

# CALL ME MARIE

## FABLES FROM MARIE DE FRANCE

### Alkemie

Tracy Cowart (voice, harps, percussion, lyre)

Ben Matus (voice, hümmelchen, percussion)

David McCormick (vielle)

Sian Ricketts (voice, recorders, douçaines)

Niccolo Seligmann (vielles, lyre)

*with*

### Chapter House

Peter Walker (voice, hümmelchen, bladderpipes, smallpipes, gaita)

Sarah Walker (storyteller)

### Prologue

Kalenda maya

Raimbaut de Vaqueiras (fl. 1180-1205)

### *The City Mouse and the Country Mouse*

Sumer is icumen in

MS Harley 978

### *The Swallow and the Linseed*

Can vei la lauzeta mover

Bernart de Ventadorn (c. 1145-1180)

### *The Mouse and the Lion*

Untitled (instrumental)

MS Harley 978

### *The Wolf and the Sheep*

La Seste Estampie Real

Chansonnier du Roi

### *The Bee and the Fly*

O quam glorifica/O quam beata domina/O quam felix femina

Worcester Fragments

### *The Man and the Hermit*

Non es meravelha s'eu chan (instrumental)

Bernart de Ventadorn

### *The Shrew Who Wants to Wed*

Volez vous que je vos chant

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fr. 765

### *The Man and the Ship*

La Quarte Estampie Real

Chansonnier du Roi

### Epilogue

Campanis cum cymbalis/Honoremus dominam

GB-Ob MS. Mus. c. 60 (I)

Au tems pascor

Jehans Erars (c. 1200/10-1258/9)

*All spoken texts by Marie de France (fl. 1160–1215).*

**co-presented by The Brick Church, NYC**



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**Alkemie** exists to explore and share the life-affirming and alternative perspectives to be experienced in the sounds of centuries past. Comprised of singer-performers playing over a dozen instruments (including vielles, harps, psaltery, gittern, recorders, douçaines, and percussion), the ensemble has a particular interest in the porous boundaries between the court and folk music of the Medieval period. Grounded in historical performance practice and fed by a love of experimentation, Alkemie's performance on the Indianapolis Early Music Festival in June 2018 was lauded as “enchanting” and “indicating [the] future health of the field of early music.”

Founded in 2013, Alkemie is based in Brooklyn and also performs nationally; since 2018 they have maintained a partnership with the Medieval Studies program at Fordham University. In addition to growing a series in NYC, Alkemie has been presented by the Amherst Early Music Festival, Arizona Early Music Society, Cambridge Society for Early Music, Capitol Early Music Series, Five Boroughs Music Festival, Johns Hopkins Program in Arts, Humanities & Health, Music Before 1800, and the European Early Music Network virtual Early Music Day festival. Alkemie also curated, recorded, and composed the music for the videogame *Pentiment*.

This season, Alkemie looks forward to an indie-rock troubadour collaboration with Charles Mueller and his band *table tennis* (“*Fine Companion*”); and a collaboration with medieval luminary and composer Shira Kammen that focuses on the works of Guillaume DuFay (“*Awesome is this Place*”).

Alkemie's members are also committed to the lively teaching of medieval and Renaissance performance practice and history. Alkemie has been in residence at Fairmont State University and has created workshops and educational outreach programs for the Capitol Early Music Series, Ramaz High School (NYC), and at Fordham University. Alkemie members teach collegiate and amateur students at Case Western Reserve University, Fordham University, the Strathmore Arts Center, Amherst Early Music Festival, Pinewoods, the Baroque Performance Institute at Oberlin, and through the Early Music Access Project. ([alkemie.org](http://alkemie.org))

**Chapter House** was formed in 2018 by GRAMMY-nominated artists Peter and Sarah Walker in order to bring old tales to new audiences. Firmly grounded in scholarship and tradition, the duo is dedicated to rediscovering and reinvigorating the connection between song and story. Chapter House has been featured on concert series presented by Gotham Early Music, the Society for Historically Informed Performance, and the GRAMMY-nominated Skylark Vocal Ensemble. Peter Walker is a critically acclaimed singer and award-winning piper who performs with ensembles in the US and abroad. He is a member of the United States Army Chorus, and cantor at the National Shrine of St. Alphonsus Liguori. Sarah grew up in the Appalachian storytelling tradition and has performed extensively in her home state of West Virginia and throughout New England. She holds degrees in Medieval Studies, Art History, and Library Science from Vassar College and the Pratt Institute.

