I love books. I love the smell and feel of very old and very new books. I have many books. (That, my dears, is an understatement.) I am lost without a book, feeling incomplete, frantic (what is there to do? I don’t have anything to read!) I love browsing in bookstores (used bookstores most of all), in libraries, and (Oh the shame of it) on Amazon.com.

Several years ago, with no deadline impending, I browsed the library of the Great God Amazon for books addressing the Medieval period, looking for something new. There was nothing there that MDC or I did not already possess. (Very deep sigh.) I assumed bookish interest in the Middle Ages had waned, a fad now passed.

2012 arrives, it’s a rainy day, and again, I’ve nothing to do. (That translates “I don’t have anything at hand that I want to read, and don’t want to go out in the rain.) I set about another browse of boredom, and suddenly, there it was! A number of NEW books focusing on the Middle Ages.

Although several are nestled nicely in my library (stacked on a table waiting their turn to be read), it was The Flower of Paradise that I turned to first, thinking: What a great title for a concert!” As I began reading, I saw that not only was the title super, the book itself contained and referred to more than a concert’s worth of music.

You’ll find below more information on the book and it’s contents below. There’s also information on our recent collaboration with Tulane Professor Michael Kuczynski, a recipe perfect for lovers of the Crescent City, words about our upcoming concert, and directions on handling a musical hiccup.

Keep reading, and see you at one (or more) of our performances of The Flower of Paradise.

THE FLOWER OF PARADISE

Marian Devotion and Secular Song in Early Music

with Vox Feminae

Sunday 14 April 3:00 pm
Saint Joseph Abbey Church
St. Benedict, LA - near Covington

Sunday 21 April4:00 pm
Ursuline Chapel
2791 State St. - New Orleans

Sunday 28 April3:00 pm
Holy Name of Mary Church
500 Eliza St. - Algiers Point

THIRD CONCERT OF THE 2012/13 SEASON
OUR 47th!!!

All free and open to the public.
Call 504-895-1972 for further information.

Love and Devotion are celebrated in our Spring concert, “The Flower of Paradise.” In the Late Middle Ages, Marian devotional songs (sacred and in Latin), and love songs (secular and in the vernacular) are remarkably similar. Both praise an idealized, virtuous woman, using highly stylized derivations of traditional medieval song forms - Marian prayer derived from earlier Gregorian chant, and love songs and lyrics from medieval courtly love song.

Inspired by the book, “The Flower of Paradise”, penned by David J. Rothenberg, our program features music sacred and secular, instrumental and vocal. Included are instrumental and vocal motets (part songs in which two contrasting lines of text are sung simultaneously, over a non-texted line derived from Gregorian Chant) as well as several 13th century non - Gregorian chants likely making their Twenty First century debut!
THE FLOWER OF PARADISE: THE BOOK AND MUSIC

Our Spring Concert, “The Flower of Paradise”, contains a variety of musical forms unique to the Middle Ages. All of the music you’ll hear is referenced in, or reproduced in the book “The Flower of Paradise”, written by David J. Rothenberg.

Noteworthy among the chants performed by Vox Feminae is “Haec dies”, the gradual from the Mass for Easter Day. (The gradual is the second of five items of the Proper of the Mass, that part which changes according to liturgical calendar). The significant part of this chant is the rather long series of thirty-four notes (melisma) to be sung on the words “in s(a)eculum” (forever). For some unknown reason, these notes became the most popular Tenor (the bottom line) of medieval motets.

THE MEDIEVAL MOTET

The medieval motet is a type of composition unique to and very popular in the 13th-14th centuries. The composition consists of two, three or more parts, performed simultaneously. The bottom or Tenor line is untexted and usually in one of the medieval rhythmic modes, over which a second sung texted line (Motetus or Duplum) was added. Another line could be added above (Triplum) with a different text, occasionally in a different language! Sometimes a fourth line (Quadruplum) was added. The Tenor line was usually a portion or complete excerpt of a popular melody (sacred or secular) of the period. The texted lines above could be sacred, secular or both, and were sung concurrently.

The two sources of medieval motets are the 13th century Montpelier Codex (over 300) and the Bamberg Codex (108). In both sources, the most frequently used Tenor line was “In seculum”, hence called the “In Seculum Motets”. Our program contains six of these “In Seculum Motets”, three of which are in “hocket” form.

THE “IN SECULUM” HOCKET MOTET

The hocket (hiccup) was used primarily in vocal music of the 13th and early 14th centuries. A predominant characteristic of music of the Notre Dame school during the thirteenth century, it was found in sacred vocal music. In the 14th century, it was most often found in secular vocal music.

It is a rhythmic linear technique using the alternation of notes. In medieval practice of hockets, a single melody is shared between two (or occasionally more) voices, so that alternately, one voice sounds while the other rests. Basically, throwing the melody back and forth between two or more voices. Untexted hockets (played by instruments) are rather rare and found in the Bamberg Codex. Seven are at the end of that manuscript, five them using the Tenor line “In seculum”. Hence, they are called the “In Seculum Hocket Motets”. Here is the opening of the “In Seculum d’Amiens Longum” hocket motet. The Tenor is in Rhythmic Mode V.
MEDIEVAL RECIPE

I’ve said in the past that New Orleans was the most Medieval of American Cities. Since our Spring Concert explores the varieties of Medieval music, I’ve selected a Mediaeval Recipe popular in New Orleans! Payn Pur-Dew (meaning God’s Bread or Lost Bread) is a medieval version of French Toast, still called Lost Bread by some New Orleans. Enjoy!

**Payn Pur-Dew**

The name means either God’s bread or lost bread; this is a medieval version of modern French toast.

- 7 fresh eggs, separated
- 4 tablespoons heavy cream or milk
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
- 12 slices whole wheat, rye, or pumpernickel bread cut into 4 squares or 4 triangles each
- 3 tablespoons brown sugar
- 1/4 pound butter for sautéing in a heavy frying pan or skillet

1. Slowly heat the butter in the heavy frying pan or skillet, being careful not to let it burn.
2. With a fork or rotary beater, beat the egg yolks with the cream or milk. Add the egg whites. Beat again.
3. Stir in the salt, cinnamon, and cumin.
4. Dip the bread pieces in the spiced egg until they are completely coated and remove them with a spatula.
5. Sauté the bread on both sides in the melted butter until golden-brown.
6. Remove them to a rack or the serving platter and sprinkle them with brown sugar. Serve warm.

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SOME INTERESTING QUOTES ABOUT MUSIC

*The difference between a violin and a viola is that a viola burns longer. (Victor Borge)*

*I understand the inventor of the bagpipes was inspired when he saw a man carrying an indignant, asthmatic pig under his arm. Unfortunately, the manmade sound never equaled the purity of the sound achieved by the pig. (Alfred Hitchcock)*
*An unalterable and unquestioned law of the musical world required that the German text of French operas sung by Swedish artists should be translated into Italian for the clearer understanding of English-speaking audiences. (Edith Wharton)

*It's easy to play any musical instrument: all you have to do is touch the right key at the right time and the instrument will play itself. (J. S. Bach)

*There are two golden rules for an orchestra: start together and finish together. The public doesn't give a damn what goes on in between. (Sir Thomas Beecham)

*The world must be filled with unsuccessful musical careers like mine, and it's probably a good thing. We don't need a lot of bad musicians filling the air with unnecessary sounds. Some of the professionals are bad enough. (Anthony Rooney)