

Florence 1359

The Goliards

Jennifer Dickinson, Cuffy Sullivan - *voice*

Anne Durant - *harp, percussion*

John Hillenbrand - *vielle*

<i>I' vo' bene</i>	Ghirardello da Firenze
<i>La bionda treçça</i>	Francesco Landini
<i>I' priego amor</i>	Francesco Landini
<i>Dança Amorosa</i> (instrumental)	Anonymous
<i>Fenice fui</i>	Jacopo da Bologna

<i>Po' ch'amor ne' begli ochi</i> (inst.)	Francesco Landini
<i>Amor mi fa cantar a la FRANCESCHA</i>	Anonymous
<i>Salterello 4</i> (inst.)	Anonymous
<i>Che ti ÇOVA NASconder</i>	Anonymous
<i>Echo la primavera</i>	Francesco Landini
<i>Giunge'l bel tempo</i>	Jacopo da Bologna

INTERMISSION

<i>Lamento di Tristano</i> (inst.)	Anonymous
<i>Lucente stella</i> (inst.)	Anonymous
<i>Per tropo fede</i>	Anonymous
<i>Adiu, adiu, dous dame</i>	Francesco Landini
<i>Non so qual' i' mi voglia</i>	Lorenzo da Firenze

<i>Salterello Lugubre</i> (inst.)	Anonymous
<i>Merçè, o morte</i>	Anonymous
<i>La Manfredina</i> (inst.)	Anonymous
<i>Plangiamo quel crudel basciar</i>	Anonymous
<i>Voi ch'amate lo Criatore</i>	Anonymous

"O happy posterity, who will not experience such abysmal woe, and will look upon our testimony as a fable.",¹ wrote Petrarch at the time of the plague in Florence. The Black Death (a term which was not, in fact, used until the eighteenth century) came to be associated with Florence more intimately than with any other city; indeed, in fourteenth-century accounts it was often referred to as 'The Plague of Florence', both because Florence was one of the earliest of Europe's great cities to be assailed, and because it raged there with far greater intensity than in most other cities.

The plague reached Italy via Sicily during the winter of 1347. By the end of the following year the worst had passed, although there would be periodic minor recrudescences, as well as another major outbreak in 1360. Even though modern historians are leery of medieval chroniclers' hyperbolic tendencies, one might suggest (conservatively) that somewhere between one third and one half of the inhabitants of Florence perished in 1348; medieval commentaries usually indicate a death toll of between one half and two thirds of the Florentine populace.

In his introduction to *The Decameron*, Boccaccio provided one of the most detailed surviving accounts of this catastrophic period: As nobody knew what was causing the pestilence, he recalled, Florentines became suspicious of everyone and everything, as well as indifferent, to a large degree, to the sufferings of the afflicted. One can only imagine the difference between Dante's Florence, whose gregarious citizens lived *in piazza*, and this quasi-ghost town of the mid-fourteenth century.

Giovanni Boccaccio was in his mid-thirties and well away on his prolific career when the Black Death came to Florence. A few years after the plague had done its ghastly work, Boccaccio commenced writing *The Decameron*, which is among the earliest works of Italian prose, and which would become a source of inspiration for writers through the centuries, from Chaucer to Poe.

A curiosity of the human condition is that, amid unspeakable misfortunes, people still laugh, dance, feast, make love, and create art. Despair would seem to be the more instinctive response to the disasters of the fourteenth century, but from this misery emerged intricate works of art, literature, and music - works that were, in fact, without precedent in earlier medieval Europe, and which have only rarely been equalled since. The ability to compartmentalize is the only explanation for the proliferation of creativity in the midst of such intense suffering; the comparison of the fourteenth century with the twentieth century has become commonplace for this very reason.

The Decameron, then, is something of a monument to compartmentalization. It told of a ten-day period from the most virulent time of the Black Death, a time when seven ladies and three young men took refuge from the plague in various palaces outside Florence.

¹ *Epistolæ Familiares*, vol. VIII.

During these ten days, our ten refugees relate a hundred entertaining tales, accompanied by merriment and music-making. These tales are in every way as revealing of the facets of life in *trecento* Italy as Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (based unashamedly upon *The Decameron*) were of life in fifteenth-century England. Every *giornata* of *The Decameron* begins and ends with music: Dioneo plays the lute, Fiametta the vielle, Tindaro the rebec or bagpipes, and each, in turn, accompanies the songs of Lauretta or Emilia.

At the beginning of the thirteenth century, several styles of musical notation existed concurrently, although none of them was very practical for indicating the rhythm of the music. Through most of the century, the challenge of denoting rhythm was met by applying one of the poetic rhythmic modes (all in triple rhythm) to the work in question, which usually would have been notated in Gregorian neumes. A curious aspect of this system was that often the lower voice would have been in a different rhythmic mode from that of the upper voice(s).

As was their wont, composers yearned for a notational system that could depict more precisely the durational value of individual notes. During the second quarter of the thirteenth century, various theorists began advocating the use of differently-shaped notes to indicate specific rhythmic values. It was not until about 1260, however, that Franco of Cologne (in his treatise *Ars Cantus Mensurabilis* - The Art of Measurable Song) described a system in which the value of each note could be expressed by a distinctive notational sign. Although Franco's system did not win immediate universal acceptance (Many late-thirteenth and even some fourteenth-century manuscripts still used the older notational style), the principles established by Franco provided the starting point for *all* future developments in notation. By the 1280s, Europe, and France especially, was in the midst of a blossoming of motet composition (in what would later be referred to as the *Ars antiqua* style) based on the new notation.

