



BLUE  
HERON

# Christmas & New Year's in 15th-Century France & Burgundy

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## Advent

- 1 Plainchant *O clavis David* (O-antiphon for December 20) JM ST PG CB 1:18
- 2 Jacob Obrecht (1457/8-1505) *Factor orbis* CB KL / JP JR / CH AS / JM ST / CB PG 8:10
- 3 Plainchant *O virgo virginum* (O-antiphon for December 24) ES KL MR 1:10
- 4 Josquin Desprez (?) (c. 1455-1521) *O virgo virginum* CB JR JM JP PG CB 6:43
- 5 Guillaume Du Fay (c. 1397-1474) *Conditor alme siderum* (alternatim hymn) CB JR JP 3:19
- 6 Antoine Brumel (c. 1460-c.1512) *Ave Maria gratia dei plena* MRES KL 1:56

## Christmas

- 7 Johannes Regis (c. 1425-1496) *O admirabile commercium / Verbum caro factum est*  
ES KL JM ST CB 7:52
- 8 Du Fay *Letabundus* (sequence) KL JM JP / ES CH JR 5:37
- 9 Johannes Ciconia (c. 1370-1412) *Gloria Spiritus et alme* JM JR PG CB 5:02
- 10 Brumel *Nato canunt omnia* MRES / JM JR / CH JP / AS ST / CB PG 8:58

## New Year's Day

- 11 Nicolas Grenon (c. 1380-1456) *La plus belle et douce figure* KL gh sm 3:50
- 12 Guillaume Malbecque (c. 1400-1465) *Dieu vous doinst bon jour et demy* MR JM JP 2:38
- 13 Anonymous *Auxce bon youre delabonestren* [ ? A ce jour de la bonne estrenne ] lj gh sm 1:29
- 14 Arnold de Lantins (d. 1432) *Amours servir et honnourer* MR AS sm 2:52
- 15 Baude Cordier (fl. c. 1400) *Dame excellent ou sont bonté, scavoir* JR JM ST PG 4:29
- 16 Cordier *Ce jour de l'an qui maint doist estrenier* SM lj sm 3:49

Total time 69:17

## Blue Heron

### Cantus

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### Instrumentalists

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Laura Jeppesen *rebec & fiddle*  
Scott Metcalfe *harp & fiddle, artistic director*

### Tenor & Contratenor

Corey Dalton Hart, Jason McStoots, Jacob Perry,  
James Reese, Aaron Sheehan, Sumner Thompson

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Recorded June 11 & September 7-14, 2024  
Church of the Redeemer, Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts

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Joel Gordon *mastering*  
Scott Metcalfe *producer*  
Scott Metcalfe, Brad Michel & Jason McStoots *session producers*  
Matthew Bennett & Joel Gordon *editing*

John Kramer Design

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All music edited from original sources by Scott Metcalfe, except *O admirabile commercium* edited by Sean Gallagher. Many thanks to Fabrice Fitch for composing a second strophe for *Dame excellent* and to Christopher Page for granting us permission to adapt his completion of the text of Cordier's *Ce jour de l'an*.

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Cover: Follower of Jan Joest of Kalkar (Netherlandish), *The Adoration of the Christ Child*, c. 1515.  
Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC (Public domain: [www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/436781](http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/436781)).

ADVENT

**O clavis David** et sceptrum domus Israel, qui aperis et nemo claudit, claudis et nemo aperit: veni et educ vincitum de domo carceris, sedentem in tenebris et umbra mortis.

O key of David and scepter of the house of Israel, who opens and no one shuts, who shuts and no one opens: come, and lead forth the captive, sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death, from the house of imprisonment.

*O-antiphon for December 20*

**Factor orbis**, Deus, nos famulos

Exaudi clamantes ad te tuos,  
Et nostra crimina laxa  
Die ista lucifera.  
Noe, noe!

Veni Domine et noli tardare: relaxa facinora plebis tue Israel.

Ecce Dominus veniet, noli timere, alleluia.

Canite tuba in Sion, quia prope est dies Domini.  
Ad te Domine levavi animam meam: Deus meus in te confido, non erubescam.

Crastina die erit vobis salus.

Deus, qui sedes super thronos et iudicas equitatem, esto refugium pauperum in tribulatione: quia tu solus laborem et dolorem consideras.

Media vita in morte sumus: quem querimus adiutorem nisi te Domine?

O clavis David et sceptrum domus Israel, qui aperis et nemo claudit, claudis et nemo aperit: veni et educ vincitum de domo carceris, sedentem in tenebris et umbra mortis.

Maker of the world, God, hear us,  
Your servants, crying unto you  
And loose the bonds of our sins  
On this day that brings light.  
Noel, noel!

Come, O Lord, and delay not: loose the bonds of the grievous sins of your people Israel.

Behold the Lord shall come, fear not.  
Sound the trumpet in Sion, for the day of the Lord is near.  
To you, O Lord, have I lifted up my soul: O my God, in you I put my trust; let me not be ashamed.

On the morrow you shall have salvation.

O God, who sits upon the throne and judges justice, be the refuge of the poor in tribulation: for you alone consider labor and sorrow.

In the midst of life we are in death: whom shall we seek to help us but you, O Lord?

O key of David and scepter of the house of Israel, who opens and no one shuts, who shuts and no one opens: come and lead the captive from the house of prison, sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death.

Canite tuba in Sion, quia prope est dies Domini: ecce veniet ad salvandum nos, alleluia.

Spiritus Domini super me, evangelizare pauperibus misit me.

