

Sequentia
Ensemble for Medieval Music

Sunday, October 23, 2005, 7 pm
Hertz Hall

Benjamin Bagby, *director*

Agnethe Christensen, *voice*

Eric Mentzel, *voice*

Benjamin Bagby, *voice, lyre, harp*

Norbert Rodenkirchen, *flute, lyre*

Lost Songs of a Rhineland Harper

I. An Ode to Cosmic Harmony

Quod mundus stabili fide Rhineland, early 11th century

II. The Image of Dawn

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ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Founded in 1977 by Benjamin Bagby and the late Barbara Thornton, **Sequentia** is among world's most respected and innovative ensembles for medieval music. Sequentia can look back on more than a quarter-century of international concert tours, a comprehensive discography spanning the entire Middle Ages (including the complete works of Hildegard von Bingen), film and television productions of medieval music drama, and a new generation of young performers trained in professional courses given by members of the ensemble. Sequentia has performed throughout Europe, North and South America, India, the Middle East, Asia, Africa and Australia, and has received numerous prizes (including a Disque d'Or, several Diapasons d'Or, two Edison Prizes, the Deutsche Schallplattenpreis and a Grammy nomination) for many of its more than two dozen recordings on the Deutsche Harmonia Mundi label. In 2002, Sequentia released an acclaimed 2-CD set of tales from the medieval Icelandic Edda: *The Rheingold Curse*, on the independent Marc Aurel Edition label. Since 2004, Sequentia has recorded exclusively for BMG Classics on the Deutsche Harmonia Mundi label. The ensemble's current program, *Lost Songs of a Rhineland Harper*, was released on the DHM label in 2004, and has already received wide critical acclaim. Sequentia has brought to life over sixty innovative concert programs that encompass the entire spectrum of medieval music, in addition to the creation of music-theater projects such as Hildegard von Bingen's *Ordo Virtutum*, the Cividale *Planctus Marie*, and the *Bordesbolmer Marienklage*. The work of the ensemble is divided between a small touring ensemble of vocal and instrumental soloists, and a larger ensemble of voices for the performance of chant and polyphony. After 25 years based in Cologne, Germany, Sequentia's home is now in Paris.

Vocalist, harpist and scholar **Benjamin Bagby**, has been an important figure in the field of medieval musical performance for over 25 years. The years 1977–2004 have been almost uniquely devoted to the work of Sequentia. Apart from this, Mr. Bagby devotes his time to the solo performance of Anglo-Saxon and Old-Icelandic oral poetry (his acclaimed bardic re-telling of *Beowulf* continues to be performed worldwide). In addition to researching and writing about performance practice, he has been a guest lecturer and professor,

teaching courses and workshops all over Europe and North America.

Agnethe Christensen, originally from Sweden, studied at the Royal Danish Conservatory and later specialized in Renaissance and medieval singing with Andrea von Ramm in Basel, with subsequent studies in Rome and Paris. Ms. Christensen has worked with composers such as Wolfgang Rihm, Luciano Berio and John Cage; with Baroque directors such as William Christie and Reinhard Goebel; and with her own medieval music group, Alba, with which she has released several CDs. She also appears on opera stages worldwide, most recently in the Danish performance ensemble Hotel Proforma's production of *Operation Orfeo*.

Eric Mentzel was born in Philadelphia and studied voice and organ at Temple University before taking a Masters Degree in early music performance practice at Sarah Lawrence College in New York. He has appeared with such renowned ensembles as Pomerium and the Schola Antiqua. Since 1988, Mentzel has appeared as a member of Sequentia, the Huelgas Ensemble, the Ferrara Ensemble, and as an oratorio soloist in addition to participating in more than 25 CD recordings and numerous radio and television productions. He has also appeared in contemporary opera productions in Germany, and is in demand as a teacher of early vocal style and techniques, teaching at the Schola Cantorum in Basel, Sequentia's Medieval Music Programme, and the Mannheim Musikhochschule. He is currently on the voice faculty of the University of Oregon School of Music.

Norbert Rodenkirchen was born in Cologne, where he studied both modern and Baroque flute at the Hochschule für Musik. He is in demand as a versatile performer and composer in the realms of new music, early music, theater and film music. He has been musical director of theater productions at the Staatstheater Darmstadt and Stadttheater Bremen, has composed works for Radio Bremen and the West German Radio, and has appeared widely as a flautist and recording artist in Europe. In 1998, together with vocalist Maria Jonas, he founded the early music ensemble *Diphona*. His first solo CD, *Tibia ex Tempore*, was released on the Marc Aurel Edition label in 2001.