By the turn of the century, there was a trend to apply these notational principles to purely secular music, as well as to blur the distinctions between the hitherto fairly rigidly-prescribed (melodic) Church Modes. Rather than dwelling any longer upon the intricacies of medieval notation, let it suffice to say that the new notation allowed composers to revel in rhythmic complexity to a degree that sometimes led to a backlash from conservative clerics, who resisted its application to liturgical music; this issue, however, is beyond the scope of this afternoon's program.

Within the context of secular art music, however, the new style assumed the force of a tsunami. By ca. 1322, Philippe de Vitry had codified his ideas in a treatise titled *Ars Nova*; the name *Ars nova* would become the term by which most of the corpus of fourteenth-century art music would be described.

From early in the fourteenth century, Italian (mostly anonymous) composers were writing songs that embraced the rhythmic complexities and melodic eccentricities of the *Ars nova*, and even from before the time of Landini (1325-97), a distinctly Italian style

emerged to distinguish itself from that of France. Francesco Landini, the blind organist of Florence's *Duomo*, and composer of at least 140 *ballate*, was unquestionably the giant of his era in Italian music, and his significant presence in this afternoon's concert reflects his importance.² The other known composers in this program were itinerants (Jacopo da Bologna, for example) or residents of Florence.

The Italian *ballata* (from *ballare*, or, to dance, which indicates its origin as a dance song) is identical in form to the French *virelai* (ABbaA). Ballatas are the musical form with which the Decameron refugees most often would have amused themselves. Despite the peril of appearing to be simplistic, a description of the difference between the Italian and the French styles of composition might stress the Italian composers' emphasis on melodic sweetness; their French contemporaries often pursued rhythmic complexity to the point of formalism, allowing the melody to be relegated to a secondary importance.

Medieval people were fond of puns and cryptograms, and indulged in them whenever they could. Hence, *Che ti ÇOVA NAsconder* contains a message to the composer's love, Giovanna (indicated by upper-case letters on the front cover of these notes), and *Amor mi fa cantar a la Francescha* might be interpreted as either 'Love makes me sing in the French manner',³ or 'Love makes me sing to Francesca'.

Within the realm of polyphony (both in Italy and in France), one must mention the stylized use of the interval of major sixth and minor third near the close of a phrase, which would then be resolved at the cadence as an octave or a unison.

The second category of music in this program is that of the instrumental dance, a genre that also benefited from Franco of Cologne's notational system - it would have been an absurdity to try to record the notes of a dance in Gregorian neumes.⁴ It is our good fortune that quite a few fourteenth-century Italian dances survive (indeed, more than enough for several programs in their own right). Unfortunately, however, we do not know (and probably never will know) how these dances would have been danced. The term *salterello* implies little jumps, and it has been theorized that the *istampitta* evolved into the *bassadanza* (a processional dance) of the fifteenth century,⁵ but we may only guess at the steps involved in *La Manfredina*, *Lamento di Tristano*, or *Dança Amorosa*.

The *lauda* is usually a vernacular⁶ hymn, employing choral refrains in alternation with soloistic strophes. *Laudesi* were lay religious confraternities which flourished in the

² Interestingly (but not abnormally) for a fourteenth-century cleric, he wrote mainly love songs, most of which are replete with voluptuous imagery.

³ It might be mentioned that toward the end of the 14th century, it became fashionable among Italian composers (*viz. Adiu, adiu dous dame*) to write French lyrics, just as it was popular among French composers to write in Italian.

⁴ Immediately upon writing this, some *partial* exceptions spring to mind, *viz. Gace Brulé: Compaignons je sais tel chose*.

⁵ Timothy McGee: *Medieval Instrumental Dances*, Indiana University Press, 1989.

⁶ There are several exceptions (*Ars antiqua motets*) in the Florence *Laudario* that are in Latin.

mercantile cities of late-medieval Tuscany and Umbria, and the laudas would have been performed in their para-liturgical services.

The laudesi companies sponsored services every evening of the week, as well as on the important feast days throughout the year. These services would have been conducted at a high altar in the host church, with the company members seated on benches before the altar. The services included processions, prayers, readings, an offertory, and a brief sermon, but most importantly, lauda singing. It is thought that a laudesi soloist (or soloists) would have sung the individual strophes, with the entire company joining in on the choruses. That the hymns were accompanied by instruments is a reasonable inference, as numerous payment records for instrumentalists (usually vielle and rebec players), who were permanently salaried by the laudesi companies, survive.

In assembling this program, we have attempted to follow a format akin to that of a 'horizontal' wine tasting, or a tasting where many different wines of the same vintage are sampled (as opposed to a 'vertical' tasting, where the same wine in many different vintages is examined): Thus, we offer you a snapshot of Florence's musical life, ca. 1359.

While every attempt has been made to be true to what we feel to be the spirit of the music, the lack of evidence of the performance practices of a time 650 years removed from our own makes it impossible to perform this music without a variety of speculative additions. As an ensemble, it is our preference to give the greatest interpretive emphasis to that evidence which does survive, and to indulge our penchant for creative speculation in those areas where little or no evidence exists.

It may seem, perhaps, a bit unorthodox to conclude a program on such a sad note. The second half of this concert is composed of works that range in mood from melancholy to tragic; given the calamitous nature of the fourteenth century, however, it seems a singularly appropriate way to end, and we hope that it will provide our audience with an aesthetically-satisfying experience.

John Hillenbrand

“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.