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## NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

Marie de France (fl. 1160–1215) is known today as the first female poet of France, and arguably the writer of the finest medieval short fiction before Boccaccio and Chaucer. In her Epilogue to her fables, Marie says, “At the end of this text, which I have composed and told in French, I shall name myself for the sake of remembrance: Marie is my name, I am from France.” While the exact identity of Marie remains hotly contested, the assertion that she is from France suggests she was living in Norman England, as does the name-dropping by her English poetic contemporary, Denis Pyramus, who says in the prologue to his “Life of Saint Edmund” that Marie’s rhymes are “loved by everyone” including “counts, barons, and knights.”

Her fables, which she called “translations” are sparkling and wry verse renderings of Aesop and other tales into French; they are the first extant collection of these popular tales in the vernacular in western Europe. Popular throughout the medieval period, her fables survive in twenty-three manuscripts from the 13th-15th centuries, including *Harley MS 978* – a manuscript from Reading which is both the largest and first collection of Marie’s tales.

As Harriet Spiegel (a translator of the fables) relates, today’s relative neglect of Marie’s fables compared to her more well-known *lais* can be explained in part by the modern history of the fable itself, which is now generally viewed as “primarily as a form of children's literature (and an unattractively moralistic one at that)”! However, as this program shows, Marie’s fables, which are marked by wit, sympathy, biting social commentary, and a point of view that can be seen as distinctly feminine – still have much to enjoy a millennium later.

For this program, we have juxtaposed English readings of Marie’s fables with contemporaneous vocal and instrumental music from English and French sources – continuing the cross-pollination between France and England that occurred throughout the medieval period. English history at this time makes *House of Dragons* look tame; suffice to say that during Marie’s life the language of the English court was solidly French, as England was ruled by Henry II and his second wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine, both born on the continent. A two-time escapee of kidnapping and forced marriage, Eleanor - granddaughter of William IX of Aquitaine a.k.a. the first known troubadour – was both a famous patron of the arts and the most powerful woman in Europe. It is at the court of her daughter, however – another Marie, but this one the Countess of Champagne – that the music of Bernart de Ventadorn flourished after Eleanor left France to wed Henry. “Can vei la lauzeta mover,” (written by de Ventadorn) survives as one of the troubadours’ greatest hits – both later trouvères and Latin poets availed themselves of this melody, and Jean Renart cited it in his *Roman de la Rose*. This piece’s oscillation between hope and despair, desire and pain is typical of many troubadour texts.

The reverdie “Volez vous que je vous chant” is an example of an unusual lyric form that originated with the northern trouvères rather than emulating the Occitan poetry of their southern troubadour counterparts. “Volez vous que je vous chant” is a gem of the dozen or so that survive, encapsulating the subtle celebration of spring and amorous delights within a dreamlike and allegorical world. The similarly pleasurable pastourelle “Au tems pascor” evokes the rustic setting that typifies its genre, while also referring by name to instruments such as the bell, panpipes, bagpipes, drum, and chalumeau!

The aforementioned source *Harley MS 978*, compiled from c. 1245–65, was likely copied in the university town of Oxford, which was at the time a major center of book production, as Reading Abbey did not have a scriptorium by this period. It was probably owned by William of Winchester, one of the three Reading monks the manuscript mentions. William was a lover of music who could have no doubt related to Marie’s fables – his history is for the most part undistinguished but occasionally scandalous. On a visit to Leominster Priory in the 1270s, he was brought before the Bishop of Hereford for “incontinence” with a number of women, including a nun of Limebrook Priory. Famous principally because it contains the ear-worm round “Sumer is icumen in,” *Harley MS 978* also possesses medical material, Goliardic satires, and a number of musical pieces, including several two-voice estampies (one of which is featured on this program.) Inscribed in so-called English mensural notation, this dance is markedly different in structure and modality from the contemporaneous estampies contained in the *Chansonnier du Roi*. This notation is also used for the two polytextual motets on this program from the *Worcester Fragments* and the less-catchily named GB-Ob MS. Mus. c. 60 (I). Like “Sumer is icumen in,” “Campanis cum cymbalis/Honoremus dominam” features a simple two-voice pes that forms the foundation of the piece; in this piece it evokes the tolling of bells.

