

# Understanding sarah fuller's analysis of guillame de machaut's de toutes flours



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Guillaume de Machaut is one of the more popular French composers and poets of the late Medieval period. Although he was a great poet, his then contemporary ways of modernizing music as it was then known has made him more popular in the field of music. It is his innovations in putting together words and music that has perhaps given rise to his popularity, and is presently considered one of the more significant pioneers in music's Ars Nova.

Music's Ars Nova movement is a modern attempt of 14th century French theorists to distinguish their musical techniques of the previous centuries from their own. Aptly called Ars Nova, the modern musical movement actually refers to new art and can be strongly distinguished by a change in the notational styles of music. Guillaume de Machaut's *De Toutes Flours*, among his other works, typifies the said style that evokes the erratic combination of musical elements, which on their own might not just work but is perfectly blended in its entirety.

*De Toutes Flours* is a classic combination of lyrical poetry which has been woven with notes to come up with a musical tapestry. The words which comprise the poem itself are reminiscent of a lover's feelings and how he analogizes these words to match his feelings and emotions towards his love and the existing antagonist in the person of Fortune. The lover's classic depiction of a rose is highly symbolic and is truly reminiscent of classic love poems from their era.

As mentioned previously, the elements that are present in Guillaume de Machaut's *De Toutes Flours* may not exactly be considered acceptable or highly remarkable; punctuated by long notations, the erratic rise and voice in <https://assignbuster.com/understanding-sarah-fullers-analysis-of-guillame-de-machauts-de-toutes-flours/>

the tone of the tenor's line, the changing and often unpredictable notes of the contratenor line, and the distinct yet volatile string of words.

Taken separately, people may find it quite hard to appreciate these elements; however, when woven together Guillaume de Machaut's timeless piece, *De Toutes Flours* puts together all these elements and melds them into a masterpiece that delivers its message well and invokes feelings of pleasure to its listeners. Guillaume de Machaut's ability to put together elements into a significantly harmonious musical piece may perhaps be rooted in his talent to compose for a four-voice texture. He is, in fact, the first composer to write Mass songs and pieces that incorporate the four voices together with instrumentations.

*Messe de Notre Dame* is the earliest known complete polyphonic piece written by a single person that puts together and melds four voices for an entirely different texture. Earlier musical pieces sung by four voices are actually separate works (per voice) which have been assembled by Mass servers, instrumentalists and scribes to come up with a polyphonic piece. These assembled musical pieces are characterized by repeated melodies usually sung by a tenor, reoccurring bridges found throughout the song and a rhythmic pattern followed through the entire song.

The Words: The Lyrics of Guillaume de Machaut's *Des Toutes Flours* Another of the better features of Guillaume de Machaut's *Des Toutes Flours* is that it contains all three stanzas which vividly describe the lover's feelings and emotions, including the situation he finds himself in. The three stanzas also offer valuable aid for listeners to understand the rise and fall in the tone, the dramatic punctuation of the notes, and even the abrupt change in the

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musical piece's rhythm and texture. There are a handful of songs from the said era which only use a part of the poem's many lines.

There are also a number of musical pieces which only incorporate a stanza or two of the original literary masterpiece from which the musical piece has originated from or has gain inspiration from. The absence of other stanzas or lines may make it difficult for listeners to understand the reasons behind the somewhat erratic changes in the musical piece's tone, texture, and punctuation. Since Guillaume de Machaut's Des Toutes Flours includes all three stanzas, listeners can better understand and appreciate the musical piece.

It's first stanza is characterized by the intense feeling of wrath as felt by the poet that would move on to a more austere, more calm string of notes and tones evident in the second stanza. The third stanza, on the other hand, is distinguished by a more powerful, dramatic and somehow vigilant combination of notes, tones, textures and words. The last stanza is also marked by a dramatic pause, which somehow builds tension to allow listeners to anticipate the musical piece's end.

The three stanzas, no matter how different they are, actually work well together to allow listeners to greatly appreciate the beauty of the song in its entirety. Repeated subtle refrains are also incorporated throughout the entire piece to pull all distinct themes together that make Des Toutes Flours a cohesive piece. The same feature also allows the listeners to be more endeared to the piece as it plays since it provides a refreshing interlude that neither overpowers nor threatens any of the three stanzas.

