



Saturday 12 October, 1pm
St Nicholas Church

MUSICAL MEETING PLACES

Blondel

Emily Baines, Elizabeth Gutteridge and Belinda Paul *renaissance winds*

Pre-concert music performed by BREMF Medieval Greatest Hits workshop participants:

Anonymous

L'Homme Armé

Robert Morton

L'Homme Armé

Guillaume de Machaut c.1300–1377

Douce dame jolie

Anonymous Trent Codex 89

Shawms:

Anxci bon youre

Anonymous El Escorial MS IV.a.24

A Florence/Helas la fille/En ma chambre

Anonymous Reina Codex/Faenza Codex

Or sus, vous dormez trop

John Bedyngham c.1422–1459/60 /

Conrad Paumann c.1410–1473

Recorders & bagpipes:

O rosa bella

Anonymous Trent Codex 90

O rosa bella

Gilles Binchois 1400–1460

Seule esgarée

Anonymous Seville Chansonier

Seule esgarée/O rosa bella

Binchois

L'ami de ma dame

Triste Plaisir

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Anonymous Nivelles de Chaussée Chansonnier	<i>Shawms:</i> J'ay pris amours
Anonymous I-TRc Ms. 1947-4	J'ay pris amours
Anonymous Glogauer Liederbuch	Gross senen
Anonymous Dijon Chansonnier	J'ay prins deux pous
Oswald von Wolkenstein 1376/7-1445	<i>Recorders:</i> Die minne fúget niemand
Anonymous Ivrea Codex	Talent m'est pris
Guillaume de Machaut c.1300-1377	Honte paour doubtaunce de meffaire De toutes flours
Francesco Landini c.1325-1397	<i>Shawms:</i> Questa fanciull'amor
Johannes Ciconia c.1373-1411	O rosa bella
Anonymous Chantilly Codex/Wolkenstein	Par maintes foyes/Der mai mit Lieber zal
Anonymous Munich MS 1516	<i>Bagpipes:</i> Hoftanz & tripla Le Petit Rouen
Giovani Ambrosio/Anonymous arranged by E Gutteridge	Petit Vriens/Le Petit Rouen

The 2024 Festival was curated and programmed by artistic director Deborah Roberts BEM who died on 9 September. We are so grateful to Deborah for her creative, innovative and fearless programming, always seeking to bring the music she loved to new audiences.

The music

In the middle of Lent, while the God-fearing population of Europe was fasting, praying, and shunning worldly excess, court musicians across medieval Europe gathered at international trade fairs to exchange ideas, catch up with old friends, and party. These events took place from the early 14th century until the middle of the 15th century. They were usually held in the Low Countries; players travelled from as far as Catalonia to take part. They met to learn the newest songs in the latest style, buy instruments, and recruit new band members.

The music they played was never written down. We know the titles of many pieces they shared at these events, but none of the music has survived.

That's a shame. It would be fascinating to know what the greatest wind players of the time were working on, year by year. On the other hand, the manuscripts we do have still tell us a lot about the spread of musical fads and styles, which tunes were hot, which were not, and which became classics. Some were carefully transcribed and barely altered as the decades passed; others were half-remembered fragments, some reworked, repurposed as dance tunes, used as models in composition lessons, and as the inspiration of Masses and musical puzzles. Along the way titles were corrupted, or lost in translation, and texts were replaced, or forgotten.

Perhaps surprisingly, dance tunes were often pulled out of art songs, rather than shoe-horned into them. 'A Florence/Helas la fille/En ma chambre' consists of three folk-like melodies, with three separate texts, performed simultaneously. The music might be classy, but the texts really aren't. The fact that they are so badly corrupted doesn't make them more palatable, it just increases the range of possible unpleasant interpretations.

The tenor line was transcribed by the most fêted of the early Italian dance masters, Domenico da Piacenza, as the ballo, 'La figlia Guglielmino'. His meticulous work *De arte saltandi et choreas ducendi* includes the earliest surviving European choreography.

Dances were traditionally accompanied by a loud wind band – professional players of shawms and brass who specialised in improvising florid variations above a slow-moving tenor line to accompany dancers; precisely the players who would have found their way to the yearly musical conventions.

The sounds of those ensembles have long since faded away, but we can get a flavour of the style and flamboyance from the artfully composed surviving settings scattered in manuscripts across Europe.

'O rosa bella' is an undisputed classic. The poem was first set by Ciconia. It is a fabulous piece, one foot planted firmly in the past, the other striding forward into a new world, filled with sugary chains of 3rds and 6ths. It didn't stand a chance against the later setting by Bedyngham, which captured the mood of the age in musical form. The sentimental, and very modern, English consonance, was instantly memorable. Of the many copies, some are faithful transcriptions, some the products of fond but defective memories. There are florid keyboard versions, and several attempts to combine it with as many popular tunes as possible.

'J'ay pris amours' was another stand-out hit, one of the four most popular songs of the 15th century. It began life as a perfect, but anonymous Burgundian chanson. In Italy it gained a florid bass line, and in Germany it took on a new name, Gross senen (Deep longing). In this setting, the tenor takes the tune, while the upper voice takes on a fluid, syncopated counter melody.

It didn't take long before the piece came to symbolise an entire genre. It became an emblem of itself, parodied in stylistically unimpeachable musical settings, which just happened to be about lice in undershirts.

The final Glogauer setting is worked around a melody which appears earlier in the collection, set against the 'J'ay pris amours' superius. That has gone, and so has the original tenor, but their imprint remains as a ghostly shadow, a wisp of the original chanson hanging in the space between sound and memory.

Belinda Paul

The performers

Blondel gives engaging and spirited performances of medieval and renaissance wind music. It is easy to imagine how the bold tones of a shawm band cut across the hustle and bustle of dance and banquet halls, or even a city square. More surprising to modern ears is the joyful and sophisticated beauty that results from this uniquely blended sound.

Blondel's past performances include concerts at Cheltenham Festival (broadcast live by the BBC), Cambridge Early Music, King's Lynn Festival, Beaminster Festival, Leeds International Medieval Congress, Wimbledon International Music Festival, Totnes Early Music Society, Barnes Music Festival, Worcester Early Music Festival and Colchester Early Music.

The Agincourt600 Committee commissioned us to record a CD based around the life of Henry V which is available as a free download from blondelwinds.bandcamp.com

We have also released two albums of 14th and 15th-century wind band music: 'Zephyrus his sweete breath' and (with First Hand Records) 'Of arms and a woman: A chronicle of love, loss, chivalry and memory'.

renaissance-winds.com



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