimbaut de Vacqueiras and is said to have used the melody from an 'estampida' played by two northern French fiddlers at the court of the Count of Montferrat. It tells that none of the joys of May can please the singer until he has a message of love from his Dona (the Lady - the object of his love).



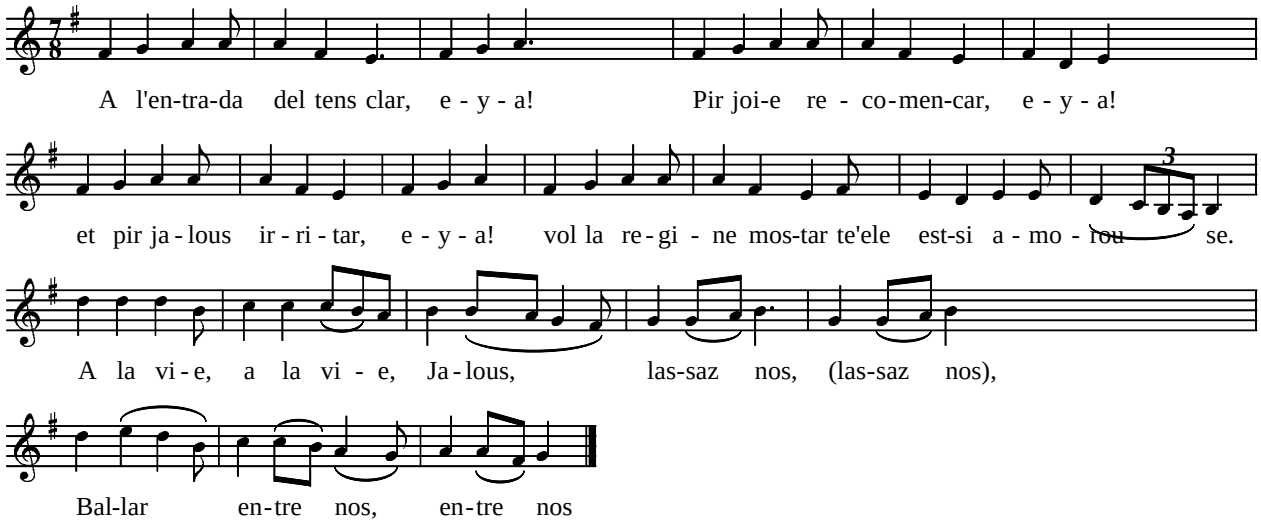
Be m'an perdut

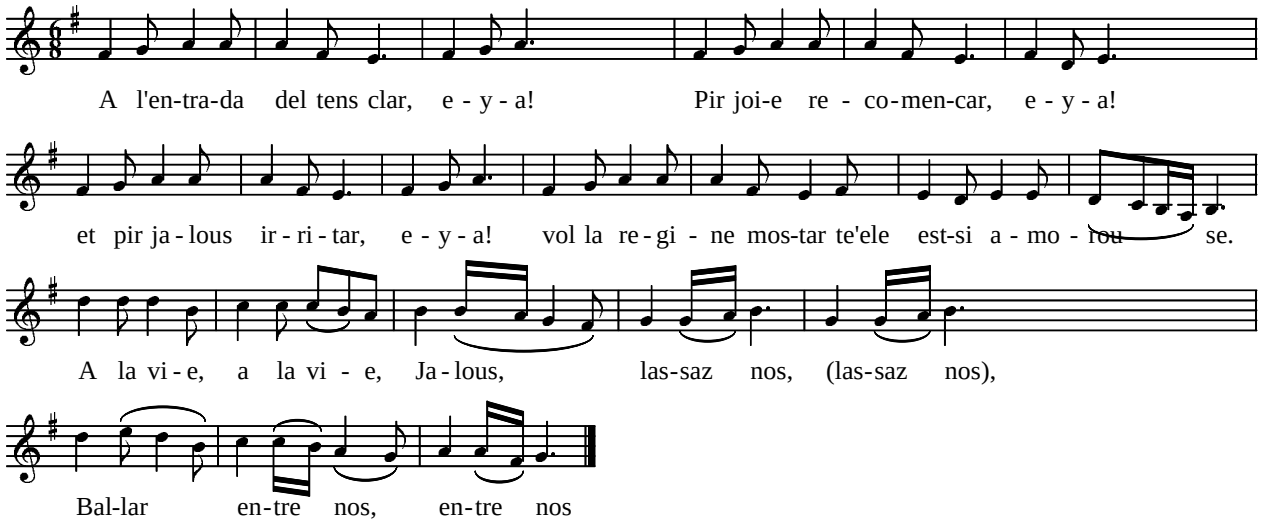
This is a song by the most famous of the troubadours - Bernart de Ventadorn. Strictly speaking, this is a Canso - the highest form of the troubadour songs. Many people believe they should be sung a-rhythmically and unaccompanied. The melodic structure (AAB) is a common one in this repertory, though here the first part of the melody is repeated with a slightly different ending. This form was to influence the Ballade form of later periods. This is our own rhythmic arrangement for playing instrumentally - the tune is too good not to use. Bernart complains of being exiled from Ventadorn because his lady is angry at him - for loving her too much.



A l'entrada del tens clar

Another well-known tune that, curiously, has found its way back into the modern Provencal folk canon. We have given two arrangements here. Our favourite is the first in 7/8 which gives it a lively momentum. For those of a more delicate disposition we also include a version in 6/8.

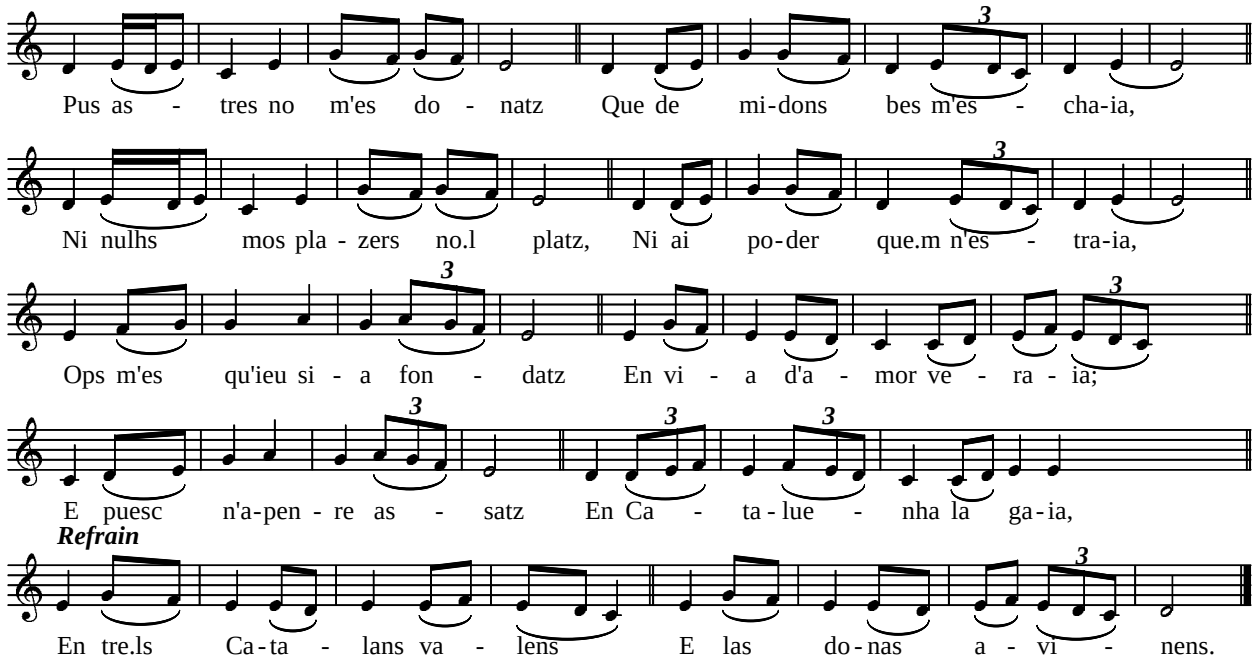




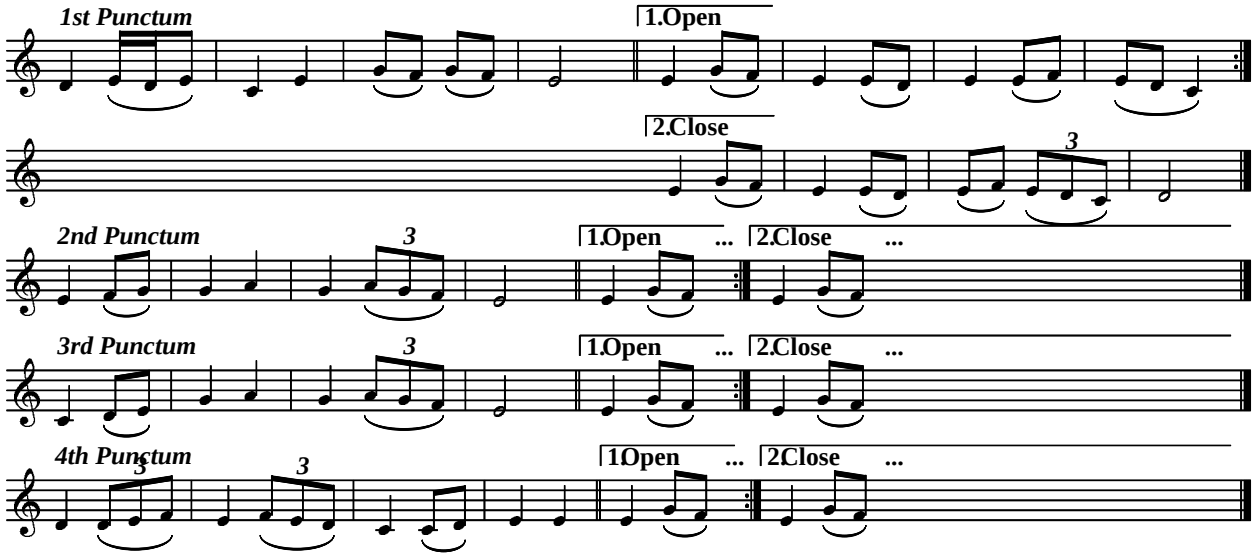
Pus astres and estampie

This is a refrain song by the late troubadour Guiraut Riquier. It tells of the poet's wish to be instructed in the ways of true love amoungst the noble and gracious ladies of Catalonia (presumably written for the court there).

The estampie is made up from sections of the original tune. The 'open' and 'close' are the two halves of the refrain. This form allows you to add extra sections if you wish - variations, freely composed, improvised, etc. (See Estampies Real for more on this form.)