The poem itself which is comprised of the same number of lines having ten syllables each except for one having seven syllables to connote a shift in the poem's rhythmic pattern, adds a subtlety in the musical piece's drama. This only manifests Guillaume de Machaut's literary prowess that is somehow diminished by his bold and innovative musical ability, which is also the greater reason behind his popularity. However, despite Guillaume de Machaut's ability of stringing words together, one cannot contend that putting these strings of words into a musical piece may have decreased the poetic quality of the poem itself.

There are several lines which overlap with the supposed literary rhyme as the poem has been intended. But then again, Guillaume de Machaut has been very careful in stressing the key words of the poem's lines to combine with the musical tone and texture in harmonious timing. There are words, for instance, which when taken or read may not provide the emotions it must supposedly provoked but are heightened when taken together with the music.

Once again, the timing and the combination of lyrics and notes lend a special quality to Guillaume de Machaut's *Des Toutes Flours*, marked by declaimed words, a repetition of subtle yet rhythmic refrains, and dramatic pauses which only builds the anticipation of the listener without compromising the musical piece's consistency and cohesiveness. Upon careful analysis of the poem, one can say that there are several points which can be up to tight scrutiny and criticism. These, however, may remain unnoticed to most once the words are blended with the musical tones.

Notably, the musical piece also highlights the sophistication of written poetry, which allows for the complete articulation of words that are normally not given too much attention to when the poem is simply read or declaimed. As a whole then, although flaws may be observed on both the poem and the different elements of the musical piece, one can say that when taken together, the literary and musical elements truly complement the other to offer more depth to the musical piece.

Indeed, critics can pinpoint several points in both the literary and musical facets of the song that are somehow diminished once these parts are joined together then taken as a whole. This, perhaps, may also be one of the better reasons behind the popularity of Guillaume de Machaut's *De Toutes Flours*, a timeless classic that has inspired romantics, musicians and poets and will continuously inspire more for decades to come.

#### Understanding Des Toutes Flours' Melody

Conceivably, what people notice first when listening to a song is its articulated melody, the vocalized part of the song which also is, in most occasions, the highest part of the musical piece. It is also the musical element that people often follow, may sing along to, and even remember the most. These qualities offer a number of reasons as to why people regard it as one of the more influential aspects of any musical piece. Indeed, the cantus or the main or leading melody is what most people deem and interpret musical pieces.

Guillaume de Machaut's *Des Toutes Flours*' cantus relies on, among other elements, rhythm. In music, rhythm is referred to as the regular pattern of

beats characterized by a string of successive notes and punctuated by rests or breaks. The musical piece in question possess, what most people may consider, great discrepancies in the way supposed or normally accepted rhythm and rhythmic patterns, yet these provide great contrast and proper synchrony when taken as a whole. Des Toutes Flours boasts of an odd yet enticing rhythmic pattern that is repeated with careful subtlety throughout the piece.

The rhythmic pattern of the melody or cantus may perhaps be quite unheard of during Guillaume de Machaut's time, yet for some particular reason, the oddity and complexity has melded well and has found its way into listeners' hearts. The bold and innovative rhythmic pattern in Guillaume de Machaut's Des Toutes Flours are particularly found at the beginning of both the first and second stanzas; and are further echoed in the same style towards the end. One can notice that throughout the piece, Guillaume de Marchaut has decided not to follow a typical melody line, rather he opted to combine several lines for a more fluid flow.

This is particularly noticeable towards the end of the second stanza as it approaches the third stanza. Although the melody line becomes more steady and fluid, variances in its rhythmic pattern that do not actually conform to its original metric design. This style in metric design is considered intrepid, even audacious for some. Despite this, the unusual metric design still complements the much steadier pace of the other lines and works well towards harmony in the end.

The same irregular metric design on the melody line also lends a feeling of uncertainty and uneasiness on the part of the poet to allow listeners to feel

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his emotions even more dramatically. Despite the differences in the notes used throughout the musical piece, the repetition in the style and design used is undeniable. The movement of the phrases, the sudden uninterrupted motions, and the punctuations are all repeated throughout the song, again for a more unified approach despite the erratic and unpredictable melody lines.

