

ALKEMIE & FREELANCE NUN

a fine companion



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Side A

1. the switch with which one switches oneself
2. love is like the spark (escoutatz!)
3. seguin + valensa
4. i know a lady
5. judas

Side B

1. nor
2. the butterfly
3. (find yourself) a fine companion
4. d'aurenga

Composer Charles Mueller builds an imaginative bridge to a world where Moog synthesizers and fuzz pedals encounter douçaines and vielles, and singers sing of love, corruption, and Medieval angst in early Occitan. Against the backdrop of this landscape, sounds, styles, and ideas resonate across millennia.



Tracy Cowart

voice, harps, hurdy-gurdy, percussion

Jim Hopkins

synthesizers, Rhodes, harmonium

Cameron LeCrone

drum set

Ben Matus

voice, recorders, dulcian, hümmelchen, ukelele

Charles Mueller

composer, guitar, bass guitar, glockenspiel

Sian Ricketts

voice, douçaines, recorders

Niccolo Seligmann

vielles, viola a chiavi, psaltery, gittern, viola da gamba, percussion

Ellie Sutherland

voice



BRIGHT SHINY THINGS

Composed by Charles Mueller. Produced by Tracy Cowart, Charles Mueller, and Sian Ricketts. Engineered by Charles Mueller. Mastered by Mike Tierney. Recorded at Tiny Panther Recording, Mount Vernon NY, March 2022. Published by BMI. Photography by Anja Schutz. Cover art and design by Haeg Design.

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Close your eyes and imagine the time of the troubadours. What do you see? For those of us who came of age in the latter part of the twentieth century, our imaginations may be caught between *Princess Bride* and *Monty Python*—scenes of men in tunics, women in gowns, and knights on horseback, perhaps with a patina of comedy and melodramatic romance. The songs of the troubadours themselves, though, reveal a much richer tapestry—one of love and travel, but also of politics, grief, playfulness, gambling, loyalty, and poets who insist on staying awake to see the dawn.

Although we may imagine men falling in love with, singing to, and swearing their fealty to women, female troubadours (called *trobairitz*) also wrote their own poetry, sang their own songs, and found their own men to swear themselves to—sometimes giving voice to the silent women who are beseeched by their lovers, and sometimes turning gender and generic conventions upside down. The first and the last pieces on the album are by two famous *trobairitz*, La Comtessa de Dia (of whom we have the greatest number of extant songs) and Azalais de Porcairagues (the earliest known *trobairitz*).

In between, there are indeed songs of love (some lovers embrace their affliction, some fight against it, and some vow never to fall prey to it again), and also songs excoriating the corruption of the wealthy, attesting to the strength of friendship, and, finally, mourning the death of one's past lover even as one commands the fidelity of one's new companion. We have loved working with these almost-millennia-old texts, many of which close by instructing the listener to pass on a message to another person or place. We hope that by engaging with these words and songs we can pass their messages on to still another time, and another world.

1. the switch with which one switches oneself

text - La Comtessa de Dia (late 12th/early 13th century)

Ab joi et ab joven m'apais
E jois e jovens m'apaia,
Que mos amics es lo plus gais,
Per qu'ieu sui coindet'e guaia;
E pois ieu li sui veraia,
Bei.s taing qu'el me sia verais,
Qu'anc de lui amar non m'estrais
Ni ai cor m'en estraia.

*C'om cuoill maintas vetz los balais
Ab qu'el mezeis se balaia.*

Mout mi plai quar sai que val mais
Cel qu'ieu plus desir que m'aia,
E cel que primiers lo m'atrais
Dieu prec que gran joi l'atraia;
E qui que mal l'en retraia
No l creza, fors so qu'ie.l retrais;

*C'om cuoill maintas vetz los balais
Ab qu'el mezeis se balaia.*

Dompna que en bon pretz s'enten
Deu ben pausar s'entendenssa
En un pro cavallier valen;
Pois qu'ill conois sa valenssa,
Que l'aus amar a presenssa;
Que dompna, pois am'a presen,
Ja pois li pro ni.ll avinen
Non dirant mas avinenssa.

Qu'ieu n'ai chausit un pro e gen
Per cui pretz meillur'e genssa
Larc et adreig e conoissen
On en sens e conoissenssa
Prec li que m'aia crezenssa.
Qu'anc de lui amar non m'estrais
ni ai cor m'en estraia.

