

# Pronunciation of the Middle High German Sections of Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*

by John Austin



It is difficult to learn and adhere to pronunciation standards for singing in any foreign language, but it is especially difficult in a language in which there are no longer native speakers to emulate. The pronunciation problems of the Middle High German songs in the *Carmina Burana* begin there; they go on to include the question of how the time and place of composition might affect the proper pronunciation of the text.

In Middle High German, there was no national standard: pronunciation, and consequently scribal practice, varied from region to region, indeed from monastery to monastery. The fact that the *Codex Buranus* was discovered in 1803 in the Bavarian town of Benediktbeuren (where Orff was born in 1895) has led some scholars to assume that it was written down there. But most scholars now believe that textual evidence points to either an area in what is now southern Austria or perhaps South Tyrol in northern Italy as the place of origin.<sup>1</sup> The time of composition can be assumed to be the thirteenth century, perhaps around 1230.<sup>2</sup> The language or dialect spoken in that time and place can be generally referred to as Middle Bavarian.

The pronunciation guidelines given in this article conform to the generally accepted guidelines for Middle High German,<sup>3</sup> except where Orff has taken over specifically Bavarian forms from the original manuscript. The most important feature is the replacement of initial <k-> as in "kramer" by <ch-> as in "chrumer." This sound change can still be heard in some Bavarian dialects today.

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We cannot be sure exactly how the monks of Benediktbeuren pronounced these songs when they sang them, but we can hope that they would at least recognize them if they heard them pronounced as recommended below. The pronunciation of the Middle High German texts is transcribed using symbols of the International Phonetic Alphabet. For those not familiar with these symbols, the following chart gives a Modern German example for each symbol used. English is not used because there are no satisfactory correspondances, especially for the vowels.

## VOWELS

[i] ihn  
 [ɪ] in  
 [e] beten  
 [ɛ] Betten  
 [y] Hütte  
 [ʏ] Hütte  
 [ø] Höhle  
 [œ] Hölle  
 [u] Buhle  
 [ʊ] Bulle  
 [o] Sohn  
 [ɔ] Sonne  
 [a] Vater  
 [ə] habe

## CONSONANTS

[p] Pein  
 [b] Bein  
 [t] Tier  
 [d] dir  
 [k] Kasse  
 [g] Gasse  
 [f] fein  
 [v] Wein  
 [w] English "wine"  
 [s] Haus  
 [z] Sohn  
 [ʃ] scheinen  
 [x] ach (never as in "ich")  
 [ç] bereit (tongue flap)  
 [h] Hose  
 [j] ja  
 [l] lassen  
 [m] man  
 [n] man  
 [ŋ] bring

## Modern German

### 1. Long, Tense Vowel

der [dɛr, dɛ:r]  
dir [dɪr, dɪ:r]  
ihr [i:r, i:r]  
Meer [mɛ:r, mɛ:r]  
mir [mɪ:r, mɪ:r]  
seht [zɛ:t]  
Tugend [tu:gənt]  
wer [vɛ:r, vɛ:r]  
wohl [vo:l]

### 2. Short, Lax Vowel

-lich [lɪç]

### 3. Long Vowel

die [di:]  
Liebe [li:bə]

### 4. Labiodental Fricative

weh [vɛ:]  
Wange [vaŋə]  
wäre [vɛ:rə]  
will [vɪl]

### 5. Palatal Fricative

ich [ɪç]  
mich [mɪç]  
sicher [zɪçə]

## Middle High German

### Short, Lax Vowel

der [dɛr]  
dir [dɪr]  
ir [ɪr]  
mer [mɛr]  
mir [mɪr]  
seht [zɛxt]  
tugend [tugənt]  
wer [wɛr]  
wol [wɔl]

### Long, Tense Vowel

-liche [li:xə]

### Diphthong

die [diə]  
liebe [li:bə]

### Bilabial Approximant (English "we")

we [wɛ]  
wengel [wɛŋəl]  
were [wɛrə]  
wil [wɪl]

### Velar Fricative (as in "ach")

i(c)h [ɪx]  
mich [mɪx]  
sicher [zɪxər]

Figure 1.

## Modern German

### Velar Stop

Kramer [kʁa:mɐ]  
komm [kɔm]  
Königin [kø:nɪgɪn]

## Middle Bavarian

### Velar Fricative (as in "ach")

chrumer [xʁamər]  
chum [xɔm]  
chünegin [xynəgɪn]

Figure 2.

## Particular Problems with the Pronunciation of Middle High German

One of the most difficult problems for people who speak German is the pronunciation of those words that are spelled (almost) the same in Middle High German as in Modern German, but whose pronunciation varies in one or more significant ways. Examples of those differences, as they occur in *Carmina Burana*, are given in Figure 1. A second type of problem involves particularly Bavarian forms, for which Bavarian pronunciations are recommended (Figure 2).

Finally, in contrast to Modern German, where doubling of a consonant is an orthographic device used to indicate that the previous vowel is short, double consonants in Middle High German texts indicate consonantal length between vowels. As an example, Modern German "Geselle" is pronounced [gə'zɛlə], but Middle High German "geselle" is pronounced [gə'zɛllə]. This slight difference may be used particularly in careful articulation of the nasal consonants.

