

ALBA: THE GOLDEN HOUR OF THE TROUBADOURS

The Goliards

Mary Adams - *voice, vielle, recorder*
Christopher Kohut - *voice, lute*
John Hillenbrand - *vielle*
Cuffy Sullivan - *voice*
Anne Durant - *harp*

Anonymous *Li Lais du Kievrefoel* (instrumental)
Bernatz de Ventadorn (...1147-1170...) *Quand l'erba frescha e'lh fuèlha par*
Guiraut de Bornelh (...1162-1199) *Reis glorios*
Gace Brulé (...1185-1210...) *Sanz attente de guierredon* (inst.)

Raimbaut de Vaqueiras (...1180-1205...) *Calenda maia*
Beatritz de Dia (...12th C.-13th C....) *A chantar*
Richard I of England (1157-99, reigned from 1189) *Ja nuns hons pris* (inst.)
Bernatz de Ventadorn *Lanquand vei la fuèlha*
Anon. *Jocundare plebs fideles* (inst.)

INTERMISSION

Berenguer de Palazol (...1164...) *De la gençor qu'òm veja* (inst.)
Berenguer de Palazol *Tant m'abelis jois et amors e chants*
Anon. *Dòmna pos vos ay chausida*
Jaufré Rudel (...1125-1148...) *Lanquand li jorn son longs en mai*

Cadenet (...1204-1235...) *Sanc fui bèla ni presada*
Raimbaut de Vaqueiras *Eissamen ai gerreiat ab amor* (inst.)
Raimbaut de Vaqueiras *Non m'agrada ivèrns ni pascors*
Bernatz de Ventadorn *Quand vei la lauseta mover*

The original idea for this project was that it would be a musical portrait of the era of Eleanor of Aquitaine, consisting only of music and poetry that would have been familiar to her ears. I chose this theme somewhat cynically, as it was an attempt to cash in on the fact that, although dead for some eight hundred years, she remains a celebrity, and her name is familiar to anyone who has even the slightest knowledge of European history. As a strong, independent-minded woman, who was one of the great cultural and political figures of the twelfth century (as was Hildegard of Bingen), Eleanor has become something of a feminist icon, although not necessarily for all the right reasons.¹ As ensemble director/impresario, one of my principal duties is to get people to come to our performances, but, so far, I have not discovered the magic formula; sometimes our audiences are large, and, alas, sometimes they are, um, less so. You see, the problem is not so much getting people to like the music - it is getting them to hear it in the first place.

This program has been in the conceptual state for a long time now (We were originally planning to perform it last May), and it has mutated somewhat in this intervening time. One possible personnel configuration did not work out, and, just as with trying on clothing, not all of the songs that I had originally imagined our performing turned out to be good fits, so this project has been reconstructed in a way that de-emphasizes the Eleanor of Aquitaine connection, while remaining a snapshot of the musical landscape of her lifetime (1122?-1204). Somewhat anomalous non-Occitan instrumental works in this program by her son, Richard I (Lion-Heart), Gace Brulé, and the anonymous (although attributed to Tristan)² *Lay of the Honeysuckle* (*Li Lais du Kievrefoel*) are survivors of the original thrust of this production. The absence of any specifically instrumental music from the southern regions of what is now France, however, made it a convenience to retain these works for this performance; with two exceptions, they remain chronologically correct.^{3 4}

On March 12, 1244, after a war that had lasted nearly thirty-five years, the citadel at Montségur⁵ fell to the army of 'crusaders' against the Albigensian heresy, and the two hundred and ten *perfecti* and *perfectae*⁶ of the Cathar church who had taken refuge within its walls were then burnt at the stake; the final nail had been hammered into the coffin of Southern resistance, and the Northern takeover of the lands of the fractious Provençal nobility was complete. This process had begun in 1198, when the newly-elected Pope Innocent III exhorted the faithful to suppress the Cathar heretics, whose beliefs were spreading rapidly throughout the southern portion of what is now France. Early in the summer of 1209, the crusading army raised at Innocent's behest left Lyon and made its way toward the South. The Pope would have preferred for the King of France to have headed the army, but Philippe-August had been careful to stay in the background, only permitting his vassals to join the crusade. The fringe benefit to the Catholic lords whose armies would invade the region would be the opportunity to seize the lands of those Southern magnates who had tolerated, and in many cases encouraged, the heresy.

Catharism was a name given to a Christian sect that appeared in the southern part of what is now France in the eleventh century, and that flourished in the twelfth and (part

of) the thirteenth centuries. Manichæan (and thereby dualistic) and Monarchian (unaccepting of the Trinity) in philosophy, Catharism was viewed as a dangerous heresy by the Church, which often referred to Cathars as Albigensians.⁷ A number of Provençal *grands* tolerated, and in some cases, encouraged the sect, providing a pretext for the invasion of the South.