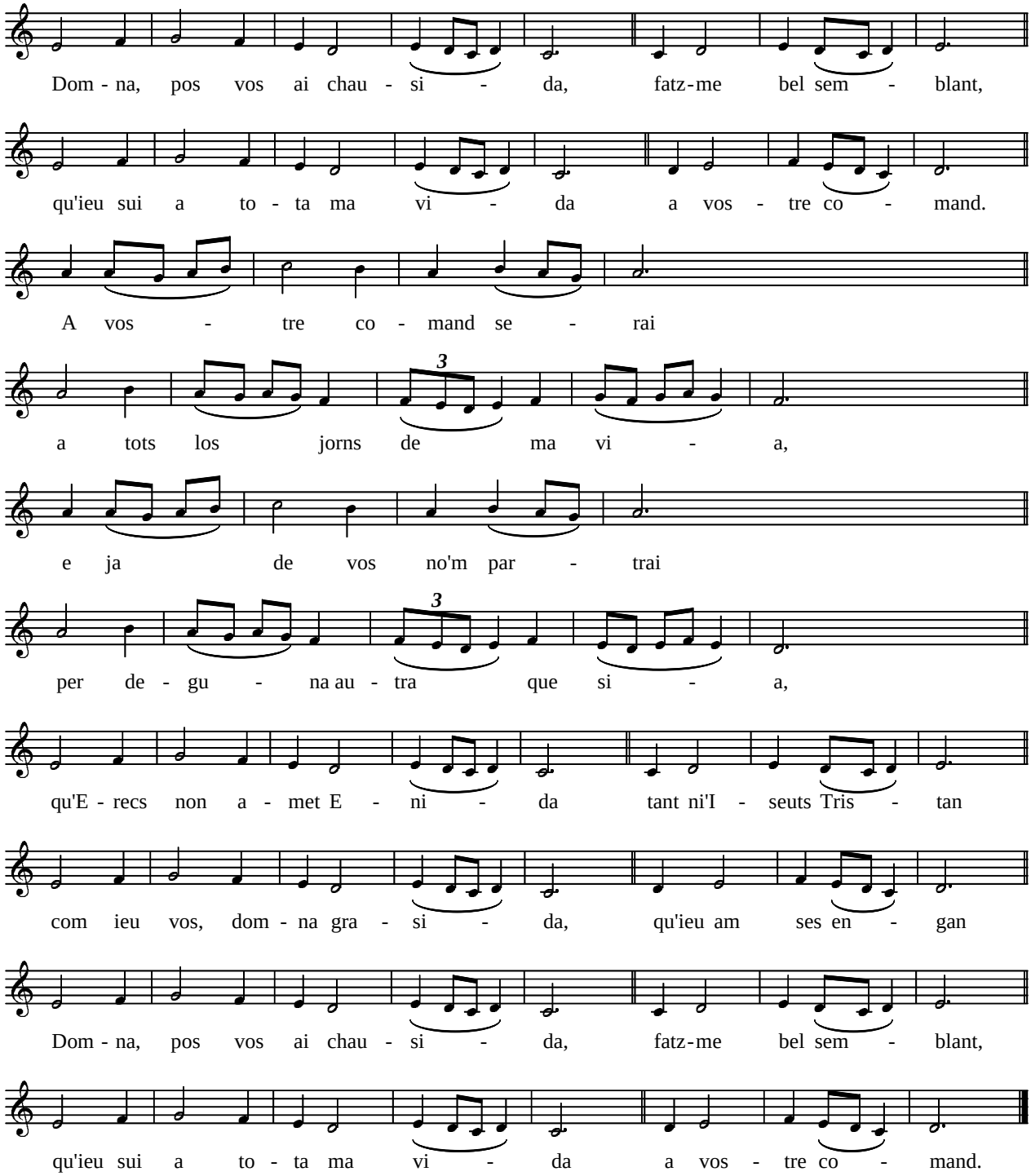


Estampie on Pus astres

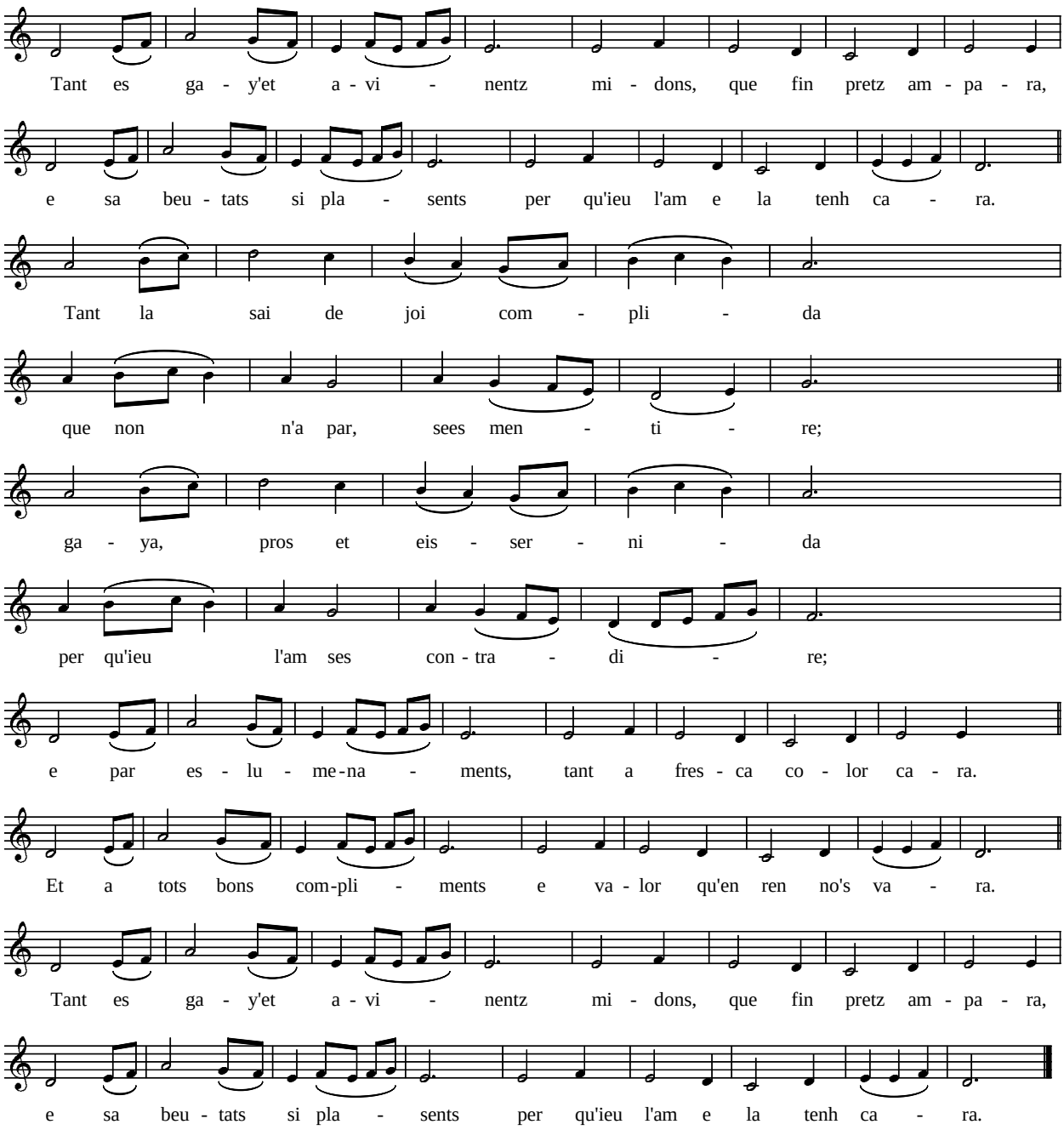


Domna, pos vos ai chausida and **Tant es gaya**

These are two examples of Dansas or dance songs. They are some of the very few troubadour melodies to be written in mensural notation (i.e. the manuscript indicates note duration as well as pitch value). It is also common that dansas only have one strophe in the manuscript. The structure of these is similar to the virelai (AbaA - see Cantigas de Santa Maria) where the first two lines act as a refrain, followed by a new section of music, then a repeat of the first section's music to new words, then a repeat of the first section (refrain). This form differs in that it has no more stanzas to follow.

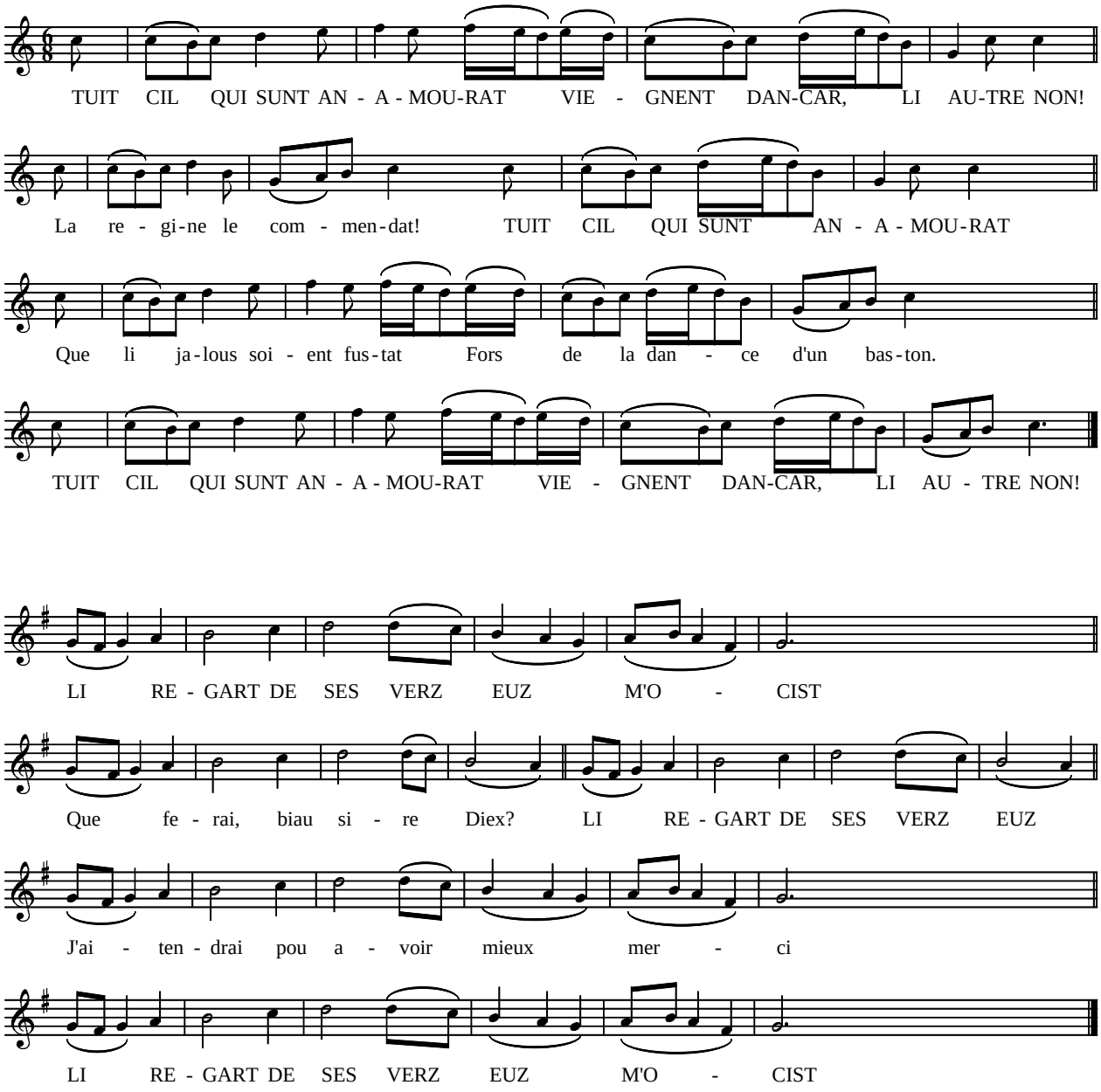


Tant es gaya

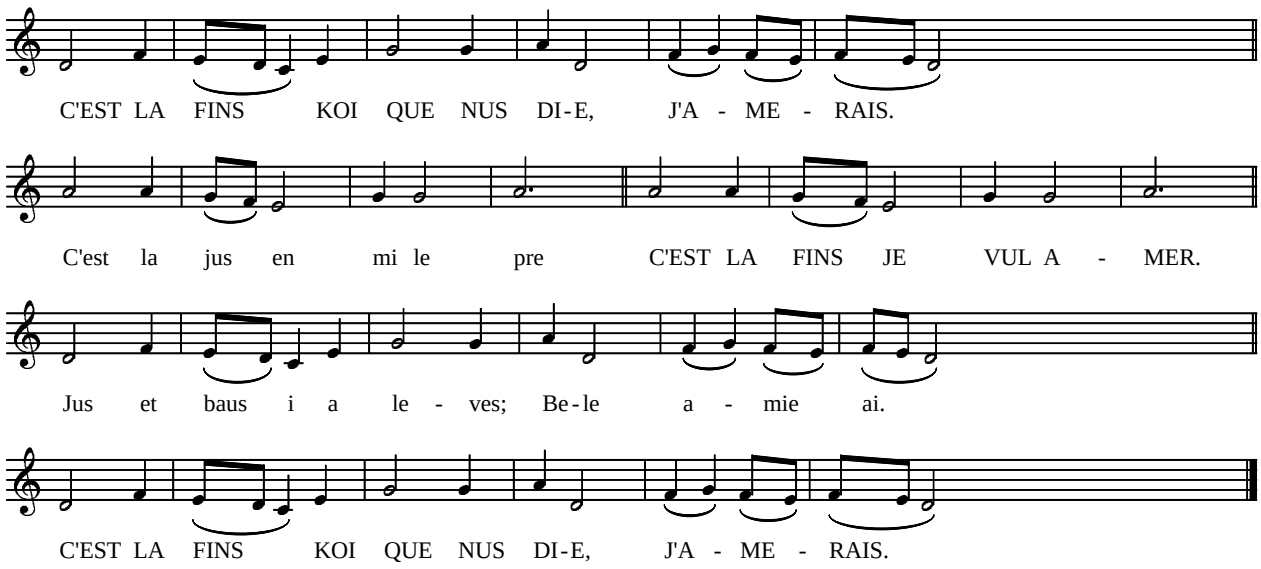

Tant es ga - y'et a - vi - nentz mi - dons, que fin pretz am - pa - ra,
e sa beu - tats si pla - sents per qu'ieu l'am e la tenh ca - ra.
Tant la sai de joi com - pli - da
que non n'a par, sees men - ti - re;
ga - ya, pros et eis - ser - ni - da
per qu'ieu l'am ses con - tra - di - re;
e par es - lu - me-na - ments, tant a fres - ca co - lor ca - ra.
Et a tots bons com-pli - ments e va - lor qu'en ren no's va - ra.
Tant es ga - y'et a - vi - nentz mi - dons, que fin pretz am - pa - ra,
e sa beu - tats si pla - sents per qu'ieu l'am e la tenh ca - ra.

Three Caroles – Tuit cil, Que ferai and **C'est la fins**

Medieval caroles have no particular connection to Christmas but rather are a type of dance song. The popularity of caroles can be measured by the large number of medieval sermons denouncing the dancing of caroles (often in the church graveyard). Unfortunately, we do not have any record of what the dance was apart from various painted depictions which show dancers in a line or a circle. The three caroles included here (the first in Occitan; the other two in Old French) show the standard form of these songs. The capitalised text is sung by all the dancers; the rest by the soloist - a form that you can be echoed by an instrumental group. There is never more than one stanza recorded for caroles. People appeared to have spent hours caroling so, presumably, they repeated them many times, made up new words (on the trot, as it were), strung a number of caroles together, or used any other idea to keep the dancers moving.