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Lost Songs of a Rhineland Harper

What did secular European song sound like one thousand years ago? Who were its singers and what instruments did they play? Where, and under what circumstances, have their songs survived? Can we ever hope to reconstruct music from such a distant age? These are the questions which led to my initial search for the lost songs of a performing musician whose name remains unknown to us, a search which now culminates—or at least pauses for reflection—in this program: Lost Songs of a Rhineland Harper.

Almost one thousand years ago a collection of Latin and German song was copied into a manuscript by Anglo-Saxon monks in the Abbey of St. Augustine in Canterbury. The original source (or sources) has long since disappeared, but the manuscript copy has survived to this day, and is now found in the library of Cambridge University. Although we will never know its exact origin, one thing is clear: many of the songs copied by the monks come from the milieu of learned, aristocratic churchmen in the Rhineland, where cities such as Cologne, Mainz, Worms and Speyer were centers of culture and power in Germany at the turn of the millennium. In addition, it is striking that many of the song texts from this collection display an intimate working knowledge of music, the voice and instruments, especially the harp and even the flute. Evidence for possible sources of the Canterbury collection points strongly to the performance repertoire of a learned “citharista,” a bilingual harper/singer from the Rhineland, whose songs delighted not only aristocratic bishops and their courts, but also powerful abbots, secular nobility (including the Kaiser’s court), and the young clerical intelligentsia of those bustling river towns with their imposing cathedrals. Here we have the songs of a professional entertainer whose audience was expected to pay for his services (and he might easily have been joined on occasion by another minstrel from the ranks of the itinerant players, or even a poetically inclined clerical cantor). Our program combines some of the earliest known musical manuscripts of European song with reconstructions from the Canterbury manuscript, to give a glimpse into the deliciously subtle, long-lost world of an unknown Rhineland harper and his sophisticated audience.

Benjamin Bagby

I. An Ode to Cosmic Harmony

In the neo-Platonic cosmos of many medieval thinkers (and certainly our harper belonged to this group), the visible world could provide tangible expression of the underlying order and harmony of the universe, whose elements vibrate in agreeable concord with their neighbors, symbolizing the unseen forces which keep our world intact.

Quod mundus stabili fide

This is one of the songs (*metra*) from the famous *Consolation of Philosophy*, written by the Roman aristocrat, philosopher and learned musician, Boethius, as he sat in prison in ca. 524, awaiting execution on trumped-up charges of treason. The *Consolation*, arguably one of the most widely-read and important Western books of all time, is in the form of a long dialogue between the despairing Boethius and a numinous female personification of Philosophia who visits him on death row. Their exchanges are interspersed with songs in verse, many of which have been found set to music in monastic manuscripts dated centuries later. Our harper’s songbook contains incipits to all of Boethius’s *metra*, attesting to their continued popularity in Germany, more than four centuries after Boethius was executed. In this song (from Book II/vii), the poet is reminded that our chaotic world is actually well-ordered, and that the source of this order is love.

Text:

In regular harmony the world moves through its transformations; seeds in competition with each other are held in balance by eternal law.

Refrain:

O happy race of men: if the love that rules the stars may also rule your hearts!

Phoebus brings rosy dawns in his golden chariot, that his sister Phoebe might rule the nights brought by Hesperus.

[Refrain]

The waves of the greedy sea are kept within fixed bounds, nor may the land move out and extend its limits.

[Refrain]

That which binds all things to order, governing earth, sea and sky, is love.

[Refrain]

If love's rein slackened, all things now held by mutual love would immediately fall to warring with each other, striving to wreck that engine of the world which they now drive, in mutual trust, with motion beautiful.

[Refrain]

And love joins peoples too, by a sacred bond, and ties the knot of holy matrimony that binds lovers, and joins also with its law all faithful friends.

