

My heart remains with you

Medieval love songs inspired by Arthurian Romance

Program Notes

In the courts of Europe at the end of the Middle Ages, musical performance not only sounded, but also looked very different than it does today. Large orchestras did not exist. Aside from fanfares and other public celebrations, music was largely a more personal, intimate affair, with poetry and melodies composed and performed by a handful of musicians and singers for private audiences or as an eagerly awaited treat at banquets and other social settings at court.

Quieter instruments such as lutes, harps and *vielles* (a predecessor of the violin) often accompanied singers to produce the sumptuous sound of interweaving melodies that characterizes the period.

The topic of the poetry is invariably that of courtly love, that mysterious and uniquely medieval literary and cultural tradition that places the lady on the highest possible pedestal and defines the social roles for noblemen and noblewomen at court. But, like the experience of love in any age, there are countless variations and some unique medieval twists on this timeless subject.

A knight is expected to woo his lady, but the pain of her initial refusal is bittersweet. The more inaccessible the object of his affections, the higher the drama and the glory of the pursuit. The troubadours, the celebrated singer/poets of the 12th and 13th centuries, preached the gospel of courtly love as the ultimate in human experience. But what did it all really mean, and why was this hopelessly romantic form of human expression so revered at that time when today chivalry appears all but dead (or is it)?

The tradition of courtly love, however, was not just tapped by jilted poets and troubadours, it also provided the inspiration for a literary tradition that turns out to be much longer lived than the long-forgotten poems and songs that once delighted noble audiences at the dawn of the Renaissance. The Middle Ages was also the great era of Arthurian romance, and a quick scan of the offerings in Hollywood and on cable television today makes it clear that our appetite for this genre has hardly waned in the interim. Foundational characters and events that are absolutely integral to Arthurian lore, such as Lancelot and his tragic affair with Guinevere, and Percival and the grail saga, were actually “invented” in the 12th century, and mostly by one man: Chretien de Troyes.

In today's concert, Asteria will follow one of Chretien's most beloved stories, that of knight Sir Yvain, to illustrate how the concepts of courtly love as presented in Arthurian romance were very much alive and well in the art songs of the 15th century, just as they would go on to inspire great writers in the centuries that followed.

Program

Ave regina coelorum

Walter Frye (d. 1474/1475)

Pour tant se j'ay la barbe grise

Anonymous,

Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. Canonici Misc. 213, circa 1420

Au gré de mes ieulx, je vous ai choisie

Antoine Busnoys (1430-1492),

Dijon Chansonnier Ms. 517

Pour prison

Gilles Binchois (c. 1400-1460),

Escorial B - Biblioteca del Monasterio Ms. IV

Entre vous nouveaux mariés

Johannes le Grant (fl. c. 1420 – 1440),

Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. Canonici Misc. 213

J'atendrai tant quil vous plaira

Guillaume Dufay (1400-1474),

Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. Canonici Misc. 213

Le souvenir de vous me tue

Robert Morton (~1430-1476)

Dijon Chansonnier Ms. 517

~Pause~

Dueil angoisseux

text: Christine de Pisan / music: Gilles Binchois

Tristre dolent – lute solo

Anonymous,

Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. Canonici Misc. 213, circa 1420

Soyes loyal

Anonymous,

Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. Canonici Misc. 213, circa 1420

Quant la douce jovencelle

Anonymous,
Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. Canonici Misc. 213, circa 1420

Dame d'onneur

Anonymous,
Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. Canonici Misc. 213, circa 1420

Le corps sen va - le cuer vous demeure

Antoine Busnoys (1430-1492),
Dijon Chansonnier Ms. 517

Translations

Ave regina coelorum

Walter Frye (d. 1474/1475)

*Ave regina coelorum
Mater regis angelorum
O Maria flos virginum ...
Funde preces ad Filium
Pro salute fidelium.*

Hail, queen of heaven,
Mother of the king of angels.
Mary, flower of virgins,
Pour forth prayers to your Son
For the salvation of the faithful.

Pour tant se j'ay la barbe grise

Anonymous,
Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. Canonici Misc. 213, circa 1420

*Pour tant se j'ay la barbe grise
Prenes engre, ma douche dame
Se poise moy, car par mon ame
C'est de tristresse ma devise*

Although I may have a grey beard,
Would that you will have me, my sweet lady!
It weighs heavy upon me, for, by my soul,
My motto is sadness.

Au gré de mes ieulx, je vous ai choisie

Antoine Busnoys (1430-1492),
Dijon Chansonnier Ms. 517

*Au gré de mes ieulx
Je vous ay choisie
La plus acomplie
Qui soit soubz les cieulx*

To the delight of my eyes,
I have chosen you,
The most perfect [creature]
That exists beneath the heavens.

Pour prison

Gilles Binchois (c. 1400-1460),
Escorial B - Biblioteca del Monasterio Ms. IV

*Pour prison, ne pour maladie
Ne pour chose quon me die
Ne vous peut mon cuer oblier
Et sy ne peult ailleurs penser*

Not for prison, nor for illness,
Nor for anything one might say,
I shall not forget you,
And I shall not change my mind.

Entre vous novviaux mariés

Johannes le Grant (fl. c. 1420 – 1440),
Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. Canonici Misc. 213

*Entre vous novviaux mariés
Menez bon het et bonne vie
Gardes que ne vous endormes
Aimsy qu'il avint l'aultre fille !*

Among ye newlyweds,
Hold good health and happy life.
Watch out that you do not fall asleep
Like it happened with the other girl!