Veniet fortior me, cuius non sum dignus corrigiam calciamentorum eius solvere.  
Hodie sciētis quia veniet Dominus, et mane videbitis gloriam suam.

Erunť prava in directa et aspera in vias planas.

Bethlehem, es civitas Dei summi, ex te exiit dominator Israel.

Crastina die erit vobis salus, dicit Dominus exercituum.

Crastina die delebitur iniquitas terre: et regnabit super nos salvator mundi, alleluia.

De celo veniet dominator Dominus, et in manu eius honor et imperium.

O virgo virginum, quomodo fiet istud? quia nec primam similem visa es, nec habere sequentem. Filiae Jerusalem, quid me admiramini? Divinum est misterium hoc quod cernitis.

Beata es Maria, que credidisti: quoniam perficietur in te que dicta sunt tibi, alleluia.

Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum, benedicta tu in mulieribus, et benedictus fructus ventris tui.

Ecce Dominus veniet, et omnes sancti eius cum eo: et erit in die illa lux magna, alleluia.

Veni Domine et noli tardare, alleluia.

Noe, noe!

Sound the trumpet in Sion, for the day of the Lord is near: behold he shall come to save us, alleluia.

The spirit of the Lord is upon me, he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor.

There shall come after me one mightier than I, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to unloose.  
This day you shall know that the Lord will come, and on the morrow you shall see his glory.

The crooked shall become straight and the rough ways smooth.

Bethlehem, you are the city of the highest God, out of you shall come forth the ruler of Israel.

On the morrow you shall have salvation, says the Lord of hosts.

Tomorrow the wickedness of the earth shall be blotted out: and the savior of the world shall reign over us, alleluia.

From heaven shall come the Lord, the ruler, and in his hand honor and strength.

O Virgin of virgins, how shall this be?

For none like unto thee was seen before thee, nor after thee. O Daughters of Jerusalem, why do ye wonder at me? That which you behold is a divine mystery.

Blessed are you, Mary, who has believed: those things shall be wrought in you which were spoken to you, alleluia.

Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you, blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

Behold the Lord shall come, and all his saints with him: and on that day there shall be a great light, alleluia.

Come, Lord, and delay not, alleluia.

Noel, noel!

**O virgo virginum**, quomodo fiet istud?

quia nec primam similem visa est, nec habere sequentem.

Filiae Jerusalem, quid me admiramini? Divinum est misterium hoc quod cernitis.

**Conditor alme siderum**,

eterna lux credentium,  
Christe, redemptor omnium,  
exaudi preces supplicum.

Qui condolens interitu  
mortis perire seculum,  
salvastis mundum languidum,  
donans reis remedium.

Vergente mundi vespere,  
uti sponsus de thalamo,  
egressus honestissima  
virginis matris clausula.

Cujus forti potentie  
genu curvantur omnia  
celestia, terrestria  
nutu fatentur subdita.

Te deprecamur agie,  
venture iudex seculi,  
conserva nos in tempore  
hostis a telo perfidi.

O Virgin of virgins, how may this be?

For none like unto thee was seen before  
thee, nor after thee.

Daughters of Jerusalem, why do ye wonder at me? That  
which ye behold is a divine mystery.

*O-antiphon for December 24*

O bountiful creator of the stars,  
everlasting light of believers,  
O Christ, redeemer of us all,  
hear our humble prayers.

Suffering with us a worldly death,  
enduring death and earthly destruction,  
you saved the suffering world,  
bringing us healing for our sins.

As the world turned to evening,  
like a bridegroom from his chamber  
you came forth from the most pure  
cloister of a virgin mother.

Before your mighty power  
all creatures kneel down,  
in heaven and on earth,  
all accept your command.

So we pray you,  
O judge of the world to come,  
preserve us when we face  
the enemy with treacherous arms.

Laus, honor, virtus, gloria  
Deo patri et filio,  
sancto simul paraclito,  
in seculorum secula. Amen.

**Ave Maria** gratia dei plena per secula. Amen.

Praise, honor, might, and glory  
to God the Father, the Son,  
and the Holy Spirit,  
for ever and ever. Amen.

*Advent hymn, seventh century*

Hail Mary, full of the grace of God forever. Amen.

## CHRISTMAS

**O admirabile commercium!** Creator generis humani, animatum corpus sumens, de virgine dignatus est nasci et procedens homo sine semine largitus est nobis suam deitatem. Verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis et vidimus gloriam eius. Magnum nomen domini Emanuel, Quod annuntiatum est per Gabriel.

Jocundare die, theotoce tinnula festo omnique inesto gaudio. Hostes nunc arte virgo bona mentis ab arce annue feliciter ire pro nobis iter. Nam si vera loquar protectrix turris ad instar atque es amica piis optima Christicolis. Verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis et vidimus gloriam eius quasi unigeniti a patre. Hodie apparuit in Israel per Mariam virginem et per Joseph. Sunt impleta que predixit Daniel. Eya! Virgo deum genuit sicut divina voluit clemencia.

Puer natus est nobis et filius datus est nobis, cuius imperium super humerum eius. Mitibus arbitriis ora velit addere sanctis natus nos orbis post mala celicolis. Suscipe. Universalis ecclesia Congaudeat his temporibus Cum angelis sic canentibus:

O wondrous exchange! The creator of humankind, assuming a living body, deigned to be born of a virgin, and coming forth without seed as a man, bestowed upon us his divinity. The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory. Great is the name of the Lord, Emmanuel, Who was announced by Gabriel.