## The Texts

The Middle High German texts are taken from Orff's performance edition; no attention is paid to alternate readings found in other sources.

### 7. "Floret silva nobilis"

Floret silva nobilis floribus et foliis.  
[flobrɛt silva nobilis floribus et foliis]

Ubi est antiquus meus amicus?  
[ubi est antɪkwus meʊs amɪkʊs]

Hinc equitavit, eia, quis me amabit?  
[ɪŋk ekwɪtavit, eia, kwɪs me amabit]

Floret silva undique  
[flobrɛt silva undɪkwɛ]

nah mime gesellen ist mir wê.  
[nax mɪmɛ gɛzɛllən ɪst mɪr wɛ]

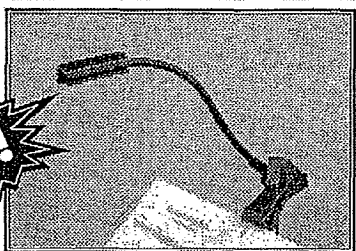
Gruonet der walt allenthalben,  
[gruonət dɛr walt allɛnthalbən]

Wâ ist min geselle also lange?  
[wa ɪst mɪn gɛzɛllə alzə langə]

Der ist geri[r]ten hinnen,  
[dɛr ɪst gɛrɪtən hɪnnən]

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O wî, wer sol mich minnen?  
[o wi, wer zol mix minnən]

8. "Chramer, gip die varwe mir"

Chramer, gip die varwe mir  
[xramər gip diə varwə mir]

die min wengel roete  
[diə min wɛŋəl røtə]

damit ich die jungen man  
[damit ɪx diə jʊŋən man]

an ir dank der minnenliebe noete.  
[an ɪr dɑŋk dər minnənliəbə nøtə]

Scht mich an,  
[zɛxt mix an]

jungen man!  
[jʊŋən man]

Lat mich iu gevallen!  
[lat mix y gəvallən]

Minnət, tugentliche man,  
[minnət tʊgəntlixə man]

minnecliche vrouwen!  
[minnəklixə frowən]

Minne tuot iu hoch gemuot  
[minnə tuət y hox gəmuət]

unde lat iuch in hohen eren schouwen.  
[undə lat yx in hoxən erən fəwən]

Wol dir, werlt, daz du bist  
[wɔl dir wɛrlt das du bist]

also freudenriche!  
[alzə frøydənrixə]

Ich wil dir sin undertan  
[ɪx wil dir zin ʊndərtaŋ]

durch din liebe immer sicherliche.  
[dʊrx din liəbə immər zɪxərlixə]

9. "Swaz hie gat umbe"

Swaz hie gat umbe,  
[swaz hiə gat ʊmbə]

daz sint alles megede,  
[das zɪnt alləs mɛgədə]

die wellent an man  
[diə wɛllənt an man]

alle disen sumer gan!  
[allə dizən zʊmər gən]

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Chume, chum, geselle min,  
 [xʊmə, xʊm, gɛzɛllə min]

ih enbite harte din  
 [ix enbitə hartə din]

ih enbite harte din,  
 [ix enbitə hartə din]

chume, chum, geselle min.  
 [xʊmə, xʊm, gɛzɛllə min]

Suzer rosenvarwer munt,  
 [zʊsər rozənvarwər mʊnt]

chum un mache mich gesunt,  
 [xʊm ʊn maxə miχ gɛzʊnt]

chum un mache mich gesunt,  
 [xʊm ʊn maxə miχ gɛzʊnt]

suzer rosenvarwer munt.  
 [zʊsər rozənvarwər mʊnt]

10. "Were diu werlt alle min"

Were diu werlt alle min  
 [wɛrə diʊ wɛrlt allə min]

von deme mere unze an den Rin,  
 [vɔn dɛmə mɛrə ʊntzə an den rɪn]

des wolt ih mih darben,  
 [dɛs wolt ix miχ darbən]

daz diu chünegin von Engellant  
 [das diʊ χy:nəgin vɔn ɛŋəllant]

lege an miner armen. Heil!  
 [legə an minər armən heil]

18. "Circa mea pectora"

Manda liet,  
 [manda liət]

manda liet,  
 [manda liət]

min geselle  
 [min gɛzɛllə]

chumet niet.  
 [xʊmət niət]

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NOTES

<sup>1</sup> René Clemencic, *Carmina Burana: Lateinisch-deutsch. Gesamtausgabe der mittelalterlichen Melodien mit den dazugehörigen Texten* (Munich: Heimeran, 1979), 178; but see also Edwin H. Zeydel, ed., *Vagabond Verses: Secular Latin Poems of the Middle Ages* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1966), 38, where Benediktbeuren is cited as the place of origin.

<sup>2</sup> Clemencic, 178, and P. G. Walsh, *Love Lyrics from the Carmina Burana* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), xiii.

<sup>3</sup> For the pronunciation of Middle High German, see Herbert Penzl, *Geschichtliche deutsche Lautlehre* (Munich: Max Hueber, 1969), 76-81, and Wilhelm Schmidt, *Geschichte der deutschen Sprache. Ein Lehrbuch für das germanistische Studium* (Stuttgart: Wissenschaftliche Verlags-gesellschaft, 1993), 230-42.

—CJ—