

# The Canterbury Tales



**Chaucer's  
world  
in words  
and music**

## **CANCIONERO**

**Anne Purnell – voice, recorders, hurdy-gurdy, percussion**

**Anthony Purnell – voice, recorder, bagpipes, strings**

**Kate Sladen – voice, strings, percussion**

**Brian White – voice, percussion**

**Dianne White - reader**

## **The Baroque Singers**

**Claire Evans – Solo soprano**

**All Saints' Church, Tudeley**

**7.30pm Saturday 8th March 2014**

## **CHAUCER AND MUSIC**

Chaucer's duties as an Esquire of the King's Household included arranging entertainment for visitors to the court. As a poet this will have meant writing and singing songs – at the close of the Canterbury Tales begs forgiveness for “many a song and many a lecherous lay”. Unfortunately none of his surviving poems have music associated with them.

There are many references to music in the Tales. He names a variety of stringed instruments: the harp (a term which, in northern Europe, often included the lyre), the lute, the rebec, the gittern, the psaltery, the hurdy gurdy and the rote (an alternative name for the crwth). We are told that the Knight's son enjoys singing and playing an instrument which may have been either a flute or a recorder. The Miller plays the bagpipes. Chaucer describes the ways in which characters sing and dance and mentions a few songs by name.

Although Chaucer was helping to establish English as a literary language French influence was still very important and the most influential composer of the day was Guillaume de Machaut. Italy was also an important influence, especially in the development of an instrumental repertory. Chaucer travelled in France and Italy and had a good knowledge of the literature of both countries. Spain also exercised an influence, largely because of the popular pilgrimages to Compostella and Montserrat. Since Spain had been occupied by the Moors for centuries their influence was also spread through the returning pilgrims.

**Sumer is icumen in**

*Anon (GBLbm. Harl. 978 f11v)*

*IN APRIL ...*

**Solemne canticum**

*Sarum rite - 29th December*

*AT THE TABARD INN*

**Thomas gemma Cantuarie**

*Anon c. 1300*

*THE KNIGHT*

**L'homme armé**

*Anon*

*THE SQUIRE*

**La Manfredina**

*Anon (GBLbm. Add. 29987 f63v)*

*THE PRIORESS*

**Quant voi la flor novele**

*Anon (Paris, Bibl. Nationale, naf 1050)*

**La Quarte Estampie Royal**

*Anon (Paris, Bibl. Nationale, ff 844)*

*THE FRANKLIN*

**Quant je voi – Colin Muset**

*Paris, Bibl. Nat. fr.846, fo.125v*

*THE GUILDSMEN & THE COOK*

**Trotto**

*Anon (GBLbm. Add. 29987 f62v)*

**INTERVAL**

*THE MONK*

**Et cler et lai**

*Anon (Paris, Bibl. Nationale, naf 1050)*

*THE SUMMONER*

**Ad mortem festinamus**

*Llibre Vermell, Montserrat*

*THE MILLER*

**Bransle de Bourgogne**

*Anon*

*THE PARSON*

**Angelus ad virginem**

*Anon (Cambridge, UL MS Add. 710, f130v)*

*THE PLOUGHMAN*

**L'Estampie du Chevalier**

*Moniot d'Arras*

*THE CARPENTER'S WIFE (The Miller's Tale)*

**Douce Dame Jolie – Guillaume de Machaut**

*Paris, Bibl. Nationale, ff 1584*

*THE SAILOR*

**Bache, bene venies**

*Carmina Burana no.200*

*THE PARDONER*

**Perspice Christicola**

*Anon (GBLbm. Harl. 978 f11v)*

*THE WIFE OF BATH*

**Dum Pater Familias**

*Codex Calixtinus*

“Sumer is icumen in”, and its Latin version “Perspice Christicola”, were probably written at Reading Abbey in the mid 13<sup>th</sup> century. The English text celebrates the arrival of the cuckoo. The Latin text is an Easter anthem proclaiming the victory over death. The accompanying instrument is a lyre, an instrument popular in northern Europe.

“Solemne canticum” is a plainsong sequence from the setting of the mass for the feast day of St Thomas à Beckett. It declares the victory of Thomas, martyred in a place consecrated to Christ.

“Thomas gemma Cantuarie” has two parallel texts. One praises Thomas who died for the faith in Canterbury while the second praises Thomas, a monk at St Martin’s Priory, Dover, who was killed by the French in a raid in 1295 when he refused to show them the Priory’s treasures.

“L’homme armé” was the great Crusade song of the Middle Ages. It is a reminder of the dangers of using force – “You should not trust the armed man”. The song was first heard at the siege of Jerusalem in 1099. Many later composers have integrated the tune into their compositions.