Rejoice with ringing bells, Mother of God, on thy festal day, and be in all joy. Now, good Virgin, keep away our enemies from the citadel of our mind, consent to go happily on our behalf. For if I shall speak true, thou art a protectress like a tower and a best friend to pious Christians. The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, as of the only begotten of the Father. Today he appears in Israel, through the virgin Mary and through Joseph. That which Daniel foretold is fulfilled. Come then! a virgin gives birth to God, as was the will of divine mercy.

Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulders. Pray that thy son be willing, with merciful judgement, to add us, after the world's evils, to the holy heaven-dwellers. Receive us! Let the Church Universal rejoice at this time with the angels, singing thus:

Eya eya alleluia!  
Deo in excelsis gloria  
et in terra pax hominibus.  
Valla sus, valla sus,  
valla sus in orisus,  
requiescat ipse parvulus.  
Noe noe, parvulus. Amen.

**Letabundus**  
exsultet fidelis chorus:  
Alleluia.  
Regem regum  
intacte profudit thorus:  
res miranda.

Angelus consilii  
natus est de virgine,  
sol de stella,  
Sol occasum nesciens,  
stella semper rutilans,  
semper clara.

Sicut sidus radium,  
profert Virgo Filium,  
pari forma.  
Neque sidus radio,  
neque mater filio,  
fit corrupta.

Come, come, alleluia!  
Glory to God in the highest,  
and on earth peace unto men.  
Hush now, shush!  
hush, shush, hush now,  
let that little one rest.  
Noel, noel, little one. Amen.

Full of joy,  
let the chorus of the faithful exult:  
Alleluia.  
The King of Kings  
is brought forth from an intact womb,  
a thing of wonder.

The Angel of Counsel  
is born of a virgin,  
the sun from a star:  
A sun that knows no setting,  
a star ever shining,  
always bright.

As a star its ray,  
the Virgin produces her Son,  
alike in form.  
Neither the star by its ray,  
nor the mother by her son,  
is corrupted.

*Cento of Christmas texts*

Cedrus alta Libani  
conformatur hyssopo  
valle nostra;  
Verbum, mens altissimi,  
corporari passum est,  
carne sumpta.

Isaias cecinit,  
synagoga meminit;  
hec scriptura definit  
esse facta.  
Sic et nostris vatibus  
nec non et gentilibus  
Sibyllinis versibus  
hec predicta.

Nunc age propera  
et Christum venera,  
crede et nova et vetera.  
Quem docet litera  
natum considera,  
ipsum genuit puerpera. Alleluia.

**Gloria in excelsis Deo**, et in terra pax hominibus  
bone voluntatis. Laudamus te. Benedicimus te.  
Adoramus te. Glorificamus te. Gratias agimus  
tibi propter magnam gloriam tuam. Domine  
deus, rex celestis, deus pater omnipotens.  
Domine fili unigenite, Jesu Christe, *spiritus  
et alme orphanorum paraclite*. Domine deus,  
agnus dei, filius patris, *primogenitus Marie  
virginis matris*. Qui tollis peccata mundi,

The tall cedar of Lebanon  
is formed by the low hyssop  
in our valley:  
the Word, the mind of the Highest,  
descended into a human body,  
having assumed flesh.

Isaiah sang of it,  
the Synagogue recalls it;  
scripture reveals that it  
has been fulfilled.  
Thus has this been foretold  
by our own prophets  
and those of the gentiles,  
in the Sibylline oracles.

Come now, make haste  
and worship the Christ,  
believe both the new and the old scriptures;  
whom the scripture proclaimed,  
look upon at his birth:  
his mother has brought him forth. Alleluia.

*Christmas sequence*

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace  
to all of good will. We praise you. We bless  
you. We adore you. We glorify you. We give  
thanks to you for your great glory. Lord God,  
heavenly king, almighty God the Father. Lord,  
only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, *holy spirit and  
kindly advocate of orphans*. Lord God, lamb  
of God, Son of the Father, *firstborn of Mary  
the virgin mother*. Who takes away the sins of

miserere nobis. Qui tollis peccata mundi,  
suscipe deprecationem nostram *ad Marie  
gloriam*. Qui sedes ad dexteram patris,  
miserere nobis. Quoniam tu solus sanctus  
*Mariam sanctificans*, tu solus dominus *Mariam  
gubernans*, tu solus altissimus, *Mariam  
coronans*, Jesu Christe, cum sancto spiritu in  
gloria dei patris. Amen.

#### **Nato canunt omnia**

Domino pie agmina,  
sillabatim neupmata  
perstringendo organica.  
Hec dies sacrata,  
in qua nova sunt gaudia  
modo plena dedita,  
Hac nocte precelsa  
intonuit et gloria  
in voce angelica.  
Fulserunt et immanua  
nocte media  
pastoribus lumina.  
Dum fivent sua peccora  
subito diva  
precipiunt monita.  
Magnificatus est rex pacificus super omnes  
reges universe terre.  
Angelus ad pastores ait: Annuntio vobis  
gaudium magnum, quia natus est hodie  
salvator mundi, alleluia.  
Natus alma virgine,  
qui extat ante secula. Noel noel!

the world, have mercy on us. Who takes away  
the sins of the world, receive our prayer *to the  
glory of Mary*. Who sits at the right hand of the  
Father, have mercy on us. For you alone are  
holy, *sanctifying Mary*; you alone are the Lord,  
*directing Mary*; you alone are the Most High,  
*crowning Mary*; Jesus Christ, with the Holy  
Spirit in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

*Text of Mass Ordinary with trope; trope text in italics*

The whole host sings piously  
to the new-born Lord,  
with words fitted syllable by syllable  
to melodious music.  
This is the blessed day  
on which new joys  
are given to the whole world,  
And on this night  
angel voices have rung out:  
"Glory in the highest."  
And at midnight  
a great light has shone  
upon the shepherds.  
While they tended their flocks,  
suddenly they heard  
the heavenly message.  
More glorious is the King of Peace than all the kings of  
the whole world.  
The angel said to the shepherds: To you I proclaim great  
joy, for today is born the savior of the world,  
alleluia.  
He is born of a gentle virgin,  
he who existed before time. Noel, noel!