[Refrain]

— translation by S. J. Tester

II. The Image of Dawn

The most poignant medieval image of dawn, known to us from the troubadours, is the erotic *alba*, a song of illicit lovers who must part after a night of love. But many dawn songs do not describe an amorous parting: they are songs that present the ineffable moment between night and day, when mysteries are made manifest, the light in the sky is in flux, visions occur, and voices of warning are heard mixed with the song of the nightingale. Here, as in the Song of Songs, the worlds of Eros and the spirit are inseparable.

Cigni

(Frankish, 10th century)

Almost no instrumental music survives in written form from the period before 1200, and yet we know that instrumental music was performed with great sophistication at all sorts of courtly gatherings. Often, such pieces had exotic titles, attesting to their popularity, or to an association with a certain story or mythological character. This tune, found in numerous vocal manuscripts, is called "The Swan" and is related to the lament of the swan heard later in the group. It is fitting that it is performed here in an instrumental version using a flute made from a delicate swan's bone.

Foebus abierat

(Northern Italy, late 10th century)

This 10th-century woman's song is the earliest-known depiction of a lover's ghostly apparition, a theme that has haunted folksong for a thousand years. Part of an ancient and important tradition, this song shares aspects of its text (and probably also its melody) with other medieval depictions of ghostly night-meetings between a man and a woman, including the Beloved in the Song of Songs, and Maria Magdalena's meeting in the garden with the resurrected Jesus.

Text:

Phoebus had departed, his voyage past; his sister was riding with unbridled span, shedding her beams in forest springs, stirring wild creatures to prey, jaws agape. Mortals had let their limbs sink into sleep. One night in April that has just gone by the image of my true love stood before me; calling me, softly, he touched me gently—his voice failed him, overcome by tears, he gave such sighs that he could not speak. At his touch I trembled fearfully; as if in terror I started up, and with outstretched arms I pressed my body to his, and then I froze, utterly drained of blood, for he had vanished! I was holding nothing! Fully awake then, I cried out loud: "Where are you fleeing, I beg you, why so quickly? Only wait, if you will—I too shall enter, for I want to live with you forever!" Soon I regretted having spoken so. The windows of the terrace had been open, the beams of Diana shone in all their beauty, while I in my wretchedness grieved, ah so long. Streams of tears flowed down over my cheeks; till the next day my weeping never ceased.

— translation by Peter Dronke

Clangam, filii

(Winchester, 10th century)

Called *Planctus cigni* (The Swan's Lament), this sequence may have had its origins in West Frankish cloisters or even in indigenous song traditions. Its archaic theme of the soul's longing is made poignant through the voice of a swan, the lost wanderer over the dark ocean, seeking nourishment and a safe haven, and finding salvation by the light of dawn.

Text:

Hear me, children, tell the lamentation of the winged swan who journeyed across the ocean. Bitterly he grieved for what he had abandoned

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to make his voyage over the high seas. This was his cry: "I am doomed. What shall I do in my misery? My wings will never support me here in this moisture, the waves batter me, the winds dash me to and fro in my exile. I am confined between peaks of water. Flying, I moan, unable to mount higher. I can see plenty of fish, but in these waves I cannot reach them for nourishment. Sunrise and sunset and brilliant polar stars, give me guidance! Summon Orion to light my way, and sweep the clouds from my sight!"

While the thoughts possessed his mind vermilion dawn came to his rescue. A breeze bore him up, making him strong, and he exulted, feeling himself flung amid the stars in their familiar high constellations. Joy overtook him, and he was ecstatic beyond telling as he dived and surfaced in the sea. Singing his melodies he glided to the welcome shores, dry land. Come now, all you multitudes of birds, and proclaim together in chorus: Praise and glory to the great King!

—translation by Fleur Adcock

Phebi claro

(Provence, late 10th century)

This little Latin song, with its Provençal refrain, survives in a single 10th-century manuscript. Does it describe the plight of illicit lovers, or is it a warning to believers (the milites Christi, or soldiers of Christ), to watch for pre-dawn attacks by demons and spiritual doubt? The poem remains vague on this point, mixing instead images of Eros and spiritual terror.

Text:

When Phoebus's bright beam has not yet risen, Aurora brings her slender light to earth; a watchman shouts to slumberers "Arise!"

Refrain:

Dawn graces the dank sea, draws forth the sun, then passes. Oh watchman, look how the dark grows bright!

Our lurking enemies are bursting forth to intercept the idle and the rash - the herald pleads and calls on them to rise.

