"... combining the breathy timbre of a portative organ
with the expressive interplay of a fine string quartet..."
(NY Times, 2006)

Venezia, *Il paradiso di dolci suoni*
The paradise of sweet sounds
1400-1600

Venice stands for mystery, amazement, contrast, unexpected discoveries, incredible beauty and *la dolce vita*. This Northern Italian city will eventually disappear in the water as the level of the Adriatic Sea is vastly rising, but its divine music will never seize to exist. Early improvisation, renaissance top hits, prima and seconda prattica with music of anonymous composers, Isaac, Agricola, Ciconia, Merula and others.

To quote an astonished Franz Liszt: *"Venice, such a deep enchantment"*

Musica Poetica: Venice circa 1500

- Amours amours — Hayne (Hayne van Ghizeghem)
- E qui le dira — Anonymous (Heinrich Isaac)
- Helas ce nest pas — Sthokem (Johannes de Stokem)
- Je nay dueul — Agricola (Alexander Agricola)
- Dit le burguygnon — Anonymous

(O. Petrucci. *Harmonice musices odhecaton Canti A B C*, Venice, 1501-1503))

Intermezzo: North Italy circa. 1400

- Czaldy Waldy — Anonymous
- [l]A Manfredina — Anonymous
- [l]A Rotta della manfredina — Anonymous

(GB-London bl add.29987 & CZ-Vysehrad Collection ms.1396)

Capricci Musicali: from the codex Faenza circa 1400

- Aquila altera – Creatura gentil – Uccel di Dio — Anonymous (Jacopo da Bologna)
- Bel fiore dança — Anonymous

(I-Florence, *Pan* 26 & I-Faenza, *Biblioteca Comunale* 117)

Intermezzo: North Italy circa 1400

- [I]Sabella — Anonymous

(GB-London bl add.29987)

La Bizarra: Ciconia in Padua circa 1400

- Una panthera — Johannes Ciconia
- Venecie mundi splendor – Michael, que stena — Johannes Ciconia

I-Bologna bc 15 & I-Perugia Peco 3065)

Intermezzo: North Italy circa 1400

- [l]Amento di tristano — Anonymous

(GB-London bl add.29987)

Ciacole: Venice circa 1615

- La Marcha — Tarquinio Merula
- La Livia — Tarquinio Merula
- La Lusignuola — Tarquinio Merula

(T. Merula, Il Primo Libro delle Canzoni a quattro Voci…, Venice, 1615)

"Printing has lately become an art in which many fine gentlemen have been trying to outdo each other every day, but no one has ever been able to find a way to print measured music. Yet we can neither praise God nor celebrate weddings without such music, which is indeed called for at every joyous occasion in life", **Ottaviano Petrucci** wrote in the dedication of the ***Harmonice musices odhecaton***, first published in 1501. What Petrucci achieved in this volume entirely changed the face of European music; he was the first in history to invent a successful method to mechanically print polyphonic music. Music could now be made in hundreds of elegant copies and distributed internationally.

The wonderful odhecaton manuscript includes music by the most famous composers of the time, including Johannes Ockeghem, Josquin des Prez, Antoine Brumel, Jacob Obrecht and many others, and is a faithful and reliable testament to the popularity of the chanson in northern Italy during the first years of the sixteenth century. This anthology of about one hundred works was a cornucopia (horn of plenty) of *top hits*. Odhecaton includes many textless works, based on vocal models, thus arguably intended for performance on consort instruments such as gambas or recorders. FRQ has carefully combined five love-related pieces that suit their instruments best. The recorders used are handcrafted copies of surviving instruments made by the Venetian-English Bassano family, which can be seen in *Kunsthistorisches Museum* in Vienna.

The first literary traces of monophonic **dance music and estampitas** are to be found around 1100. First musical examples include such famous melodies as *Kalenda Maya* (Reimbaut de Vaqueiras) and the four *estempida* by Cerveri de Girona. Occitania and the region north of Paris are the geographical centers up to 1350. Roughly, from 1400 on the Italian *istanpitte* (now preserved in London, British Library add.29987) set the tone for the future evolution of dance melodies. The *istanpitte* manuscript probably comes from Umbria, or possibly Perugia of even Venice. It's a visually rather sober manuscript in Italian notation that contains eight instrumental pieces with programmatic titles, of which we present you a selection:
La Manfredina is a complex and repetitive melody, of which we have no textual clues or indications. It's a dance in two parts, followed by a *rotta*. ***La Rotta*** is comprised of similar musical material, although here the slow melody turns into a dance. From the same manuscript also comes the ***Lamento di Tristano***, a musical interpretation of the original Celtic Saga of the famous singer Tristan, who is passionately in love with Isolde. A solemn exception to this Italian story is the melody ***Czaldy Waldy***, which is the earliest preserved Czech dance. The title may be a garbling of the Turkish *saldy maldy*, meaning *to start dancing*.

What we propose in our medieval dances and istanpitte is an attempt – inspired by a historically multicultural awareness – to recreate a certain art of sounding the recorder during that medieval period. The collection of istanpitte and improvisations may be considered as a tribute to all the jongleurs and poet-musicians who sincerely believed that, through music, the soul could be stirred to boldness and valour, magnanimity and liberality – qualities that give dignity to the human condition.

Ut eorum anomos ad audaciam et fortitudinem
Magnanimitatem et liberalitatem commoveat,
Quae omnia faciunt ad bonum pregiment.