*C'om cuoill maintas vetz los balais
Ab qu'el mezeis se balaia.*

Joy and youthfulness sustain me,
And my own youth and joy sustain
My lover's irresistible good cheer,
And so I too am cheerful.
And since I'm faithful to him,
He'd better be faithful to me;
And he'd never think to betray me,
Nor would I ever be tempted to stray.

*For one is always the one who picks
The switch with which one switches oneself.*

I'm pleased to know he's still desired
By those from whom I stole him,
And for the one who used to have him,
I pray God finds someone to take her;
And let him not believe any tales he hears,
except the tales I tell him myself;

*For one is always the one who picks
The switch with which one switches oneself.*

A woman who knows what's good for her
Must stake her reputation
On a well-endowed cavalier;
Once she is sure of his worth,
She should announce her love eagerly;
For since she is so obviously enamored,
Any reputable person
Would never refute it.

I have chosen a knight who is rich and noble,
Whom I will make even more so;
His wealth is comprehensive,
To match my comprehension.
I pray that he trusts in me always,
For he'd never think to betray me,
Nor would I ever be tempted to stray.

*For one is always the one who picks
The switch with which one switches oneself.*

2. love is like the spark (escoutatz!)

text - Marcabru (c. 1127-1150)

Dirai vos senes duptansa
D'aquest vers la comensansa;
Li mot fan de ver semblansa;
– Escoutatz! –
Qui ves proeza balansa
Semblanza fai de malvatz.

Jovens faill e fraing e brisa,
Et Amors es d'aital guisa
De totz cessals a ces prisa.

Amors vai com la belluja
Que coa.l fuec en la suja
Art lo fust e la festuja,
– Escoutatz! –
E non sap vas qual part fuja
Cel qui del fuec es gastatz.

Amors soli'esser drecha,
Mas er'es torta e brecha
Et a coillida tal decha.

Greu sera mais Amors vera
Pos del mel triet la cera
Anz sap si pelar la pera.

Ab diables pren barata
Qui fals'amor acoata,
No.il cal c'autra verga.l bata.

Qui per sen de femna reigna
Dreiz es que mals li.n aveigna
Si cum la letra.ns enseigna;
– Escoutatz! –
Lai ou non pot mordre, lecha
Plus aspramens no fai chatz.

Malaventura.us en veigna
So tuich no vos en gardatz!

I swear I won't deceive you
As I sing this tune.
My words might even be true.
Listen!
Anyone suspicious of my song
Must be hiding something.

Youth fails and falls and breaks,
And Love is such a tyrant
That it taxes all it touches.

Love is like the spark
That makes the embers smolder
And blaze when no one's watching.
Listen!
You can't escape the flames
When your clothes are on fire.

My Love was once flawless,
But now it has warped and cracked,
Revealing the defects.

I know my Lover is unfaithful.
He took all the honey and left me with wax;
He's found another to peel his pear.

She who gambles with Love
Finds herself in bed with the devil;
She'll have torments aplenty!

But we all know: if you heed a woman's words,
You deserve your own misfortune;
So the Scripture tells us.
Listen!
Where Love cannot bite, it licks
With a tongue rougher than a cat's.

Misfortune stalks
the unwary!



3. seguin + valensa

text - La Comtessa de Dia

A chantar m'er de so qu'ieu non volria,
Tant me rancur de lui cui sui amia,
Car ieu l'am mais que nuilla ren que sia;
Vas lui no.m val merces ni cortesia.

*Perque vos m'etz tant fers,
Perque vos m'etz tant salvatges?*

D'aisso.m conort car anc non fi faillessa,
Amics, vas vos per nuilla captenenssa,
Anz voz am mais non fetz Seguis Valenssa,
E platz mi mout quez eu d'amar vos venssa,

*Lo mieus amics, car etz lo plus valens;
Mi faitz orguouill en ditz en parvenssa,
E si etz francs vas totas autras gens.*

Meravill me com vostre cors s'orguouilla
Amics, vas me, per qu'ai rason qu'ieu.m duoilla
Non es ges dreitz c'autr'amors vos mi tuoilla
Per nuilla ren qe.us diga ni acuouilla;
E membre vos cals fo.l comenssamens
De nostr'amor! ja Dompnedieus non vuoilla
Qu'en ma copla sia.l departimens.

