

## MACHAUT'S LAI OF THE FOUNTAIN

### ***Le Petit paradis***

*Johannes Ciconia: Le ray au soleil*

*Guillaume de Machaut: Gais et joli*

### ***Seeing reflections***

*Magister Franciscus (Andrieu): De Narcissus*

### ***Source of life***

*Machaut: Le lai de la fonteinne*

### ***Fountain of Love***

*Anon., arr. Nagy: Bel fiore dança*

*Ciconia: Sus une fonteyne*

*Pykini: Playsance or tost*

### ***Performers***

Kim Leeds, mezzo-soprano  
Elena Mullins, soprano  
Scott Metcalfe, vielle & harp  
Allison Monroe, vielle  
Debra Nagy, voice, medieval winds & harp

Video Art Design by Camilla Tassi

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## Notes on the Program:

This program is inspired by the rare beauty of the medieval garden and its prized centerpiece - the fountain. A private garden encapsulated a sort of paradise not so different from the Garden of Eden and its centerpiece fountain was an artful combination of engineering and architecture: form and function came together to delight and entertain. Within the *jardin d'amour* (or garden of courtly love), fountains' still waters reflected the world above while their gentle bubbling complemented the sounds of birds and the rustling of leaves. Fountains also symbolized purity and renewal while serving as a metaphor for life's source and the divine.

Considering the range of associations and symbolism represented in this concert's beautiful and somewhat otherworldly music, we wanted to incorporate a sumptuous visual representation by drawing images from a range of both secular and sacred sources. Camilla Tassi's video art design draws its imagery from contemporary illuminated manuscripts that include the Roman de la Rose (c. 1405), small devotional books of hours (c. 1400), Machaut's own collected work manuscripts (c.1350-1380), and a medieval treatise on health and natural remedies (c. 1400).

Water that flows, ripples, reflects, and refracts light permeates this program from beginning to end. For instance, Johannes Ciconia's extraordinary canon *Le Ray au soleil* is practically kaleidoscopic as a single melody unfolds at different rates of speed while Magister Franciscus' ballade *De Narcissus* relates Ovid's (and the Roman de la Rose's) cautionary tale about a man falling in love with his own reflection. Ciconia's *Sus une fontayne* works differently but feels similar: extended mixed-meter passages, shifting rhythms, and long melismas beguile the listener as the singer delivers the text, "While gazing into a fountain I heard such sweet singing that my heart, body, and mind were captured as I waited."

In Guillaume de Machaut's *Lai de la Fonteinne*, flowing melodies become brilliant rainbows when refracted into three-voice canons that represent the mystery of the Holy Trinity. Just as Bach frequently embedded symbols into the very fabric and structure of his music, so did Machaut adopt a form in which one part contains three. The even numbered verses of his *Lai de la fonteinne* - written as a single line of music - generate their own polyphony in complex canons full of syncopation and hocket. The fountain, the stream flowing from it, and its source become an extended metaphor for the Trinity as Machaut asserts, "there is no difference between these three, for they are all of one essence, one virtue, one substance, one power, one wisdom: here is a most marvellous mystery."

In truth, it's a rare thing to hear (or perform!) an entire lai. This 12-stanza form inevitably yields a big piece of music, which takes over 20 minutes to perform. Machaut's large-scale sense of the musical and poetic journey is extraordinary as he leads the listener to absorb and transmit the musical and emotional shape of the whole piece from stanza to stanza through a series of unfolding variations.

The Garden of Courtly Love had the potential to excite all the senses. Within the garden walls, lovers were overwhelmed by lush greenery, trees of every description, the scent of fresh flowers, fruit, and herbs, and the sweet singing of birds. Pleasure-seekers whiled time away reciting poetry, singing, and dancing. This is clearest in the program's final two pieces: the anonymous instrumental *Bel fiore dança* (from the Faenza Codex) and Pykini's *Playsance or tost*, which rouses us from contemplation with the songs of birds (heard as "occy, occy") and the verdant coming of springtime.

– Debra Nagy

*Projected Imagery:*

**Machaut MS A**

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS fonds français 1584  
Dit de la fonteinne amoureuse, f° 173a.

**Machaut MS C**

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS fonds français 1586  
Dit dou Lyon, f. 103.

**Machaut MS F**

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS fonds français 22545  
Dit de la fonteinne amoureuse, f° 126v

**Roman de la rose (French, c. 1405)**

Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Ms. Ludwig XV 7  
*Scipio Lying in Bed Dreaming; Guillaume de Lorris Lying in Bed Dreaming*, fo. 1  
*The Lover Views the Garden*, fo. 5v  
*Narcissus Gazing at his Reflection*, fo. 11

**Book of Hours (French, c. 1400)**

Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Ms. Ludwig IX 5  
*The Coronation of the Virgin*, fo. 82v

**Très Riches Heures of Jean, Duc de Berry (c. 1412)**

Chantilly, [Musée Condé](#), MS 65  
*Madonna and Child*

**The Belles Heures of Jean de France, duc de Berry (1405-1408)**

New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art  
*Holy Trinity*, f. 91v

**Houses of the Earls of Ormond Book of Hours (c. 1500)**

London, British Library, Royal 2 B XV  
*Holy Trinity*, f. 10v

Ibn Butlan, ***Theatrum Sanitatis* (French/Lombardy, c. 1400)**

Rome, Biblioteca Casanatense, Ms. 4182  
*Pomegranate Tree*