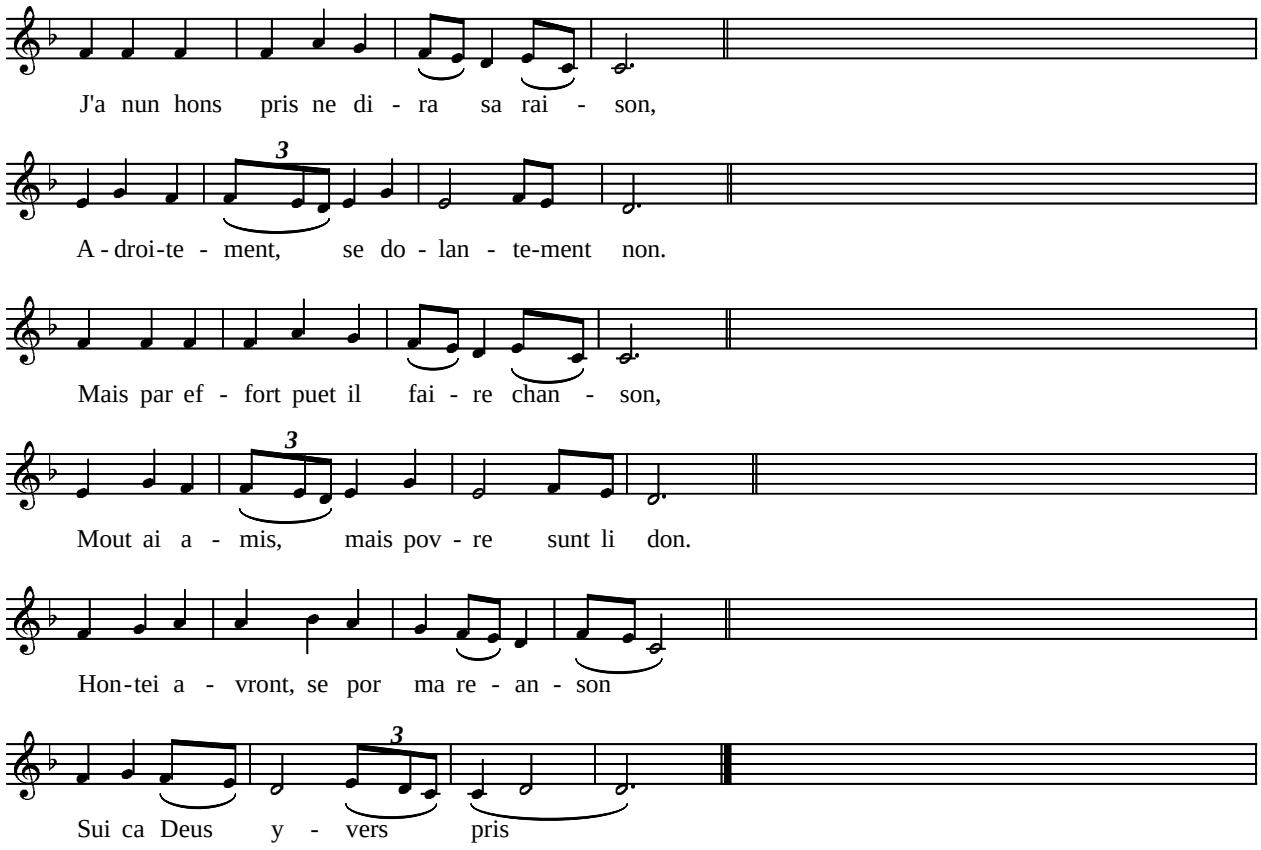


C'est la fins



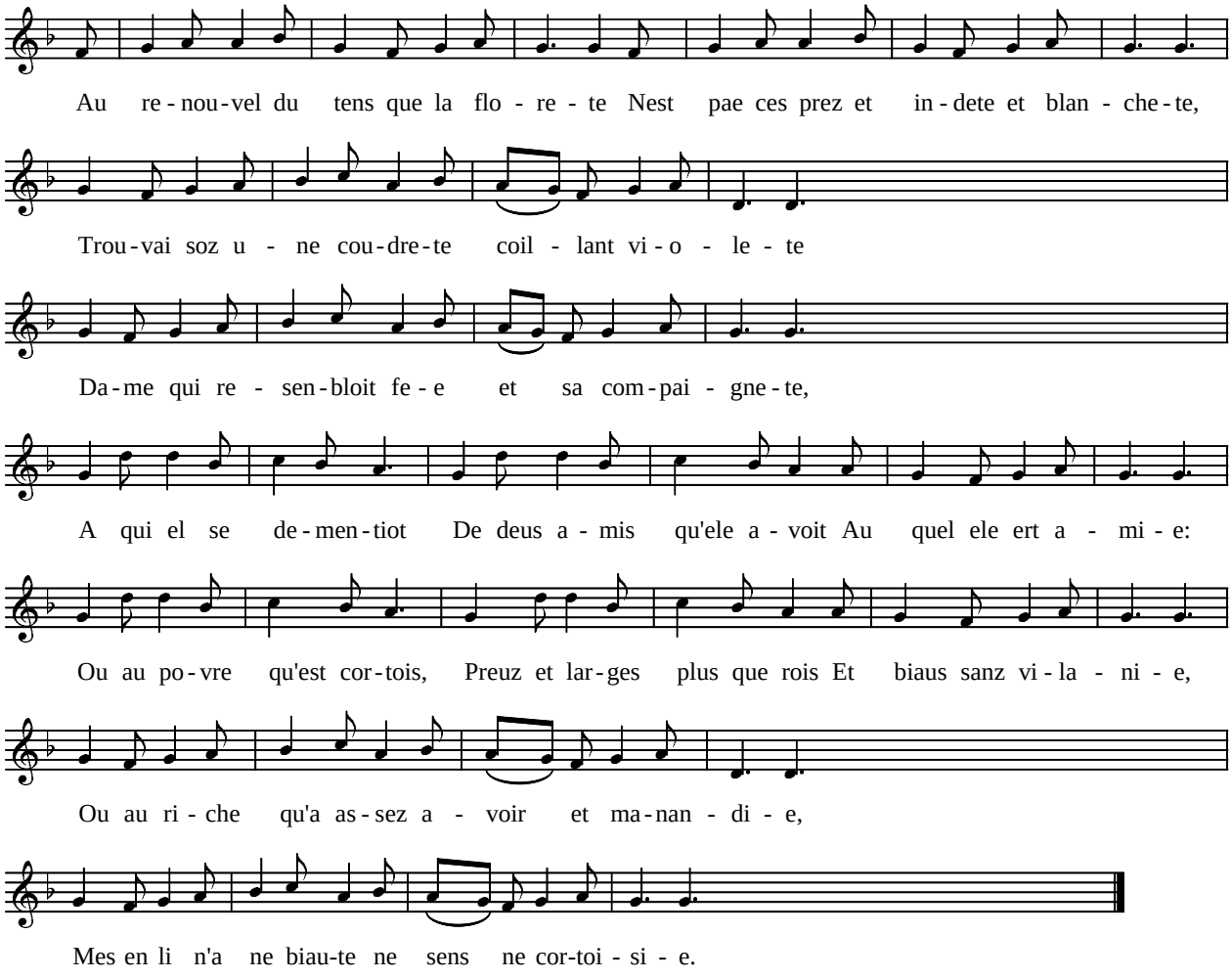
J'a nun hons pris

Attributed (by some) to Richard Lionheart and said to have be written whilst he was being held captive in Austria. It is basically a complaint that no-one is paying his ransom - but a lovely tune. This one is good to sing or play fairly freely - don't let it become a waltz.



Au renouvel

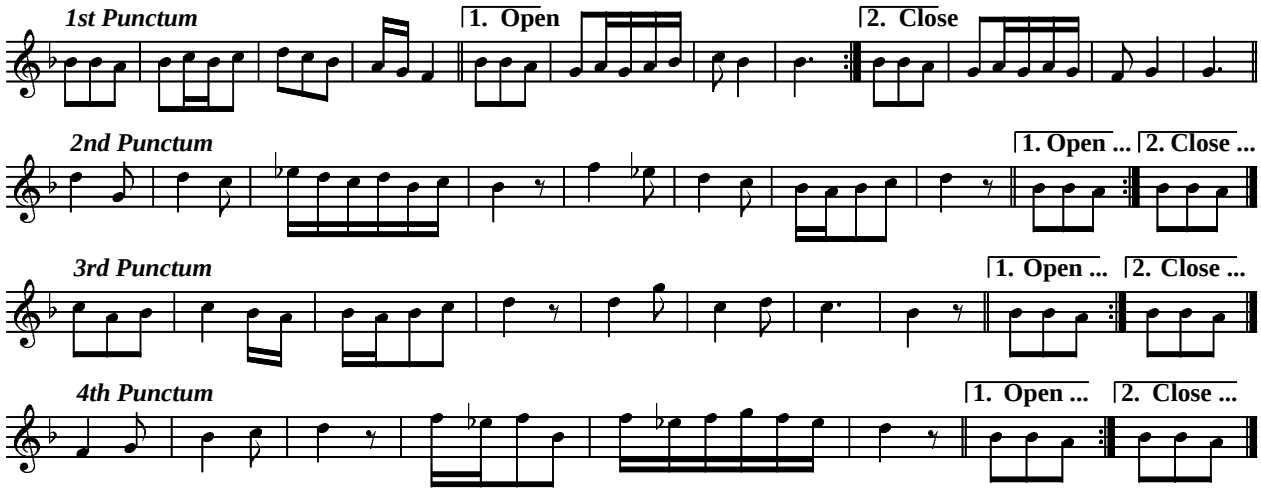
This is an example of one of the lighter styles of trouvère song. A knight is riding along in spring and overhears a debate between two women in a field as to whether it is better to love a poor man who is handsome and refined or a rich man with no beauty or brains…



Estampies Real

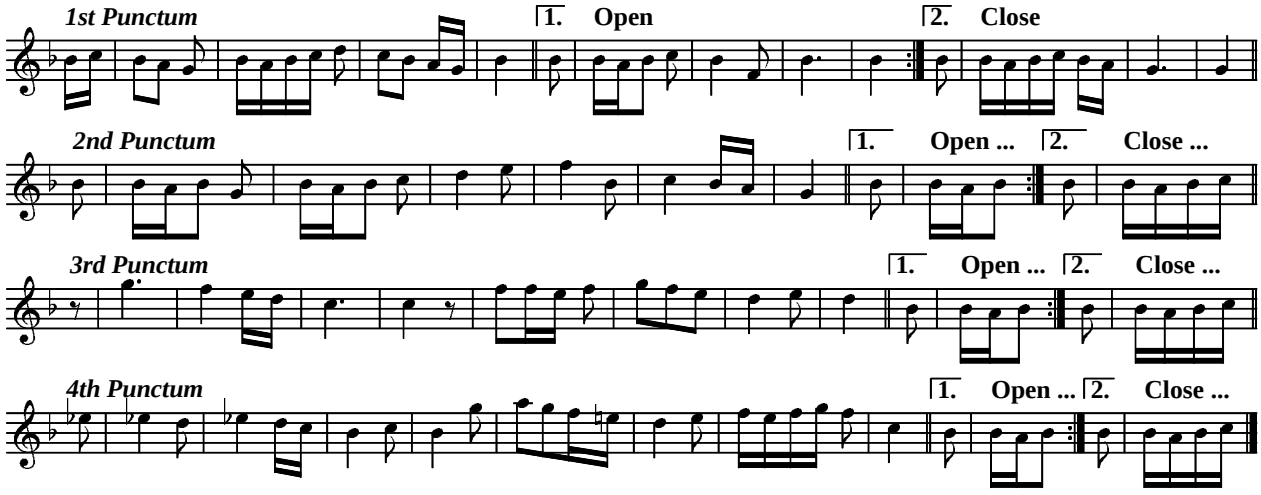
Two of the 7 (and a half) "Estampies Real" (i.e. royal estampies) from the Manuscrit du Roi. The estampie was also a dance form, but we know even less about how it was danced than the carole. It also appears to have been the most common form of instrumental music (but there are only 30-odd instrumental pieces recorded before 1400). What is distinctive is the form, with each section repeating a melody first with an 'open' ending, then with a 'closed' ending, and the same endings used throughout. They are much played and loved by instrumentalists. These two make a nice pair (we usually play them in the opposite order - no. 6 then no. 5)

Estampie no. 5



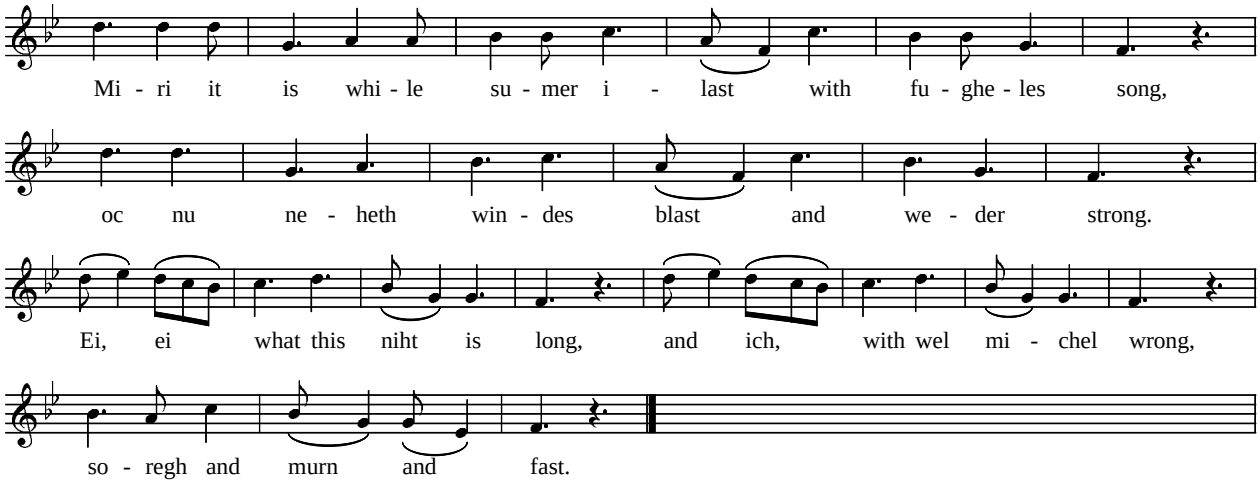
Note: the end of each punctum has the complete 'Open' on the first time through, then the complete 'Close' on the repeat.

