

What's Old is New | The Leuven Songbook

The Lover (l'Amant)

Anon: *J'ay pris amours*

They Meet

Binchois: *Je ne vis onques la pareille*

He wishes to serve

Hayne: *De tous biens plaine*

She responds

Ockeghem: *D'un aultre amer*

The Feast

Basse danse settings (arr. Nagy): *Tristre plaisir, Sans faire de vous, Danse de Cleves*

They must separate

Anon: *En attendant vostre venue**

Time passes

Anon: *Escu d'ennuy**

He hears nothing

Anon: *J'ay des semblans**

A misunderstanding

Anon: *Par malle bouche**

She is dismayed

Binchois: *Comme femme desconfortée*

Love's Slavery

Anon: *Helas mon cuer, tu m'occiras**

New hope

Anon: *Oublie, oublie**

**Unique, previously unknown songs from the Leuven Chansonnier*

Performers:

*Ellen Hargis, soprano
David Douglass, vielle
Charles Metz, organetto
Shawn Keener, visual design*

*Debra Nagy, director, voice, harp, recorder
Jason McStoots, tenor
Daniel Fridley, baritone
Allison Monroe, vielle and rebec
Charles Weaver, lute*

Notes on the Program:

It's not everyday that a previously-unknown window into the past opens up and allows us more than a glimpse into its foreign and fantastic world. Such was the magnitude of the discovery when a small, beautifully-preserved songbook from the fifteenth century turned up in a bundle of papers being sold at auction in 2016. Experts were brought in to evaluate this little book – its pages are smaller than a postcard – and they immediately recognized its significance. Dubbed the Leuven Songbook (for where it is now kept in Belgium), it shares music and other features with five similar books collectively known as the Loire Valley Chansonniers. Containing forty-nine songs, of which twelve are unique (that is, they were previously unknown), the Leuven Songbook not only expands the repertoire of fifteenth-century song but also enriches our understandings about book culture, reading, and performing in the late Middle Ages. Our concert tonight interleaves famous songs with unique pieces from the Leuven Songbook presented in a multimedia format that we hope both enlightens and delights.

Hand-produced by a team of artisans that included separate copyists for both music and lyrics, artist-illuminators, and book binders, the Leuven Songbook belongs to a rich tradition of small, beautiful, personal books. Given as gifts or commissioned for a particular owner, chansonniers contain both popular and little-known or unique songs. Effectively, *chansonniers* were the fifteenth-century's answer to today's personal playlist. Songs like *J'ay pris amours* or *De tous biens plaine* were hugely popular: they clearly traveled the continent (appearing in books from across France, Italy, Germany, and Spain) and remained in the repertoire for decades (they feature prominently in the earliest printed songbooks from the 16th century and were constantly rearranged and updated by later composers). By contrast, *Je ne vis onques la pareille* had already been in circulation for at least thirty years by the time it was copied for the Leuven chansonnier: it is one of the few works mentioned by name as part of the lavish entertainments at the Feast of the Pheasant (1454) where it was apparently sung by a girl brought in on the back of a stag!

The unique songs in Leuven and similar books, however, seem to have had but brief moments in the sun. Because of their extremely limited distribution, unique songs are often used to try and identify the origins of a particular volume. That is, we understand that a unique song was probably only in vogue for a short time and in a specific place. While we rarely know the names of their composers, there's no reason to believe that jewels like *En attendant vostre venue* or *J'ay des semblans* couldn't be the work of a master like Ockeghem. We can delight in these little-known works like a rare record's B-side.

