

Gothic Voices, Suggested Programmes (July 2004)

Some programmes are specific to a theme, a season, particular composers or historical events; others offer a more general survey of medieval music, showing its development from monody such as plainchant into the polyphony of the early renaissance. Visit our website (www.gothicvoices.co.uk) to hear sample music from the different programmes.

- **Silver Tongues** *Medieval music to celebrate Gothic Voices' 25th anniversary season*
- **The Medieval Magic Carpet** *A musical flight-of-fancy hosted by Brother Giraldus*
- **A Medieval Grand Tour** *A musical journey of discovery around Europe*
- **The Tournament of Love** *Medieval love songs*
- **Arts Ancient and Modern** *The Old, the New and the Contemporary*
- **The Testament of St Gregory** *Gregorian chant and its influence on medieval music*
- **Bruno of Toul** *Medieval music featuring 11th century plainchant of Pope Leo IX*
- **The Pilgrimage of Man** *Music from the time of the Crusades*
- **At the Court of the Virgin Mary** *The story of the composition of the "Salve Regina"*
- **The Combat of Life and Death** *Martyrdom and Resurrection*
- **Champagne and Burgundy** *A celebration of Machaut and Dufay*
- **Puer natus est - A Child is Born** *Medieval music for the Christmas season (4 singers)*
- **Nowel Syng we bothe Al and Som** *A version of our Christmas programme for (5 singers)*
- **Echoes from an Old Hall** *Later medieval music (6 singers)*

We are very happy to discuss music with promoters who may wish for a programme following a particular theme.

SILVER TONGUES

Medieval music to celebrate Gothic Voices' 25th anniversary

To celebrate its 25th anniversary Gothic Voices presents **Silver Tongues**, a compendium of medieval music from the 12th to the 15th century, containing some of the group's favourite works.

One brief concert can scarcely provide more than a tantalizing glance over the abundant variety of passions, textures and timbres of the music of the Middle Ages, but introductions by the singers help to set the pieces in their context and to give some insight into the mind of a medieval composer.

Discover the delights and pangs of courtly love, the timeless spirituality of plainchant, the tumult of war or the ecstasy of religious devotion, all distilled in these miniature masterpieces from England, Germany, Italy and France. Hear works by celebrated medieval figures such as Hildegard of Bingen, Guillaume de Machaut and John Dunstaple.

Above all, come and share in the pleasures of a medieval sound-picture created by the Silver Tongues of Gothic Voices – at once familiar and yet set apart – something rich and strange.

THE MEDIEVAL MAGIC CARPET

For three or four singers and an actor

To celebrate 25 years of Gothic Voices we present a programme that draws together the very best of the repertoire and our own personal favourites. The Medieval Magic Carpet transports our audience from Hildegard's Abbey in 12th-century Bingen to the turbulence of the Crusades, from the devotions of pilgrims on their way to Compostela to the love songs of the troubadours. Through music we paint a picture of medieval life in all its vigour and variety.

To guide and entertain us along the way we have created our own medieval courier – Brother Giraldus. In his isolated monastery in the Welsh borders he dreams of distant lands and other times. When a returning crusader leaves the magic carpet in his care, Giraldus wastes no time in setting out to explore the world. In the course of the monastic day, from Matins in the early hours of the morning to Compline last thing at night, Brother Giraldus (not perhaps the most devout member of his order!) absents himself from the daily worship and instead rides the magic carpet to a series of very different destinations. His thumbnail sketches of each time and place – along with a touch of local gossip – introduce and link the music in this unusual and enchanted journey.

Composers featured in the programme include Hildegard of Bingen, Martim Codax, Guillaume de Machaut, John Dunstaple and, of course, that prolific medieval master – Anonimus.

A MEDIEVAL GRAND TOUR

A musical journey of discovery around Europe

At one time no aspiring English gentleman's education was complete without his having made the "Grand Tour", a journey around Europe to sample the principle cultures and languages of other countries. This programme takes us on a musical voyage sampling the sacred and secular delights of five countries and six centuries!

