

■ De Caelis
Direction Laurence Brisset



■ Offering from the heart

Courtly Music of the 13th and 14th Centuries: Poet-Musicians
of Oil and Oc

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Offering from the heart

Courtly music from the 13th and 14th centuries

This program, both melodious and poetic, offers a window into the human soul, caught between the sweetness and torment of love.

Voices, bowed vielles, organetto, flutes, and vihuela de penola come together for a romantic journey once sung by poet-musicians.

This little theater of intimacy is filled with desire, sadness, separation, beauty, and sensuality. The courtly music of the 13th and 14th centuries celebrates a refined and chivalric ideal but also reflects the doubts and uncertainties of the heart. Love is universal, and the songs of yesterday still touch the hearts of today, a vibrant emotion that defies time and continues to move us.

And to blur the boundaries, as always with De Caelis, ancient works blend with contemporary French songs “seasoned” with a medieval twist. A touch of whimsy that delights the heart!

Anonymous songs, troubadours and trouvères, Bernard de Ventadorn, Jaufré Rudel, Beatriz de Dia, Gace Brulé, and anonymous motets from the Montpellier manuscript.

Laurence Brisset, artistic direction, organetto

Clara Pertuy, vocals

Claire Trouilloud, vocals

Jean-Lou Descamps, vielle, vihuela, flutes, chalumeau

In the Game of Love, the Offering of the Heart

In the courtly art of the Middle Ages, the offering of the heart marks the initial stage of the romantic journey. Since its first appearance in the 14th century in *Le Roman d’Alexandre*, the red heart, with its rounded and symmetrical shape as we know it today, has symbolized romantic love. From that point onward, it appears in numerous works such as *Le Livre du Cuer d’Amours Espris* by René d’Anjou, or *Le Petit Livre d’Amour* by Pierre Sala. Over time, its image spread everywhere—from medieval manuscripts to playing cards, from coats of arms to emojis—the heart has become a universal symbol.

A Refined and Chivalrous Ideal

A new art of love emerged in the Middle Ages: *Fin’amor* or courtly love.

Love is described as an experience that is both sweet and painful, filled with desire, hope, but also fear and uncertainty.

First the troubadours, and then the trouvères, spread this courtly model with its well-established rules. They sang of an idealized love where the lady, often unattainable, is portrayed as





perfect. As for the lover, he is devoted but typically unhappy. His romantic quest tests his chivalric qualities, as the service of love exalts loyalty, fidelity, and unwavering devotion. A vast corpus of songs, poetry, and romances is dedicated to this theme.

Poet-Musicians

For the troubadour and, later, the trouvère, the text was of paramount importance—the melody had to first serve the poetry, just as the lover serves his lady.

A favorite form of entertainment in medieval courts, their songs exalted an idealized love. They innovated and created, deriving from the Occitan word *trobar* (to compose or invent), new ideas to embroider on an established framework.

They placed their talent in the service of enduring emotions that defy time and continue to move us. They played an essential role in the development of poetry and music in the vernacular language in France, inspiring works such as *Le Roman de la Rose*, a major piece of courtly literature where contemplation and wonder are coupled with formal perfection.

The Song, a Little Theater

Nature—any intimate place where desire can arise, such as a garden, grove, fountain, or bedroom—forms the setting. Knight, poet, shepherdess, and distant lady are the actors. Spring evokes love and renewal; winter, dawn, sadness, or separation. Birds are the lovers' messengers, while flowers and gardens symbolize the beauty of the beloved. The tension between the sensual experience of love and its spiritual or idealized aspects reflects medieval debates about the nature of this sentiment.

The Motets

At the same time, astonishing multi-voice compositions flourished: motets. Highly fashionable in the 13th century, they skillfully combined musical discourse and dialectical art. They layered and intertwined different texts and even languages. These small Towers of Babel, whether masterpieces of rhetoric or cheerful chatter, reveal the enthusiasm of musicians exploring the new possibilities of notation. They feature the simultaneous superimposition of texts where each voice expresses a sentiment—be it romantic, religious, or even political. The sacred and the profane often coexist within them, and it is not uncommon for the same words to be used to sing of the ideal woman and the Virgin Mary.

The Accompaniment

We know little about the instrumental accompaniment of these songs, but the iconography of the time offers a treasure trove of clues. The many instruments depicted allow us to imagine a practice balancing historical structure with creative freedom.



You will hear some instruments from the rich medieval instrumentarium:

- A bowed vielle, ancestor of the violin.
- An organetto, a small portable organ consisting of a keyboard played with one hand while the other operates a bellows.
- A chalumeau, a wooden wind instrument with a cylindrical pipe made of reed or boxwood and a single beating reed.

Various types of flutes.

- A vihuela de penola, a plucked string instrument played with a plectrum, a precursor to the guitar.

These instruments have been faithfully recreated based on historical sources.

The Program

Chanson, Canso, Aube, Reverdie, Jeu-parti, composed by Bernard de Ventadorn, Beatriz de Dia, Jaufre Rudel in the langue d'oc, as well as other anonymous works. Secular motets in langue d'oïl from the 13th century, mostly originating from the Montpellier Manuscript, along with ballads and rondeaux by Guillaume de Machaut punctuated by a few dances.

To blur the boundaries, we have paired these ancient works with some contemporary refrains "cooked" in the medieval style.

These intimate works are immediately moving, opening a window onto the medieval soul. The lines between past and present fade, allowing us to feel our hearts beating in unison with the same concerns.

The title of this program is inspired by *Le Cuer d'Amour Espris* by René d'Anjou, a tale that is both romantic and allegorical, recounting the adventures of the Heart in the form of a dream.



DE CAELIS ENSEMBLE

www.decaelis.fr



Founded in 1998 under the artistic direction of Laurence Brisset, the ensemble De Caelis explores musical realms of both the past and present, offering human and sensitive interpretations. Specialists in the a cappella vocal repertoire of the Middle Ages, De Caelis incorporates contemporary creations, most of which are commissions as part of program development. The ensemble invites composers to use its vocal material to express a unique language that engages with ancient writings, fostering dialogues between creators and blending sensitivities.

Deeply involved in musical research, De Caelis regularly participates in residencies, experimenting with timbre, ornamentation, and improvisation. The ensemble initiates artistic collaborations across a wide range of disciplines, opening new horizons that allow performances in both heritage sites and modern venues. It works with actors, musicians, dancers, videographers, visual artists, circus performers, and puppeteers.

De Caelis also organizes opportunities for the public to engage with its concerts and designs innovative outreach activities: musical happenings, concerts in private homes, participatory creations, listening booths, and more.



IN THE PRESS



«There is much flesh, warmth, and femininity. » Télérama



« True moments of grace. » Diapason



« Masterful » Le Pèlerin Magazine



« t's beautiful, it's sublime to hear » France Culture



« The singers create an otherworldly brilliance. » Le Monde de la Musique



« A Crush » Le Figaro



« The French ensemble's sound is sumptuous » Goldberg Magazine



« Passionate and exciting musicians » Cadences



«Poignant, even to the point of ecstasy » Répertoire

CONTACTS



ENSEMBLE DE CAELIS
www.decaelis.fr

Artistic direction
Laurence Brisset

Production and distribution
Céline Landais
production@decaelis.fr
+33 (0)6 63 62 30 74

Administration
Aurélie Gorce-Marion
direction@decaelis.fr
+33 (0)6 03 08 50 37

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De Caelis is a member of Profedim and the Fédération des ensembles vocaux et instrumentaux spécialisés (FEVIS).