Proesa grans que'l vostre cors s'aizina
E lo rics pretz qu'avetz m'en ata"ina.
C'una non sai, loindana ni vezina...
Mas vos, amics, etz bien conoissens.

Valer mi deu mos pretz e mos paratges
E ma beltatz e plus mos fis coratges,
Per qu'ieu vos man lai on es vostr'estatges
Esta chansson que me sia messatges:

Ieu vuoill saber, lo mieus bel amics gens,
Per que vos m'etz tant fers ni tant salvatges.

I'm forced to sing against my will
About something that hurts me deeply.
I love him more than anything;
But to him, my words mean nothing.

*Why are you so uncaring;
Why are you so cruel?*

I know I'm not at fault;
I've given you no cause for complaint.
I love you more than Seguin loved Valensa,
And even now I declare it proudly.

*If you are so valiant, tell me the truth:
Why are you cold to me,
And yet you smile at others?*

I marvel at your arrogance,
and I have every right to be mad:
I see now that your love can be bought
with flattery and expensive gifts.
Remember when we first consummated
Our love? I swear to God, if you leave,
It won't be because of me.

Your allure will not release me
From its spell.
No woman could ever resist...
But you well know your own charms.

My virtue and my beauty, but above all
My faithful heart will plead my case;
I send you this desperate song
To act as my messenger.

I'm heartbroken, and I need to know:
Why are you so uncaring, so cruel?

4. i know a lady

text - Guilhem IX Duke of Aquitaine, VII Count of Poitiers

Farai un vers de dreit nien:
Non er de mi ni d'atra gen,
Non er d'amor ni de joven,
Ni de ren au,
Qu'enans fo trobatz en durmen
Sus un chivau.

No sai en qual hora.m fui natz,
No soi alegres ni iratz,
No soi estranhs ni soi privatz,
Ni no.n puecs au,
Qu'enaisi sui de nueitz fadat
Sobr'un pueg au.

Malautz soi e cremi morir,
E re no sai mas quan n'aug dir;
Metge querrai al mieu albir,
E no sai tau;
Bos metges er si.m pot guerir,
Mas non si amau.

Amigu'ai ieu no sai qui s'es,
C'anc no la vi, si m'aiut fes;
Amigu'ai ieu no sai qui s'es
Ni no m'en cau.

Anc non la vi ez am la fort;
Anc non aic dreit ni no.m fes tort;
Anc non la vi ez am la fort;
No.m prez un jau.

Qu'ien sai gensor e belazor,
E que mais vau.
Peza.m be quar sai rema,
Ab aitan vau.
Fait ai lo vers,
No sai de cui.
Trametrai lo a celui
Enves Anjau.

La contraclau.

I'll make a song of pure nothingness:
It's not about me or anyone else,
It's not about love or youth,
Nor of anything at all.
I wrote it while asleep
On a horse.

I don't know my astrological sign;
I don't feel happy and I don't feel sad;
I'm not a stranger and I'm not your friend.
It's not my fault, though,
A fairy bewitched me,
One night on a hill.

I feel sick and I'm getting sicker,
I've never felt this bad before;
I'd go to a doctor,
If only I knew one.
I'll know he's good if I get better,
But not if I get worse.

I have a girlfriend, but I don't know her that well,
I've never seen her her face, I swear to God;
She gives me neither grief nor joy,
And I don't care.

I've never seen her, and so I love her;
She's never done me right or wrong.
I've never seen her, and still I love her;
It's too much effort.

I know another who is sweeter and cuter,
A better prize.
It depresses me to be here,
And for that reason I'm going to leave.
I wrote this song;
I don't know why.
I'll send it to someone
Who lives near Anjou.

The key.



5. judas

text - Peire Cardenal (c. 1200-1272)

Tartarassa ni voutor
No sent tan leu carwn puden
Quom clerc e prezicador
Senton ont est lo manen.
Mantenen son sei privat,
E quant malautia.l bat,
Fan li far donassio
Tal que.l paren no.i an pro.