Estampie no. 6



Miri it is while sumer ilast

Very few songs in (Middle) English have survived with music (all of them can be found in Dobson and Harrison, *Medieval English Songs*.) as most songs at this time were written in Anglo-Norman or Latin. Most that have been found are fragments, eg. with the manuscript used in bindings for later books. Such is the case for 'Miri it is'. It is fortunate that we now have the tune but unfortunate that it was at the bottom of the fragment so only the first stanza has survived. This song dates from early-mid 13th century and probably comes from around Cambridge which, presumably, had some spectacularly miserable winters in those days.



Cantigas de Santa Maria (CSM)

These are from the collection of 400+ songs relating miracles performed by the Virgin Mary recorded in four manuscripts (only three with music), commissioned by Alfonso X 'El Sabio' (the Wise) of Castille in the late 13th century. The stories themselves seem to vary from the fanciful to the extremely implausable and often go on at great length (up to 30 stanzas) - no doubt all part of a fine evening's entertainment.

The tunes are often in a popular 'folk' style with refrains that could have been sung by the original audience in much the same way as more recent folk tunes. Many of the tunes would make a good basis for filk.

The form of most cantigas is the Virelai. This starts with the refrain and then has stanzas with refrains between and ends again with the refrain. The second part of each stanza has the same melody as the refrain. This can be expressed as:

AbaAbaAba... where 'A' is the refrain,

'b' is the first part of the stanza (often with a repeated section), and

'a' is the second part of the stanza to the music of the refrain

The notation used by the scribes for the cantigas indicates the rhythm (unlike the troubadour and trouvère repertory) but in many places is quite ambiguous. It is quite possible for different people to transcribe these tunes with very different rhythmic interpretation. Most of those we have included are generally accepted transcriptions with minor differences (except CSM 9 which has a non-standard rhythm but seems entirely plausible to us).

The numbering of the cantigas is different in each manuscript. The numbering we use is from E1 (El Escorial MS B.I.2 / B.J.2 / j.b.2) which is the same as used by Hingio Anglés in his complete edition.

A very useful website for the Cantigas with facsimiles is http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/cantigas/

Included:

