

Douce Dame Jolie (Lady Fair and Sweet)

Written by bluesever

Thursday, 19 November 2015 11:41 -

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One of the most famous musical pieces of the Middle Ages, "**Douce Dame Jolie**" sometimes referred to only as 'Douce Dame', is a song from the 14th century, by the French composer **Guillaume de Machaut**.

It is an example of the genre known as the

virelai,

one of the fixed formes of the fourteenth century (the others were the

ballade

and the

rondeau

). This is a relatively early work of Machaut's, dating from the time of his patronage by John of Luxembourg, King of Bohemia.

Douce Dame Jolie

The word "Virelai" comes from old French and means "the beauty of music, dance and poetry". It probably did not originate in France, and it takes on several different forms even within the French tradition. Similar forms can be found in most of the literatures of medieval and early Renaissance Europe. The standard *virelai* form has three stanzas, each preceded and followed by a refrain. Each stanza is in three sections, the first two having the same rhyme scheme and the last having the rhyme scheme of the refrain.



Guillaume de Machaut

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Most scholars believe **Guillaume de Machaut** was born c. 1300 in or near Reims, perhaps in the town of Machault or the nearby village of Cauroy de les Machaut. Nothing is known for certain about his family or social status, except that he had a brother, Jean, who like him became a canon of Reims cathedral. He probably received his early education in Reims, and he may have received a master of arts degree from the University of Paris, but the evidence for that degree is weak.



Douce Dame Jolie

By about 1323 he had entered the service of John, king of Bohemia, working first as a clerk but eventually rising to the rank of secretary. With the king he apparently traveled extensively. Through the influence of John of Bohemia he received several church benefices, culminating in a canonicate at Reims cathedral.



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King John of Bohemia

Whether he settled in Reims around 1340 or decades later, Machaut owned a house in that city by 1372. The house no longer stands, but its location near the cathedral has been identified, and it appears to have been fairly large, with a courtyard and garden. This suggests that he and his brother, who shared the house, had some means. Machaut died around 1377: we don't have the exact date, but his canonry was given to another man on 9 November 1377, so it must have been earlier that year.



Reims Cathedral

Machaut seems a poet and a musician in equal measure, one of only a handful of figures to show equal mastery of these arts. He is frequently portrayed today as an avant garde composer, especially because of his position with regard to the early Ars Nova (a new, more detailed rhythmic notation), but one must also emphasize the masterful continuity with which he employed established forms. While using the same basic formats, he made subtle changes to meter and rhyme scheme, allowing for more personal touches and a more dramatic presentation.

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Reims Cathedral