*Joseph fili David, noli timere accipere Mariam  
conjugem tuam: quod enim in ea natum est  
de Spiritu Sancto.  
Alleluya. Noel, noel!*

Puer natus est nobis, et filius datus est nobis:  
cuius imperium super humerum eius: et  
vocabitur nomen eius magni consilii angelus.

*Puer natus est nobis, et filius datus est nobis.*

Verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis, et  
vidimus gloriam eius, quasi unigeniti a patre,  
plenum gratie et veritatis.

Magnum nomen Domini Emanuel,  
quod annuntiatum est per Gabriel,

Hodie apparuit in Israel,  
per Mariam virginem et per Joseph.

Eya, eya!

Virgo Deum genuit,  
sicut divina voluit  
clementia.

Pax in terra reddita  
nunc letentur omnia  
nati per exordia.

Ipse sua pietate  
solvat omnia  
peccata nostra.

Alleluya. Noel, noel!

*Exortum est in tenebris lumen rectis corde:  
misericors et miserator et justus Dominus.*

*Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary  
as your wife: for truly, he is born in her of the  
Holy Spirit.  
Alleluia. Noel, noel!*

A child is born to us, and a son is given to us: whose  
government is upon his shoulder; and his name shall  
be called the Angel of great counsel.

*A child is born to us, and a son is given to us.*

The Word was made flesh and lived among us, and we  
beheld his glory, as of the only begotten of the father,  
full of grace and truth.

Great is the name of the Lord, Emmanuel,  
He who was announced by Gabriel

Today appears in Israel,  
through the virgin Mary and through Joseph.

Come then!

A virgin gives birth to God,  
as was the will of divine  
mercy.

Now let all rejoice  
to see peace restored to earth  
by the birth of this child.

For he by his obedience  
takes away all  
our sins.

Alleluia. Noel, noel!

*In the darkness is arisen a light to pure hearts: merciful  
and compassionate and righteous is the Lord.*

*Centio of Christmas texts; tenor text in italics*

## NEW YEAR'S DAY

### **La plus belle et douce figure,**

La plus noble, gente faiture,  
C'est ma chiere dame et mestresse.  
Bon an, bon jour, joye et liesse  
Li doinst dieux et bone aventure!

C'est tout mon bien, c'est ma déesse,  
Celle par qui ma douleur cesse,  
En qui je preing ma noreture,

Qui servir vueil sans nul destresse  
De cuer, tant que vogue me lesse,  
N'en ce monde d'autre n'ay cure.

Former la sut dieux de nature  
Blanche, blonde, tout par mesure;  
Playsanment y jouta josnesse,  
Largesse, honour, toute noblesse  
En fais, en dis et en parleure.

*La plus belle et douce figure ...*

### **Dieu vous doinst bon jour et demy**

Au commencement de l'anée,  
Belle brunette et bien amée,  
Bon moys, bonne sepmaine ossy,  
Dieu vous doinst bon jour et demy.

Je vous donne le cuer de my  
Pour estrine, dame honnorée.

The fairest and sweetest face,  
the noblest, most gracious form,  
is that of my dear lady and mistress.  
A good year, a good day, joy and happiness  
may God grant her, and good fortune!

She is all my good, she is my goddess,  
she through whom my pain ceases,  
from whom I take sustenance,

whom I wish to serve without the least restraint  
of heart, as much as reputation will permit me,  
for I care for none other in this world.

God formed her by nature  
pale, blond, all in just measure;  
pleasingly he added youth,  
generosity, honor, and every nobility  
in deed, word, and speech.

*The most beautiful and sweetest face ...*

God grant you a good day and more  
at the beginning of the year,  
fair sweetheart and well-beloved,  
a good month and good week as well:  
God grant you a good day and more!

I present to you this my heart  
as a New Year's gift, honored lady.

*Dieu vous doinst bon jour et demy  
Au commencement de l'anée!*

Recevés le en gré, je vous pry,  
Si j'aray joyeuse pensée  
Et chanteray sanz demourée,  
Qui qu'en soit joieux ou mary,  
Dieu vous doinst bon jour et demy.

*Dieu vous doinst bon jour ...*

### **Auxce bon youre delabonestren**

*instrumental setting*

Only the first line of the original song's text survives, in corrupt form. The verse probably read either "A ce jour de la bonne estrenne" ("On this day of good gifts") or "Au bon jour de la bonne estrenne" ("On the good day of good gifts"): "Aux ce" ("On the this") is grammatically impossible; "jour" was never spelled with a final e, whereas "estrenne" always was; and the line might have had eight or ten syllables (plus the final mute e), but not nine.

### **Amours servir et honnorer**

Vueil je de l'an ce premier jour,  
Car la belle par sa douchour  
Si m'a promis de moy amer

Et m'a volu espoir donner,  
Affy que doye sans sejour

*Amours servir et honnorer  
Vueil je de l'an ce premier jour.*

*God grant you a good day and more  
at the beginning of the year!*

Receive it with pleasure, I pray you,  
then my thoughts shall be joyful  
and I shall sing without cease,  
no matter whom it please or annoy,  
God grant you a good day and more!

