

2023
YORK
EARLY
MUSIC
FESTIVAL

ApotropaiK

The harp, the philter and the sword

All Saints' Church, North Street

Wednesday 12 July 1.00pm

ApotropaiK

The harp, the philter, and the sword: Medieval music for Tristan and Yseult

Quan vei la lausetta mover	Bernart de Ventadorn (c. 1130/40-c. 1190/1200)
Chominciamento di gioia [instrumental]	Anonymous *

La u jou fui dedens la mer (Lai du Boire Pesant)	Anonymous **
D'amours vient mon chant et mon plour	Anonymous **

D'amours viennent li dous penser	Anonymous **
Palamento [instrumental]	Anonymous *

Ja fis canchonnetes et lais (Tristan's mortal Lai)	Anonymous **
Li solaus luist et clers et biaus (Yseult's mortal Lai)	Anonymous **

Di novo è giunto [madrigal]	Jacopo da Bologna (fl. 1340-?1386)
Tant me sui de dire teü (Lai du Voir disant)	Anonymous **

La Harpe de mélodie [virelai]	Jaquemin de Senleches (fl. 1382-3)
Honeysuckle Lai	Anonymous ***

Lamento di Tristano; La rotta	Anonymous *
A vous, Tristan, amis vrai	Anonymous **

* London: British Library, Add. MS 29987 (end 14th century)

** *Tristan en prose*, Vienna: Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, 2542 (13th century)

*** *Chansonnier said of Noailles*, Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, fr.12615 (13th century)

*We are grateful to the John Feldberg Foundation for its
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The famous myth of Tristan and Yseult was the starting point for the development of our programme. Although the origins of the story take us back to the end of the twelfth century, it was not until the following century, that of the trouvères, that the first musical settings on the theme of the two lovers appeared. Thus, in the so-called *Tristan in prose* (c. 1240), Lais (or songs) appear, acting as independent commentaries on the narrative, most of which are preserved in a manuscript in the National Library in Vienna. Fascinating in more ways than one, these pieces give a voice to the characters of the legend and are contemporaneous with the creation of the stories. They serve as a 'trail of breadcrumbs' in our musical evocation of Tristan and Yseult's love story.

More than any other, the 'mortal' Lais of the two main characters provide a metaphor of love as a mortal wound, foreshadowing the tragic end of the story. The origin of their passion is recounted in the *Lai du Boire Pesant*, where Tristan describes the effects of the potion he drank with Yseult on the boat that took them both back to Cornwall. The letter sent by Yseult to Tristan, which reminds him of his love despite their separation, illustrates their mutual and unalterable feelings, as does the *Lai D'amours vient mon chant et mon plour* where Tristan accepts his enslavement to love. But Jealousy is the daughter of Love: Tristan feels it after hearing the *Lai* sung by Palamède, who has also fallen in love with Yseult. It is also jealousy that drives King Mark, who is reviled in the *Lai du Voir disant* – a magnificent example of a polemic song.

Other pieces contemporary with the first rewritings of the myth reveal the rich melting pot that the stories created in the imagination of medieval musician-poets. The figure of Tristan serves as a fitting subject for Bernard de Ventadorn's famous *canço*, *Quan vei la lausetta mover* ('Tristan, you will have nothing more of me,/for I am going away, unhappy, I know not where'). The *Honeysuckle Lai*, a masterpiece attributed to Tristan in the narrative, did not give rise to a specific song in the *Tristan en prose*; there is, however, another example in a *chansonniér* preserved in Paris, which also recalls the famous *Lai* written by Marie de France (fl. 1160-1215) on the same theme.

Two fourteenth-century vocal pieces shed polyphonic light on this earlier series of Lais. Jacopo da Bologna's madrigal evokes the world of chivalry and Senleches' virelai *La harpe de mélodie* reminds us that the harp occupies a special function in the *Tristan en prose*: it is the instrument that accompanies the Lais, played by the characters themselves or an intermediary, called a 'harper'.

Finally, the instrumental pieces are all taken from the so-called 'London' manuscript (British Library, Add. MS 29987). This choice was made because of the presence in

this source of the famous *Lamento di Tristano*. Tristan's lament is literally translated into music, for a purpose that has yet to be identified.

No one knows for what occasion the Lais in the Vienna manuscript were conceived. Perhaps they were part of the 'performance' of the medieval novel? In the Middle Ages, the concept of the concert as we know it today had not yet been invented. But it is clear that these Lais were born out of the myth itself: Tristan fulfils the ideal of the thirteenth-century trouvère, the musician-poet who devotes himself to 'finding' both the music and the text of his works.

Quan vei la lausetta mover

A troubadour, disappointed in love for his lady, calls for Tristan, the most famous musician-knight, to help him.

La u jou fui dedens la mer (Lai du Boire Pesant)

Tristan sings of his feelings after drinking the love philter on the boat bringing Yseult back to Cornwall.

D'amours vient mon chant et mon plour

Tristan is now enslaved by his love for Yseult.

D'amours viennent li dous penser

Palamède, another knight, sings of his burning love for Yseult. Tristan hears it and, jealous, challenges him to a duel.

Ja fis canchonnetes et lais (Tristan's mortal Lai)

Tristan comes across a misleadingly friendly letter written by Yseult to Kahédin, a knight she wants to get rid of not but too unkindly. Tristan, thinking that his love is lost, has but one last wish: death.

Li solaus luist et clers et biaux (Yseult's mortal Lai)

Yseult is in her garden. Mistakenly thinking that Tristan is dead she wants to throw herself on his sword but King Mark stops her at the last minute.

Tant me sui de dire teü (Lai du Voir disant)

An insulting Lai of Dinadan, addressed to King Mark who, through jealousy, broke the courtly pact of secrecy.

Honeysuckle Lai

Tristan and Yseult meet secretly in the forest. Tristan sings a Lai about their eternal love and his hope for a speedy reunion. They bind their fate to the tree under which they embrace: a honeysuckle.

A vous, Tristan, amis verai

A love letter from Yseult to Tristan.

ApotropaiK

Clémence Niclas *voice, recorders*

Louise Bouedo *bowed fiddle*

Marie-Domitille Murez *gothic harp*

Clément Stagnol *medieval lute*

‘Apotropaique’ is a French adjective meaning an object or saying used to protect against evil or misfortune. The members of the ApotropaiK ensemble chose this evocative name to unite them in their passion for medieval music. They met at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Lyon and were taught by some of the leading specialists in medieval music.

The repertoire of the ensemble goes from the twelfth century to the fifteenth century, from the first troubadours’ songs to the birth of Renaissance music. The ensemble is particularly interested in instrumental or vocal monodies such as the French and Italian estampies or the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*. Its members also like to immerse themselves in the repertoire of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries by playing the instrumental diminutions of the Faenza Codex or the Buxheimer Orgelbuch, the Bourgogne court songs or the melodies of the heart-shaped songbook.

The ensemble gave its first performances at the Cluny medieval music centre in Paris in November 2016. Then, after winning the first prize at the Journées de musiques anciennes de Vanves competition in November 2017, they were invited to several festivals and concert venues in France and Europe. In July 2022, they took part in the York International Young Artists Competition, winning the Friends of York Early Music Festival prize, the EEEMERGING prize and the Cambridge Early Music prize.

ApotropaiK is in residence at the Royaumont Foundation (2023-2025) and thanks Anne Ibos-Augé, musicologist, and Damien de Carné, professor of medieval literature at the University of Lorraine, for their expertise in helping to create this programme.



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YORK EARLY MUSIC FESTIVAL

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