“La Manfredina” and the “Trotto” are 14<sup>th</sup> century dance tunes from Italy. Both tunes are found in a manuscript preserved in the British Library.

“Quant voi la flor novele” is an anonymous song from France. It is a prayer to the Virgin Mary asking her to intercede that our sins might be taken away. The accompanying instruments are a rebec and a psaltery.

“La Quarte Estampie Royal” comes from a collection of French dance tunes which may well have been used as test pieces for competitions between minstrels. We share the tune between recorder, oud and rebec.

Colin Muset was a trouvère, a poet and musician from Northern France. He worked in Lorraine and Champagne from about 1230. He tried writing songs about courtly love but achieved greater popularity with his more personal songs. In “Quant je voi” the poet sees winter approaching and wishes he could find a comfortable to stay with plenty of good food – “pork, beef, mutton, wild duck, pheasant, venison, fat chickens and capons and baskets of good cheeses. Female company would also be welcomed! Muset is known to have played the medieval fiddle. We are also using a hurdy gurdy.

“Et cler et lai” is a religious song which uses a tune by Jehan Erars. The original song described a group of boys going out for a picnic and ending up fighting over a girl. This version is a song to the Virgin Mary asking for guidance and forgiveness. The tune retains a rustic quality emphasised by the accompanying hurdy-gurdy and crwth.

“Ad mortem festinamus” is a dance song from the Llibre Vermell – a collection of songs compiled to be suitable evening entertainment for pilgrims waiting outside the monastery at Montserrat. In an age when plagues such as “The Black Death” were common the sentiments of the song are understandable: “Life is short, death comes quickly. Unless you change your life you will not be blessed and enter the Kingdom of Heaven. All is vanity. We are hurrying towards Death.” The accompanying instrument is a gittern.

The “Bransle de Bourgogne” was a dance which enjoyed a long period of popularity. It makes a fine duet for hurdy gurdy and bagpipes.

“Angelus ad virginem”, a description of the angel’s visit to Mary, was a very popular song in medieval England. Four manuscript copies have survived and one of these has three versions of the music. The song was written in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century, probably in

France, although there was a contemporary translation into English – “Gabriel fram heven-king”. In the Miller’s Tale Chaucer describes Nicholas, the young student, playing the Psaltery and singing the Latin version of the song.

“L’Estampie du Chevalier” is an instrumental version of the song “Ce fu en mai” by Moniot d’Arras, a trouvère working between 1213 and 1239.

Guillaume de Machaut (1300 – 1377) was a major literary figure as well as a musician. In his early career he was much involved in court life as secretary to Jean de Luxembourg, King of Bohemia. “Douce Dame Jolie” is a virelai, a song with a refrain. The poet tells the sweet, pretty lady that his happiness is entirely dependent on her kindness.

“Bache, bene venies” comes from the collection of poems known as Carmina Burana. Several of these poems were famously set to music by the 20<sup>th</sup> century composer Carl Orff. The poems were written by the Golliards, itinerant theology students who were in no hurry to complete their studies and take their vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. This is a drinking song in praise of wine and its ability to make men confident and women generous ... The small skin covered lute is copied from an instrument held by a musician carved on the entrance of the cathedral at Compostella.

“Dum Pater Familias” was the hymn traditionally sung by pilgrims arriving at the tomb of St James at Compostella. We use hurdy-gurdy, rebec and oud to accompany it.



# CANCIONERO

Weald Music Services  
Ferndale Cottage  
Laddingford  
Maidstone  
ME18 6BU

Tel: 07802 752995

E-mail: [cancionero@mail.com](mailto:cancionero@mail.com)

Web site: <http://www.kentminstrels.co.uk>

Instruments featured in this concert: **Soprano Recorders** by John Hanchet (Germany) and Phil Bleazey (Nottingham), **Alto Recorder** by Moeck (Germany), **Bagpipe** by Friedrich Dokter (Austria), **Rebec** by NRI (Manchester), **Hurdy-Gurdy** by Martin Turner (Norwich), **Oud** from Gamil Georges (Cairo), **Compostellan Lute, Gittern, Lyre, Psaltery, Crwth, and Fiddle** by Anthony Purnell (Kent), and percussion collected from a variety of sources.

The next concert featuring The Baroque Singers, accompanied by Cancionero, is at St John’s Church, Groombridge on 7<sup>th</sup> June 2014.

The programme includes:

- Andrea Gabrieli: Missa Brevis
- Martin Codax: Cantigas de Amigo
- Italian Laude – 13<sup>th</sup> century praise songs