Home-base for our tour is the medieval Germany of Abbess Hildegard of Bingen, to which we return throughout the programme. In the meantime we'll call in on England, France, Italy and Spain over a period of time spanning the 11th to 16th centuries. On our way we'll encounter the works of such great composers as Francesco Landini, Guillaume de Machaut, Guillaume Dufay and Francisco de Peñalosa.

This is a programme of great variety, from the spare beauty of Hildegard via light, melodious polyphony to the challenges and rewards of the more complex works of Machaut and Dufay. Sight-seeing of the highest order!

THE TOURNAMENT OF LOVE

Medieval love songs

A programme of secular music illustrating the subject of love - courtly and not-so-courtly – featuring works from England, France, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands by composers such as Bernard de Ventadorn, Blondel de Nesle, Richart de Semilli, Martim Codax, Colin Muset, Guillaume de Machaut, Francesco Landini, Solage, Guillaume Dufay, Gilles Binchois and, of course, Anonymous.

You will hear cantigas, troubador and trouvère songs, conducti, motets, canzonas, virelais, ballades and rondeaux all of them concerned with love in its glorious variety, ranging from the unrequited through the fulfilled to the blatantly lustful. The music is by turns joyful, doleful, skittish and soulful and, if nothing else, proves that some things in life never change!

ARTS ANCIENT AND MODERN

The Old, the New and the Contemporary

A programme in which Gothic Voices casts its eyes both back towards its performing roots and forwards to the present day. The group's first recording, *A Feather on the Breath of God*, featuring the music of the 12th century German mystic Abbess Hildegard of Bingen, was for many years the best selling record of medieval music ever made. We include a number of Hildegard's hymns and sequences in this programme, contrasted with plainchant and both sacred and secular polyphony of the *Ars Antiqua*. This is music of interweaving textures and timbres, melodious and captivating.

In the second half we move to music from the later medieval era, in particular the wider ranges and experimental dissonances of *Ars Nova* works by masters such as Machaut and Solage. From the present day there is a piece written in a medieval

idiom by the contemporary British composer Bayan Northcott, specially commissioned for Gothic Voices. *Ave Regina Caelorum* is written in a medieval idiom, taking its inspiration both from plainchant and from Dufay's own setting of the Ave Regina - a tribute to the enduring legacy of this music.

THE TESTAMENT OF ST GREGORY

Gregorian chant and its influence on medieval music

Gregory the Great could be called the father of plainchant. During his fourteen year reign as Pope (590-604) he revised the liturgy, assigning certain chants already in use to specific services of the Church's year. So successful was he in this that by the middle ages it was widely believed that he had in fact composed the chant himself - pictures showed him receiving dictation direct from the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove. Though this may be taking things a bit far, it is certainly true that the impact he had on musical development was enormous. Even today, plainchant is still the essential liturgical music of the Roman Catholic Church.

This programme of Gregorian chant and medieval polyphony demonstrates the variety of styles within plainchant and its influence on the sacred and secular music of western Europe. Works by Guillaume de Machaut, John Dunstaple and anonymous pieces from the Old Hall Manuscript show how profoundly plainchant entered the musical consciousness, finding its way even into secular motets.

BRUNO OF TOUL

Medieval music featuring 11th century plainchant of Pope Leo IX

Bruno of Toul, who became Pope Leo IX in 1049, was an extraordinary man. A gifted musician, praised for the "honeyed sweetness" of his chants, he was also the pope who led an army against the Normans in southern Italy, a precursor to the Crusades.

This programme is constructed so as to lead us step by step back in time, four polyphonic songs taking us from the sonority of the 14th century to the limpid, contemplative genre of mid-11th century plainchant. The core of the concert consists of Bruno's chants for the feast of his papal predecessor St Gregory the Great, together with sequences by earlier contemporaries such as Notker. Finally we retrace our steps towards the end of the 14th century with a sumptuous postlude of polyphonic pieces. Drawn into the world of chant, the audience will be given the chance to explore and enjoy the subtle changes over four decades of this remarkable music.