[Refrain]

From Arcturus the north wind is released, the stars

of heaven hide their radiance, the Plough is drawn toward the eastern sky.

[Refrain]

—translation by Peter Dronke

Aurea personet lira

(Rhineland, early 11th century)

The nightingale (Latin: *philomela*) is the quintessential creature of the hours before dawn, warning lovers, consoling the lonely and vexing the sleepless. Here, in the form of a sequence, the song of this little warbler is praised extravagantly and found to be better than all the musical instruments. Although the earliest extant musical source (sung here) dates from the 12th century, we find the text in numerous older sources, including the songbook of the Rhineland harper.

Text:

May the golden lyre sound bright melodies, may a single string be tightened over fifteen notes; may the middle tone produce the first sound according to the hypodorian mode. Let us give praise to the nightingale with well-tuned voice, singing out a sweet melody as music without mastery of which there can be no true songs . . . The nightingale is joyful, aware of her sweet voice . . . she gives forth notes to mark the summer season . . . giving peace to sleepers through intervals of song, and to the wayfarer lovely relief from toil. The loveliness of her voice, more brilliant than the lyre, in warbling outdoes all the little flocks of birds . . . Blessed the season for which such a symphony re-echoes! . . . O you little bird, never cease to sing . . . I want you to produce happy harmonies on your little tongue, so that you will be remembered in the palaces of kings. Now, we have rendered you enough splendid services which are pleasant in sound and rhythmic in wording, worthy for young scholars and their pastimes. The time has come to end our harmonic song . . . May God preserve us and govern us in his mercy! Amen.

—translation by Jan Ziolkowski, abridged

III. Songs of the Harp

In the 10th and 11th centuries, two types of harp were known: an archaic, rounded shape with a very few strings all of the same length, and the more familiar, triangular shape with many more strings of varying lengths. From the Canterbury

manuscript, these are songs of praise to the harp itself, instrument of kings, healers and magicians, an instrument whose strings vibrate in the hands of the harper like the resonating human soul in the hands of the Creator.

**Caute cane, cantor care
(Rhineland, early 11th century)**

This intriguing song was possibly designed as a prelude to a longer work, now lost. It is a playful and yet highly virtuosic meditation on the role of the human body and soul as “instrumentum” in the praise of God, in which the sinews of man become strings of the harp and his larynx becomes a flute. Astonishingly, each word of this virtuosic text begins with the letter “c”.

Text:

Sing circumspectly, sweet singer; let the windpipes puff together brightly, let the strings make a harmony resound elegantly, take an easy path, bridge the valleys. Join together head, heel, and heart, skilled in the paths of the body. Make melody with one string, make melody with more, make melody to the creator with your windpipes!

—translation by Jan Ziolkowski, abridged

**Magnus Cesar Otto
(Rhineland, early 11th century)**

A praise-song to the three German Emperors named Otto, beginning with Otto I “The Great” (936–73) who defeated the Hungarians. It seems the Kaiser slept as his palace burned one night. His servants, afraid to disturb his sleep, finally called his harper, who played the emperor’s favorite tune until Otto woke up, and thereby saved his life and the empire. In memory of this event, the song was immortalized as “Modus Ottinc.” The likely date of composition for this song is between 996 and 1002, making it something truly “millennial” for us today.

Text:

As great Emperor Otto, to whom this tune refers in its title (called “of Otto”), on a certain night settles his limbs in sleep, by a sudden mishap the palace burst into flames. Attendants of the king stand by, they fear to touch the sleeper, and by striking the strings they awaken and save him, and they attached the name of their lord to the song.

Awakened, he arose as a hope for his people, soon to come as a great dread to his adversaries; for at that time the rumor was flying that the Hungarians had raised their standards against him. Armed, they were encamped along the riverbank; they lay waste cities, fields, and villages far and wide. On all sides mothers lament that their sons have been driven into exile, sons their mothers.