J'atendrai tant quil vous plaira

Guillaume Dufay (1400-1474),

Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. Canonici Misc. 213

*Jatendrai tant quil vous plaira
A vous declarer ma penser
Ma tres chière dame honourée
Je ne sais sil men deplaira*

I shall wait as long as it pleases you
To declare my feelings to you
My most dear, honored lady,
Though it may displease you.

Le souvenir de vous me tue

Robert Morton (~1430-1476)
Dijon Chansonnier Ms. 517

*Le souvenir de vous me tue
Mon seul bien quand je ne vous voy
Car je vous jure sur ma foy
Sans vous ma liesse est perdue ...
Jusqua vostre revenue.*

The memory of you kills me,
My one treasure, when I cannot see you.
Because I swear to you upon my honor,
Without you my happiness is lost ...
Until your return.

~Pause~

Dueil Angoisseux

text: Christine de Pisan / music: Gilles Binchois

*Dueil angoisseux, rage desmesuree, grief desespoir ...
Princes, priez a Dieu
Qui bien briefment me doint la mort.*

Anguished grief, immoderate fury, grievous despair ...
Princes, pray to God
That very soon he may grant me death.

Tristre dolent – lute solo

Anonymous,
Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. Canonici Misc. 213, circa 1420

Soyes loyal

Anonymous,
Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. Canonici Misc. 213, circa 1420

*Soyes loyal a vo povoir,
Confort arez de doulx espoir
Bien brief, mon amy gracieux,
En despit des faulx envieux qui
Vos ont greve main e soir.*

Remain loyal as well as you are able.
You will soon receive comfort from Sweet Hope,
My gracious friend,
To the distress of the false, envious ones
Who have wounded you day and night.

Quant la douce jovencelle

Anonymous,
Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. Canonici Misc. 213, circa 1420

*Quant la douce jovencelle
La très gracieuse et belle
Celle don't suy amoureux
Veult que me tiengne joyeux
Ne doy je obeir a elle ?*

If the gentle maiden,
The most gracious and beautiful,
She, with whom I am in love,
Desires only to make me happy,
Should I not grant her wish?

Dame d'onnour

Anonymous,
Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. Canonici Misc. 213, circa 1420

*Dame donnour et de tous biens garnye
Veullies pour dieu de moy avoir pite
Car de lonc temps ne fu jour ne nuytie
Que ne pensasse a vo finne beauté*

Lady of honor and blessed with all good things,
Would you, for God, have pity on me,
For so long there has not been a night nor a day
That I did not contemplate your fine beauty.

Le corps sen va - le cuer vous demeure

Antoine Busnoys (1430-1492),
Dijon Chansonnier Ms. 517

*Le corps sen va le cuer vous demeure
Le quel veult faire avec vous sa demeure
Par vous vouloir aymer tant et si fort
Que incessamment veult mettre son effort
A vous suir jusque ad ce que ie meure*

The body departs, and the heart remains with you.
That which wishes to make with you its home,
From the desire to love you so strongly and so much,
That it wants constantly to exert itself
To serve you, until I die.

Artist Bios

Asteria burst onto the national Early Music scene in October 2004, winning Early Music America's first Unicorn Prize for Medieval and Renaissance Music with a performance heralded by the New York Times as "intimate and deeply communicative...meltingly beautiful." This engaging duo brings out the passion and emotional impact of late medieval vocal and instrumental music with timeless love songs of wide appeal, transporting their listeners back to the age of chivalry.

Eric's skill on the lute and sweet tenor voice are complemented by his expertise in early music, earned through study at the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis and extensive archival research into original sources. Following graduation from Middlebury College, Eric spent several years immersing himself in the European musical archives of the Hague, Basel and Marburg. During this time he also did post-graduate studies in composition and musicology at the Frankfurt Conservatory of Music, worked in the studio of New York based *avant-garde* composer Philip Glass and studied medieval lute with Crawford Young and voice with Richard Levitt at the *Schola*. He now makes his home in New York, where he has studied with Drew Minter and Gary Ramsey.

Sylvia brings to the partnership not only her quicksilver soprano but also a strong dramatic connection with the audience, gained from a professional career in musical theater. She has starred internationally as Christine in "The Phantom of the Opera," and on Broadway as Joanna in "Sweeney Todd" under the direction of Harold Prince, Susan Schulman and Stephen Sondheim.

Raised in London and the Pacific Northwest, Sylvia grew up surrounded by classical music, opera and dance. She pursued a passion for early music at Carleton College, guided by Stephen Kelly, taking leading roles in early operas and operettas on her way to a degree in music. She studied acting with Wesley Balk at St. Olaf College and recorded with Dennis

Russell Davies and the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra. Arriving in New York, Sylvia was invited to sing with the New York City Opera. She is currently studying with Marcy Lindheimer, Victoria Clark and Alexandra Neil.

Upon meeting, Eric and Sylvia immediately discovered their mutual interest in earlier repertoire and began to rendezvous regularly in New York's Central Park to work on late Medieval and Renaissance pieces, gradually developing their passionate approach to the music. Asteria's performances convey the anguish and ecstasy of the poetry and the rapturous beauty of the interweaving vocal and instrumental lines.

Their unique style is showcased on four CDs: *Le Souvenir de Vous Me Tue*, *Soyes Loyal*, *Un Très Doulx Regard* and, recorded in an authentic Burgundian chateau, the lovely *For The Love of Jaqueline*. All four CDs, along with more information about their research and upcoming concerts are available through their website: ASTERIAMUSICA.com, and via digital download at Amazon.com and iTunes.