CSM 7 - Santa Maria amar

CSM 9 - Por que nos aiamos

CSM 100 - Santa Maria Stella do Dia

CSM 111 - En todo tempo

CSM 119 - Como somos per conssello

CSM 139 - Maravillosos et piadosos

CSM 159 - Non soffre Santa Maria

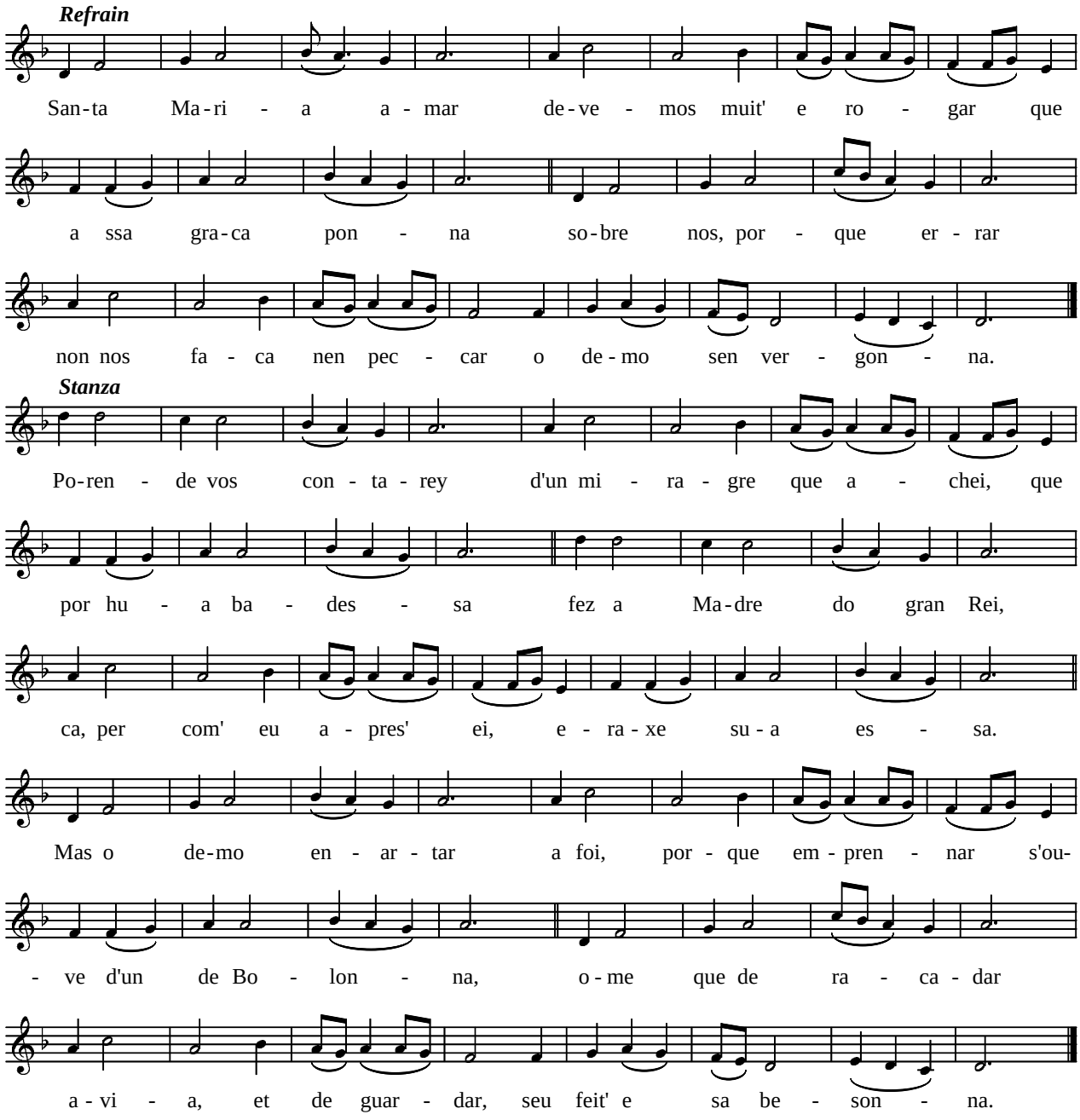
CSM 167 - Quen quer que na Virgen fia

CSM 302 - A madre de Jhesu Cristo

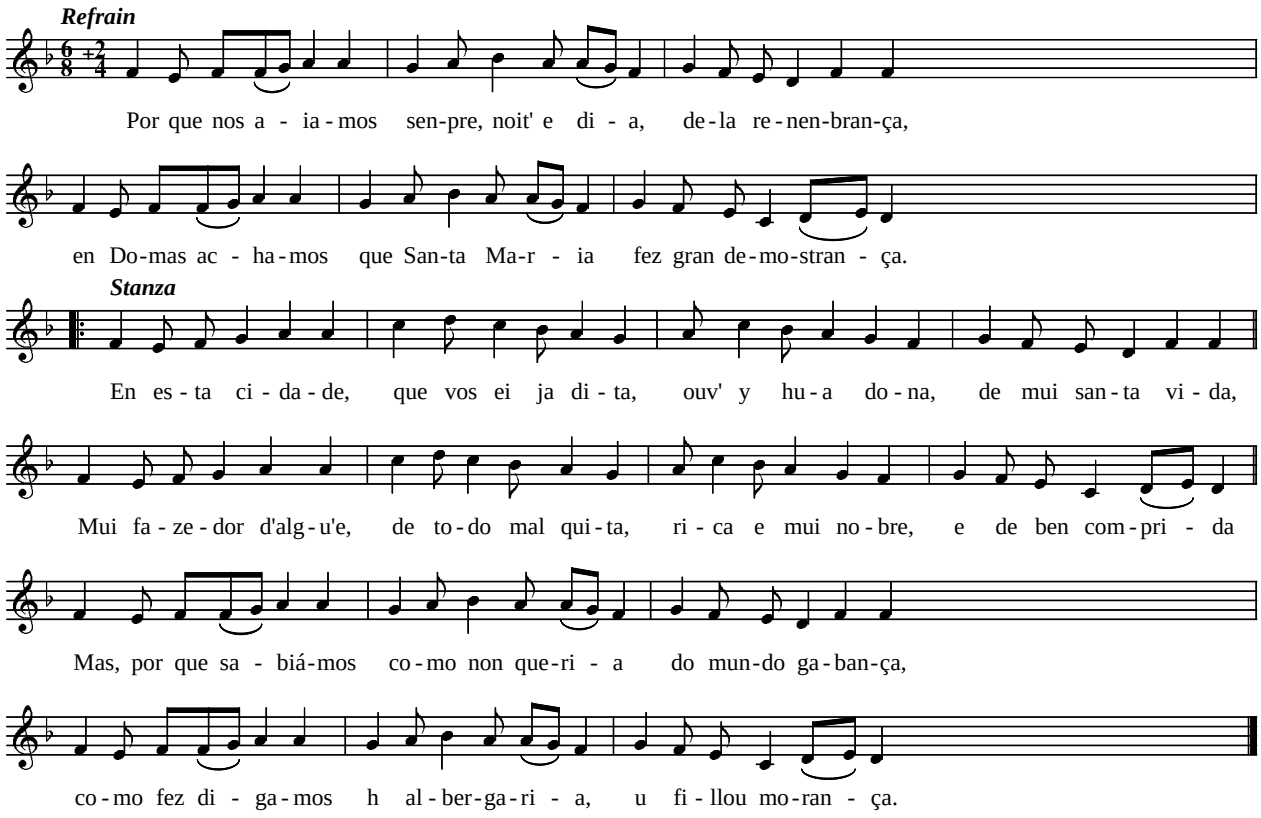
CSM 377 - Sempr'a Virgen groriosa

CSM 391 - Como pod' a groriosa

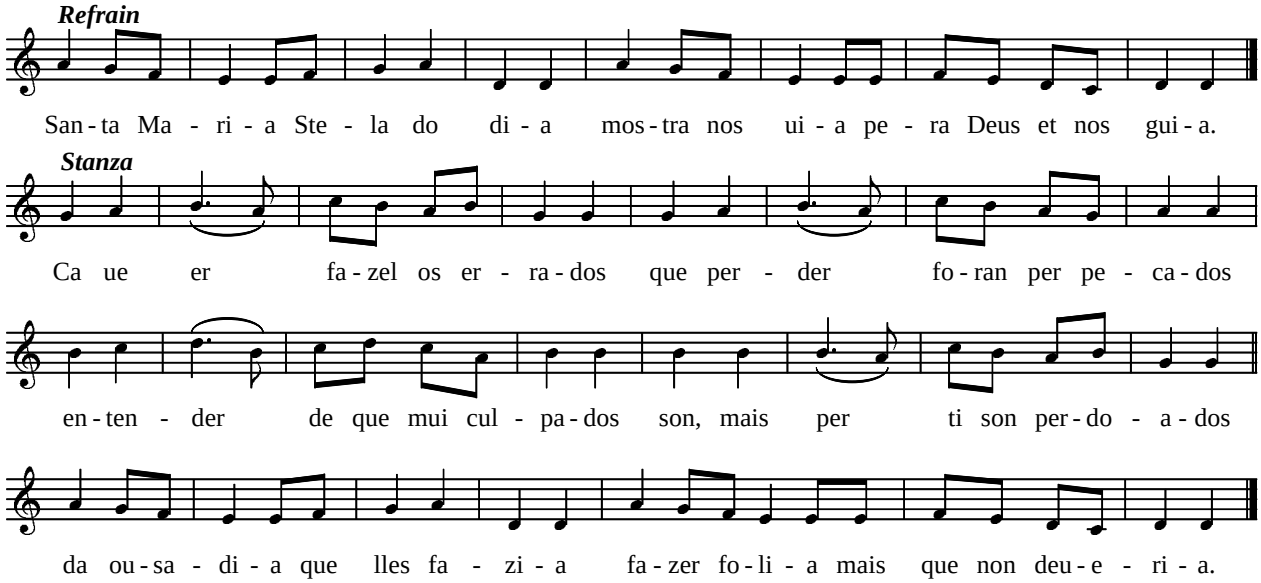
CSM 7 - Santa Maria amar



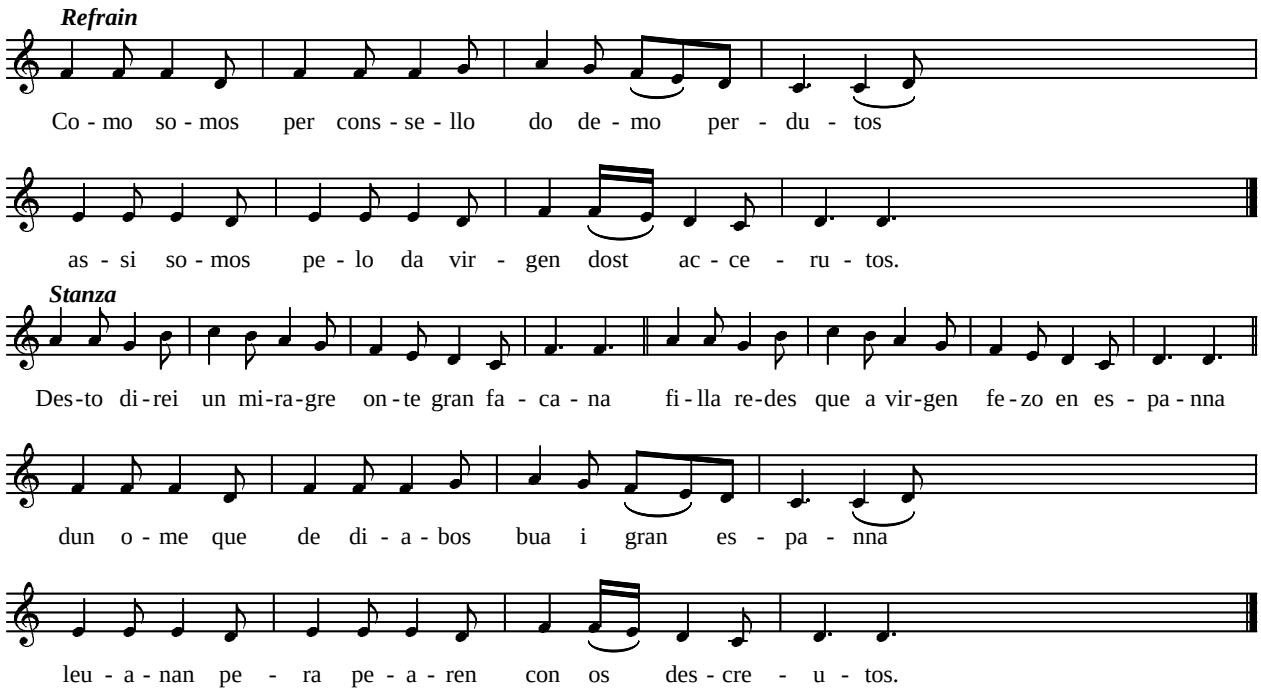
CSM 9 - Por que nos aiamos



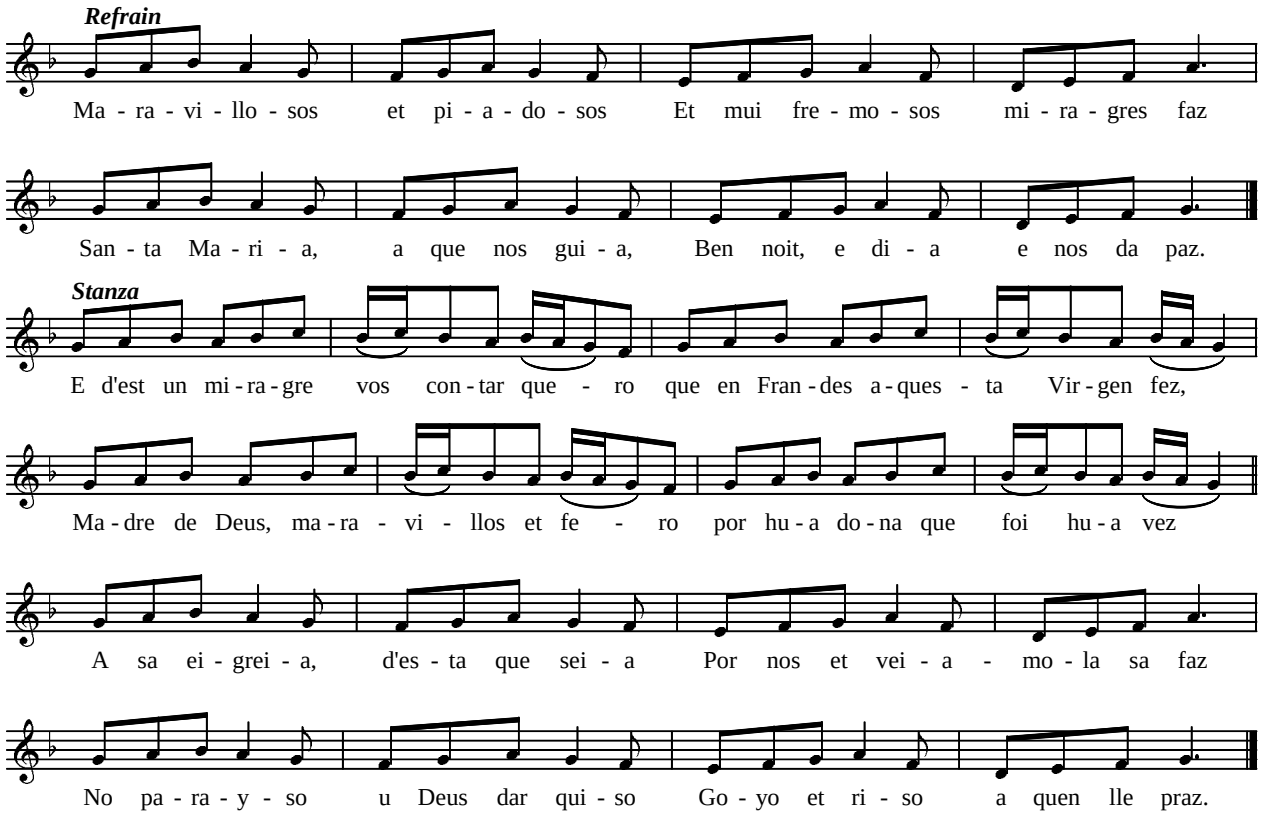
CSM 100 - Santa Maria Stella do Dia



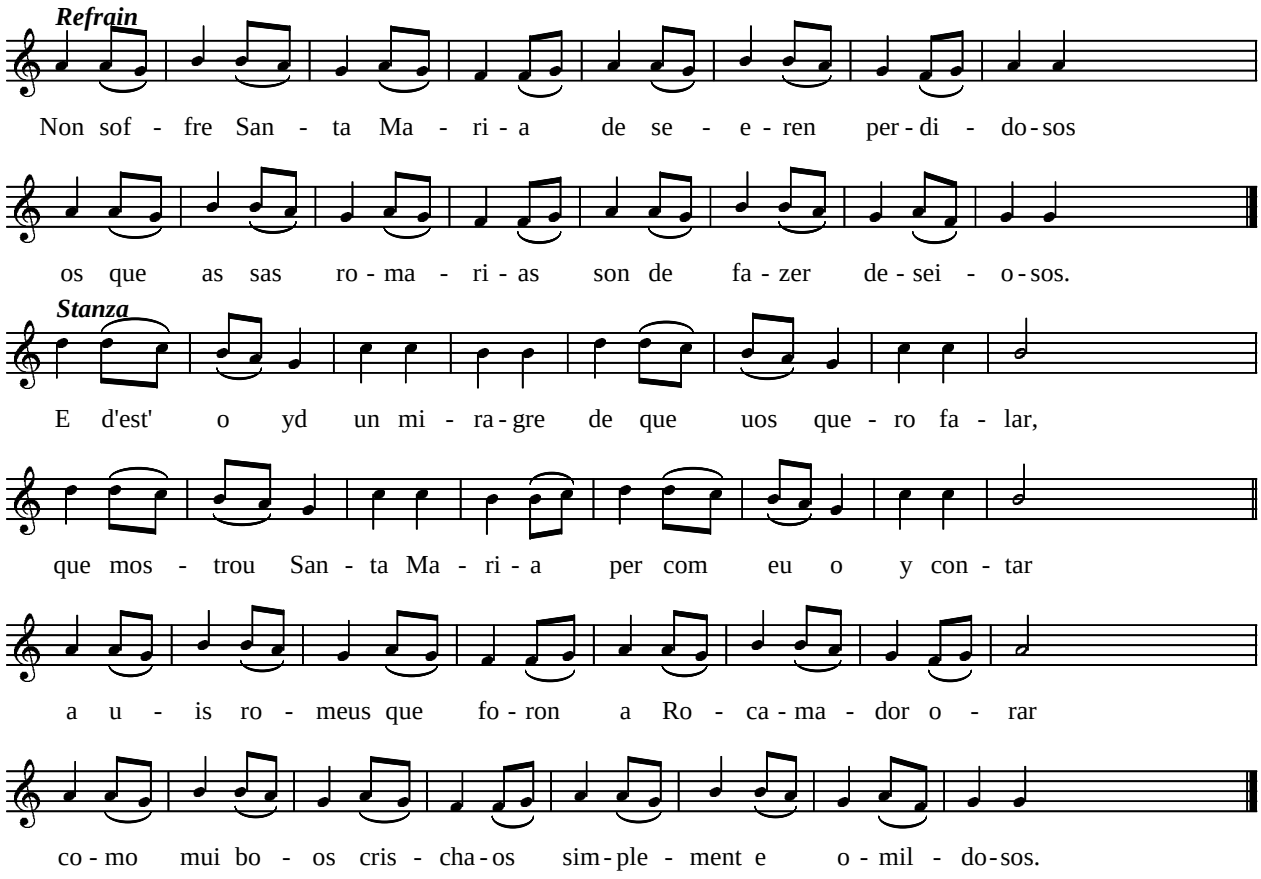
CSM 119 - Como somos per conssello



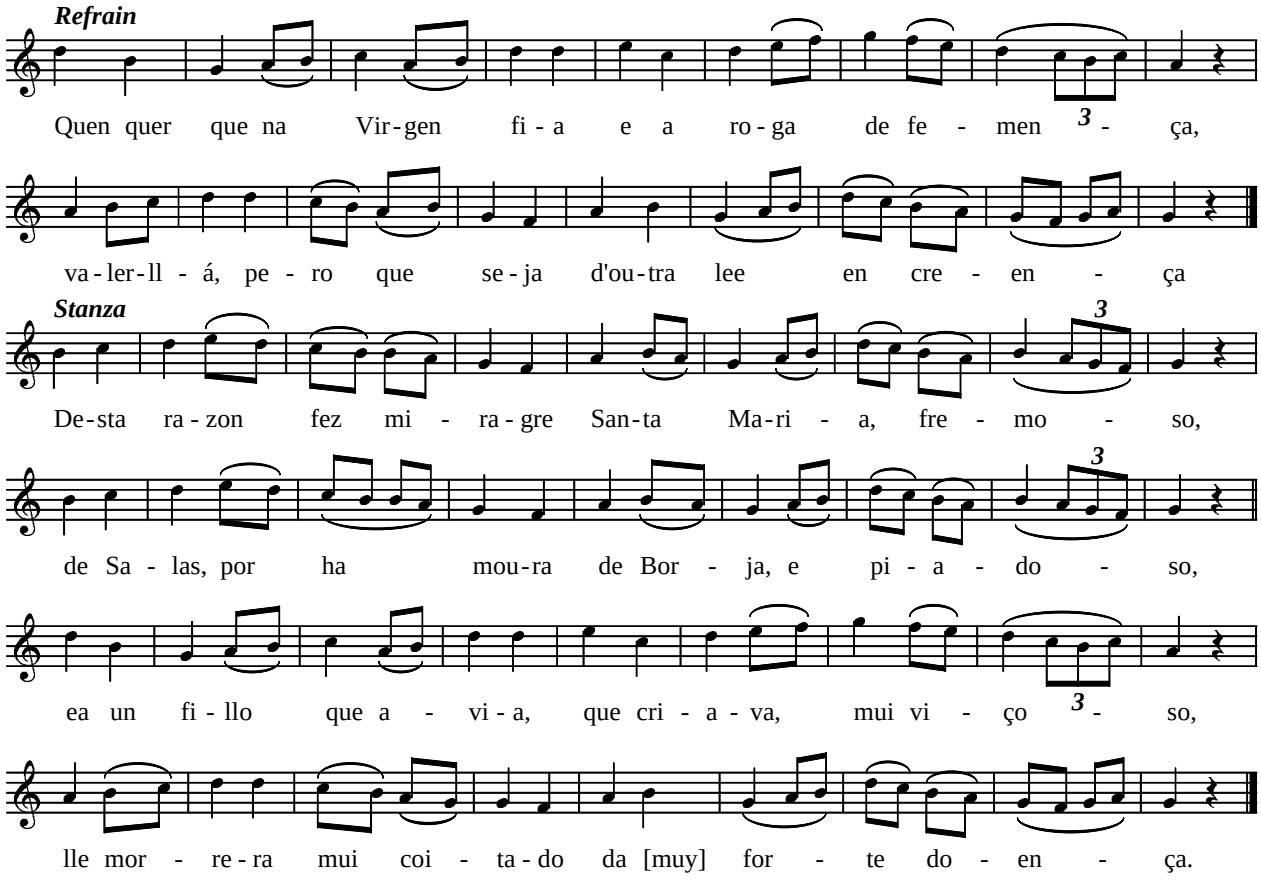
CSM 139 - Maravillosos et piadosos