“Alas” said Otto, “For a long time, too long, I have been warning the sluggish soldiers in vain. As I have been tarrying, the slaughter has been ever increasing. Therefore, put an end to delays and confront the Parthian foes with me!” Fearless Duke Konrad, than whom no one is braver, says “May the knight perish whom this war frightens. Take up your arms. I myself as standard-bearer shall be the first to shed enemy blood.” Set afire by these words, they roar for war, call for arms, shout for their foes, follow the standards; and everywhere a great clamor upon trumpets arises, and a hundred Teutons mingle among thousands. The few attack, the many fall; the Frank presses on, the Parthian flees. A lifeless mob blocks the waves; the Lech, reddening with blood showed to the Danube the slaughter.... After the victory by a small band, and after bequeathing his name, realm, and excellent conduct to his son, he passed away. After him, youthful Otto reigned for many years ... a just, merciful and brave emperor, he failed in only one respect: for he rarely triumphed in celebrated battles. But his remarkable offspring Otto, a glory of youth, was as brave as he was fortunate, brave in war, powerful in peace, in both nonetheless gentle, amid triumphs, war and peace, he always showed regard for his poor, for which reason he is called “father of the poor.”

Let us now put an end to this tune, lest perchance, for want of talent, we be blamed for detracting in any way from the virtues of such great men; for even renowned Virgil would scarcely be equal to their virtues.

—translation by Jan Ziolkowski, abridged

**Rota modos arte
(Rhineland, early 11th century)**

This little song praises not only the harp, but the entire cosmos which it embodies, and which is represented in Pythagorean theory by musical measure.

Text:

Let us sound melodies loudly upon the harp with musical skill, so that the constant soul may take pleasure in them. As renowned Pythagoras learned from smiths, as he comprehended harmonies by means of four hammers, he determined the intervals of the seven planets, from which celestial music comes into being, as the arithmetic rule of numbers relates, giving all things first principles. May the king, ruling all wondrously, rule us for ever!

—translation by Jan Ziolkowski

David regis inclita proles (Rhineland, early 11th century)

A song of rejoicing which introduces and amplifies the liturgical “Sanctus” text, while putting harps into the hands of almost everybody in the universe and repeating the refrain “Davitice” (in the manner of David) like a mantra.

Text:

The famous progeny of King David, playing on their harps.

Refrain:

In the manner of David, of David, of David,
then, they call out,
in the manner of David, of David, of David,
then, they call out,
in the manner of David, of David, of David,
then, they call out for Saul!

Before the throne of the living God King David sits; on his knees David has a harp; King David causes great joy playing on his harp!

[Refrain]

The blessed stand before the throne, playing their harps to honor Christ, son of the living God.

[Refrain]

The Cherubim and Seraphim too, do not cease from calling out “Holy, holy, holy!”

[Refrain]

—translation by Jan Ziolkowski, abridged

IV. The Harper in the Underworld

Felix qui potuit boni (Rhineland, early 11th century)

Another song from the *Consolation of Philosophy* of Boethius. It tells the story of the mythological singer and harper Orpheus, describing his daring voyage into the realm of the dead to rescue his beloved wife, Eurydice, through the power of song. The fact that this song turns up in the Rhineland harper’s collection attests to the power of the Orpheus myth in musical circles throughout the early Middle Ages.

Text:

Happy is he who can look into the shining spring of goodness; happy is he who can break the heavy chains of earth.

Long ago the Thracian poet, Orpheus, mourned for his dead wife. With his sorrowful music he made the woodlands dance and the rivers stand still. He made the fearful deer lie down bravely with the fierce lions; the rabbit no longer feared the dog, quieted by his song.

But as the sorrow burned within his breast, the music which calmed all nature could not console its maker. Finding the gods unbending, he went to the regions of hell. There, he sang sweet songs to the music of his harp, songs inspired by his powerless grief and the love that doubled his grief. Hell is moved to pity when, with his melodious prayer, he begs the favor of those shades. The three-headed guardian of the gate is paralyzed by that new song, and the Furies are touched and weep in pity. At last, the judge of souls, moved by pity, declares, “We are conquered. We return this man to his wife, his companion, purchased by his song. But our gift is bound by the condition that he must not look back until he has left hell.” But who can give lovers a law? Love is a stronger law unto itself. As they approached the edge of night, Orpheus looked back at Eurydice, lost her, and killed her.

This fable applies to all of you who seek to raise your minds to sovereign day. For whoever is conquered and turns his eyes to the pit of hell, looking into the inferno, loses all the good he has gained.

—translation by Richard Green, abridged

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V. The Harper in the Snakepit

Atli sendi ar til Gunnars (Iceland, 10th century.)

