

Miller Theatre Program Notes

Early Music: *Voices from the Island Sanctuary*

Saturday, January 22, 2011 at 8:00PM

For centuries, Parisians and visitors to Paris have been thrilled by the imposing Cathedral of Notre Dame, whose massive towers and elegant flying buttresses dominate the Île de la Cité. We perceive the cathedral as a large church, a single building surrounded by city streets, kitschy souvenir shops, overpriced cafés, a park with romantic benches for lovers, and the long lines of tourists waiting to climb the towers. But in the 12th century, the cathedral of Notre Dame was situated within its own 'campus', a vast complex of interconnected buildings (including several smaller churches) surrounding the cathedral itself, all encircled by a wall and enclosing almost one full third of the island. Within these walls (the 'close' of the cathedral precinct) there existed an autonomous mini-state, with its own laws and enforcement, free from the secular power wielded by the French king residing nearby; with housing and meals for the hundreds of clerics who worked and lived there; with an army of servants to keep the whole place operating smoothly; with students from many countries following lectures in theology and philosophy; with aristocratic churchmen called canons, managing their vast estates and political intrigues from comfortable dwellings within the close. There was a school for the choirboys, a private port on the Seine, and the palace of the archbishop himself, where important guests were entertained and where the brightest, most ambitious spirits of learning and the arts were able to demonstrate their virtuosity. Latin—spoken and sung in a variety of accents and with varying degrees of elegance—was the official language of the community, but courtly French could also be heard, and the dialect of the city was heard among servants and workmen. Construction on the new cathedral continued throughout this period (the present structure was begun in the 1160s and the towers were not finished until at least 1250) and the dust and noise of the masons was omnipresent. The cathedral itself was at the heart of this city within a city, and deep within the cathedral was yet another walled precinct: the choir before the high altar, where the singing of the mass and offices was carried out night and day by a large number of canons and lesser clergy who were rewarded in return for this service. It was also in this enclosed space that the best young male vocalists in Europe were to be heard on important feast-days; it was here that the most innovative musical minds gave expression to new ideas in thrilling sonic structures that echoed the dynamic new architecture taking shape around them.

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The Courtly Chancellor

At the intersection of courtly secular and ecclesiastical song, this Latin *lai* in praise of Maria is a quintessential early 13th-century musical and poetical structure: constant repetition of themes set within an ever-varying form. This *lai* melody is found in later medieval sources with French texts and was obviously widely popular throughout the period in both secular and sacred contexts. Philippe le Chancelier (d.1236)—the illegitimate son of an archdeacon and a noblewoman, born and educated within the close of Notre-Dame—was a brilliant church politician, theologian, poet and administrator. He was a legend in his time—as chancellor of the incipient university he fought for justice for the students of Paris—and left behind at least 70 magnificent Latin songs.

Ave, gloriosa virginum regina

Hail, glorious queen of virgins, noble vine, elixir of life, resin of mercy! Hail, abundant pool of grace, clean us of our filthy flesh in the basin of purification. Morning star, radiant in brightness...through you the Divine Law illuminates with its teaching. O rose blooming with loveliness, without a thorn of sin, with inward love incline your ear to us and save us from destruction...

Passionate Young Urban Males

The creators of these songs, young clerical intellectuals but also some established courtly poets, were the 'angry young men' of their time, deeply concerned with justice (for their own class, that is) and decrying corruption in the Church and at court. At the confluence of Notre-Dame, the schools of the Left Bank, and the courtly aristocracy, we feel even today the immense creative energy of these young men.

In 1236, riots in the city of Orleans resulted in the deaths of more than 100 students. The outraged scholars of Paris were soon hearing the anonymous Latin song **Aurelianis civitas** intoned within the safety of the Latin Quarter and the precincts of Notre Dame.