THE PILGRIMAGE OF MAN

Music from the time of the Crusades

Devotion to the Holy City of Jerusalem found its keenest expression in acts of pilgrimage, and the most momentous pilgrimages were the armed expeditions, undertaken at the instigation of Pope Urban II, which we have now come to call (in accordance with later medieval usage) the 'Crusades'.

Much music associated with pilgrimage came to be written between the First Crusade

and capture of Jerusalem in 1099 and the final fall of the Crusader states to Islam in 1291. We present a selection of music from England, France and Spain, including works composed for the coronation of the best-known English crusader, King Richard the Lionheart. Iberian songs from around 1230 by Martim Codax show pilgrimage from the point of view of the women who were left behind. Also connected with pilgrimage, this time to Santiago de Compostela, we include sacred Iberian works from the Codex Calixtinus. From the timeless spirituality of plainchant, through the heartfelt lamentation for those lost on Crusade, belligerence against the enemy or exultation upon victory, we have here a vivid cross-section of medieval musical emotion.

AT THE COURT OF THE VIRGIN MARY

The story of the composition of the "Salve Regina"

The cult of the Virgin, the "Queen of Heaven", was hugely popular throughout Catholic northern Europe during the Middle Ages. As a paragon of all the feminine virtues, and as a mediator between humans and God, Mary has been granted by the church her own unique status, somewhere between *adoration* (as paid to God) and *veneration* (as paid to the saints). A vast corpus of sacred music is connected with her, either in settings of her great canticle the *Magnificat* or in antiphons such as the well-known *Salve Regina*.

With this programme we explore the medieval repertory of French and English Marian chant and polyphony. It is tender, devotional music, full of imagery and colour. The ensemble also presents the first performances in modern times of the great plainchant morality poem *Pange Lingua: Cor Letare*, a kind of medieval "soap-opera", telling the story of the origin of the Marian antiphon *Salve Regina* and portraying the perils of disobedience to the monastic rule.

THE COMBAT OF LIFE AND DEATH

Martyrdom and Resurrection

The greatest battle of them all, celebrated in music across the centuries. The Christian martyrs are the warriors and the ultimate victory comes with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We start with two soaring, ecstatic plainchant sequences of the 12th century Abbess Hildegard of Bingen, portraying both the martyrdom of St Ursula and the life-giving nature of the Holy Spirit of God. A lament upon the death by drowning of the Emperor Frederick Barbarosa is followed by a frankly blood-thirsty song of the Holy Innocents celebrating the death of King Herod. After a 13th century motet in which simultaneous texts are sung, one about death, the other about life, we close the first half with works in honour of the martyrs St Catherine of Alexandria and St. Stephen.

The second half of the programme begins with the cumulative excitement of an isorhythmic motet (in which the tempo seems to increase dangerously towards the end), once again featuring St Catherine, followed by a dance-like carol in honour of St Thomas of Canterbury. The Blessed Virgin Mary is often held as an example of life-giving grace (*Vita, dulcedo, et spes nostra*), and the following more contemplative pieces include votive antiphons and the moving memorial of her suffering by the cross

of her son. The programme concludes with the jubilant plainchant Easter sequence *Victime paschali laudes* and a setting of the Easter introit *Hec dies quam fecit dominus* rejoicing at Christ's resurrection; a suitably up-beat finish to celebrate the triumphant victory of life.

CHAMPAGNE AND BURGUNDY

A celebration of Machaut and Dufay

A programme of rich harmonies, rhythmic energy and glorious inventiveness from two of the greatest masters of the Middle Ages.

Born a century apart, the names of Guillaume de Machaut (c.1300-1377) and Guillaume Dufay (c.1400-1474) dominate music in medieval France. Machaut spent forty years as a canon of Reims in the Champagne region whilst Dufay, although living mainly in Cambrai in northern France, became one of the leaders of the Burgundian school of composition through his connections with Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy.