This is the Old Icelandic *Atlakvida* (Lay of Attila the Hun), the earliest-known retelling of the famous Rheingold tale and its violent end. In earlier tales, we learn of how Sigurd (in later versions known as Siegfried) killed the dragon Fafnir and stole the gold, and of the ensuing miseries caused by this theft. At this point in the vast legend, Sigurd's widow, Gudrun, has been remarried to the Hunnish King, Atli (Attila), who wants to lure her brothers to visit him, to force them to reveal the whereabouts of the cursed gold. The story takes place in Germanic lands, along the Rhine, even in the mythical "Mirkwood Forest," and it was certainly known to our harper in its orally-transmitted Germanic version. But it has survived in writing only in Iceland, as part of the famous Edda collection. This tale of greed, betrayal and murder is sometimes called "The Greenlandic Lay of Atli," and as such was probably among the first European songs heard in North America, as Norsemen inhabited the earliest white settlements in "Vinland" (now in Newfoundland) more than a thousand years ago.

Text:

Atli sent a messenger, and invited the brothers Gunnar and Hogni for a banquet, promising rich gifts, but their sister Gudrun sent a warning to her brothers. She hid a message on a gold ring with a wolf's hair wrapped around it. Atli's men detected the warning, however, and altered the ring before handing it to Gunnar. The wolf's hair remained as a dire omen. Despite protests and tears, dreams and premonitions against going, a warrior's courage despises caution. Then Gunnar and Hogni rode toward their fate. The valiant warriors galloped through Mirkwood toward their doom. The earth shook as the brave men rumbled across the plains. Gunnar and his men were welcomed into Atli's splendid compound hung with marvelous shields, lances and pennants. But Atli's watchtowers were full of sharp things.

Gudrun: "You have been betrayed, Gunnar. Atli intends to kill you. You should have stayed in the saddle, for now the snake-pit lies waiting for Hogni and you."

Gunnar: "It's too late now, sister, to summon the Nibelungen. We're a long way from our valiant fighters on the Rhine."

Gunnar was captured, bound and tied. But Hogni fought on. Seven men were cut down by his sword and the eighth was shoved into a fire. Then Hogni too was captured. They asked Gunnar if he would reveal the hiding place of the Rheingold in exchange for Hogni's life.

Gunnar: "Hogni's heart must first lie in my hand, cut bleeding from the breast with cruel-slitting knife."

Trying to trick him, they cut out the heart of Hialli and gave it to him on a platter.

Gunnar: "This is the heart of Hialli the coward, look how it quivers on the platter, just as it quivered in his breast."

Then Hogni laughed, deep and loud as the blade plunged into his breast. The bloody heart was placed on a platter and brought before Gunnar.

Gunnar: "Unlike the heart of the feeble coward, Hogni's heart hardly quivers. When it was in Hogni's breast it quivered even less. Atli, now that Hogni is dead, only I know where Fafnir's gold is. The Rhine shall be master of the metal of men's strife, the god-sprung river will rule the inheritance of the Nibelungen, in rolling waters and not shining in the hands of the Hun's children."

Then the valiant warrior wrapped in chains rode a chariot through a gawking crowd on his way to dying. Gunnar was lowered into a pit squirming with poisonous serpents. And in the pit, with hate in his soul, he played the harp (which Gudrun had sent him) with his bound hands. He played it fearlessly and sang of his fate. And so the valiant warrior died. Then Atli with his men, drunk on victory, were received by Gudrun who fought back her rage and tears. She offered her husband a personal toast, with gilded cup.

Gudrun: "My lord, accept this toast from your wife who rejoices as a wife should, but who as your enemy's kin mourns as she should. You are welcome, here in your hall, to enjoy Gudrun's freshly killed young game to eat."

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With gleaming face the daemonic woman darted to bring more drink. Thick with ale, Atli barely heard Gudrun's words. He downed her gift of ale. His warriors, too, knee deep in drink, noticed nothing strange. Then Gudrun served tasty morsels of meat to Atli, and the horror spewed forth from Gudrun's lips.

Gudrun: "My lord, blood mixed with ale you are drinking, human flesh dressed with honey you are chewing. Never again will you bounce our two boys on your knees. Never again will you teach them your warrior's skills. Never again will they ride their fine stallions. My lord, from their little skulls, you eat your children's flesh."