Ambitious young Parisian clerics were fascinated by *Fortuna*, the goddess who turns the mysterious wheel which randomly brings the weak to the height of power, and the powerful to a humiliating fall. In the two-voice *conductus* **O varium fortune lubricum**, we are reminded that even the great societies of Troy, Carthage, the Romans, and the Greeks were not immune to her power. How could the illustrious Parisian clerics and noblemen be otherwise? This was a period of profound disgust at how money had come to rule the world and the Church; positions of power were openly on sale—especially in Rome—leading our young French poets to protest in vehement, virtuosic song. The masterful Gospel parody, **Initium Sancti Evangelii**, which is found in the *Carmina Burana* collection, paints a vivid picture of a greedy Roman Curia and Pope who have completely lost their moral compass (luckily for the singers, Rome was very far from Paris).

In a nod to a well-known *conductus* exhorting Christians to crusade in the Holy Lands, a new text, **Curritur ad vocem nummi**, instead cynically exhorts the listener to perfect the art of usury and bribery, ignore the law, and do whatever it takes and get rich as fast as possible, without a care for others.

Texts of praise and lamentation were also heard in Paris. In the *planctus* (lament) **Anglia planctus itera**, probably created upon the death of the English King Henri II Plantagenet, in 1189, we hear the high art of rhetoric in song, as the imagery of a solar eclipse is used to express the darkness and confusion of 'renewed loss': Henri's son Geoffroy de Bretagne had died three just years earlier.

Finally, the text to **Bulla fulminante** ('a fulminating Papal Bull'—perhaps in reference to the divorced French king Philippe Auguste, who had been excommunicated by the pope?) was set to the final melisma of a famous *conductus* about the search for justice and truth. Here, a new song is created which sarcastically declares that the deaf papal courtiers in Rome are completely corrupt and will only respond to bribery.

Aurelianis civitas

O city of Orleans, filled with evil and polluted by an unimaginable crime!... You have murdered Christ's servants, whom you should have shielded from the rage of the crowds... Weep, o city of blood, for the gravity of your crime! O blessed city of Paris, in which an impious man is instantly punished for his iniquities. It is a proper place for study, where the citizen is good to the student; a city to which one always would return if one could ever bear to leave it.

O varium fortune lubricum

O Fortune, changing and slippery, your tribunal and judges are unstable. You prepare huge gifts for him whom you would tickle with favors as he arrives at the top of your wheel. But your gifts are unsure, and finally everything is reversed; you raise up the poor man from his filth and the loudmouth becomes a statesman.

Fortune edifies and ruins; she throws down the man she earlier honoured, and protects the one she had rejected before. She contradicts her own decrees, and her gifts cannot be kept. Hers is a fragile alliance: it oppresses the nobles and makes them poor, while making the poor noble and rich.

Thanks to the meddling of deceiving Fortune in war, the brilliant city of Troy lies pitifully now in ruin and ashes. Who destroyed the authority of the Romans? Who destroyed the eloquence of the Greeks? Who destroyed the glory of Carthage? Undependable destiny has taken back what it has given and has smashed everything which is built up.

Initium Sancti Evangelii

Here begins the Holy Gospel of the silver marks.

In those days the pope spoke to the Romans: "When the son of man comes to our throne of glory, so say unto him: 'Friend, why have you come?' But if he doesn't stop knocking, and gives you nothing, then throw him out, into the darness outside".

It came to pass, that an impoverished cleric came to the court of the Lord Pope and called out loudly, saying: "Have mercy on me, at least you gatekeepers of the pope, since the hand of poverty has smitten me. I am needy and poor, and beg you to help me in my misery!"

When they heard this, their hearts hardened and they said: "Friend, your poverty has ruined you. Get you behind me, Satan, since you have no sense for money. Truly, I say to you, you'll never enter the joy of the Lord before you've paid your last penny!"

So the poor cleric went out and sold his coat, his tunic, and everything that he owned, and gave the money to the cardinals, gatekeepers and servants. But they asked: "This is supposed to be enough for all of us?" and they threw him out the door. He wept bitterly, and there was no one to console him.

Later there came a rich cleric to the papal court, a man with property, income, and connections; he had even once bought his way out of a homicide conviction. He gave money to the cardinals, the servants and gatekeepers. But they all thought how they might get even more.

But when the pope heard how much the others had received in gifts, he became deathly ill. The rich cleric sent the pope a huge pile of gold and silver, and he immediately recovered.