Another consequence of the North's conquest of the South was the dispersal of the remaining troubadours,⁸ many of whom fled to the hospitable courts of the kings of Aragon and León-Castile. Others migrated to the Italian peninsula, and still others headed to the heart of the very nation that had destroyed their culture; troubadours, at least, those who had not been part of the political opposition, were welcome in the noble courts of France. Their poetry was admired, if not understood, and their songs were fashionable; after all, the French poets had already been imitating the troubadours for the better part of a century

By comparison with the noble courts of northern Europe, life in a twelfth-century castle in what is now southern France may have seemed positively hedonistic. It is not that the less attractive aspects of medieval existence were absent: For most people, life was brief, and a perpetual struggle for subsistence; for men of higher estate, warfare was simply day-to-day business; women were valued principally for the property that they might bring into a marriage. On the other hand, poets and musicians flourished, enjoying the respect of their contemporaries, and ornamenting what otherwise would have been a bleaker setting through their pursuit and practice of *lo gai saber* (joyful wisdom); despite the austerity and inherently military purpose of the twelfth-century castle, Occitan noble courts became hotbeds of poetic and musical culture.

The earliest surviving vernacular songs emerged from these feudal courts. These poem-songs (called *cansos*) embodied a near-deification of the *lady* (*dòmna*)⁹ as the object of the poet's adoration. In this quintessentially phallocratic society, the troubadour would have referred to his *particular* lady by the masculine term *midons* (my lord), as the use of this address would have been his way of putting her on the highest pedestal. An ethos and structure of rules for living a life that was linked to the poetic impetus of the songs the troubadours wrote established itself, and became the model for all Christendom.

The earliest vernacular song (other than the ancient epics, or *chansons de geste*)¹⁰ has traditionally been attributed to Guihelm IX (...1071-1127), Count of Poitou and Duke of Aquitaine (and grandfather of Eleanor), and one of the most powerful feudal lords of his era. Although only fragments of two of his melodies survive, his poetry reveals him to have been an intelligent, playful wordsmith, one who took pleasure in the *poetic forms* for their own sake. His *vida*¹¹ describes him as "...One of the most courtly men in the world, and one of the greatest deceivers of women, a very capable knight, and very liberal in gallantry. And he knew how to invent poetry and how to sing very well, and he wandered around the world in order to deceive the ladies. And he had a son whose wife was the Duchess of Normandy,¹² who had a daughter who was the wife of King Henry of England,¹³ and the mother of The Young King,¹⁴ and of Richard,¹⁵ and of Count Geoffrey

of Brittany."¹⁶

While the sobriquet 'The First of the Troubadours' may have been awarded to Guihelm more on account of his exalted social status than horological exactitude (Predictably enough, his court teemed with troubadours from the 'first generation'), he would serve as a model for Europe's poet-princes¹⁷ that would last into the fourteenth century.

The notion of *fin' amors* (courtly love) orbited around the impossibility of the poet's attaining the object of his desire; after all, the domna *was* married to the lord of the castle.¹⁸ The poet's duty, then, was to adore the domna, to praise her, to write cansos addressed to her, and to endure the exquisite torments of unrequited love. One of the peculiarities of this culture was a practice known as the *jazer*, a test of the purity and inherently non-carnal nature of the troubadour's love for his lady: The two would spend the night in bed together, naked and alone, *and absolutely no hanky-panky would ensue*, thus proving the elevated stratum of this *poetic* love. Yeah, right.

From the content of today's program, one might infer that there was more than adequate room in Occitan culture for good old, old-fashioned lust; the lord of the castle was usually the cuckolded 'jealous one' (*lo jalos*, or *jilos*) mentioned in many cansos. In one of the popular song formats, the *alba* (dawn song), the poet assumes the role of the illicit lovers' friend, faithfully watching lest anyone interrupt their tryst, and warning them of the approaching dawn. The *alba* was known to have been a popular song form, although only Cadenet's *Sanc fui bèla ni presada* and Guiraut de Bornelh's *Reis glorios* survive¹⁹ (both based on the Gregorian chant *Ave, Maris Stella*); among other things, they serve as inspiration for the title to this program.

There are two hundred and eighty troubadour poems that have come down to us with their melodies, of which two hundred and forty eight have ascribed authors; thirty two are anonymous. These melodies are contained in a number of *chansonniers*, most of which were compiled in the last forty years of the thirteenth century. This chronology is not irrelevant to this program, as the latest of the works that we will perform would have been composed at least fifty years, and the earliest ones, almost a century, before they were collected and written down for posterity. Many of those troubadour melodies that exist in more than one chansonnier are different from one another in each individual transmission. This is, of course, the inevitable result of the music's entirely oral existence over the course of a half-century or more; that any of these transmissions of melodies resemble their counterparts in the other chansonniers *at all* might be seen as surprising in itself.