Saps qu'endeven la ricor
De sels que l'an malamen?
Venra un fort raubador
Que non lur laissara ren:

So es la mortz, que.ls abat,
C'ab catr'aunas de filat
Los tramet en tal maizo
Ont atrobon de mal pro.

Neither buzzards nor vultures
Smell rotting flesh
As quickly as clerks and priests
Smell a rich man.
In an instant, they become his closest friends;
When illness strikes,
They leech him of his wealth,
Leaving nothing for his heirs.

Do you know what happens to those
Who get rich by evil deeds?
A mighty robber comes
To take it all away:

Death strikes them down,
And, bundled in four yards of cloth,
He takes them to a great estate
Where they enjoy a wealth of torments.



A

1. nor

text & melody - Peire Cardenal

Ar me puec ieu lauzar d'Amor,
Que no.m tol manjar ni dormir;
Ni.n sent freidura ni calor
Ni non badail ni no.n sospir
Ni.n vauc de nueg arratge.
Ni.n soi conquistz ni.n soi cochatz,
Ni.n soi dolenz nin soi iratz,
Ni no.n logui messatge;
Ni.n soi trazitz ni enganatz,
Que partitz m'en soi ab mos datz.

Autre plazer n'ai ieu maior,
Que no.n traïsc ni fauc traïr,
N.in tem tracheiris ni trachor,
Ni brau gilos que m'en azir;
Ni.n fauc fol vassalatge,
Ni.n soi feritz ni derocatz,
Ni no.n fauc lonc badatge,
Ni soi forsatz d'amor.

Ni dic qu'ieu mor per la gensor,
Ni dic que.l bella.m fai languir,
Ni non la prec ni non l'azor,
Ni la deman ni la dezir;
Ni no.l fas homenatge,
Ni no.l m'autrei ni.l me soi datz,
Ni non soi sieus endomenjatz,
Ni a mon cor en gatge
Ni soi sos liatz.

Ni soi sos pres ni sos liatz,
Anz dic qu'ieu li soi escapatz.
Non voilh voler volatge,
Que.m volv e.m vir mas voluntatz
Mas lai on mos vols es voltatz.
Ni soi forsatz d'amor.

This is what I have to say about love:
That it doesn't keep me from eating or sleeping,
Nor does it make me hot or cold,
Nor do I yawn or sigh,
Or sleepwalk at night.
Nor have I been conquered, or seek to conquer;
Neither am I sad or irritated,
Nor do I write love letters.
Nor have I been tricked or deceived –
For I came away with all my dice.

I find happiness in better things;
I do not betray and I am not betrayed,
Nor do I fear traitors,
Nor disagreeable, jealous folk,
Nor do I make a fool of myself,
Nor am I wounded or destroyed,
Nor do I wait around in vain –
Nor am I vanquished by love.

Nor do I proclaim that I'll die for my lady,
Nor say that I languish for her,
Nor do I entreat her or adore her,
Nor make demands nor desire her,
Nor do I pay homage to her,
Nor do I debase myself for her,
Nor am I her servant,
Nor have I pledged my heart –
Nor am I devoted to her.

Nor am I her captive nor her thrall,
Rather, I say I escaped it all.
I don't want to be bound
To a desire that has
A will of its own –
Nor am I vanquished by love.

2. the butterfly

text & melody - Folquet de Marseilla (c. 1160-1231)

Sitot me soi a tart aperceubutz,
Aissi cum cel qu'a tot perdut e jura
Que mais non joc, a gran bonaventura
M'o dei tener car me sui conogutz
Del gran engan qu'Amor vas mi fazia;
C'ab bel semblan m'a tengut en fadia
Mais de detz ans a lei de mal deutor
C'ades promet mas re no pagaria

*Pero no.is cuig, si be.m sui irascuz
Ni faz de leis en chantan ma rancura...*
Ja.l diga ren que no semble mesura;
Mas be sapcha c'a sos ops sui perdutoz,
C'anc sobre fre no.m volc menar un dia,
Anz mi fetz far mon poder tota via,
Et anc sempre cavals de gran valor,
Qui.l biorda trop soven, cuoill feunia.

