

# ASTERIA

## *a Rose of Such Virtue*

Presenter Information Kit

## Artist Bios

In October 2004, Asteria burst onto the national Early Music scene, winning Early Music America's first Unicorn Prize for Medieval and Renaissance Music with a performance heralded by the New York Times as "intimate and deeply communicative...meltingly beautiful." This engaging duo brings out the passion and emotional impact of late medieval vocal and instrumental music with timeless love songs of wide appeal, transporting their listeners back to the age of chivalry.

Eric's skill on the lute and sweet tenor voice are complemented by his expertise in early music, earned through study at the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis and extensive archival research into original sources. Following graduation from Middlebury College, Eric spent several years immersing himself in the European musical archives of the Hague, Basel and Marburg. During this time he also did post-graduate studies in composition and musicology at the Frankfurt Conservatory of Music, worked in the studio of New York based *avant-garde* composer Philip Glass and studied medieval lute with Crawford Young and voice with Richard Levitt at the Schola. He now makes his home in New York, where he has studied with Drew Minter and Gary Ramsey.



Sylvia brings to the partnership not only her quicksilver soprano but also a strong dramatic connection with the audience, gained from a professional career in musical theater. She has starred internationally as Christine in "The Phantom of the Opera," and on Broadway as Joanna in "Sweeney Todd" under the direction of Harold Prince, Susan Schulman and Stephen Sondheim.

Raised in London and the Pacific Northwest, Sylvia grew up surrounded by classical music, opera and dance. She pursued a passion for early music at Carleton College, guided by Stephen Kelly, taking leading roles in early operas and operettas on her way to a degree in music. She studied also with Wesley Balk at St. Olaf College and recorded with Dennis Russell Davies and the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra. Arriving in New York, Sylvia was invited to sing with the New York City Opera and began ongoing coaching with Marcy Lindheimer.



Upon meeting, Eric and Sylvia immediately discovered their mutual interest in earlier repertoire and began to rendezvous regularly in New York's Central Park to work on late Medieval and Renaissance pieces, gradually developing their passionate approach to the music. Asteria's performances convey the anguish and ecstasy of the poetry and the rapturous beauty of the interweaving vocal and instrumental lines.

The result of Asteria's exploration can be heard on their first two recordings of 15th century chansons, *Le Souvenir de Vous me Tue*, and *Soyes Loyal*, both available from [www.asteriamusica.com](http://www.asteriamusica.com) and via digital download from [www.magnatune.com](http://www.magnatune.com).

# Program

## A Rose of Such Virtue

*Sacred and Secular Love in the Waning Middle Ages*

Novo Profusi Gaudio	Anon English
Tant est Mignone	Guillaume Dufay
Pour Prison	Gilles Binchois
Se Mon Cuer	Anon Burgundian
Va T'en Souspir	Estienne Grossin
Vergine Bella	Guillaume Dufay
Of a Rose Singe We	Anon English
Soyez Loyal	Anon Burgundian
<i>~Pause~</i>	
Seule Esgaree	Gilles Binchois
Le Souvenir de Vous me Tue	Robert Morton
J'atendray Tant	Guillaume Dufay
Deuil Angoisseux	Gilles Binchois
Se La Face Ay Pale	Guillaume Dufay
There is No Rose of Such Virtue	Anon English

# Program Notes

Much of the courtly poetry from the 12th to the 15th centuries can be summed up, as Robert Morton does in his 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.

The Romance of the Rose, the great love epic of this age, sets forth the code of chivalry in intricate detail and becomes in the process a sort of manual for courtly conduct as it describes the impassioned pursuit by a lover to win his "rose" through a variety of allegorical situations and encounters. As in the greater part of 15th century verse, the richness and evocativeness of the symbols lends an almost palpable form to their underlying meanings: the unmatched beauty and sensuality of the Rose only heightens the allure of the Lady it represents, just as its thorny guardian, a giant figure aptly named Danger, lends a larger than life gestalt to the risks of pursuing the Lady.

But there is another lady, another rose, of no small importance in this period: the Virgin Mary. The literary traditions surrounding the sacred stories are as rich with metaphor and allegory as those of the secular. In many cases, the very same symbols are used, for which only a thin layer of context distinguishes a profane reference from a sacred one. Popular sacred songs in the vernacular, such as the English carols "There is no rose of such virtue" and "Of a rose sing we", existed peaceably alongside secular chansons such as the anonymous 'La Douce Flour' (the sweet flower) from the early 15th century and The Romance of the Rose itself.

"A Rose of Such Virtue" explores the resonant symbolism that existed in both the secular and vernacular sacred chansons during the close of the Medieval period in Europe. The individuals who populated the courts of Medieval Europe were highly adapted to a dualistic existence. Their lives were marked by the utter chaos and tenuous fabric of reality, on the one hand, and the refinement and grace that accompanied the pursuit of the chivalric ideal, on the other. We hope that listening to these works of extraordinary beauty sheds a glimmer of light upon the passions of the age. Vive Ma Dame!

# Program Text Synopses

## *Novo Profusi Gaudio*

Anon 15th century English

All the people are speaking of the birth of our saviour,  
Benedicamus Deo.

## *Tant Est Mignonne Ma Pensee*

Guillaume Dufay (1400-1474)

So sweet and gentle are my thoughts...  
More than any woman I know it is clear that this is the lady who is surpassed by no other...

## *Pour Prison*

Gilles Binchois (1400-1460)

Not prison, nor illness, nor anything one can tell me  
Can make my heart forget you...

## *Se Mon Cuer*

Anon ~1420

If my heart is taken, it is not mistaken,  
When it is for loyal service and obedience  
To her who has honored me in taking my heart.

## *Va T'ent Souspir*

Estienne Grossin (~1420)

Go, sigh, I beg you, quickly to my Lady;  
And tell her sweetly of my malady.  
Tell her that I certainly have no desire to choose another...

## *Vergine Bella*

Guillaume Dufay (1400-1474)

Beautiful virgin, crowned with stars...love drives me to speak of you!

## *Of A Rose Singe We*

Anon 15th century English

Of a rose singe we,  
Mysterium Mirabile.

## *Soyes Loyal*

Anon from Oxford Can. Misc. 213 (~1420)

Remain loyal as well as you are able. You will soon receive comfort from Sweet Hope, my gracious friend.

## *Seule Esgaree*

Gilles Binchois (1400-1460)

Alone, abandoned by all joyous pleasure  
Pain is that in which I shall languish...

### *Le Souvenir De Vous Me Tue*

Robert Morton

The memory of you kills me,  
My one treasure, when I cannot see you.

### *J'atendray Tant*

Guillaume Dufay

I will wait as long as it pleases you,  
To declare my thoughts to you, my sweet, honored lady.

### *Dueil Angoisseux*

lyric: Christine de Pisan / music: Gilles Binchois

Anguished grief, rage beyond measure...  
Princes, pray to God, who owes me death soon.

### *Se La Face Ay Pale*

Guillaume Dufay

If the face is pale, the cause is love...

### *There Is No Rose Of Such Virtue*

Anon 15th century English

There is no rose of such virtue,  
as is the Rose that barre Jesu

# Other Materials

Print-quality images:



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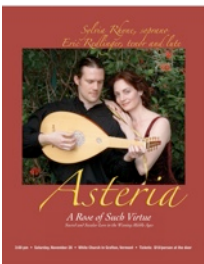


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Sample Program Design (tri-fold):



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