The pope called the cardinals together and spoke: "Brothers, watch out that you are not fooled by such empty words! I've just given you a good example, so learn to grab like I can grab!"

Curritur ad vocem nummi

Run to the sound of money calling – a pleasant invitation! We all have a secret lust for the forbidden, even though we know we shouldn't. Learn, then, how to fool people! Just do it! Deny yourself nothing in this life and live like the rest of us. Live like the rich clerics: measure the punishment according to the bribe. When you bring in your net and see that the harvest is ripe, then at least add a little usury to your portfolio.

He who hasn't mastered the arts which will make him fit for this life, he should stand on the sidelines to watch and learn. Dare everything, even if you use trickery and fraud. Leave nothing out! That's my credo: let the world serve you! You have no need to adhere to the law, no need to worry about justice. Let this edict be holy to you: Where virtue is a crime, there is no place for God!

Anglia planctus itera

England, repeat your lamentations and return to grief: consider the double loss as a double star has set. Harshly death has raged in you...therefore, always inclined to grief, enter into grief. The sun of Paris has been eclipsed in Britain and is seen everywhere. O day, noxious to the world! O day announcing grief, covering the sun in darkness! O day, daughter of the night! O day without forgiveness! O day full of darkness!

Bulla fulminante

When the papal Bull fulminates, when the judge speaks a thundering verdict, when the accused makes an appeal while a false judgement weighs upon him, that's when Truth is oppressed, picked apart, and sold,

and justice becomes a whore. One appeals again and again to the Curia, but the goal isn't reached until the last coin is spent.

If you're seeking favors from the Roman Curia, then first change your habits: do not offend the judges with your integrity, and remember that it's useless to be well qualified. You'll wait many months while others move past you. With a nice bribe, however, you will be noticed immediately.

The gatekeepers of the pope are deafier than Cerberus. You can howl all you want, in the mistaken hope that something will change. But even the plea of Orpheus (who moved Pluto, the god of the underworld) would remain unheard there. But they might listen if you knocked with a hammer made of silver.

New Monophonic Sounds in Parisian Churches

Beginning in the early 12th century, the city of Paris was the European center for new trends in philosophy and the arts, especially music and Latin poetry. And the intellectual centre of Paris was on the Île de la Cité, in and around Notre Dame, at the royal court just a stone's throw away, in the schools which were rapidly expanding on the Left Bank, and in nearby monastic churches where the best and brightest gathered. We present here some of the most remarkable 'new music'—both monophonic and in polyphony—of the Parisian scene.

A dynamic aspect of intellectual life in Paris was the flourishing of the art of rhetoric, during a time which saw the rise of virtuosic sermons, lectures before rooms packed with rapt students, and the power of the word in political and spiritual life. In **Minor natu filius** we hear a concise re-telling of the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), a completely new manner of 'vocalizing' a well-known Gospel story, in which musical language and rhetoric shape the simple tale with an intensity that no mere reading could ever approach.

During a particularly turbulent period of ecclesiastical politics and intrigue at Notre Dame in the early 12th century, William of Champeaux (himself an archdeacon at the cathedral) founded an Augustinian monastery on the Left Bank, naming it St. Victor. It was to serve as a calm place of refuge, meditation, spiritual study, and teaching for the clergy of Notre Dame, far from the urbanity and distraction of the busy cathedral on the island (if you search the Left Bank today, looking for a trace of St. Victor, you will only find relatively modern buildings and the Jardin des Plantes). Many of the most illustrious men in Notre Dame's history chose to live within the wealthy and comfortable walls of St. Victor, including a venerable 12th century *praecentor* of Notre Dame named Adam (often referred to as Adam of St. Victor) who died in 1146. To him are ascribed a large number of astonishing new compositions in sequence form (Latin: *sequentia*), daring in their texts and melodies, which were sung on important feasts in both churches. This sequence for Easter, **Zima vetus expurgetur**, with its elaborate mosaic of images drawing upon the Old Testament, would have delighted the sensibilities of the erudite Victorine brothers, within their own church or in the choir of the nearby cathedral.