With their tiny dimensions, chansonniers were clearly intended for personal use yet they contain frustratingly little evidence of having been used! If you imagine three singers or players gathering around the manuscript to perform a song, think again: they're too small to reasonably be considered as performing material. Furthermore, mistakes in the musical notation were rarely (if ever) corrected. It's not that no one ever marked them up: there's evidence of owners writing a few words on a flyleaf, perhaps adding their own *device* or motto. It's possible that merely possessing such a book was an end in itself. A leading expert on the Loire Valley Chansonniers, Jane Alden has suggested that rather than belonging to members of the aristocracy, chansonniers fit well into the collections of bibliophiles. As social climbers in a rising class of bourgeoisie, notaries or secretaries collected books on leisure pursuits, such as falconry, hunting, and botany. Alden adds, "Just as owning a hunting treatise suggested knowledge of the hunt, possession of a chansonnier attested to the aesthetic refinement of the book's owner, denoting his or her participation in a musically literate society."

The inclusion of an index in the Leuven Songbook further testifies to how a reader would have engaged with its contents. Rather than starting at the beginning and flipping through, the reader could select a song from the index and drop into the text wherever they wanted. Alden posits that chansonniers "were ideally suited to piecemeal reading, rather than following a single linear

narrative. They functioned as portable musical libraries that could be visited regularly, for different amounts of time, in a variety of circumstances." Complete with beautiful, sometimes fanciful initials, chansonniers were at once visual, musical, and literary objects. A reader could thus appreciate or "read" them on many different levels: they could choose to view or hear the musical notation, browse the poetry, or simply enjoy the elaborate decorations.

Some scholars believe that anytime we read a series of poems or listen to songs in a certain sequence, we try to find links or relationships between them. Considering a songbook owner's experience of "piecemeal" reading, tonight's concert uses the book's contents to construct an imaginary narrative of love and loss. Like other late-medieval miscellanies of lyric poetry, our story is propelled not only by words but also images. Just as woodcuts of lovers broke up the visual monotony of printed pages while threading a visual narrative through printed books of lyric poetry like the *Jardin de plaisance et de rhetorique*, we've chosen images from a lavishly-decorated French manuscript of the *Roman de la Rose* (c. 1475) to illustrate and enrich our story.

One of the most widely-read works of the Middle Ages, the *Roman de la Rose* is at once a courtly song, a story of initiation, and a literary game complete with metaphors and other literary devices. Over 300 manuscript versions of the *Roman* survive (its text dates back to the late 13th Century), many of which are gorgeously illuminated with images of *L'Amant* (the lover) and numerous allegorical characters. The fact that many songs in the Leuven Chansonnier still make reference to allegorical figures from the *Roman* like Bon Espoir (Good Hope), Amours (Love), Malle Bouche (Slander), and Dangier (Risk) testifies to the enduring cultural currency of courtly love themes in the late fifteenth century. While the cultural references may have been old, their modern musical settings in the Leuven Songbook (complete with pervasive imitation, irregular modes, and experimentation with four-voice textures) gave chivalric poetry a modern voice.

Our imagined story begins with the Lover introducing himself by way of his motto (*J'ay pris amours à ma devise*): it's summer and he's a man on a mission (to fall in love)! Naturally, the most gracious lady in the world catches his eye as a prelude to piercing his heart (*Je ne vis onques la pareille*). Showering her with compliments, he expresses his wish to serve (*De tous biens plaine*), and she replies with an oath of fidelity (*D'un autre amer*). Flirtation continues that evening as the couple enjoys a great feast followed by dancing. Nothing good can stay, however, and the lovers must separate. She dutifully awaits his return (*En attendant vostre venue*) while he goes off to the battlefield, bearing the arms of affliction and sadness (*Escu d'ennuy*). He receives only snippets of news while he is away and begins to doubt that she still loves him (*J'ay des semblans*). He is shocked to receive a letter from his Lady's handmaid accusing him of disloyalty (this is the first he's heard of it!), and he rushes to both refute the rumors and apologize (*Par malle bouche*). She laments lost love in personal, emotional terms (*Comme femme desconfortee*), while he complains of a broken heart while hinting at future conquests (*Helas mon cuer, tu m'occiras*). A friend urges the Lover to forget his troubles (*Oublie, oublie*) and make room for the next lady in his life.