Jacopo da Bologna (c.1310-1386?) is one of the most interesting composers of the Italian trecento. Jacopo concentrated mainly on composing madrigals, including both canonic (caccia-madrigal) and non-canonic types. Of the first type the politically-inspired ***Aquila altera*** is a brilliant example. Jacopo's ideal was the"*suave dolce melodia*", which in *Aquila altera* is very clear in the opening phrase of both canti. In addition to his compositions, he also wrote a short theoretical treatise, *Questa è l'arte del biscanto misurato*. He may also have been active as a poet, to judge from the autobiographical texts of the madrigals *Io me sun un che* and *Vestìse la cornachia*. Jacopo is one of the rare composers of whom a portrait survives (see picture).

Haughty eagle, turn your heroic eye to the summit of the lofty mind
where your life takes its repose.
There the state of bliss both seems and is.

Bird of God, symbol of justice. your glory is prized above all.
because your great deeds are crowned by victory.
There you see the shadow, and there the true essence.

Gentle creature, noble animal. Single-mindedly your nature
wants to rise high and to contemplate the sun.
There is the image and the perfection.

Explicitly designated in the title as a dance, ***Bel fiore dança*** was undoubtedly conceived as an instrumental composition and was not based on a vocal model, as were the overwhelming majority of pieces in the Faenza Fa117 collection. Striking for this piece is the complete absence of exuberant ornamental figuration that characterizes the manuscript. To the two-voice Faenza texture we have added a slightly *subtilior* countertenor.

This *bel fiore* (also *belfior*) becomes very popular in the whole of Italy, and is found in numerous dance-manuscripts and lute tablatures in fifteenth and sixteenth century Venice.
(J. Abondante, lib. I, Venice, 1536, *Bel fior gagliarda*; J.M. da Crema, lib. I, Venice, 1546, *Saltarello bel fior*; M.A. del Pifaro, lib. I, Venice, 1546, *Saltarello bel fiore*; and many others)

With **Johannes Ciconia** (° Luik c.1370, + Padua 1411), thé hinge-figure to the fifteenth century, the 'invasion' of the composers from the Low Countries in Italy began. The 'oltremontani' would play a leading role in the music history Western-Europe for almost two centuries. With Ciconia a new style emerges, one that combines the ingenuity of the French Ars Nova with the fluid melodies of the Italian belcanto. To this combination Ciconia adds a great sense of polyphonic writing and feeling for text. From the many two- and three-voiced pieces that Ciconia wrote in honor of Italian cities or courts, FRQ has selected two:

Una panthera is an expressive three-voiced madrigal in honor of the city of Lucca. Remarkably for such early music, this piece is securely dated: May or June 1399. At that time, Ciconia was serving Giangaleazzo Visconti in Padua. *Una panthera*, one of his most famous and delighting compositions, was composed for the visit of the noble Lazzaro, from the city of Lucca. The lyrics are deeply flattering. They refer to the mythical founding of Lucca by an armored panther (or

leopard), in the company of the war-god Mars. The celebration of the creature's strong defense of the city is aimed to flatter Lazzaro into accepting terms for a political and military alliance with Padua.

When Venice, under doge Michele Steno, conquered Padua six years later (in 1405), Ciconia composed the motet ***Venecie mundi splendor*** */ Michael qui Stena domus*, praising the noble city of Venice, the powerful doge and Italy. This non-isorhythmic motet has two texts, one praising Venice, the other honouring the conqueror Michele Steno. The (translated) incipits of both canti are as follows:

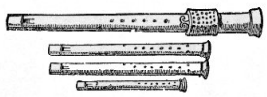
Venice, thou marvel of the world and pride of Italy! In thee all striving for the canons of elegance flourishes.

Rejoice, thou mother of the sea, thou saving force by which each evildoer is cleansed. Thou art a mainstay to land and sea, a support for the lowly.

Michele, who dost bear the burden of the ducal house of Stena, honor to thee, for thou, a good man, dost lead a celibate life.

Kindly prince, like unto Phoebus, the world salutes thee, And thou, the ever noble victor, Dost apportion the fruit of victory to thy people

Unfortunately, no recorders have come down to us from the time of Ciconia and the istanpitte. For Ciconia's pieces as well as the Faenza Fa117 collection, FRQ makes use of a very rare collection of instruments, made by the Amsterdam-based maker Adrian Brown. Brown has provided us with a small cylindrical consort based on the woodcut illustrations in the treatise of Sebastian Virdung (*Musica getuscht und angezogen*, 1511, see picture).



Having little basis in surviving instruments and using the woodcuts as a template, he constructed a speculative recorder consort at pitch a'=520 (which is the pitch of the oldest still-sounding organs in northern Italy) consisting of a Bass in F, tenors in c and altos in g. These recorders in walnut have a quite peculiar sound and an interesting and colorful articulation, which suits this early repertoire best.

Italy circa 1600: one of the most intriguing periods in the history of music. Throughout Europe, polyphony holds sway. In Italy, with Venice at its center, a new style is being created. The composer aims to arouse feelings in his listeners primarily with virtuoso diminutions, harmonically supported melodies and expressive intervals. This rediscovery of pure instrumental music – its 'emancipation from vocal music – knew leading figures in Monteverdi, Caccini, and twenty years later also in the oeuvre of **Tarquinio Merula** (1607-1665). Merula, a well-trained organist and violin virtuoso, worked as bandmaster and director of church music in Cremona, Bergamo and Venice. With his late *canzone* (1637), he belonged to the early advocates of the sonata di camera and di chiesa and was one of the most advanced composers of the time. Merula's works are to be found in numerous instrumental prints in the whole of the seventeenth century. ***La Marcha***, ***La Livia*** and ***La Lusignuola*** are taken from the first book of canzonas. The preface of this 1615 adds the text '*per sonare conogni sorti de strumenti musicale*'. FRQ chooses four expressive recorders to perform this music '*per movere l'affetto dell'animo*'.

Tom Beets 2009