Minor natu filius

The younger son is the Gentile people, blind and without faith, like the prodigal son, who became destitute, fled to the desert, and fed swine. Penitent, he returns, and the father rejoices because the young boy is back; See how the lost one, considered perished, has returned! The calf is killed and a ring is placed on his finger. The envious brother is afflicted and filled with hate because his little brother is received with love by the father. (Luke 15:11-32).

Zima vetus expurgetur

Let the old leaven be purged so that the new resurrection may be celebrated. This is the day of our hope: the power of this day is marvellous by the testimony of the law. This day despoiled Egypt and freed the Hebrews from the cruel kiln, established in the labour of their servitude. Now the praise of divine virtue, now of triumph, now of salvation, an unimpeded voice breaks out: this is the day which the Lord has

made, this is the end of our pain, the healing day....the serpent devours the serpents of Pharaoh...Christ pierces the serpent in its jaw. ... David is inspired...Samson levels a thousand with a jawbone....the whale restores the fugitive Jonah....thus from Judah the strong lion, with the gates of dire death broken, rising on the third day, as the voice of the father roared, carried back so many spoils to the bosom of the celestial mother. Life and death have fought, Christ has risen truly, and with Christ many witnesses to the glory have risen. Let the new morning, the joyful morning, wipe away the evening weeping: because life conquered death, it is time for joy. O Jesus victor, Jesus life, Jesus, common way of life, by whose death, death is put to sleep, invite us to the Paschal table with confidence; O living bread, living water, vine true and fertile, feed us, cleanse us, so that your grace may save us from a second death. Amen.

New Polyphonic Sounds in Parisian Churches

Grounded in the extemporized oral tradition of Magister Leoninus and the *organistae* of Notre Dame in the period around 1200 (a tradition which gave birth to the romantic myth of a 'School of Notre-Dame'), this notated *organum duplum* of the responsory **Descendit de celis** attests to the powerful new hybrid genre heard in late 12th-century Paris: 2-voice *organum purum*, *copula* and *clausula* build upon the venerable chant, revealing a metamorphosis in both time and vertical sonority. In keeping with the improvisational roots of this music, the singers of *Sequentia* draw on a 12th-century French *organum* treatise (Vatican, Ottob. lat. 3025) to extemporize their own versions of some of the *organum purum* sections, while singing the rhythmic *clausulae* from the manuscript source. The chant sections are sung from a 13th century Parisian chant book.

Descendit de celis

He came down from heaven, sent from the Father's citadel; through the maiden's ear he entered our region, putting on a stole of purple, and he went out through the golden gate, light and glory of the whole structure of the world.

The Lord coming forth like a bridegroom from his pavillion;

And he went out through the golden gate, light and glory of the whole world.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit...

And he went out through the golden gate, light and glory of the whole world.

He came down from heaven, sent from the Father's citadel; through the maiden's ear he entered our region, putting on a stole of purple,

and he went out through the golden gate, light and glory of the whole world.

Eros and Ambition

The clerics who worked, sang, and studied on the Île de la Cité, within the close of Notre Dame and near the French royal court, were among the most accomplished and worldly men in the Europe of their time. In this society, we would expect to find the most illustrious poets, the most renowned scholars, surrounded, of course, by ambitious—and often libidinous—young men who were at the beginnings of their careers. The following songs give us a glimpse into the more worldly aspects of clerical life: the ambivalence towards physical pleasure (in a city famed for its temptations) and the need to concentrate on study, advancement, and prestige.

Delicate Latin verse is the ideal vehicle for fantasies of sexual conquest in **Sic mea fata canendo solor**, from the milieu of Hilarius of Orleans (d. Paris, ca. 1150), with its lip-smacking double-entendre, set to a tune which the Aquitanian clerics and troubadours of an earlier generation might well have known.

We often think of the Renaissance as being a period of revival for Classical themes. Actually, the 12th century Parisian clerics witnessed a huge output of text and song touching on the heroes of Greek Antiquity, the Trojan War, and the old gods. It would not seem strange to the singers of the *conductus*

Veneris prosperis that it is found in a manuscript containing principally Christian texts. And how convenient that the god Jupiter might condone behavior which the church would consider sinful.

