

Medieval metal

Medieval metal is a subgenre of **folk metal** that blends heavy metal music with **medieval folk music**. Medieval metal is mostly restricted to **Germany** where it is known as ***Mittelalter-Metal*** or ***Mittelalter-Rock***.^[1]^[2] The genre emerged from the middle of the 1990s with contributions from **Subway to Sally**, **In Extremo** and **Schandmaul**. The style is characterised by the prominent use of a wide variety of traditional folk and medieval instruments.

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History

Precursors

The medieval folk band **Corvus Corax**, was formed in 1989 and released a debut album in the same year.^[3] The group relies on period instruments that include the **cister**, **hurdy-gurdy**, **biniau**, **buccina**, **davul**, **rig** and **cornetto curvo** with the most prominent being the shawm and bagpipes. They are also known for their use of source material, adopting melodies from medieval literature written in an old system of notation called **neumes** but otherwise using their own interpretations for arrangements and the rhythm. They describe their approach as "louder, dirtier and more powerful than any interpretation of medieval music before."^[4] The result has been associated more with medieval taverns and pubs rather than the royal courts or church.^[3]

While medieval metal is a German phenomenon,^[5] one of the inspirations for the genre is the English **folk metal** band **Skyclad**. Formed in 1990 as a **thrash metal** band, they added violins from session musician Mike Evans on several tracks from their debut album, *The Wayward Sons of Mother Earth*, with the song "The Widdershins Jig" acclaimed as "particularly significant" and "a certain first in the realms of Metal".^[6] The band added a full time **violinist** to their ranks^[7] and has since been credited not only as the originators and pioneers of folk metal but also as a direct inspiration for medieval metal bands.^[6]^[8]

Origins

The East German band Subway to Sally was formed in 1992 as a folk rock band, singing in English and incorporating Irish and Scottish influences in their music. With their second album *MCMXCV* released in 1995, the band adopted a "more traditional approach" and started singing in German. Taking Skyclad as an influence,^[8] Subway to Sally performs a blend of **hard rock** and heavy metal music "enriched with medieval melodies enmeshed in the songs via bagpipes, hurdy-gurdy, lute, mandoline, shalm [*sic*], fiddle and flute" and combined with "romantic-symbolic German-speaking poetry" in their lyrics.^[9] With chart success in their native Germany, they have since been credited as the band "that set off the wave of what is known as medieval rock."^[5]

In the year 1994, a concert was organised in **Berlin** that featured a collaboration between a rock band known as Noah and members of the aforementioned medieval group Corvus Corax.^[10] The result of this mix of medieval and rock music saw the group Noah turning into **In Extremo**. They began with two acoustic medieval albums before releasing a metal album *Weckt die Toten!* in 1998.^[11]^[12] They have since found chart success in Germany with their "medieval style stage garb and unashamed usage of such bizarre instruments as the Scottish bagpipes."^[13]

Corvus Corax also joined in the fray with the release of an EP in 1996 that featured metal music with bagpipes.^[3] The EP was titled Tanzwut and the group has since continued exploring medieval metal as a side project by that name. Their style blends not only medieval music and heavy metal but also **industrial** and **electronic** beats.

The year 1999 also saw the release of **Schandmaul**'s debut album.^[14] Describing themselves as the "minstrels of today,"^[15] the **Bavarian** outfit employs a musical arsenal that includes the bagpipes, barrel organ, shawm, violin and mandolin.^[15] Like Subway to Sally and In Extremo, Schandmaul has experienced chart success in their native Germany.^[14]^[15] Other groups that also emerged during the late 1990s and early 2000s included *Letzte Instanz*,^[16] *Morgenstern*^[17], Saltatio Mortis and Schattentantz.^[18]

Musical characteristics

Like its parent genre, medieval rock features the same typical instruments found in heavy metal music: guitars, bass, drums and vocalist. Bands in the genre are known to supplement their sound with a wide range of folk and traditional instruments. Woodwind instruments like the bagpipes, flutes and shawm can be found in the music of Corvus Corax, Tanzwut.^[3] In Extremo,^[13] Schandmaul,^[15] Morgenstern,^[17] Schattentantz^[18] and Subway to Sally while string instruments like the violin, lute, hurdy-gurdy, cello, harp and mandolin are employed by Subway to Sally,^[9] In Extremo,^[13] Schandmaul,^[15] Morgenstern,^[17] and Schattentantz.^[18]

List of bands

Band	Country	Formed	Notes
Corvus Corax	 Germany	1989	[5]
Cultus Ferox	 Germany	2001	[19]
Feuerschwanz	 Germany	2004	[20]
Folkstone	 Italy	2004	[21]
In Extremo	 Germany	1996	[5]
Letzte Instanz	 Germany	1996	[16][22]
Morgenstern	 Germany	1998	[17]
Obsequiae	 United States	2007	[23]
Outlaws of Ravenhurst	 Canada	2005	[24][25]
Saltatio Mortis	 Germany	2000	[26]
Schandmaul	 Germany	1998	[5][14]
Schattentantz	 Germany	1999	[27]
Schelmish	 Germany	1999	[28]
Subway to Sally	 Germany	1992	[5][29]
Tanzwut	 Germany	1998	[30]

See also

- Folk metal
- Medieval folk rock
- Pagan metal

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Medieval metal	
Other names	Mittelalter-metal
Stylistic origins	Folk metal • medieval folk rock
Cultural origins	Mid-1990s, Germany
Typical instruments	Electric guitar • bass • synthesizer • percussion • woodwinds • strings • vocals • bagpipes • lute • harp • hurdy-gurdy • shawm
Regional scenes	
 Germany	
Other topics	
Neo-Medieval music	



Corvus Corax



Subway to Sally, seen here performing live at the 2005 Sundstock Openair, has been credited as setting off this genre of music.



Tanzwut are seen here performing with bagpipes and other woodwind instruments.