

King's Chapel Presents—The Quilisma Consort  
12:15pm, Tuesday, January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2005

## *Aspirations: Voices of Medieval France*

Settings of the plainsong *Benedicamus Domino*

Benedicamus Domino

Two-voice organum

Clausula

Secular motet: Pucelete/Je languis/Domino

Secular motet: Quant revient/Lautre jor/Flos filius

Plainsong chant (ca. 900)

ca. 1175 (School of Notre Dame)

ca. 1200 (School of Notre Dame)

ca. 1250

ca. 1250

Motet: Ex semine Rosa/Ex semine Abrahe/Ex semine

Isorhythmic motet: De bon espoir/Puis que la douce/Speravi

Perotin (early 13<sup>th</sup> c.)

Guillaume de Machaut (ca. 1300-1377)

Rondeux of Adam de la Halle

He, Dieux! quant verrai

Fi, maris, de vostre amour

Tant con je vivrai

Adam de la Halle (ca. 1230- ca. 1288)

de la Halle

de la Halle

Motet: On parole de batre/A Paris/Frese nouvele

Rondeau: Adieu ces bons vins (composed in 1426)

late 13<sup>th</sup> c.

Guillaume Dufay (ca. 1400-1474)

Virelai: Ma trédol rosignol joly

Virelai: Par maintes foyz

Attributed to Borlet, late 14<sup>th</sup> c.

Johannes Vaillant, fl. 1360-1390

Rondeau: J'atendray tant qu'il vous playra

Rondeau: Donnés l'assault

Dufay

Dufay



*The Quilisma Consort* is a new ensemble that performs old music. We explore repertoires of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, seeking creative ways to express the emotion and artistry of early European music.

*Lisa Gay* founded the Quilisma Consort in 2004 to satisfy her addiction to early music. An avid recorder player and fan of Orlando de Lasso since childhood, she has performed in *The Christmas Revels* in Cambridge and Chicago, and with ensembles such as *Calliope*, *The Masqued Phoenix Consort*, and *Ars et Amici*. She studies recorder with John Tyson.

*Melika M. Fitzhugh* is a long-standing member of the world music ensemble *Urban Myth* where she plays many instruments including fiddle, bass, and percussion. She came to the Quilisma Consort to focus on early music. She has a degree in music composition from Harvard University.

*Carolyn Jean Smith* received an MA in Early Music from the Longy School. She has performed with *Stämbandet*, *Serendipity* and *Cantata á Trois*, and has studied with Ford Weisberg, Sonja Lindblad and John Tyson. She has performed in several venues, including the Society for Historically Informed Performance Concert Series, and can be heard on *Nordic Voices*, a CD by *Stämbandet* under the Nordic Sounds label.

### Thank you

to the Boston Recorder Society for encouragement,  
to John Tyson for coaching and instrument loans,  
and King's Chapel for hosting us.

*Aspirations* are lofty goals, often seemingly unreachable. The root of this word—*spiritus*—implies a spiritual longing, or at least a longing that is felt deeply in the soul. But *spiritus* also means “breath.” How natural, then, that such emotions should be expressed in singing, where breath and words become music. The recorder (our consort’s primary instrument) is well suited to this repertory because the musician’s breath functions much as it does in singing and because the recorder can create subtle articulations similar to consonants, vowels, word shapes, and sentence phrasing. In this concert, we strive to communicate the sentiment and sound of the lyrics, *sans* words.

Medieval France was a time and place of aspirations, both sacred and secular. The most influential sung texts of the time were the Christian Mass and Divine Offices, originally chanted with all voices singing the same tune in a flowing arrhythmic style (*plainsong*). Inspired to further beautify the services, singers experimented with multi-voiced music. A common style was to sing the original chant very slowly (the *tenor*) while a second voice sang a new melody, as in *organum*. Around the time that construction of the great cathedral of Notre Dame began, Paris was home to the pioneer composers of 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century polyphony including Leonin and Perotin. Innovations of the “School of Notre Dame” included more precise ways of notating rhythm and meter, resulting in a dance-like style that contrasts dramatically with the ethereal sound of plainsong.

Another invention of the French composers was the *motet*, in which the ornamenting voice sang different lyrics than the tenor. Perotin’s motet on the plainsong chant *Ex semine* (“from the seed”) offers two ornamental lines that poetically complement the theme of the chant by elaborating on the concept of “seed” in reference to the Nativity. One speaks of Christ as the seed of Abraham, and the other as a rose sprung from the seed of a thorn. Both end with words *sine semine* (“without seed”). Not all of these lyric additions celebrated the sacred. Lay composers adopted the motet form, developing it into a highly artistic courtly entertainment. This explains the perplexing combination of lyrics that simultaneously plead for a girl’s affection (“Pucelete, bele et avenant”), bemoan the pangs of unrequited love (“Je languis”), and praise God (“[Benedicamus] Domino”). In secular pieces, even the tenor line sometimes came from such base sources as street cries. The tenor of the motet on *Frese nouvelle* translates as, “Fresh strawberries! Nice blackberries!”

These secular texts reflect another way in which French music had a long-lasting impact on the Western musical tradition: the rise of courtly love, a tradition of unfulfilled and often undisclosed longing for a lady of higher station. Troubadours such as Adam de la Halle celebrated this ideal in very mannered and formulaic poetry and song. The three pieces by de la Halle presented here are *rondeaux*, in which both music and text repeat in a very particular pattern: verse 1, chorus, verse 2, verse 1, chorus with new text, and a final reprise of the first verse and chorus. The expressions of longing and heartbreak are quite familiar to us today, and it wouldn’t be very far off the mark to say that the medieval French invented modern love.

The medieval texts of love are full of strong and changeable emotions, and the music often reflects these stormy qualities. Dufay’s “Donnes l’assault” begins with a call to “Lay siege to the fortress” in a bold trumpet-like blast that quickly smoothes to a more tender style when the lover clarifies that it is the metaphorical fortress of his lady’s heart. Distressed strains accompany a desperate plea to the God of Love to alleviate his suffering or, in the next verse, an equally desperate plea to his lady to have mercy on him.

French artistry is also apparent in the ornate imitation of birdcalls. The pieces by Borlet and Vaillant both invoke the Graeco-Roman myth of Philomela, Procne and Tereus, in which love gone horribly wrong results in the characters turning into birds. They become emblems of betrayal and revenge. In *Ma trédol rosignol joly*, the tenor line sings, “Nightingale of the pretty woods, give the wicked one early misfortune and then death.” In the upper voices, a lover asks the birds for help in making peace between himself and his displeased lady. The nightingale’s cry *oci oci oci* (“kill kill kill”) intertwines with pleas for mercy: *merci merci merci*. The birdcall sounds in the upper voices blend seamlessly with the rest of the music, weaving ancient myths with personal accounts of love.

Whether crying to God for spiritual purification or crying to a nightingale for justice in love, the vocal music of medieval France speaks of lofty aspirations. Thank you for joining us in this preview of our debut concert, which gives a glimpse into our own aspirations. Please come see the full-length concert, featuring performances on guitar and harp, and works of Johannes Ciconia, Juan del Enzina and Josquin des Pres.

***Sunday, February 6<sup>th</sup>, at 7pm at St. Peter’s Episcopal Church (Central Square stop on the Red Line)***

For more information about this and other Quilisma events, please visit [www.quilisma.us](http://www.quilisma.us).