- Debra Nagy

[Les Délices](#) (pronounced *Lay day-lease*) explores the dramatic potential and emotional resonance of long-forgotten music. Founded by baroque oboist Debra Nagy in 2009, Les Délices has established a reputation for unique programs that are "thematically concise, richly expressive, and featuring composers few people have heard of." The New York Times added, "Concerts and recordings by Les Délices are journeys of discovery." In addition to touring engagements and community outreach, Les Délices presents an annual concert series at Plymouth Church in Shaker Heights, OH, where the group is Artist in Residence. Visit www.lesdelices.org for more information.

Beguiling and intelligent, provocative and classic, ravishingly beautiful and deliciously edgy - [The Newberry Consort](#) has been delighting audiences for more than three decades. Called “Chicago’s gift to early music” by the Boston Globe, Consort brings to the stage the sounds, stories, and spirit of times past in meticulously researched and beautifully performed multi-media programs. Directed by David Douglass, Newberry Musician-in-Residence, and early music diva Ellen Hargis, the ensemble plumbs the Chicago Newberry Library’s vast music collection and assembles a star-studded roster of local and international artists to bring world-class performances of music from the 13th to the 18th centuries to audiences around the world. Affiliated with the Newberry Library Center for Renaissance Studies, the Consort also serves as an ensemble-in-residence at both the University of Chicago and Northwestern University. In addition to an annual concert series in Chicago, the Consort has an active touring schedule.

David Douglass, a founding member of The Newberry Consort in 1988, was appointed the ensemble’s Director and Musician-in-Residence at the Newberry Library in 2007. First trained as a modern violinist, then as a baroque violinist, David soon became interested in early bowed strings such as rebec and vielle, as well viola da gamba and violone. He was the first to develop a historical technique for producing “a distinctively ‘Renaissance’ sound and style for the violin” (Fanfare) in groundbreaking work exploring and reconstructing the repertoire of early string bands with The King’s Noyse. David is much in demand as a writer and lecturer on early violin history, technique and repertoire. He teaches at the Northwestern University, and is on the faculty of many summer courses in early music.

Daniel Fridley, bass, is a doctoral student in the Case Western Reserve University Historical Performance Practice program and obtained his Masters of Music from the Cleveland Institute of Music. His “spotless, resonant bass” (Cleveland Classical) lends itself well to both early music and operatic performing. Upcoming performances include Thésée in Rameau’s Hippolyte et Aricie (CIM/CWRU), and his first Coffee Cantata with Wyoming Baroque. Recent credits include Caccini’s Alcina (Boston Early Music Festival); Dangerous Love (Newberry Consort); Jesus in Bach’s St. John Passion (Atlanta Baroque); Leporello in Don Giovanni (La Musica Lirica); Polyphemus in Acis and Galatea (CWRU); and Figaro in Le nozze di Figaro (CIM). He has been a Studio Artist with Central City Opera and a Young Artist with the Boston Early Music Festival.

Soprano **Ellen Hargis** is one of America’s premier early music singers, specializing in repertoire ranging from ballads to opera and oratorio. Her discography embraces repertoire from medieval to contemporary music, and includes two nominations for Grammy Awards for Best Opera. As a stage director specializing in historical opera, she has directed five operas for Haymarket Opera in Chicago, and will direct Rameau’s Hippolyte et Aricie for the Cleveland Institute of Music in February 2019. In addition to serving as co-director for the renowned Newberry Consort in Chicago, Ms. Hargis is a visiting professor at the Eastman School of Music and Case Western Reserve University, and has been appointed to the Historical Performance Voice Faculty at the Longy School of Music in Boston beginning Fall 2018.