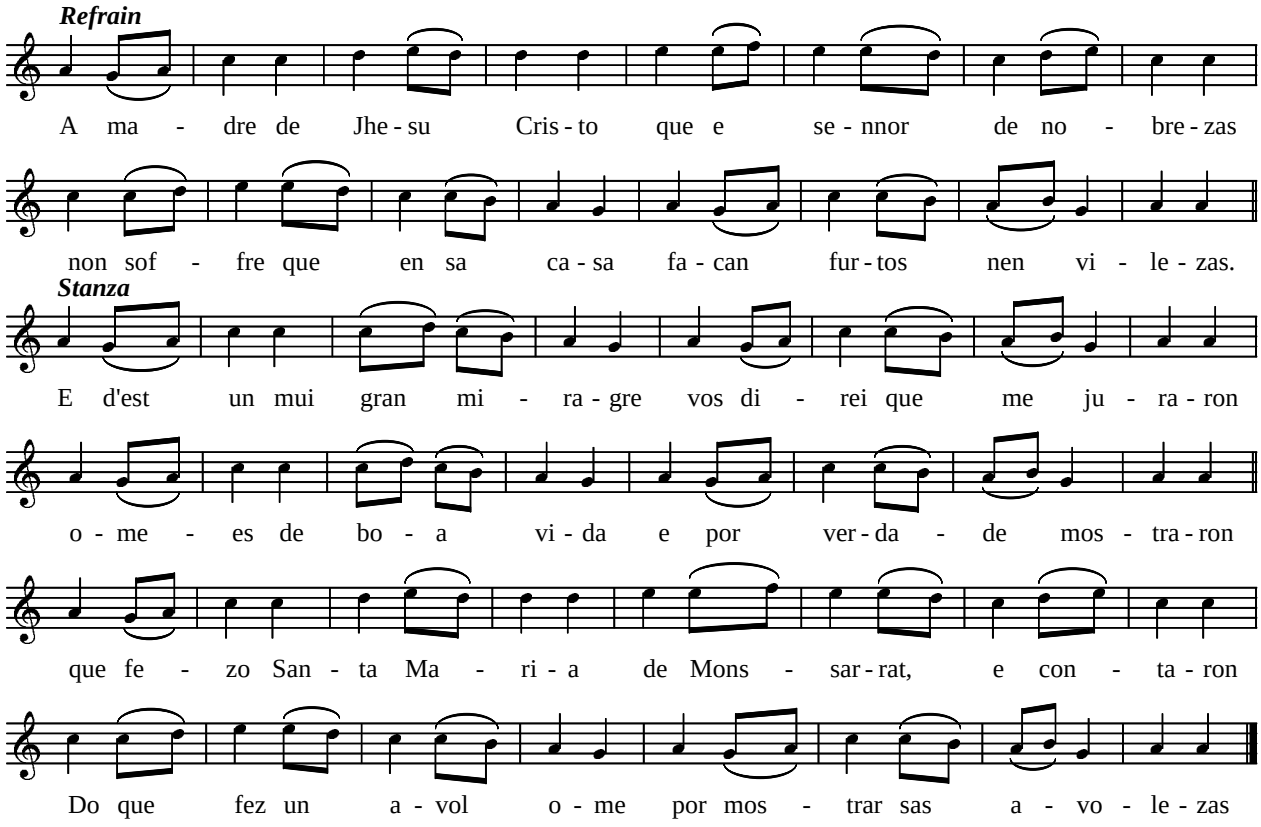
CSM 159 - Non soffre Santa Maria



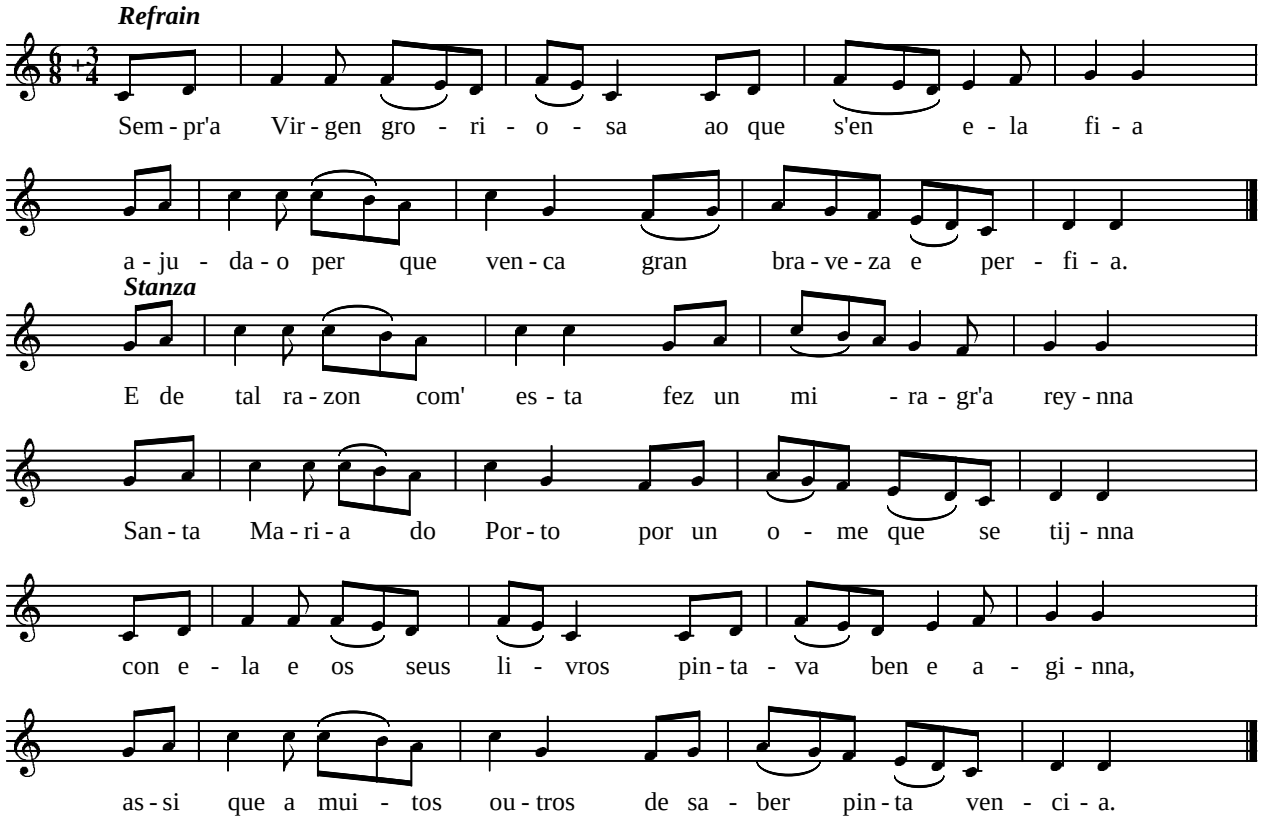
CSM 167 - Quen quer que



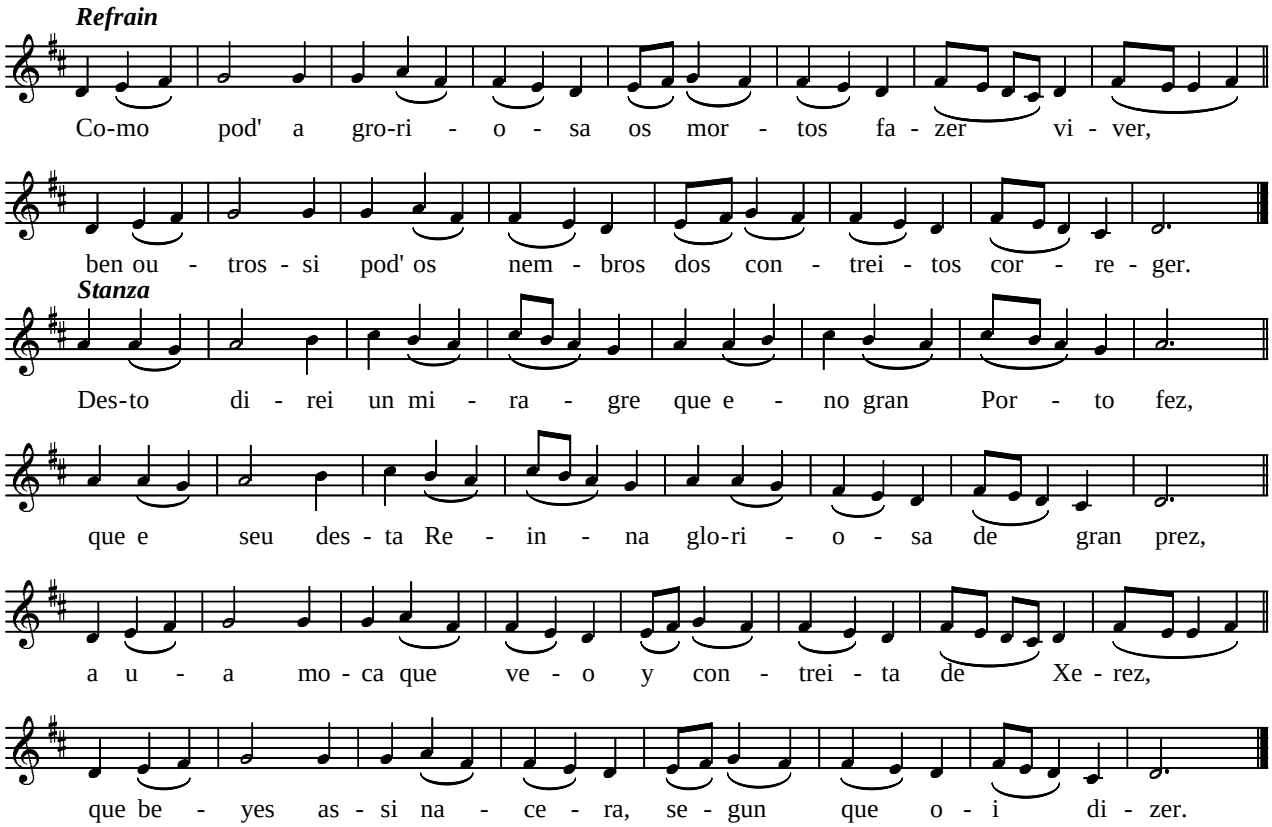
CSM 302 - A madre de Jhesu Cristo



CSM 377 - Sempr'a Virgen groriosa



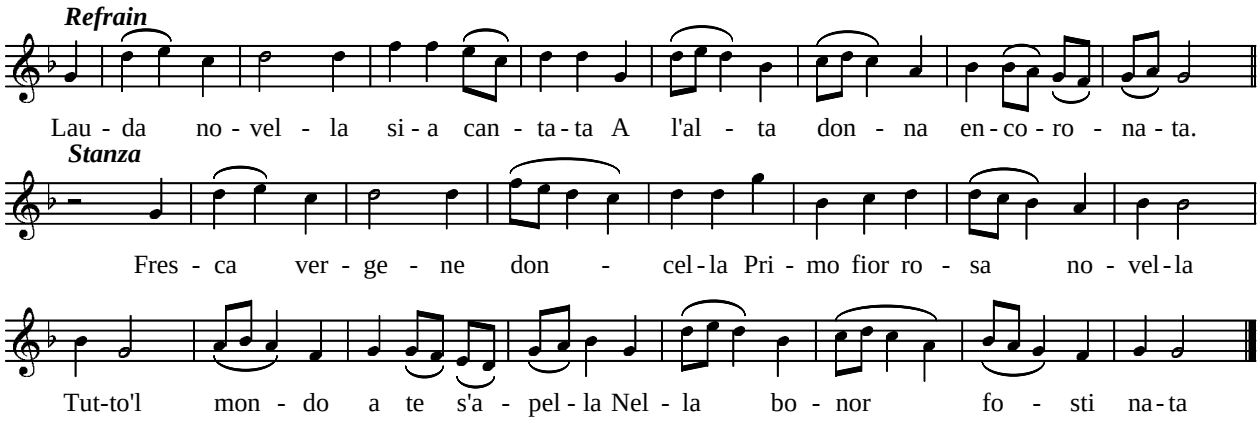
CSM 391 - Como pod' a groriosa



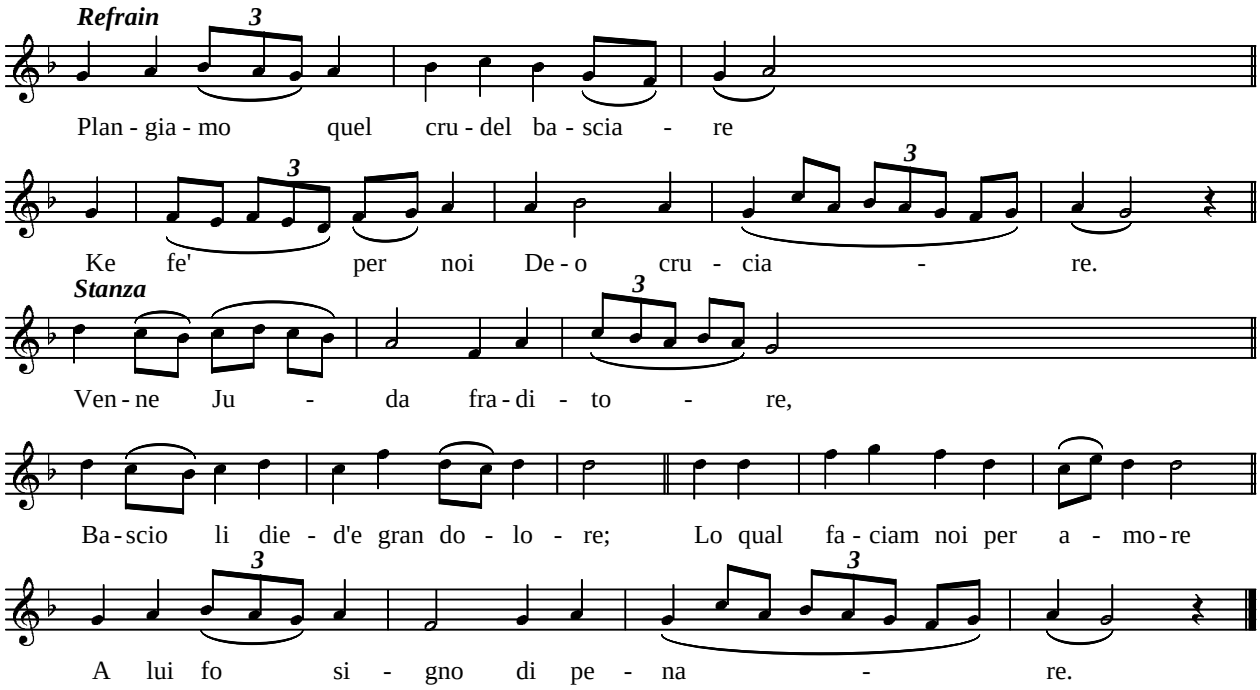
Italian Lauda

The Laudi were devotional hymns of the confraternities of Italy in the 13th – 14th century. They were often used in processionals involving a number of singers and instrumentalists (laudesi). Some have suggested that many Laudi were sacred texts set to popular tunes (a common process as was the setting of secular texts to ‘sacred’ melodies). This would appear to be a largely untapped area of medieval music. It is also a fine source for ‘ceremonial’ music.