This programme traces a path from the early experiments with dissonance and rhythm of the *Ars Nova*, through the more exaggerated mannered style of the *Ars subtilior* at the turn of the century towards the new transparency of texture with which Dufay sought to imitate the work of Dunstaple, the *Contenance Angloise*.

Particularly interesting is the way in which the driving force behind new techniques of composition, very definitely with Machaut and the French school during the mid-14th century, moves at around the turn of the century to England, demonstrated especially in the pieces of the Old Hall Manuscript, and continued in the works of Leonel Power and John Dunstaple, only to be taken up again by the Burgundian school in France in the mid-15th century.

For the initiated this is a fascinating journey through the period's most significant developments in polyphony, enjoying both well-loved and lesser-known pieces along the way. For those lucky enough to be meeting this music for the first time it is a spell-binding introduction to some of the greatest music ever written.

PUER NATUS EST - A Child is Born

Medieval music for the Christmas season

The twelve days which make up the Feast of Christmas are particularly rich in musical possibilities. We present a programme featuring some of the gems of the medieval repertoire for the season.

The first half covers the period from the Annunciation through Advent to Christmas Day itself; the second half concentrates on the Feasts of the following twelve days: St Stephen, St John the Evangelist, the Holy Innocents, St Thomas of Canterbury, New Year's Day (the Feast of the Circumcision of Our Lord) and the Epiphany.

Within this short period there is an immense variety, ranging from the joy of the birth of Christ through the tragedy of the massacre of the Holy Innocents by King Herod and the martyrdoms of St Stephen and the English St Thomas à Becket (cut down on

the altar steps of Canterbury Cathedral) to the Adoration of the Magi as Christ is shown forth to the Gentiles at Epiphany. Piety and celebration, drama and entertainment - all the essential ingredients of a medieval Christmas.

NOWEL SYNG WE BOTHE AL AND SOM

*A version of our Christmas programme for **five singers***

The addition of an extra singer allows us to include two very special and quite substantial medieval pieces in this concert: Pérotin's great conductus-motets *Viderunt omnes* and *Sederunt principes*.

First performed around the year 1200 at Notre Dame de Paris, these works represent the summit of composition in this genre in their fusion of the old *conductus* and new *motet* forms. Imitation, voice exchange and melodic variation are employed, all of them brand-new techniques in medieval composition, and the fast-moving, rhythmic polyphony of the higher voices is contrasted with the elongated plainchant of the *Tenor* (lowest voice). Both pieces are based on plainchant *Graduals*, respectively for the Feasts of Christmas and St Stephen the Martyr (26th December), and are performed in this programme on either side of the interval.

The concert concludes with Jacob Handl's magnificent five-voice motet for Epiphany, *Omnes de Saba*.

ECHOES FROM AN OLD HALL

*Later medieval music for **six singers***

Perhaps the most important source of late medieval sacred music from England is the Old Hall Manuscript, dating from around the beginning of the 15th century and compiled for use at the Old Hall at Ware, a small town about 40km north of London. Our programme explores and celebrates the magnificent music from this manuscript.

Until the late 14th century most medieval English composers had remained anonymous; here for the first time some are named - Leonel Power and John Dunstaple, the major figures of the day, featuring largely. The majority of the collection is made up of individual mass movements. We present a selection of these together with plainchant, opening and closing the first half with spectacular Glorias by Pycard and Power, masterpieces of the medieval era.

For the second half we move to Flanders, France and Spain and the continental response to Power and Dunstaple, both of whom were widely revered in Northern Europe. From Dufay we have *Ave regina celorum*, a piece so close to his own heart that in his will he stipulated that it be performed at his deathbed. Secular works by Binchois, Dufay and Haucourt make up the central group in this half and we finish with Pierre de la Rue's great six voice motet *Pater de caelis Deus*.

Interspersed throughout the programme are four plainchant Marian antiphons which are traditionally sung in the evening at the end of the office of Compline. As these echoes from the Old Hall come down to us today, we can only marvel at the richness of the art of music in the late middle ages.