Tongue in cheek, the career-conscious young student singing **Vitam duxi** wants to 'have it all' and does not regret the time he wasted on the pleasures of life.

And since love and jealousy are never far apart, one luscious 3-voice conductus from Paris (**Procurans odium**) reminds us that vicious rumors about the beloved only serve to heighten the energy of eros, so that the lover can finally 'harvest sweet grapes on the envious enemy's thorns'.

Although Pierre de Blois (d. 1212) was a court poet for Henri II and Eleanor of Aquitaine, his works were widely appreciated by the intelligentsia in Paris as well (he had studied there as a youth). The complex sequence **Olim sudor Herculis**, with its ironically moralistic refrain, would have been appreciated fully by an audience which knew the story of Hercules intimately, and that audience was in Notre Dame. Who could resist—then or now—the playful subtext about 'great' men making fools of themselves in the name of Venus? And who would not identify with the singer's plan, wanting to flee from her enticements in the name of career and prestige?

Sic mea fata canendo solor

Only by singing can I endure my fate, like the swan when death is near. Once I had rosy cheeks but grief has made them pale. Increasing troubles add to my woes, my vigor is waning, and I prepare to die miserably.

Ah! to die, to die, because I love but am unloved.

If she would favor me, the one I desire, I'd gladly skip heavenly joy in the hereafter. If I could sleep with her, just one night, and suck nectar from her lips... Death would not frighten me in that moment; I could perish in bliss. Ah! Yes, I could, I could, if I would just know that ecstasy.

When I see her, my hand wants to glide beneath her tunic, to play with those smooth breasts. (At this thought, I notice how Venus excites me.) I see in her face a little rosy glow of modesty, and I desire to kiss her mouth.

Ah! to kiss, to kiss and lustily set my seal upon her.

Veneris prosperis

Everybody should enjoy the happy arrival of Venus, when those tender flowers are budding out. Follow the ancient custom: be ready for love, and shun all other forms of vice. Pledge your dues to Venus, you tender youths...pleasure is the boy's law! Jupiter, ruler of all things, has taught us that nothing agreeable is done basely. Thus he speaks, and thus he fulfills all his vows, living in conformity to his own edict. It pleases me, therefore, to live as a lover; to imitate Jupiter is not such a bad idea. Transfixed by the arrow of voluptuousness, I will sail under my own free will, navigating by the star of Venus!

Vitam duxi

I have lived a joyous life of love, caring more for pleasure than for propriety. But now I'm recovering from my former life, concentrating more on my studies than on amorous combat. Why? Only one thing compels me: that I should enjoy the favour of fame while living an easy life! It's good that we devote some time to love, so that we know what it feels like when we want to avoid it in the future. Now, knowing what is forbidden, I will be able to resist passion when it returns. Still, we shouldn't condemn love: it helps us to find pardon, seek grace, and it makes the inexperienced lover more courteous and gentle; otherwise, he might act boorishly while the fruit of Venus is being plucked.

Procurans odium

The slanderers' plot to sow discord hasn't worked out as planned. Evil rumors have only solidified the lovers' hearts. And so the tables are turned on the unsuspecting enemy; he becomes a helper. Thus is confirmed the happy status of those who love truly.

I know that such mean attacks by gossips can be useful; thanks to them I had the luck to avoid being fed up with love. With bad intentions, they gave me only joy, and in the end my desire is compounded. With such a remedy in hand, I can harvest grapes from the thorns of my enemies.

Olim sudor Herculis

Once, the labours of Hercules (crushing monsters far and wide, removing the world's plagues) shone far and wide. But in the end, this fame withered, and he was enclosed in blind darkness by the enticing girl Iole, the hero was made a captive.

[refrain]: Love withers the merits of fame; a lover never laments the time he has lost, but rashly labours to dissipate himself under Venus.