*God grant you a good day and more ...*

To serve and honor Love  
is my wish, this first day of the year,  
for the beautiful lady, through her sweetness,  
has promised to love me

And has wished to give me hope,  
thus I affirm that I must, without hesitation

*Serve and honor Love:  
this is my wish, this first day of the year.*

Pour ce vouray mon cuer oster  
De pensement et de destour,  
A ce que toute ma langour  
En liesse puisse tourner.

*Amours servir et honnorer ...*

**Dame excellent ou sont bonté, scavoir,**  
Biaulté de corps et maintieng gracieux,  
Je scay que bien puis dire tout pour voir  
Estre je doy de cuer le plus joyeux  
Par vo douchour et le plus amoureux,  
Car vous m'avés tolu toute langour.  
Si pri a dieu qui maint lassus es chieulx,  
*Que tres bon an vous doint et tres bon jour.*

[Si gentement m'avés guerredonné  
Que d'entre tous me tiens le plus heureux,  
Dont vous ai je mon cuer habandonné  
Qui en despit sera des envieux.  
Le temps ai veu ou fuz tout langoureux,  
Mais ce jour d'huy suis entré en amour,  
Si pri a cil qui est d'amer soigneux  
*Que tres bon an vous doint et tres bon jour.*]

*Second strophe by Fabrice Fitch*

In this way she wishes to release my heart  
from worry and preoccupation,  
that all my languor  
may be turned to delight.

*To serve and honor Love ...*

Excellent lady, in whom are joined goodness, knowledge,  
physical beauty, and gracious bearing,  
I know that I may well say, in all truth,  
that I should be most joyful at heart  
on account of your sweetness, and most loving,  
for you have taken away all my suffering.  
Thus I pray to God who reigns in heaven above  
that he grant you a very good year and a very good day.

So nobly have you rewarded me  
that I think myself the happiest of men:  
therefore I have surrendered my heart to you,  
and shall do so in spite of the envious.  
There was a time when I languished,  
but today I find myself happy in love,  
thus I pray of him who takes care to love well  
that he grant you a very good year and a very good day.



**Ce jour de l'an qui maint doist estrenier**  
joieusement sa belle et douce amie,  
quant est de moy, je veul de ma partie  
mon cuer, mon corps entirement donner

A ma dame, qui tant fait a loer:  
tout quant que j'ay plainement li ottrie

*Ce jour de l'an qui maint doit estrenier*  
*joieusement sa belle et douce amie.*

[Mon cuer me fait loialement amer  
a ce jour cy et pour toute ma vie ;  
soulas et ris, plaisir et chiere lie  
toudis auray, dont li doy mercier.]

*Ce jour de l'an ...*

*Missing strophe adapted & emended from*  
*version by Christopher Page.*

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Text of *O admirabile commercium* emended by Leofranc Holford-Strevens;  
translation adapted from Leofranc Holford-Strevens.

Text of *Letabundus* revised and translated by Richard Tarrant.

All other translations by Scott Metcalfe.

This New Year's Day, when each must give a gift  
joyfully to his fair and sweet love,  
as for me, I wish for my part  
to give my whole heart and body

to my lady, who is so worthy of praise:  
all that I have I bestow freely upon her

*this New Year's Day, when each must give a gift*  
*joyfully to his fair and sweet love.*

My heart compels me to love faithfully  
on this day and all my life long;  
mirth and laughter, pleasure and good cheer  
shall I ever enjoy, for which I owe her thanks.

*This New Year's Day ...*



*O virgo virginum* in concert, 2016  
Photo: Liz Linder



# Christmas at the Courts of 15th-Century France & Burgundy

## **In tenebris et umbra mortis**

By mid-December in the northern hemisphere, the days have been getting shorter for six months. The fall brings more and more darkness, and by the time winter finally arrives, northern Europeans live more in darkness than in light. At the winter solstice Paris sees just over eight hours of daylight; the Low Countries, further north, endure even shorter days.

Whatever the reasons early Christians settled on December 25th to celebrate the birth of Christ, observing the savior's birthday just a few days after the solstice locates the feast at the cusp of the year, when the sun begins, imperceptibly at first, to climb again in the sky. The penitential, prophetic, and preparatory season of Advent falls during the darkest weeks of the year. It is there that our program begins, "in darkness and in the shadow of death."

## **Advent**

The plainchant antiphon *O clavis David* is one of a series of seven ancient "O antiphons" sung to the same melody, one for each of the seven days before Christmas Eve. The antiphons, each beginning with the interjection "O," address the Messiah to come with various exclamations: "O Sapientia" (wisdom), "O Adonai" (Lord), "O radix Jesse" (root of Jesse), "O clavis David" (key of David), "O Oriens" (morning star), "O Rex" (king), "O Emanuel" ("God with us"). The initial letters of the words following "O" spell out the promise in a reverse acrostic, SARCORE, "ero cras": "Tomorrow I shall be there." An eighth antiphon for Christmas Eve, *O virgo virginum*, was often added to the original seven. In it, the daughters of Jerusalem demand of the Virgin Mary that she explain the unique wonder of her conception of Jesus. She admonishes them that what they seek to know is a divine mystery.