The greater part of what we know of the lives of these poets as individuals is found in the *vidas* (mentioned above, and in the endnotes), or lives of the troubadours, which appear in the manuscripts as short introductions to, and commentaries upon, the poets' lyrics. Some of the collections of troubadour poems present *vidas* and *razos*²⁰ as prefaces to the verse selections. Many of the *vidas* are thought to be recounted (or invented) by the mid-thirteenth-century troubadour, Uc de Saint Circ, and should not be

taken as the unimpeachable truth. In most instances, however, they are the *only* evidence that we have, and they are often rather entertaining stories. We have posted the vidas (in English) of all of the troubadours who are in this program on our web site (www.savannahgoliards.net), as well as an essay (screed?) on troubadour terminology that I wrote for the benefit of the other ensemble members, titled *A Troubadour Crib Sheet*; click on 'Further Reading'.

The content of our performance comes from that *golden moment* (I confess to having exercised a bit of artistic license in describing a period that is in excess of fifty years as the 'golden hour' of this program's title) before the great thirteenth-century land-grab erased the glory of Occitan culture; when the songs in this program were written, no-one had the slightest premonition that the artistic life of the South was poised on the brink of extinction.

For this performance, we have used McGhee, Rigg, and Klausner, Eds: *Singing Early Music*, Indiana University Press, 1996 as our guide to the pronunciation of Old Occitan.

John Hillenbrand, October, 2008

Some further reading:

Elizabeth Aubrey: *The Music of the Troubadours*, Indiana University Press, 1996.

Eds. F.R.P. Akehurst and Judith M. Davis: *A Handbook of the Troubadours*, University of California Press, 1995.

William D. Paden, Ed: *The Voice of the Trobairitz*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989.

Meg Bogen, *The Women Troubadours*, W.W. Norton and Co., New York, 1980.

John Frederick Rowbotham, *The Troubadours and Courts of Love*, Macmillan and Co., New York, 1895.

Margarita Egan, Trans: *The Vidas of the Troubadours*, Garland Publishing, New York, 1984.

Paul Blackburn, Trans: *Proensa: An Anthology of Troubadour Poetry*, University of California Press, 1978.

Robert Kehew, Ed: *Lark in the Morning* (a parallel text edition), The University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Melody transcriptions:

Hendrik van der Werf, *The Extant Troubadour Melodies* (in note heads), published by the author, Rochester, N.Y., 1984.

Ismael Fernandez de la Cuesta, *Las Cançons dels Trobadors* (note heads and neumes), Institut d'Estudis Occitans, Tolosa, 1979.

Manuscript sources for the works in this program:

Li Lais du Kievfoel - Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fr. 12615, ***Le Chansonnier de Noailles***.

Quand l'erba frescha, Reis glorios, Calenda maia, Lanquand vei la fuèlha, De la gençor, Tant m'abelis, Sanc fui bèla ni presada, Eissamen ai gerreiat, Non m'agrada ivèrns - Paris, Bib. Nat., fr. 22543, ***Le Chansonnier d'Urfe***.

Sanz attente de guirredon, Ja nons huns pris - Paris, Bib. Nat., fr. 846, ***Le Chansonnier Cangé***.

A chantar, Dòmna pos vos ay chausida - Paris, Bib. Nat., fr. 844, ***Le Manuscrit du Roi***.

Jocundare plebs fideles - Burgos, Monasterio de las Huelgas, unnumbered codex, ***The Las Huelgas Codex***.

Lanquand li jorn - Paris, Bib. Nat., fr. 20050, ***Le Chansonnier de Saint-Germain-des-Prés***.

Quand vei la lauseta mover - Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, S.P. 4 (*olim* R71 sup.), ***The Milan Chansonnier***.

¹ An immense inherited fortune, great beauty, and probable nymphomania would seem peculiar qualifications for feminist celebrity.

² The legendary Breton harper, warrior, and lover of Iseult (or the Wagnerian *Isolde*).

³ *The Lay of the Honeysuckle*, as an anonymous composition, is impossible to date accurately, but is almost certainly from the thirteenth century.

⁴ The troubadour Cadenet (...1204-1235...) was born a bit later than the others in this program. He is included because of his authorship of the second of the two surviving *albas*.

⁵ Located in the heart of France's Languedoc-Midi-Pyrénées region, 80 miles southwest of Carcassonne (near the Pyrenees Mountains), the ruins of the fort (a later structure built on the ruins of the Cathar stronghold) at Montségur perch atop a 3,000-foot *pog*, or rock formation.

⁶ The Cathar church was made up of 'believers', who were the main body of members, and *perfecti*, who were priests, of a sort. One entered Cathar holy orders after receiving the *consolamentum*, a spiritual baptism. From that moment, the *perfectus* or *perfecta* renounced all material goods of the world, and led a life of preaching, meditation, fasting, and chastity.