Lauda novela



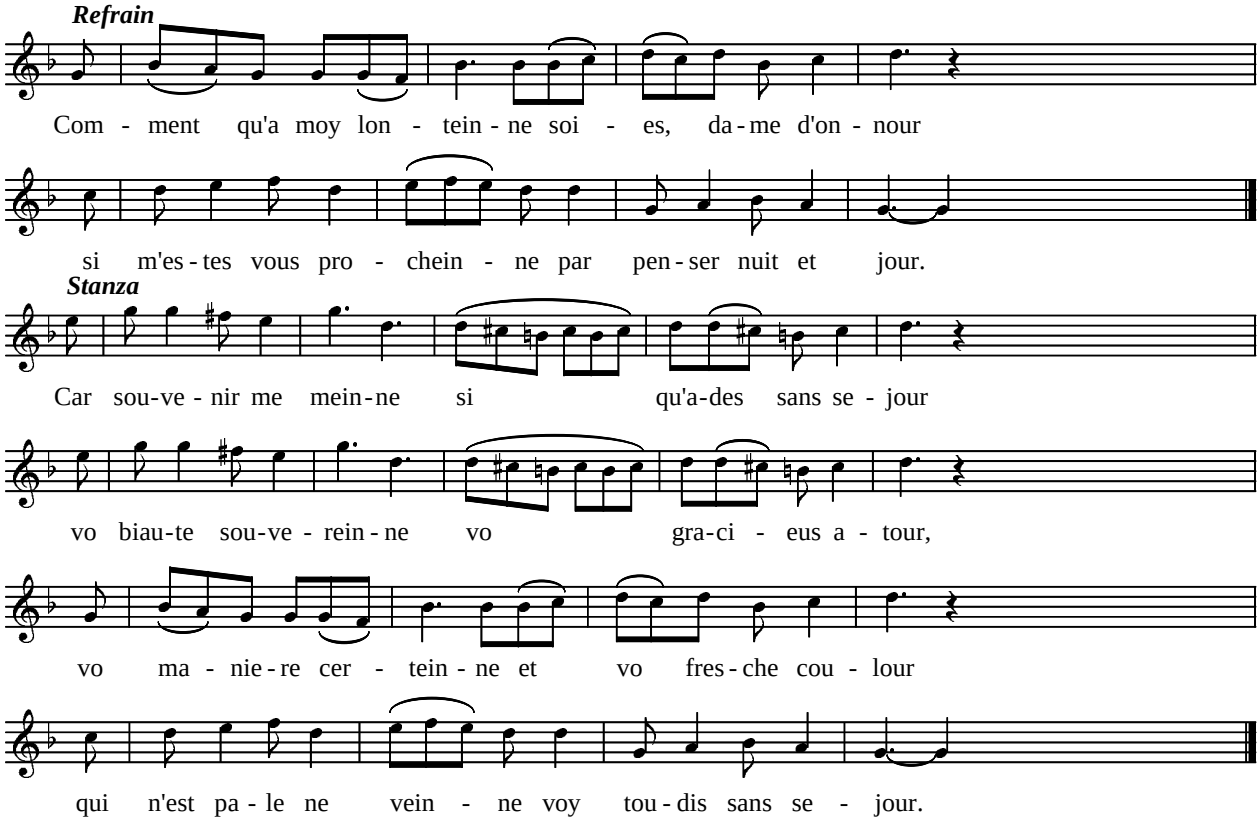
Plangiamo quel crudel



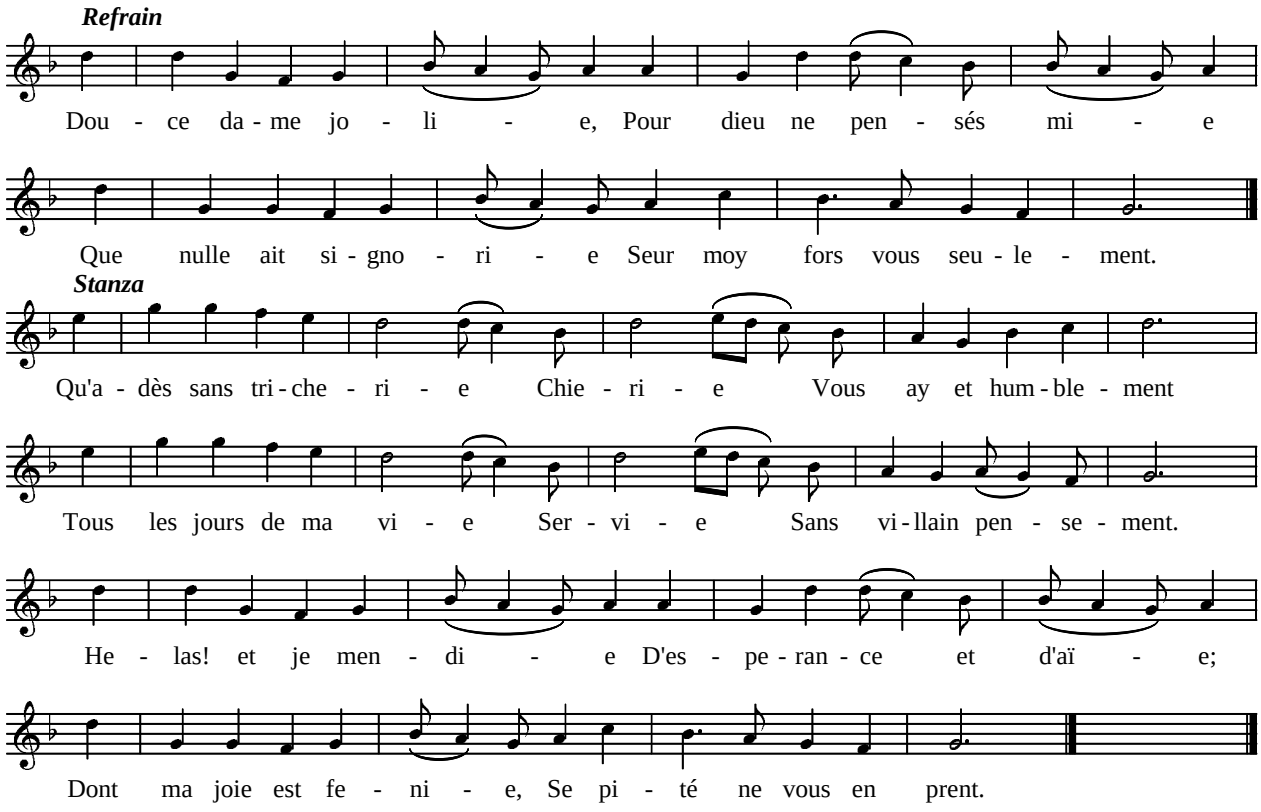
Guilliame de Machaut

Guilliame de Machaut was the secretary to, in succession, the Kings of Luxembourg, Navarre, France and Cyprus and was active through much of the 14th century. He was probably the most influencial composer and poet in France in that period. He has been described as the bridge between the older styles (ars antiqua) and the new (ars nova). Although better known for his sacred and polyphonic works we have included 2 of his monophonic virelai.

Comment qu'a moy lonteinne



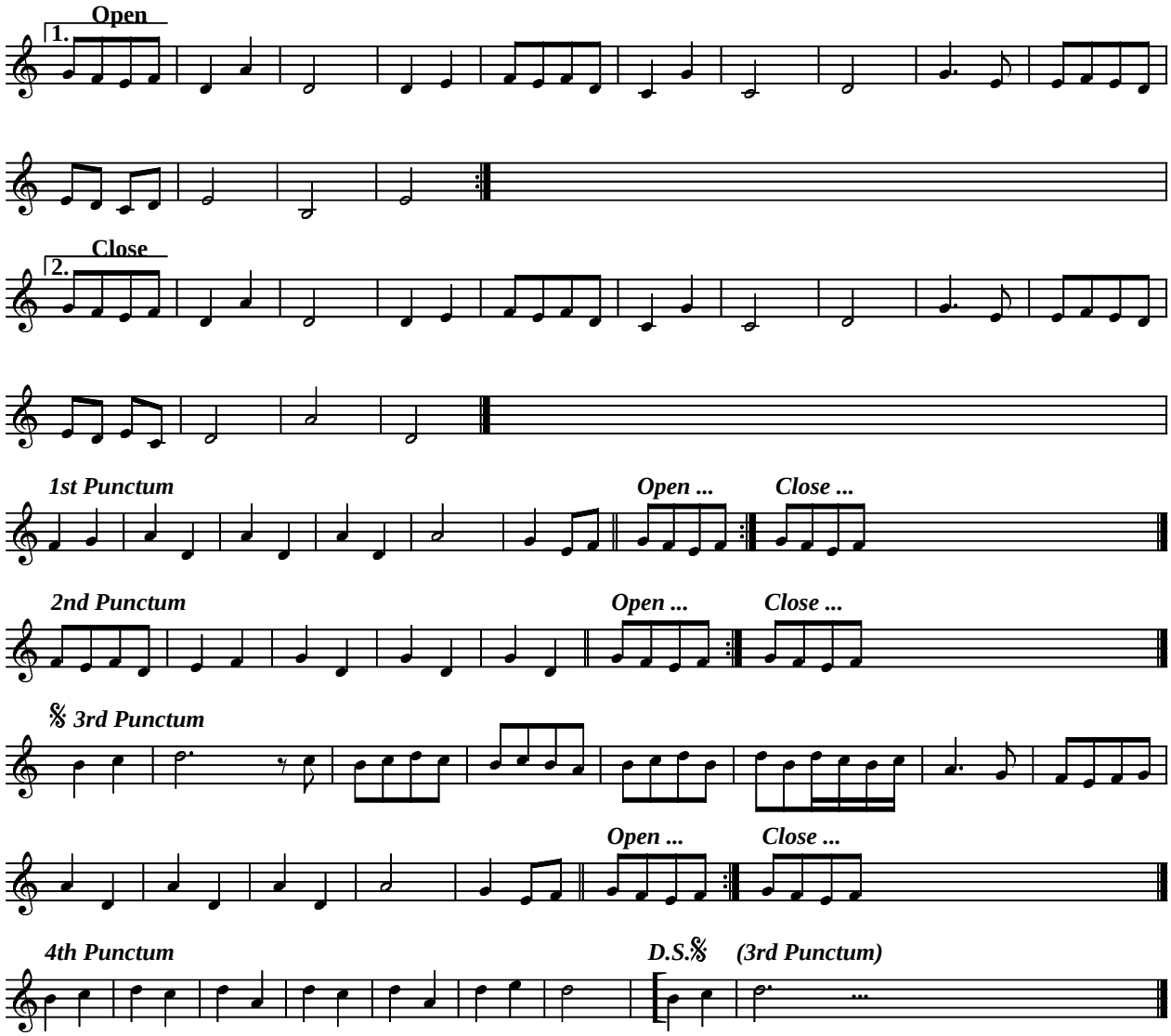
Douce dame jolie



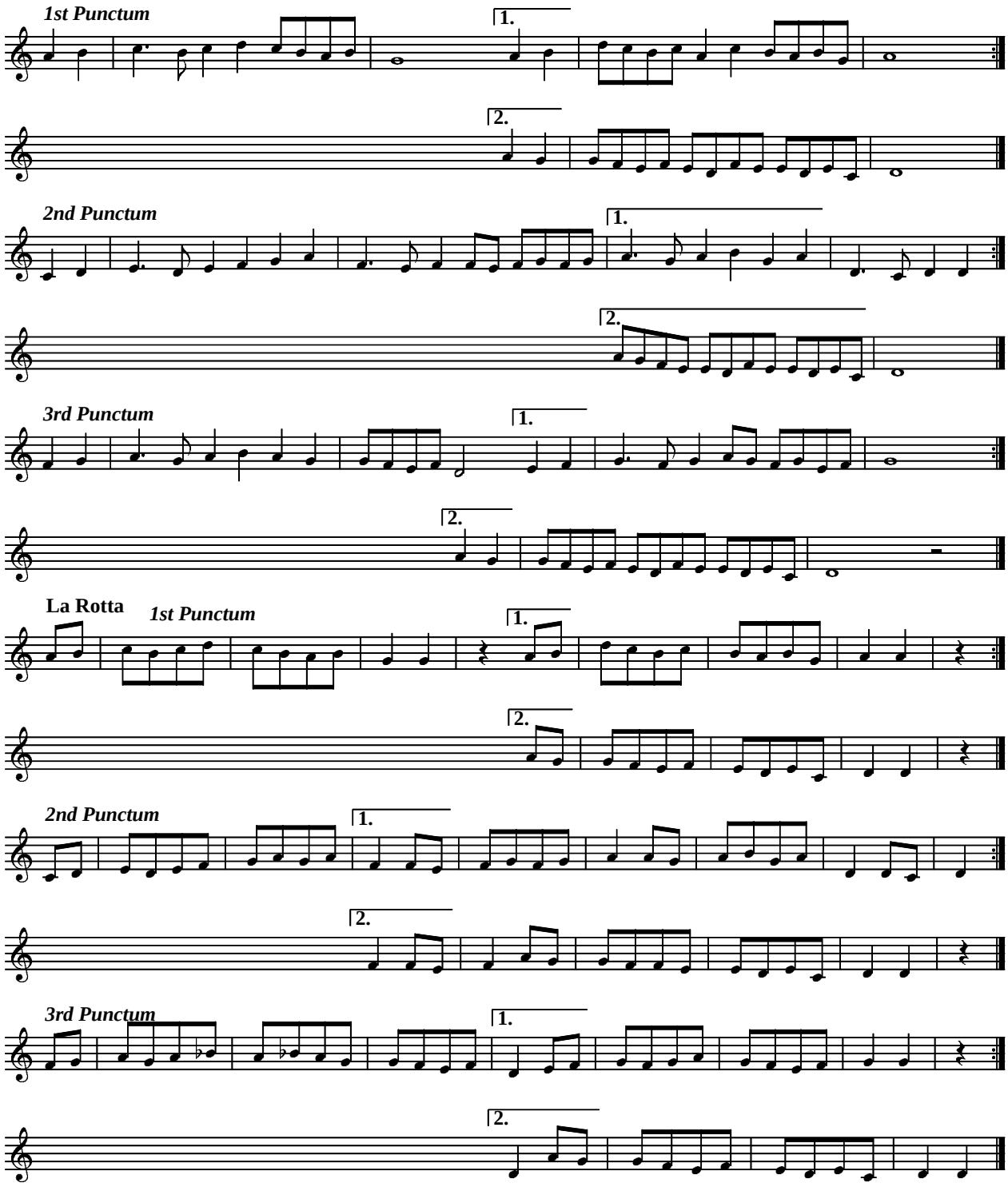
Italian Instrumental Dances

Two more of the surviving instrumental pieces, these are from a late 14th century North Italian manuscript containing 17 instrumental pieces among secular and sacred vocal pieces. La Manfredina and Rotta are a dance pair where the first part is slow and the second part is a fast variation. (Lamento di Tristano is another better known example – there is only one other that I know of.) Note that the structure is the same as for the estampie but typically with longer 'open' and 'close' sections.