Obrecht's *Factor orbis* quotes both *O clavis David* and *O virgo virginum*, one at the end of each half of the motet, along with texts and some tunes from seventeen other liturgical items. The liturgical texts, mostly for Advent, are introduced by a plea to the Maker of the world to hear the cries of his servants "on this day that brings light." The musicologist Jennifer Bloxam interprets *Factor orbis* as a sermon in music, an exegesis of the scripture "Canite tuba in Sion" ("Sound the trumpet in Sion," Joel 2:1), but to fully comprehend this sermon as it is preached musically is impossible, for at times five different texts are sung simultaneously. The motet's continuously shifting textures bring now one, now another text to the foreground. The opening plea, sung in imitative duet by the highest voices, comes to a cadence as a third voice enters with "Veni Domini," "Come, Lord," whereupon the duetting voices, joined by the bass, break into the acclamation "Noe!" The entrance of the tenor on the cantus firmus "Canite tuba" is marked by a long hemiola in all parts. At the introduction of two non-Advent texts, "Deus qui sedes super thronos" (Epiphany) and "Media vita in morte sumus" (Lent), the texture changes from counterpoint to homophony. The effect is heart-stopping. The homophonic texture is in turn swept away by a return to counterpoint that moves twice as fast as anything beforehand, and this concludes the first part. This "double-time" music reappears to wind up the second part, now at a somewhat

slower speed determined by the proportional relationship between the mensurations of the two sections, gathering all the voices together for the final cries of “Noe!”

The six-voice motet *O virgo virginum* ascribed to Josquin sets the O-antiphon in its entirety, quoting the complete plainchant melody in the top voice and alluding to it in the five others.\* The composer deploys the six voices in antiphonal groups, often setting the three highest voices against the three lowest. Equally characteristic of the piece is the hypnotic overlapping of short motives (as at “fiet istud” in the *prima pars* and “Filiae” at the beginning of the *secunda pars*). A disorienting metrical shift at “hoc quod cernitis” heightens the sense of mystery: here the mensural organization shifts proportionally from two beats per bar to three, but at the same time an extended hemiola at the next higher level of organization divides every pair of bars into three, disrupting the listener’s sense of pulse.

### Emulation & homage

The composers on our program represent several generations of musicians from northern France or modern-day Belgium. Du Fay was born near Brussels and trained as a choirboy in Cambrai; his contemporary Malbecque seems to be from Maalbeek, north of Brussels. Grenon hailed from Paris or nearby, Ciconia was a proud native of Liège, like Arnold de Lantins, and Cordier proclaimed his birthplace as Reims. Regis’s birthplace is unknown, but he spent most of his working life in Soignies, about 50 miles northeast of Cambrai. Josquin was born near Saint-Quentin in Picardy, Obrecht in Ghent in Flanders, and Brumel possibly near Chartres.

As northern musicians followed their itinerant careers, many making their way to Italy, their paths crossed in one place or another—Malbecque sang with Du Fay in the papal chapel, Arnold de Lantins with him in Rimini; Du Fay and Grenon worked together at Cambrai Cathedral, which attempted (unsuccessfully) to hire Regis; Brumel succeeded Obrecht as

\* The ascription to Josquin is found only in sources copied after his death in 1521, a time when scores of works were attributed, more or less implausibly, to the most famous composer of the early sixteenth century. In a recent evaluation of the claims to authenticity of all the pieces somewhere ascribed to Josquin, Jesse Rodin and Joshua Rifkin place *O virgo virginum* in the category of “Works for which no convincing argument can be made.”

*maestro di cappella* in Ferrara, where Obrecht had succeeded Josquin—and the music they composed was disseminated into all the corners of Europe. Whether musicians knew each other personally or not, they knew each other’s music, and it is common to come across instances of compositional emulation or rivalry, within and between generations. Regis’s *O admirabile commercium*, Obrecht’s *Factor orbis*, and Brumel’s *Nato canunt omnia* form a trio of works in which Obrecht’s and Brumel’s motets pay homage to that of the older Regis. All three motets are for five voices and feature multiple texts and cantus firmi: Reinhard Strohm has described *O admirabile commercium* as a “huge Christmas pie,” stuffed full of antiphons and gospel texts, plainchant and popular devotional songs or *cantiones*. Regis, who seems to be reinventing the motet each time he composes one, reserves one of his most genial inspirations for the close of *O admirabile*, a marvelous suspension of forward motion at the (possibly nonsense) words “Sus, valla sus in orisus,” as if the jubilant choir falls suddenly into a reverent hush at the cradle of the newborn.

The relationship of *Nato canunt omnia*, in particular, to Regis’s motet is unmistakable. Brumel’s work quotes one of the same Christmas *cantiones*, the rollicking “Magnum nomen domini Emanuel!”—an unusual moment of pure levity in a highbrow genre—and the striking, heraldic fifths that begin the *secunda pars* (“Puer natus est”) are taken directly from *O admirabile* (which is itself alluding to a plainchant melody), with more voices thrown in for good measure. Where *Factor orbis* conveys the penitence and prophetic mysticism of Advent, *Nato canunt omnia* is filled throughout with the high spirits of Christmas, manifested not least in a superabundance of jaunty cross-relations (e.g. F natural and F sharp sounding in close proximity or simultaneously).

All of the music discussed above quotes plainchant melodies. So too do Du Fay’s settings of the Advent hymn *Conditor alme siderum* and the Christmas sequence *Letabundus*. Both are intended for *alternatim* performance, each strophe of plainchant answered by a strophe in polyphony in which the topmost voice sings an elaborated version of the chant melody.

