

The Artists



ASTERIA burst onto the national Early Music scene in 2004, winning the first Early Music America (EMA) Competition for Medieval/Renaissance Performance with their exquisite interpretation of love songs from the Burgundian court of Philip the Good. This engaging duo brings out the passion and emotional impact of late medieval vocal and instrumental music, moving the *New York Times* to declare, “They sang these songs of love and loss as if to each other, yet drew a listener in completely.” Eric’s skill on the lute and sweet tenor voice are complemented by Sylvia’s quicksilver soprano and strong dramatic connection with the audience, gained from a professional career in musical theater where she has starred internationally and on Broadway.

Informed through immersion in the archives of Europe and performed entirely from memory, Asteria’s programs bring the past to life. Presented at the Boston Early Music Festival by EMA in 2005, Asteria has since had an active touring schedule, including such venues as the Berkeley Early Music Festival (featured artist), the Cloisters, Dumbarton Oaks, Simon Bolivar Amphitheatre in Mexico City, the Regensburg Tage Alter Musik and in 2008 at the Landshüter Hofmusiktag, Germany. Their unique style is showcased on three CDs of 15th Century Burgundian chansons, “Le Souvenir de Vous Me Tue,” “Soyes Loyal” and, recorded in the authentic halls of France, the lovely “Un Très Doulx Regard.”



Touring Programs

Un Tres Doulx Regard

The Blossoming of the Burgundian Spirit in Song, 1390-1440

Just like the shy lover who is knocked off his feet by the merest glance from the object of his affection, the music of the first generation of Burgundian composers at the end of the ars nova is infused with the sweetness and explosive passion of new love. Asteria’s latest program, “Un tres doulx regard,” is the result of extensive archival research during their sabbatical year in France in 2006/2007. Largely drawn from anonymous or unattributed compositions from the last decade of the 14th century and very beginning of the 15th, this body of work reflects the generation of “Dufay’s teachers”, and contains many of the elements that will later be the hallmarks of the mature Burgundian style that swept Europe during of the middle of the 15th century.

Flower of Passion ~ Thorn of Despair

Chivalry and Courtly Love in Medieval Burgundy

This program brings together a sumptuous collection of courtly songs that would have likely been performed in the courts of the Dukes of Burgundy at the height of their cultural influence during the mid to late 15th century. The composers and musicians who prospered under the reign of Philip II, Duke of Burgundy, were the envy of Europe, and his court chapel was compared favorably to that of the Pope himself. Philip’s generosity and appreciation of music contributed to a legacy of poetry and song that would be continue to be performed and imitated long after the end of Burgundian influence. The title of the program is drawn from the 13th century work *The Romance of the Rose*, an epic poem of love that chronicles the quest of a stricken lover to retrieve his “rose” from an impregnable fortress.

A Rose of Such Virtue

Sacred and Secular Love in the Waning Middle Ages

Much of the courtly poetry from the 12th to the 15th centuries can be summed up, as Robert Morton does in his exquisite chanson from the latter 15th century, with one phrase: “Vive Ma Dame!” The Lady, the absolute, flawless, most worthy object of chivalric desire, is surely one of the most mysterious and intriguing elements of medieval art. Her frequent portrayal as a flower, particularly a thorny rose, only emphasizes the cost of granting her one’s devotion. But the symbols of the lady and the rose are simultaneously also images for the virgin mother. Asteria explores the dual nature of these themes with beautiful English and French music from the early 15th century.

Outreach initiatives

Asteria has experience in a wide variety of outreach situations, from in-depth presentations on medieval performance practice, sources and notation to talks with tots about knights and chivalry. And of course, their talks are always peppered with songs and musical examples. Asteria’s recent lecture on historically-informed performance at New York’s Hunter College drew attendees from across the United States. And in an outreach event for German school children, Asteria’s enthusiasm for their subject led a wide-eyed pupil to inquire of Eric: “are you a knight?”



Troubadours, Knights and Ladies in the King’s Castle

Sylvia and Eric will demonstrate their instruments, sing songs and talk about what it was like in the medieval culture of knights, ladies, troubadours and kings.

Performance Practice in Medieval Chansons

Eric offers a discussion on performance practice for medieval music, taking a look at original manuscripts and how one transcribes what we find there for an ensemble today. Using images from original manuscripts, paintings and chateaux in France, Asteria examines how one searches through cultural clues and lyrics to create a presentation of ancient music that resonates with audiences of today, including intriguing demonstrations from their own repertoire.

Finding the Emotional Journey in a Song

Sylvia offers a masterclass in performance technique, working with singers of all ages and genres on how to connect to the emotional journey in texted music and bring it to life for the audience. Sylvia has been teaching these arts privately and in music camps, high schools and universities for over a decade. She works gently with each student to bring out the best that they have to offer, and shares powerful insights gained from a career in opera, early music and Broadway, delivered in a respectful and thought-provoking style.

*This is modern medieval music for fans
of Classical and current sounds...*

Movement Nouveau

...Superb artistry...

Columbus Dispatch

This duo combines perfectly...

...captivating and intimate.

Goldberg Magazine



Booking:

GEMS Live!

a service of Gotham Early Music Scene

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About this music

In the courts of Europe at the end of the Middle Ages, musical performance not only sounded, but also looked very different than it does today. Large orchestras and choirs did not exist, nor did the modern concept of a concert in which an audience assembles for the express purpose of listening to music. In fact, aside from fanfares and other public celebrations, music was largely a more personal, intimate affair, with songs composed and performed by a handful of musicians and singers for private audiences or as part of a larger program of entertainment at banquets and other social settings at court. Lords increased their prestige by hiring composer/musicians to accompany their daily activities. Softer instruments such as lutes, harps and vielles (a predecessor of the violin) were favored to accompany singers in the beautiful polyphonic textures that characterize the sound of the period. Indeed, rather than the accompanied melodies of modern music, the chansons of five hundred years ago were comprised of multiple melodies that intertwined in sumptuous tapestries of harmony.

The subject of the poetry is almost without exception that of courtly love, the quest to honor, praise, and ultimately to prove oneself worthy of a "Lady". While the texts of these love songs do bear more than a passing resemblance to their counterparts in contemporary popular music, their role in late medieval society is particularly profound, and their artistic quality often of the highest degree. This is a culture of gesture and role playing, of fantastic displays of emotion and grandeur. Just like the characters in the chansons, 15th Century lords, courtiers and pages all rejoiced, wept and despaired with great frequency and urgency, as the occasion demanded. Art, then as now, reflects the currents of its time, and Asteria's moving performances, informed by years of academic and personal research into this fascinating period of history, provides a rare insight into the passions of another age.



*Deeply communicative...
...meltingly beautiful.*

The New York Times

Asteria

Sylvia Rhyne, soprano

Eric Redlinger, tenor and lute



*Songs of Love and Passion
from the
Courts of Medieval Europe*

*Instrumental and Vocal Music from the
Renaissance and the Middle Ages*



ASTERIA

<http://asteriamusica.com>