Shawn Keener has been winning over multimedia skeptics with stylish, intelligent presentation design since 2012. As a musicologist, editor, and graphic designer with an upbringing in the theater, she brings a unique skill set to creating concert backdrops that are visual extensions of historically informed performance. She has an ongoing relationship with Chicago’s Newberry Consort—notably “Rosa das Rosas: Cantigas de Santa Maria” (2012–15) and “Le Roman de Fauvel” (2016)—and created the presentation for Les Delices/Blue Heron’s “Remède de Fortune” in 2017. After years working at the Newberry Library (Chicago), Keener is now an editor at A-R Editions, the leading North American publisher of scholarly editions of music.

Jason McStoots is a gifted young tenor whose “bright, clear, and fully-fledged” singing has been described as “exquisite” and “alluring.” Jason has performed around the world, and was honored with a Grammy award with the Boston Early Music Festival for his roles of Ixion in Charpentier’s *La*

descente d'Orphée aux enfers and Florestan in *La couronne de fleurs* in 2015. He has been a fixture on the BEMF stage, and appeared with such groups as Boston Lyric Opera, Pacific MusicWorks, Boston Camerata, TENET, Tragicomedia, and others. He is a core member of Blue Heron and can be heard on all six of their recordings. Jason teaches voice at Brandeis University and has staged operatic works for the Connecticut Early Music Festival, Amherst Early Music Festival, Wayland First Unitarian Players, and Brandeis University.

Charles Metz studied piano at Penn State University, beginning his harpsichord studies through private lessons with the legendary Igor Kipnis. In the process of earning a Ph.D. in Historical Performance Practice at Washington University in Saint Louis Missouri, he studied with Trevor Pinnock. As an early keyboard specialist he is currently performing on his historic Italian virginal, harpsichords and fortepianos. Dr. Metz also obtained a doctorate in Optometry and worked for twenty years in his own private practice and Clarkson Eyecare in St. Louis before retiring ten years ago. In addition to his performing activity, he serves on the Board of Directors of Chamber Music Society of St. Louis, The Newberry Consort and Early Music America.

Allison Monroe recently completed her DMA in Historical Performance Practice at Case Western Reserve University, where she studied violin with Julie Andrijeski. A multi-instrumentalist, Allison also plays viola, treble viol, recorder, rebec, and vielle. She holds a B.A. in violin performance from the University of Maryland and an M.M. in viola performance from the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. Her performing credits include concerts with the Newberry Consort, the Oregon Bach Festival's Berwick Academy, Seattle Baroque Orchestra, the Washington Bach Consort, the Brecon Baroque Festival Orchestra, and Sequentia as a student at Early Music Vancouver 2015. Allison's research interests include reconstructing repertoire for early seventeenth-century English violin band and the use of bowed instruments in accompanying medieval monophonic song.

Praised for her "dazzling technique and soulful expressiveness," (Rocky Mountain News), and a musical approach that's "distinctly sensual...pliant, warm, and sweet," (New York Times), **Debra Nagy** is one of North America's leading performers on the baroque oboe. A dedicated chamber musician, Debra is the founder of *Les Délices* and indulges her love of late-medieval music as a regular guest with Boston's acclaimed Blue Heron and Chicago's Newberry Consort. Debra has received many awards for her creative and scholarly pursuits including a 2010 Creative Workforce Fellowship from Cuyahoga Arts & Culture. She is also an unabashed foodie and loves commuting by bike from her home in the heart of Cleveland's historic Ohio City neighborhood.

Charles Weaver is on the faculty of the Juilliard School, where he teaches Historically Informed Performance on Plucked Instruments. He has directed an opera with New York's Dell'Arte Opera and has accompanied operas with the Yale Baroque Opera Project and the Boston Early Music Festival. He also works with the New York Continuo Collective: an ensemble of players and singers exploring seventeenth-century vocal music in semester-length workshop productions. Chamber music appearances include Quicksilver, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Blue Heron, and many others. In addition to teaching lute at the Lute Society of America Summer Workshop and the Madison Early Music Festival, Charles is associate director of music at St Mary Church in Norwalk, Connecticut, where he specializes in Renaissance polyphony and Gregorian chant.