## New Year's with the Valois

Europeans have long celebrated the season around the winter solstice with the ritual exchange of gifts and wishes for good luck and a prosperous new year. The custom in its present form coalesced around the feast of Christmas only in the late nineteenth century, but its roots in western culture can be traced as far back as the ancient Near East. Romans of the imperial era marked the Kalends of January with a festival several days in length, during which the people offered tributary gifts called *strenae* to the emperor in exchange for presents of money. Medieval Europe absorbed the Roman New Year's festivities into its own calendar, modifying them somewhat according to the evolving sensibilities of the Christian church, but the tradition of giving presents at New Year's persisted despite the efforts of the church to suppress what it regarded as pagan beliefs in good luck omens and the efficacy of ceremonial gift exchange. In France, the Latin *strena* passed into the vulgar tongue as *estraise* (*estreine*, *estrenne*, *étrenne*, etc.), retaining its meaning of "omen of good fortune" as well as "New Year's gift."

New Year's was celebrated with peculiar intensity at the courts of the Valois nobles who ruled both France and Burgundy in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, and members of the courts exchanged precious gifts in enormous quantity. Philip the Bold, duke of Burgundy from 1364 to 1404, disbursed an average of 6.5 percent of his annual budget on *estraines*, while his nephew and political enemy Louis d'Orléans spent no less than 19,000 *livres* at New Year's in 1404. (At the time a good horse or a finely ornamented harp might be had for around 50 *livres*, a house for 100 or so.) Illuminated books, jewel-encrusted saltcellars, enamelled serving vessels, golden cups, reliquaries, pendants, brooches, rings, horses, dogs, hunting falcons: all changed hands in an ostentatious public ritual that honored the chivalric virtue of largesse, reinforced social ties and obligations, established position within the courtly hierarchy, and allowed the rich and powerful to flaunt their wealth.

Just as it does today, all this flamboyant materialism sometimes benefitted those further down the social ladder, the artisans and craftspeople who fashioned the sumptuous *objets d'art* prized by their noble commissioners. The makers of New Year's gifts included poets and

The so-called *Goldenes Rössl* or Golden Knight (French, c. 1400–1405; *ronde-bosse* enamel, gold, silver, silver gilt, jewels). The sole *étrenne* known to have survived aside from songs and manuscripts, it was given by Isabeau of Bavaria to her husband, King Charles VI of France, on New Year's Day, 1405, and pawned that very year to pay off debt. Charles, dressed as a knight, is depicted kneeling before the Virgin, the Child seated on her lap.

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musicians, and it is a small irony that while one single, superb little golden and bejeweled tabernacle is the only known *estrange* aside from manuscripts to have survived—much of the rest having been dismantled, melted down, and sold off to finance the endless wars pursued by a bellicose and perpetually cash-strapped nobility—more than two dozen songs remain to us that commemorate the occasion. (Ten of them are by Du Fay, including *Entre vous, gentils amoureux*, which appears on Blue Heron’s recording of music by Du Fay, VNC 1001.) While we don’t know the exact circumstances in which New Year’s songs were written, we can imagine that a courtier would provide a composer with verses to set to music, and the song would then be presented to the courtier’s lady love or perhaps performed at a public celebration. In exchange for his *estrenne* a courtier might hope to win the lady’s amorous favor, while the musicians could expect a gift of money or household necessities. We know, for example, that in January 1454 Johannes Okeghem presented Charles VII a book of music as a New Year’s gift, receiving in return four ells of scarlet cloth worth 44 *livres*, while in 1459 a single song “most richly illuminated” earned him another 44 *livres*. (Sadly, neither book nor song is now known to be extant.)

In keeping with the conventions of chivalric love, these fifteenth-century New Year’s songs are not boisterous, champagne-inspired toasts. Elegantly crafted and finely wrought, their merit was measured in part by their ingenuity and their *estrangeté* or novelty, which the poet Christine de Pizan considered an essential quality of a gift. Most are marked by a graceful sort of melancholy, for courtly love can never be consummated, only yearned and suffered for. Along with the songs we include a short instrumental composition based on a song: a garbled first line in an English manuscript (“Auxce bon youre delabonestren”) is all that remains of the original text, but the reference to the day of the *estrenne* makes it clear that this too was a New Year’s gift.

### A word on words

It is a bitter truth that some of the most joyous Christmas texts are marred by venomous barbs aimed at Jews and others regarded by Christianity as unbelievers; some of these were set to beautiful music. There is no single or perfect solution to this problem. Our view is that we musicians are not playing roles in some sort of historical reenactment, nor is it our job as performers to preserve the historical record by reciting it neutrally. (That is a critical task, but it’s not ours.) We want to enjoy what we are doing and convey that enjoyment to our audience, and we don’t feel obliged to sing words we find hateful, so our choice on this occasion is to emend the words of *Letabundus*. If you are interested in the original text, you can, of course, find it on the internet—or, in the spirit of early music, visit a library.

—Scott Metcalfe

**Blue Heron** has been acclaimed by *The Boston Globe* as “one of the Boston music community’s indispensables” and hailed by Alex Ross in *The New Yorker* for its “expressive intensity.” The ensemble ranges over a wide repertoire from plainchant to new music, with particular specialities in 15th-century Franco-Flemish polyphony and early 16th-century English sacred music, and is committed to vivid live performance informed by the study of original source materials and historical performance practices.

