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# Faculty Awarded Humanities Grant to Direct Summer Seminar

Program to Bridge Music, Language Through Medieval Lyric Poetry

Sept. 18, 2017

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— Bridging their disciplines of music and language – melody and literature – with a project to help others do the same, two Illinois Wesleyan University faculty members are the recipients of a \$128,000 grant to direct a summer seminar on medieval lyric poetry in June of 2018.

Assistant Professor of [Music](#) William Hudson and Professor of [French](#) Christopher Callahan were awarded a grant by the [National Endowment for the Humanities](#) (NEH), an independent federal agency that is dedicated to promoting excellence in the humanities. NEH awards grants to top-rated proposals.

“I was extremely pleased as the acceptance rate for this grant is quite low,” said Hudson, noting that fewer than 16% of grant proposals are approved by the NEH. “It’s an amazing opportunity and a rarity for a Humanities project to receive so much funding.”

Through the grant funding, Callahan and Hudson will host a three-week seminar that is open to language/literature and music faculty across the country seeking to expand their curriculum into the Middle Ages. The interdisciplinary seminar, titled “Courtly Lyric in the Medieval French Tradition. Poetry as Performance,” will focus on the *trouvères*, who were lyric poets in medieval France.

Studying themes introduced in *trouvères* poetry that are still relevant today — such as social conventions surrounding love and relationships, love versus family obligation, gender and empowerment, rhetorical skill in debate on ethical questions, and poetic commentary on current events — will help participants integrate what they learn in their teaching, Hudson said.

Experts in both poetry and music, the *trouvères* integrated song and text to create poems that are essentially strophic songs – or songs with a melody that repeats for each stanza – according to Callahan. The *trouvère’s* interpretation of literature through performance is reflective of the time period.

“In the medieval period, all literature was intended to be encountered *viva voce*, through dramatic reading or performance of some kind,” said Callahan. “The pleasure of medieval lyric for contemporary listeners lay in the ways in which melody interacted with text.”

It is the dual nature of the work that initially drew Hudson and Callahan to medieval lyric poetry.



William Hudson

“I love the wonderful imagery evoked in the poetry, and the melodies are hauntingly beautiful,” said Hudson. “The music doesn’t include any dynamics, tempo indications, or even rhythm; it forces the performer to craft something that works for that piece in that moment.”

The seminar is intended for teacher-scholars who wish to teach medieval lyric with text and melody as equal partners, according to Callahan. By interpreting medieval lyric poetry from a literary and musical standpoint, the seminar will foster collaboration between language/literature scholars and music faculty, introducing participants to one another’s discipline.

“I think it’s critical to not only understand one another’s discipline, but to be able to integrate disciplines as much as possible,” said Hudson. “Giving linguists facility in music and vice versa can only add value to a course.”

Participants will interpret medieval notation by transcribing and analyzing images of 13th-century manuscripts through recitation and performance. The participants’ transcriptions will then be hosted on the project website in the hopes of starting an online database of searchable *trouvère* melodies.

Hudson and Callahan hope that the dual nature of the seminar will encourage participants to collaborate with their own colleagues at their home institutions.

“The seminar project will require collaboration between pairs of participants, one from languages and the other from music, which should lead to future publications,” said Callahan. “It is our expectation that participants will take with them the tools and confidence to integrate these two disciplines in their coursework and their future research.”



Musicians re-enact *trouvères* performing at the Palace of Tau in Reims, France (source: Wikimedia Commons)



Christopher Callahan