The Hydra, more savage than any plague, was not able to cause him alarm, him whom a mere girl subdued; he yielded to Venus's yoke! [refrain]

The poisoned breath of Cacus, with flaming vomit; the deceit of Nessus; Geryon of the Hesperus and the gatekeeper of Hell (each with triple form) did not terrify him. But a girl made him captive with a simple smile. [refrain]

In combat with the Libyan Antheus he stood firm, and checked the fraud of a cunning fall when he kept him from falling; but he who thus unbound the tight bonds of combat is conquered and bound when he – Jove's mighty offspring – falls into Iole's embraces! [refrain]

He had become famous by such great deeds of valour, he whom with soft chains a bland girl imprisons, and she showers him with kisses, offering him from her tiny lips the nectar of Venus. A man dissolute with the pleasures of Venus devalues the memory of great deeds and glory. [refrain]

But I, stronger than Hercules, I will fight against Venus! I will flee her, and devote my full energy to study and the advancement of my career! O my dear Lycoris, farewell, and wish me well, for in this battle, flight is stronger than fighting.

New Year's Day

In the days following Christmas, a number of feasts were celebrated at Notre Dame during which various lower groups in the cathedral hierarchy (priests, deacons, subdeacons, and even the choirboys) had their own day to assume full power in the church and control the entire operation of the liturgy. This ancient tradition, which was probably linked to pagan winter-solstice practices, was a harmless and benevolent moment of lightness in the liturgical year; but by the late 12th century the Parisian celebrations began to get out of control, with incidents of blasphemy in the church, clerics dressing as women, fighting, and indecent displays of youthful (male) energy. The Feast of the Circumcision, on New Year's Day—which came to be known as the *Festum Fatuorum* (Feast of Fools)—belonged to the subdeacons, a group of underpaid, overworked young men (mostly former choirboys who were now the principal daily vocal soloists in the choir) who were particularly notorious for their naughty songs and scandalous pranks in the church (many involving the cantor's "rod"—*baculus*—a symbol of authority in the choir). When a Papal legate complained about their behavior in 1198, the Bishop of Paris finally had to issue an official reprimand, and these raucous festivities were severely curtailed, at least temporarily. In their place a number of new musical compositions were provided for the boys and young men to sing, as an attempt to channel their youthful energy into serious rehearsals and the propriety of carefully-managed celebrations, instead of the spontaneous revels which formerly marked this feast.

Festia ianuarua

January's feasts are the most festive of feasts, truly represented by the most meaningful symbols. This is an offering of lights, this is an illumination, and a declaration of the true meaning of things.

Annus renascitur

The year is reborn! Let us be joyful now! The old is cast out, and the new Adam is born. Let us rejoice at the year renewed! The baculus is passed around... a new sun rises ... the clouds depart! Let us be joyful now!

Novus annus hodie

Today a new year urges us to begin joyful praises... therefore, let us celebrate this annual feast, loosing the chains of sin, giving drink to the thirsty, healing the sick with this medicine, as joyfully we sing as a memorial:

[refrain]: Ha! Ha! He! He who truly wishes to sing should make praise with three gifts: with his mouth, heart and good works he should labour, so that he might live and please God!

He is worthy of memory whose end is joyful, worthy of great praise whose kindness is without end, who created the heavens, the earth and the sea. Thus he ruled the world with his Word, and was concerned to enrich man, to command his subjects, and according to his will give him immortality.

[refrain]: Ha! Ha! He!...

notes by Benjamin Bagby

Sources: *Most of the music heard in this program is taken from the most important source of medieval vocal music from Notre-Dame: Florence, Bibl. Mediceo-Laurenziana, Pluteo 29,1 (copied in Paris sometime after 1255). The conductus, Festa ianuarua, is taken from a related Parisian manuscript (Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Helmst. 628 Guelph.). The responsory chant Descendit de celis is from a late 13th-century Parisian chant book (source: Paris BN lat. 15181). The texts to Initium Sancti Evangelii and Curritur ad vocem nummi are taken from Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Hs. clm 4660 ('Carmina Burana'). The performers are singing from facsimiles of the mss. or from transcriptions prepared by Benjamin Bagby (exceptions: the recitation-tone of the Gospel parody was provided by Katarina Livljanic; the Victorine sequence Zima vetus expurgatur (source: Paris, BN lat. 14819) is performed from a transcription by Margot Fassler).*