Founded in 1999, Blue Heron presents a concert series in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and has appeared at the Boston Early Music Festival; in New York City at Music Before 1800, The Cloisters (Metropolitan Museum of Art), and the 92nd Street Y; at the Library of Congress, the National Gallery of Art, and Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, D.C.; at the Berkeley Early Music Festival; at Yale University, the University of Chicago, and the University of California, Davis; in Cleveland, Kansas City, Milwaukee, Montreal, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Providence, St. Louis, San Luis Obispo, Seattle, and Vancouver; and in England, Germany, and Belgium. Blue Heron has been in residence at the Center for Early Music Studies at Boston University and at Boston College and has enjoyed collaborations with A Far Cry, Dark Horse Consort, Les Délices, Parthenia, Piffaro, and Ensemble Plus Ultra.

Blue Heron’s first CD, featuring music by Guillaume Du Fay, was released in 2007. Between 2010 and 2017 the ensemble issued a 5-CD series of *Music from the Peterhouse Partbooks* (available as a set entitled *The Lost Music of Canterbury*), including many world premiere recordings of works copied around 1540 for Canterbury Cathedral and restored by Nick Sandon; the fifth CD in the series was awarded the 2018 Gramophone Classical Music Award for Early Music. Jessie Ann Owens and Blue Heron won the 2015 Noah Greenberg Award from the American Musicological Society to support the world premiere recording of Cipriano de Rore’s *I madrigali a cinque voci*, released in 2019. Between 2015 and 2023 Blue Heron celebrated the circa-600th birthday of Johannes Okeghem (c. 1420-1497) by performing his complete works in a multi-season project entitled *Okeghem@600* and recorded all of his songs for a two-CD set, *Johannes Ockeghem: Complete Songs*. Volume I of the set was named to the *Bestenliste* of the *Preis der deutschen Schallplattenkritik*. Blue Heron’s recordings also include a CD accompanying Thomas Forrest Kelly’s book *Capturing Music*:



CAMERON BEAUCHAMP



CODY BOWERS



PAUL GUTTRY



COREY DALTON HART



GRANT HERREID



LAURA JEPPESEN



KIM LEEDS



JASON MCSTOOTS



SCOTT METCALFE



SOPHIE MICHAUX



JACOB PERRY



MARGOT ROOD



ELISA SUTHERLAND



JAMES REESE



AARON SHEEHAN



SUMNER THOMPSON

*The Story of Notation*, the live recording *Christmas in Medieval England*, a compilation of medieval songs entitled *A 14th-Century Salmagundi*, and (in collaboration with Les Délices) a live recording of a concert production of Guillaume de Machaut's *Remede de Fortune*.

**Scott Metcalfe** is widely recognized as one of North America's leading specialists in music from the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries and beyond. Musical and artistic director of Blue Heron since its founding in 1999, he was music director of New York City's Green Mountain Project from 2010-19 and has been guest director of TENET (New York), the Handel & Haydn Society (Boston), Emmanuel Music (Boston), the Toronto Consort, The Tudor Choir and Seattle Baroque, Pacific Baroque Orchestra (Vancouver, BC), Quire Cleveland, and the Dryden Ensemble (Princeton, NJ), in music ranging from Machaut to Bach and Handel. He also enjoys a career as a baroque violinist, playing with Les Délices (dir. Debra Nagy), L'Harmonie des Saisons (dir. Eric Milnes), and other ensembles. Metcalfe's scholarly work, centered on the historical performance practice of medieval and Renaissance vocal music, has been published in numerous program and recording notes, and he is the author of two essays in a long-forthcoming book on the Peterhouse partbooks and two articles in the *Journal of the Alamire Foundation*. He has edited music by Francisco de Peñalosa for Antico Edition (UK) and songs from the Leuven chansonnier for the Alamire Foundation (Belgium); other editions are in the works, including a new edition of the songs of Gilles Binchois (c. 1400–1460). He has taught at Boston University, Harvard University, and the Peabody Institute, served as director of the baroque orchestra at Oberlin Conservatory, and been a visiting member of the faculty of Music History at the New England Conservatory. He received a bachelor's degree from Brown University (1985), where he majored in biology, and a master's degree in historical performance practice from Harvard (2005).

## BLUE HERON RECORDINGS

**GUILLAUME  
DU FAY**  
MOTETS  
HYMNS  
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**I MADRIGALI  
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CIPRIANO DE RORE  
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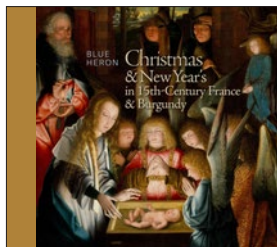
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OCKEGHEM**  
COMPLETE SONGS  
VOL. 2



Blue Heron is funded in part by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, a state agency.

## BLUE HERON RECORDINGS

### CHRISTMAS IN MEDIEVAL ENGLAND



### CHRISTMAS & NEW YEAR'S IN 15TH-CENTURY FRANCE & BURGUNDY

### GUILLAUME DE MACHAUT REMEDE DE FORTUNE

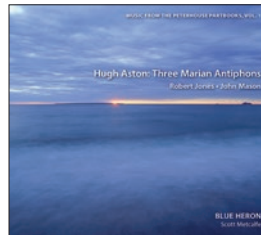


### A 14TH-CENTURY SALMAGUNDI MACHAUT, SENLECHES, LANDINI ET AL.

## BLUE HERON RECORDINGS

### MUSIC FROM THE PETERHOUSE PARTBOOKS (Canterbury Cathedral, c. 1540)

#### VOL. 1



#### VOL. 2



#### VOL. 3



#### VOL. 4



#### VOL. 5



#### THE LOST MUSIC OF CANTERBURY

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