A monstrous moaning filled the victor's splendid hall, the weeping and howling of an entire clan, all except Gudrun. Then she scattered all the gold of the kingdom to whomever desired it. She cared nothing of gold; it was gold that brought this horror about, it was gold that killed her love, it was gold that destroyed kith and kin. Then Gudrun stabbed the drunken Atli where he lay, and with the sword-point she gave the bedding blood to drink. She set loose the hounds and servants, and then tossed flaming firebrands across the entrance doors, barring exit. The ancient timbers came crashing down and smoke and fire consumed all within.

The whole tale is told: never after her will any wife go thus in armor to avenge her brothers. She caused the death of three kings, that bright lady, before she died.

—based on the translation of Ursula Dronke,
as retold by Ping Chong and Benjamin Bagby,
abridged

VI. Desire and Seduction

Many lyrics survive from 11th-century sources that attest to the powerful influence of the Song of Songs' dreamlike erotic language on medieval poets and singers. There are songs of almost transcendental desire—both feminine and masculine—but also simple, almost farcical lyrics of seduction, and we shouldn't be surprised to find all these delicacies spread by the harper before an appreciative intellectual, even ecclesiastical audience.

Iam, dulcis amica, venito (Aquitaine, late 10th century)

This is one of the most famous lyrics in medieval Latin to have survived. It exists in several versions, some of which stress the dramatic tension of the erotic situation, while others dwell on the almost sacred, dreamlike nature of the love-dialogue, mirroring the Song of Songs. The version found in the harper's songbook is distinctly a seduction scene.

Text:

He: Come now, sweet friend, whom I love as my own heart! Come into my little room that's laden with all that's exquisite. There the couches are covered, the house is ready with curtains, flowers are scattered within, and fragrant grasses among them. The table's been brought near, an abundance of bright wine, and whatever delights you, dear one. There sound the notes of sweet harmonies, even higher the flutes are blown. There a boy and a well-schooled girl are devising fair songs for you. He touches his cithara with a plectrum, she fashions her song to the lyre, and trays are brought by the servants with hot-spiced goblets of wine. The feasting does not concern me as much as our sweet conversation; such abundance of things does not matter as much as love's intimacy. So come now, my chosen beloved, dearer to me than all women, radiant light of my eyes and greater part of my soul!

She: I was alone in the forest and I loved secret places; often I fled from the uproar and I avoided the crowds. Now snow and ice are melting, leaves and grass growing green; the nightingale sings high above, and love burns in the cave of the heart.

He: Dearest one, do not delay now: let's bend our minds to loving! Without you I can't go on living; now we must love to the limit. What use to postpone it, my chosen one; it's got to happen soon anyway. You'll do it, so come, do it quickly—on my side, there's no delay!

—translation by Peter Dronke

Advertite, omnes populi (Rhineland, early 11th century)

Story-telling was an important part of the harper's art, and here, in the "Story of the Snow-Child," we even have a miniature farce, complete with a

sarcastic narrator and a deceitful married couple.

Text:

Listen, all you people, to an amusing story and hear, how a wife deceived a Swabian and how he deceived her in turn. A humble Swabian, citizen of Constance who was transporting rich freight across the ocean in ships, left at home an all-too-wanton wife. Scarcely had he cleaved the sea with gloomy oars when, look! a storm arises and the sea rages, the winds battle with one another, the billows surge, and, after many days at sea, the south wind deposits him, a wanderer, on a distant shore. In the meantime his wife is not idle at home; some traveling players are in town, and young men gather around, and, unmindful of her exiled husband, she receives them joyfully. Pregnant on the very next night, she bore an unrightful son on the rightful day.

After two years have passed, the exile returns. The unfaithful wife runs to meet him, dragging with her a little boy. After they have given kisses, the husband says to her, "Tell me from whom you have this child, or else you will suffer the extreme punishment." But she, fearing her husband, applies deceit. "My..." at last she begins, "my husband..." she stammers, "once, stricken with thirst in the Alps, I quenched my thirst with snow. So, pregnant from that, alas! I gave birth to this ruinous son! Languishing with love for you I arose at dawn and made my way barefoot across the snows and cold, and searched the desolate seas to see if I could find sails flying in the wind, or catch sight of the prow of a ship..."