“O quam glorifica/O quam beata domina/O quam felix femina” and “Ave gloriosa mater salvatoris” exemplify the English penchant for celebrating the Virgin Mary, who dominates the extant song-texts of this time. Indeed, *Regulae concordia*, (c. 970) the great document of Benedictine reform in England, established the Saturday mass for Mary, along with prescriptions for Marian antiphons following lauds and vespers, and the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception was first articulated there by Eadmer of Canterbury (1060-1128). Here Mary is celebrated in all three texts of the piece, demonstrating the English zeal for the Virgin that would influence continental practices.

*Tracy Covart, ed. Sian Ricketts*



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To learn more, visit [alkemie.org](http://alkemie.org).

## TRANSLATIONS

### **Kalenda maya**

Neither Mayday, nor beach-tree leaf, nor bird's song, nor gladiolus, can please me, noble lady, until a speedy messenger comes to me from your fair person, who can tell me of new pleasure that love brings me with joy; and I repair to you, true lady, and he falls, wounded, (the jealous one), ere I depart.

My fair friend, may it not be, by God, that the jealous one laughs at my pain; for he would sell dearly his jealousy if two such lovers were parted. Never again would I be joyous, for joy without you would bring no profit. Such a road would I take that one never more would see me; that day I would die, Lady fine, that I lost you.

Your worth, nobler than all, Lady Beatrice, so sweetly begins and increases; by my belief, you adorn with merit your might, and with fine words, without fault, and of pleasing deeds you are the source. Knowledge and compassion you have; discernment, and worth without dispute; you dress yourself in benevolence.

Gracious lady, each praises and proclaims your merit, which is pleasing; and to the one who forgets you, life is worth little. And so I adore you, distinguished lady; for as the noblest I have chosen you, and as the best, of perfect merit. I have wooed and served you better than Erec did Enide. I have composed and finished, Lord Engles, the *estampida*. *Samuel N. Rosenberg*

### **Sumer is icumen in**

Summer has arrived, loudly sing cuckoo! The seed grows and the meadow blossoms and the wood now sprouts [into bud]. Sing cuckoo! The ewe bleats for the lamb, the cow lows for the calf; the bullock leaps, the buck cavorts – merrily sing cuckoo! Cuckoo, cuckoo! Well do you sing cuckoo; do not ever cease now. *Helen Deeming*

### **Can vei la lauzeta mover**

When I see the lark beating his wings, for joy, against the sun's ray until he forgets to fly and lets himself fall for the sweetness which goes to his heart – Alas! such great envy comes over me of those whom I see rejoicing, I marvel that at once my heart does not melt from desire.

Alas! I thought I knew so much about love, and I know so little! For I cannot keep myself from loving her from whom I shall have no good. She has stolen my heart, and stolen my self, and herself and all the world; and when she took herself away, she left me nothing except desire and a longing heart.

Mercy is lost, truly, and I never knew it, for she, who ought to have most of it, has none, and where shall I seek it? Ah! how terrible it appears, to one looking at her, that this poor, love-sick wretch, who will never have good without her, she allows to perish, without helping him.

Since with my lady nothing avails me, neither prayers nor pity nor the right I have, and since to her it is no pleasure that I lover her, never shall I tell her again. Thus I leave her and give up. She has slain me, and by death I shall answer, and I go away, since she does not retain me, wretched, into exile, I know not where.

Tristan, you will have nothing more from me, for I depart, wretched I know not where. I forsake and give up singing, and I hide myself from joy and love.

*Samuel N. Rosenberg*

### **O quam glorifica/O quam beata domina/O quam felix femina**

O how thou glitterest with glorious radiance, virgin Mary, royal offspring of the tribe of David, sitting exalted above all the celestial beings of the empyrean. Thou, chaste mother with virginal honor, hast with thy holy womb prepared the palace for the lord of angels; hence Christ is born, God incarnate, whom the whole worshipping world adores, before whom now every knee is rightly bent, and from whom we beg, when thou comest, the casting out of darkness and the joys of light.