Towards the third stanza, one can notice the anticipation built during the first two stanzas. The similarity in the melody lines of the first and second stanzas, including the slight change in metric design as the second stanza draws to a close may be a clear indication of Guillaume de Machaut's penchant for a distinctive and dramatic end; a fitting conclusion that ties together the melody and the words perfectly. The final stanza's melody line is characterized by more even and more fluid movements that conform to the other line's pace.

The third stanza follows a more regular metric pattern that makes it highly contrasting from the second stanza. The same contrast heightens the drama which marks Guillaume de Machaut's *De Toutes Flours*. The slow yet steady build up of the melody line manifested in the first two stanzas and its gradual transition leading to the third stanza lends to the distinction of *De Toutes Flours* as one of the better musical piece from its era. *De Toutes Flours'* Tenor Line It is undeniable that tenors do not take their jobs lightly.

In so saying, tenors spend precious time studying and perfecting the lines they are supposed to sing. Further, there are quite a few composers who take delight in making the tenor line quite challenging, not only to make their musical pieces more beautiful but seemingly to challenge a tenor's

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singing prowess. Guillaume de Machaut's *De Toutes Flours* may not exactly be the most difficult piece that tenors may encounter through the course of their professional career, yet it provides a number of difficulties that may challenge their musical talents and knowledge.

Aside from the pitch, tenors also act as a time keeper who must be conscious of the metric design of the piece. In singing *De Toutes Flours*, tenors must be careful in his timing, paying close attention to the changes in attack and in tempo throughout the song. He must also be aware of the proper rhythmic timing of all existing lines and the supposed emotions that must be evoked based on the stanzas. The tenor also acts as a "mediator" who carefully mediates between the lyrics and the melody, to provide a more fluid and steady tone to the musical piece.

The tenor line for Guillaume de Machaut's *De Toutes Flours* is more rhythmic and melodic compared to the melody line. It only rises above the surface of the melody line, which may perhaps lead tenors to believe that its difficulty may be diminished somehow. The tenor line and its build up starts quite gradually. Despite this, the tenor slowly yet surely establishes his territory through the regular presence of tetrachords to hexachords until it reaches the full octave. This may be especially helpful in building the listener's anticipation, as well as the tenor's gradual intensity as he goes through the musical piece.

Once again, the tenor line is marked by distinct increase and linear descent that repeats itself throughout the musical piece with careful refinement. This specific design may be one of the greater parts of *De Toutes Flours* that distinguishes it from other musical pieces from the era, yet may also be the

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reason behind the complications which tenors face while singing the song. The different notes used and the way the tenor line is sung may be regarded as erratic, quite similar to the other existing elements of the musical piece.

This may perhaps be the reason as to why tenors may find it difficult to establish a degree of stability until he reaches a particular phrase only upon which stability may be fulfilled. Despite the supposed difficulties in the tenor line, the tenor still finds several venues to highlight his musical ability when singing Guillaume de Machaut's De Toutes Flours. For one, despite its variances in notes, tone and texture, the musical piece's tenor line is actually quite organized and systemized than the other parts of the piece.

De Toutes Flours' Contratenor Line Guillaume de Machaut's De Toutes Flours also boasts of a contratenor line that may be best understood in a three-voice framework. The contratenor line is actually less organized and less systematic than the melody line. If the tenor line and the melody line are directly marked by linear motions and accentuated notes, the contratenor line is set apart by rhythmic and melodic disjunctions or the melded tenor and melody lines. This shows the part played by the contratenor line to make the musical piece an even better one.

It tries to fit into the "spaces" that needs to be filled as dictated by both the tenor and the melody line. This makes the contratenor line even more demanding as it forms an alliance with the tenor line while also forming the supposed alliance with the melody line. This happens simultaneously while the proper contrast is provided also for both lines. The parallelisms in the notes used for all three lines - the tenor line, the melody line and the

contratenor line also contribute to the further melding of the all said lines, again for better cohesiveness.