Five years or more pass after this, and the merchant repairs his oars, refits his shattered ship, fastens the sails, and takes the snow-child with him. Once he has traversed the sea, he puts the child up for sale and, handing him over to a trader for hard cash, receives one hundred pounds; after selling the lad he returns a rich man. And upon entering his home he says to his wife: "Give solace, wife, give solace, dearest! . . . I lost your child, whom not even you yourself loved more than I. A storm arose and a raging wind drove us, too tired to resist, onto sandy shoals; and the sun scorched us all terribly, and that child of yours . . . melted! Give solace, wife, give solace, dearest!" Thus the treacherous Swabian tricked the wife, thus fraud overcame fraud: for the child whom the snow engendered quite literally melted under the sun.

—translation by Jan Ziolkowski

O admirabile Veneris idolum (Northern Italy, 11th century)

This famous poem has been the subject of much discussion over the years: Is it a heterosexual song of desire, sung by a woman, or is it an older man lamenting that his young male lover has been seduced by a rival (a genre known in antiquity as *paidikon*)? We cannot know for sure, and since the gender situation is vague the singer must embody both possibilities. We do know that the poem has its origins in northern Italy, near Verona, that its fame spread to Germanic lands, and that the melody is also known as that of the sacred pilgrims' song, "O Roma nobilis."

Text:

O marvelous idol of Venus, in whose substance there is no defect: may the prime-mover, who created the stars and heavens and who founded the seas and land, protect you. May you not suffer deception through the craft of a thief. May Clotho, who carries the distaff, cherish you. "Keep the boy safe!" not by supposition, but with resolute heart I entreat Lachesis, sister of Atropos, that she not consider pulling off the thread. May you have Neptune and Thetis as companions when you are borne over the river Adige. Why do you take flight—please tell—even though I love you? What shall I do, wretch, since I cannot see you? Hard substance from the bones of Mother Earth created humankind when the stones were cast. Of these this dear boy is one, who does not heed tearful moans. While I am sad, my rival will rejoice: I cry out like a hound when a fawn takes flight.

—translation by Jan Ziolkowski

Puella turbata (Frankish, 10th century)

Here, we reconstruct what could have been an instrumental tradition of minstrels from the Rhine with their rendering of an ancient Frankish melody, a piece entitled "Puella turbata" (The troubled girl). We will never learn who the girl was (although it's probably not hard to guess why she was troubled) but we do know the power that this melody had over the centuries, both within the church and outside it.

PROGRAM NOTES

Suavissima nunna

(Rhineland, early 11th century)

An amorous dialogue between a man and a nun, in which both participants begin each line singing in Latin and then finish it in Old German, making for a hilarious and chaotic swirl of erotic confusion. A medieval English censor was fairly successful in effacing this song (and other naughty lyrics) from the Canterbury manuscript, but a combination of technology, scholarship, and good luck have made a reconstruction possible.

Text:

He: Sweetest nun, ah, trust me joyfully! Blossom-time has come, the grass is green on the earth.

She: What do you want me to do, young man? You are wickedly urging your beloved far away from heaven.

He: My dearest one, put my love to the test! Now the leaves in the wood are green, now birds sing in the wood.

She: Let the nightingale sing! My soul will be Christ's, to whom I vowed myself, to whom I shall be true.

He: Oh lovely lady, I am telling you my trust, oh dwelling-place of my soul, angel of the heavens!

She: Yet the rewards of the angels will force you to betray the soul of your little bird.

He: Dearest nun, put my love to the test! What is more, I shall give you great honor in the world.

She: All such things pass like clouds in the sky. Only Christ's kingdom endures forever.

He: I too believe he reigns so beautifully: he does not refuse to give; that indeed does he grant.

She: I so want to trust in the name of my lover, who is true to me, that you are wounding my senses.

Narrator: Praise be to Love that he is converting her, her whom he will penetrate like the sun, as now she is eager for love.

—reconstruction and translation by Peter Dronke

Veni, dilectissime

(Rhineland, early 11th century)

This timeless text speaks for itself.

Text:

Come, dearest love (with ah! and oh!) to visit me. I will please you (with ah! and oh! and ah! and oh!). I am dying with desire (with ah! and oh!). How I long for love! (with ah! and oh! and ah! and oh! and ah! and oh!). If you come with the key (with ah! and oh!) you will soon be able to enter (with ah! and oh! and ah! and oh! and ah! and oh!).

—translation by Jan Ziolkowski