Saltarello no. 2



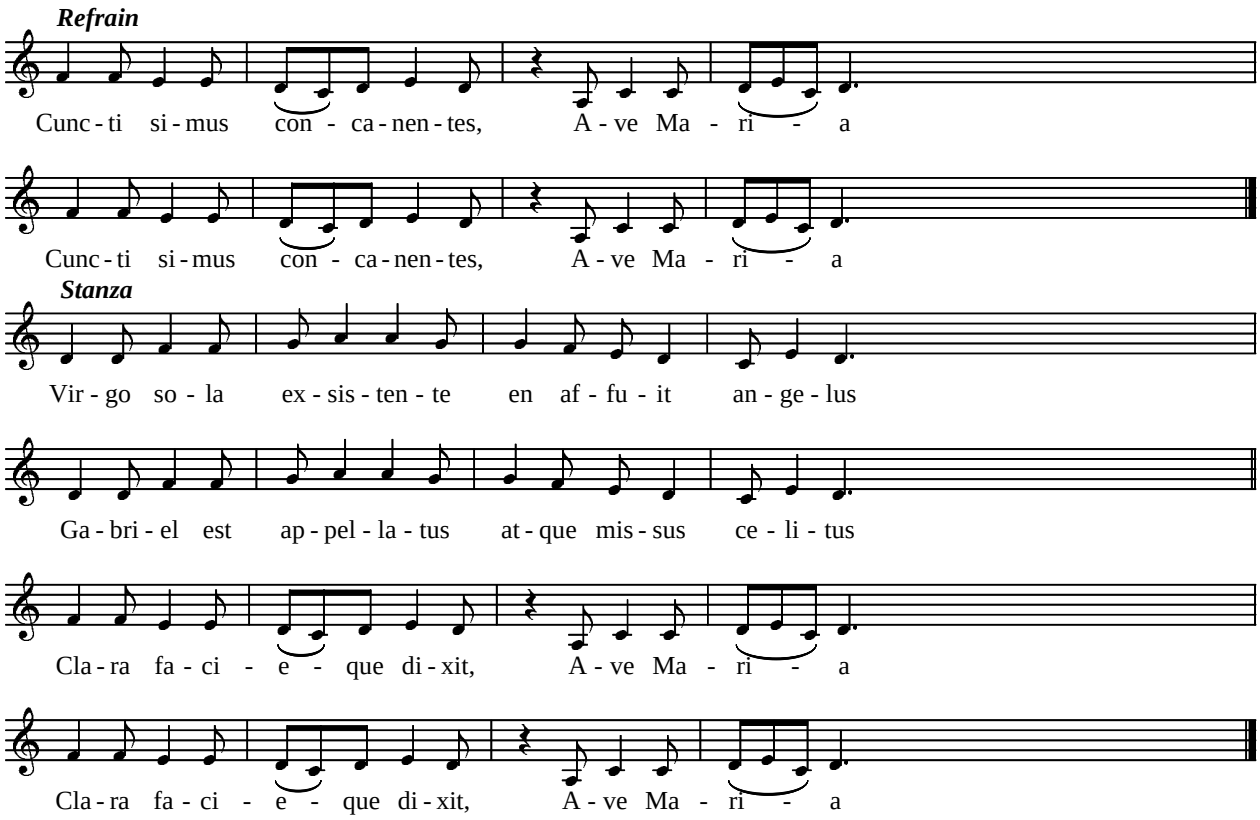
La Manfredina and Rotta



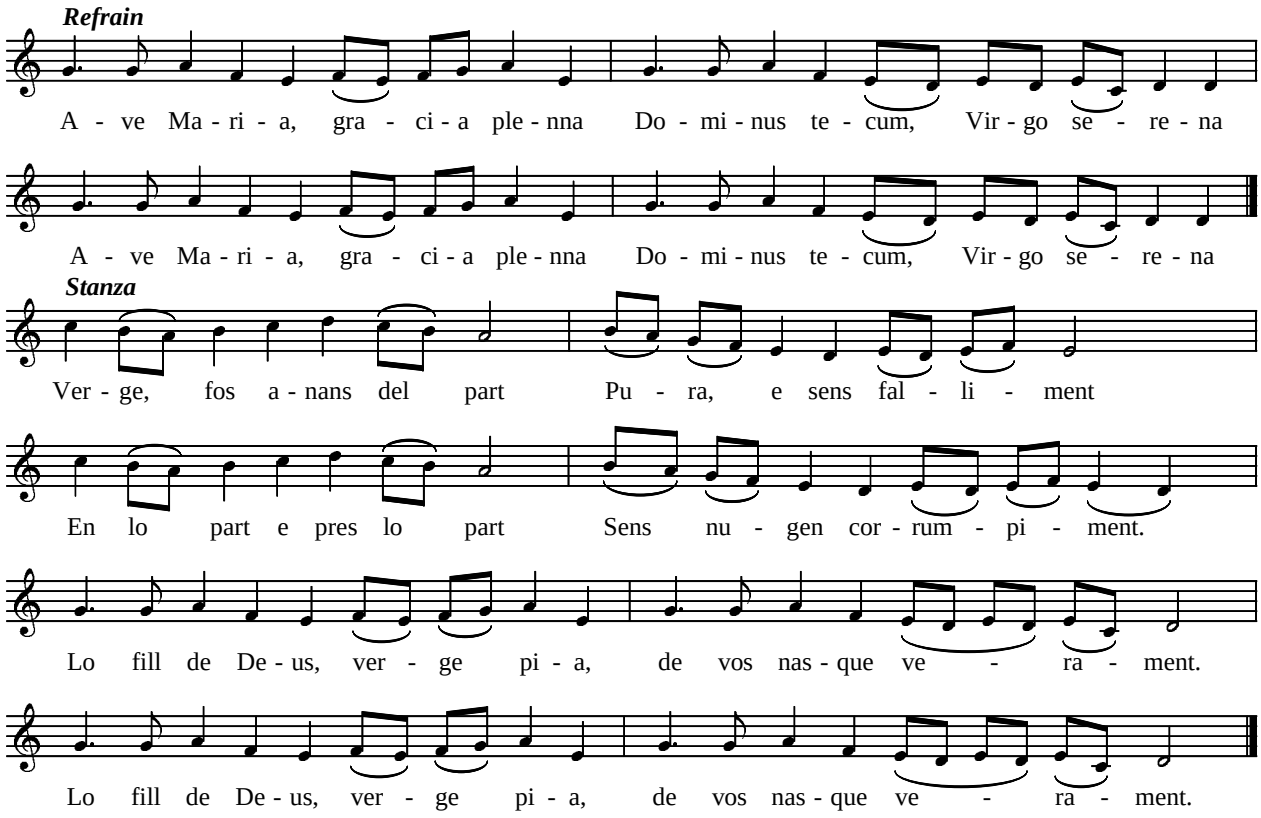
Llibre Vermell

The Llibre Vermell of Montserrat was compiled in Northern Spain at the end of the 14th Century. The name (‘Red Book’) derives from a 18th century leather binding. It is a collection of ten pilgrim songs. There is a story that pilgrims in the area were spending to much time singing and dancing popular songs & dances instead of contemplating the meaning of their pilgrimage. So the church gave them some songs that had more suitable lyrics, reusing the popular tunes. They are all in the virelai form discussed in the Cantigas section.

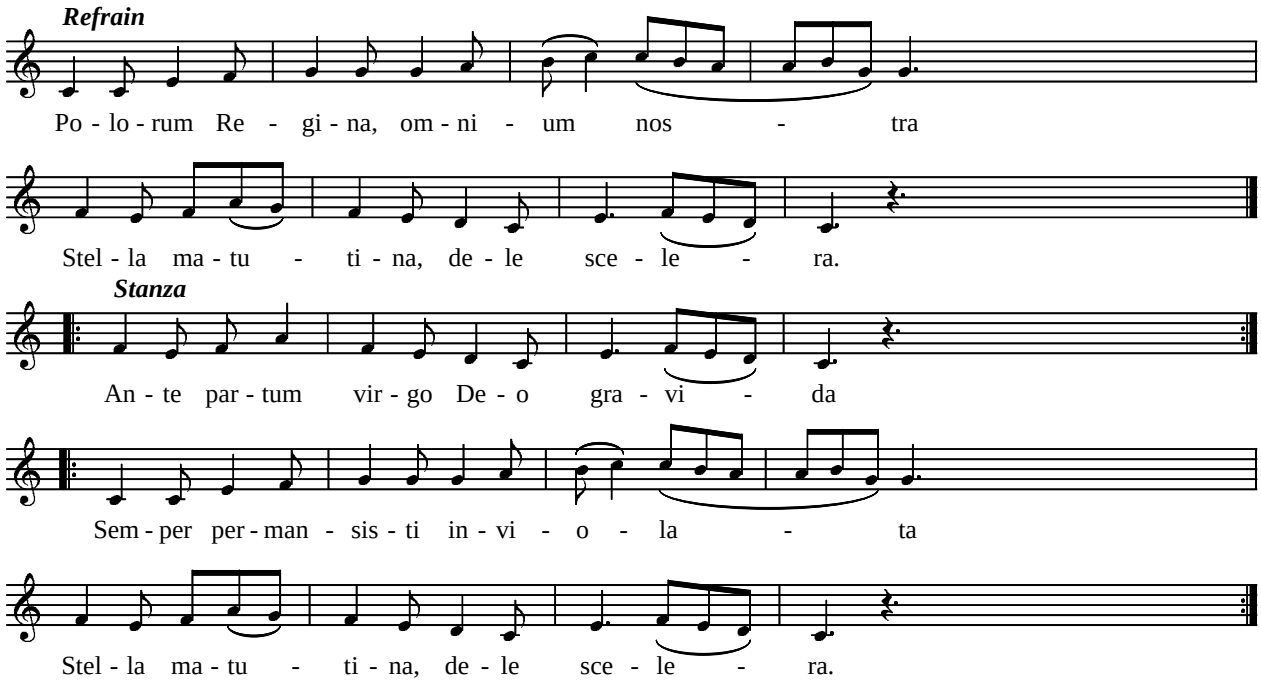
Cuncti simus



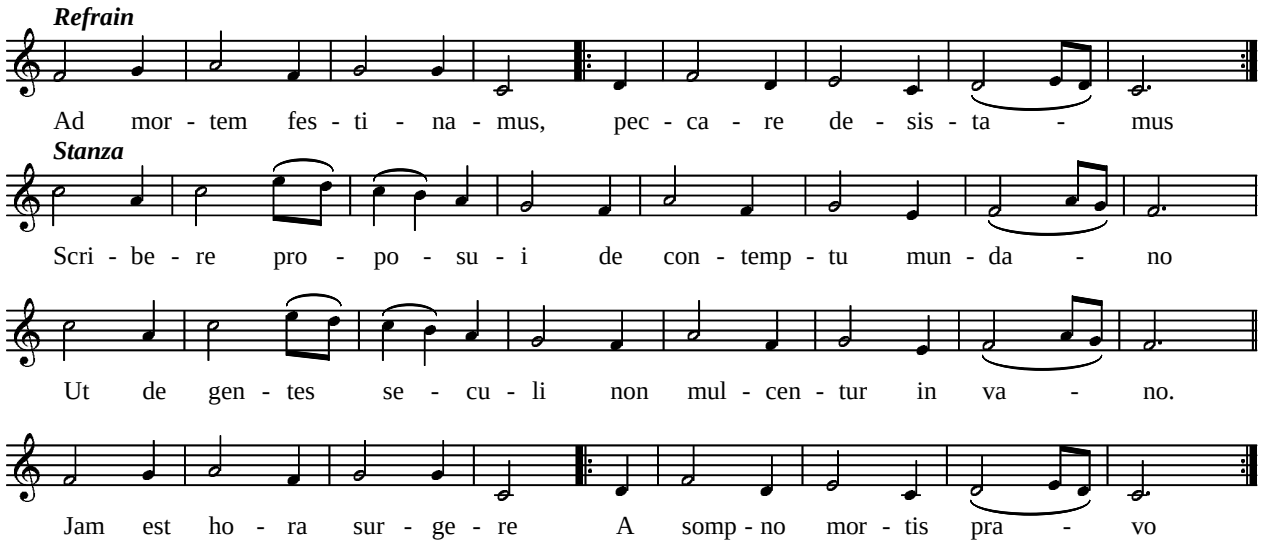
Los sept goyts



Polorum Regina



Ad mortem festinamus



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Tuit cil, Que ferai	Montpellier - Faculté de Médecine, H 196 (duplum of Li jalous/Tuit cil/VERTATEM and J'ai les maus/Que ferai/IN SECULUM)
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