*Per so, Amors, mi soi ieu recrezutz
de vos servir!*

Q'aissi cum prez'om plus laida pintura
De loing, no fai qand l'es de pres venguz,
Prezav'ieu vos mais qand no.us conoïssia,
E s'anc vos volc, mais n'ai qu'er no volria:
C'aissi m'és pres cum al fol qeridor
Que dis c'aus fos tot qant el tocaria.

Although I realized too late,
Like one, who, after having lost everything,
Swears off gambling forever, I am fortunate
To now finally understood
How much he wronged me;
For with one glance, he kept me waiting
More than ten years, like a debtor
Who is full of promises but never pays.

*Even though I am upset
And can sing of nothing else,
I would never openly speak against him;
But I hope he knows that he has ruined me,
For he never allowed me to prove my loyalty;
Instead, he always bid me do as I wished,
And a prized dog becomes a wolf
when allowed to roam free.*

*Therefore, Love, I am done
being your servant!*

I loved you more when I did not know you –
Like a painting that looks beautiful from afar
But gets uglier as you approach –
But I can now see your flaws.
So it was with that foolish king
who wished that everything he touched would turn to gold.



3. (find yourself) a fine companion

text & melody - Guiraut de Bornelh (fl. c. 1165-1200)

Reis glorios, verrais lums e clartatz,
Deus poderos, Senher, si a vos platz,
Al meu companh siatz fizels ajuda,
Qu'eu non lo vi pos la nochs fo venguda,
Et ades sera l'alba.

Bel companho, si dormetz o velhatz,
Non dormatz plus, suau vos ressidatz,
Qu'en oriēt vei l'estela creguda
Qu'amena. I jorn, qu'eu l'ai conoguda,
Et ades sera l'alba.

*Bel companho, en chantan vos apel:
Non dormatz plus, qu'eu aug chantar l'auzel
Que vai queren lo jorn per lo boscatge,
Et ai paor que. I gilos vos assatge.*

Bel companho, la foras als peiros
Mei preiavatz qu'eu no fos dormilhos,
Enans velhes tota noch tro al dia;
Era no.us platz mos chans ni ma paria,
Et ades sera l'alba.

Glorious king, who shines upon us all,
Powerful God, Lord, if You please,
Watch over my fine companion;
I have not seen him since night fell,
And soon it will be dawn.

Fine companion, whatever you're up to in there,
Sleep no longer, and rouse yourself,
For in the East there is a rising star
Which brings the day; I see it now!
And soon it will be dawn.

*Fine companion, hear my song!
Sleep no more, for I hear birds in the forest
Complaining about the dawn, and I fear
They might grow envious and attack you!*

Fine companion, I'm outside your door;
You begged me to stay awake
And keep watch all through the night;
Now you say my song is too loud!
And soon it will be dawn.

4. d'aurenga

text - Azalais de Porcairagues (late 12th century)

Tant ai lo cor deseubut,
Per qu'ieu soi a totz estraingna,
E sai que l'om a perdut
Molt plus tost que non gasaingna;
E s'ieu faill ab motz verais,
D'Aurenga me moc l'esglais,
Per qu'ieu m'estauc esbaïda
E.n pert solatz en partida.

Amic ai de gran valor
Que sobre tots seignoreia
E non a cor trichador
Vas me, que s'amor m'autreia.
Ieu dic que dis que non fai
Dieus li don mal'escarida
Qu'ieu m'en teing fort per guerida.

Bels amics de bon talan
Son ab vos toz jornz en gatge,
Cortez'e de bel semblan,
Sol non demandes outratge;
Tost en venrem a l'assai,
Qu'en vostra merce.m metrai:
Vos m'avetz la fe plevida,
Que no.m demandes faillida.

My heart was betrayed long ago;
That's why I am so reluctant.
I learned that it is easier to lose
Than it is to win;
But I shall recall the truth as I remember it:
Aurenga was his name.
He was the cause of my sorrow;
Why I can no longer feel happiness.

This man of great worth,
Whom I esteemed more than anyone,
Promised to never deceive me
And allowed me to fall in love with him.
And I say to anyone who says it was not so:
May God curse you forever!
For I know that this, at least, was true.

You are handsome and kind,
And my weary heart can't help but fall
For your charm and fine countenance –
Do not lead me to despair.
You will soon be put to the test,
And I leave myself at your mercy.
You swore that you would be faithful;
Do not make me suffer again.