O how blessed art thou, Mary, most gentle lady; hear the prayers of the lowly who piously sing thy praises; our soul remains empty and fouled by sins; through thee it can be cleansed, if Christ would; thou who art royal and shining white like the lilies, remember us that thou mayest ask thy son to give us the solace of peace. Glory be to the king of kings and reverence for Mary; let us praise her with songs and in mellifluous hymns.

O how happy a woman art thou, most serene virgin, dearest mother of Christ, parent of him who reigns over everything, who rules over the heavens for all ages; thou art entrance to the high king and shining door of light. Clap your hands, you redeemed people, for the life given through the virgin's action.

*Ernest H. Sanders*

### **Volez vous que je vos chant**

Do you wish me to sing you a sweet song of love? No rustic composed it, but rather a knight, in the shade of an olive tree in the arms of his sweetheart.

She wore a linen shift, a white ermine wrap, and a tunic of silk; she had stockings of iris and shoes of mayflowers, fitting just right.

She wore a sash of leaves whose green deepened in the rain; it had buttons of gold. Her purse was of love, with pendants of flowers: it was a love-gift.

She was riding a mule; its shoes were of silver and its saddle of gold; on the crupper behind her three rosebushes grew to provide her with shade.

So she went down through the field; some knights came upon her and greeted her nicely: "Lovely lady, where were you born?" "From France I am; I am renowned, of the highest birth.

The nightingale is my father, who sings on the branches high in the forest; the siren is my mother, who sings high on the shore of the salt sea."

"Lovely lady, may such birth bode well! You are of fine family and high birth; would to God our father that you were given me as my wedded wife!"

*Samuel N. Rosenberg*

### **Campanis cum cymbalis/Honoremus dominam**

Let the whole choir of mankind praise the Lord with bells and cymbals; let the heavens praise Him with lyres and psalteries. Let Him be praised for ever with organs, and with individual ways of giving song, with joyful notes.

Let us honor the Lady, worthy of the court of heaven, chosen to be the royal mother of the King's glory. Let there be always jubilation for the mother, after the song, and devoted prayer for the condition of the weak.

Geoffrey Webber

### **Au tems pascor**

At Easter time the other day, I was riding by a pasture. In a secluded spot because of the heat, I found in my way Perrin and Guiot and Rogier. Among themselves they said that after eating a fete would be announced. Gui will lead the tumult, with bell and panpipes and his bagpipe with the great drone he will play the dance. *Cibalala du riaux du riaux, cibalala durie.*

Said Gui, "I shall be more splendidly dressed than ever before; I shall provide such amusement, sir, that the honors will be mine. I want to wear my leather shoes, and I shall have my wreath of prune twigs and my pleated tunic. No one in the country performs the rabardel better than I. I know well how to play the chalumeau and the whole art. *Cibalala...*

Rogier in turn said for love he would give Sara a belt. Perrin changed color, is frightened; Rogier should not take her away. Then he said to him reprovingly, "Rogier, you had better leave it there. Sara is too sensible. I think she will be married between now and Lent. Gui will have his drum and bagpipe filled [with money]." *Cibalala...*

Without delay they scattered in all directions, and I went on my way. On my return I found Perrin with a drum on the grass, where there was dancing and springing; the girls and shepherds stamp their feet. But Rogier does not at all approve. He knows well Sara is pledged, and by whom she has been caught. Gui with drum and fife play for them this estampie: *Cibalala...*

Rogier was never angrier, and said, "I shall not give up for any love; should I not beat this traitor Perrin? For he went behind my back. For his misfortune he made himself a go-between." Then he asked for his sword and assembled such people as were not a bit cowardly. They so anointed Perrin's muzzle that he had no desire to sing: *Cibalala...*

When I saw how Perrin was treated, I drew back a little and watched the melee. Much hair was pulled, and many blows given. Gui mixed in and a blow of a knife pierced his bagpipe! *Cibalala...*

### **REFRAIN**



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