⁷ After the town of Albi, northeast of Toulouse, where a famous debate between Cathars and Catholic priests had taken place. Catharism had no center, or capital city.

⁸ The Occitan word *trobador* (troubadour in French and English) is derived from the word *trobar*, meaning to invent, compose, or to find. *Trouvère* (the French equivalent of *trobador*) also means 'finder', which implies a difference between the way these poets viewed themselves and their art, and the way in which a modern composer might view himself; for instance, *contrafaction*, or the practice of taking someone else's melody and using it for one's own poetry was a normal step in the process of creation in several genres of troubadour and trouvère songs.

⁹ Usually, she was the chatelaine.

¹⁰ Neither music, nor the merest hint for performance practice of these epics survives.

¹¹ The *vidas*, or lives of the troubadours, appear in the manuscripts as short introductions to, and commentaries on, the poet's lyrics. Some of the collections of troubadour poems - *chansonniers* - present *vidas* as prefaces to the verse selections. The earliest *chansonniers* with *vidas* date from the middle to the late thirteenth century.

¹² The *vida* is inaccurate on this point.

¹³ Henry II (Courtmantle) Plantagenet (1133-1189), King of England (from 1154).

¹⁴ Henry, The Young King (1158-1183), co-King [in name only] of England (from 1170).

¹⁵ Richard I, The Lion-Hearted (1157-1199), King of England (from 1189).

¹⁶ Geoffrey of Brittany (1158-1186).

¹⁷ The best-known of whom were Thibaut IV (1201-1253), Count of Champagne and King of Navarre (from 1234), Charles of Anjou (1226-1285), King of Naples (from 1266, losing control of Sicily in 1282), Alfonso X, The Learned (1223-1284), King of León and Castile (from 1252; deposed in 1284), Dinis I, The Farmer (1261-1325), King of Portugal (from 1279), Richard I of England, and Conon de Béthune (?-1220?), Seneschal and Regent of the Latin Empire of Constantinople (a younger son of Robert V of Béthune).

¹⁸ This would seem to apply more to those troubadours who were of lowly estate than to magnates like Guihelm.

¹⁹ One of the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* (number 340), *Virgen Madre groriosa* (also based on *Ave, Maris Stella*), is also an *alba*, but in the Gallego (proto-Portuguese) tongue rather than in Occitan.

²⁰ A *razo* is a prose commentary (often appearing with the *vida*) explaining the circumstances in which a poem was composed, and often citing the particular verse passage to which it applies.

The ensemble The Goliards was founded (in Atlanta) in 1998, with the intent of exploring the European musical repertory from before 1400. Among the productions from their Atlanta incarnation are: *Decameron: Aspects of Musical Life in Boccaccio's Florence* (1999), *Maravillosas et Piadosas: Cantigas de Santa Maria from the Court of Alfonso X* (1999), *Songs of Medieval England* (1999), *Ondas do Mar: Monophonic Songs from Thirteenth-Century Europe* (1999), *A Celtic Journey* (2000), *Homage to Guillaume de Machaut (1300-1377)* (2000), *Minstrels of Albion* (2000), *Utreia!: Songs from the Pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostella* (2000), *Quant Voi la Flor Nouvele: The Blossoming of the Chanson in Medieval France* (2001), *Calenda Maia: The Glorious Legacy of the Troubadours* (2001), *Voluptas Intemperantiae (The Joy of Excess)* (2001), *O Greenest Branch: Marian Hymns by Abbess Hildegard of Bingen* (2002), *Raimbaut the Troubadour* (2003 and 2004), and a recital by mezzo-soprano Holly McCarren of *virelais* and *ballades* by *Guillaume de Machaut* (2004). Since relocating to Savannah, the ensemble has performed *Triste Plaisir: Melancholy Love Songs from the Renaissance* (2006), a performance of songs by *Turlough O'Carolan* (2007), and *La Sirena de la Mar* (2007). The ensemble's next performance will take place in November of this year (*Alba: The Golden Hour of the Troubadours*).

“The goliards took their name from one Bishop Golias, a debauched priest who is featured in many of their poems (and who may never have existed). While many students and clerics wandered from university to university to satisfy their thirst for knowledge, the goliards, it seems, wandered simply to satisfy their thirst. They sought pleasure and adventure, and delighted in drinking, loving freely, and gambling away what little money they had.”*

"One of the class of educated jesters, buffoons, and authors of loose or satirical Latin verse, who flourished chiefly in the 12th and 13th centuries in Germany, France, and England."

*From Norman F. Cantor, General Editor, *The Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages*, Viking Press, N.Y., 1999.

**From *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, 1971.