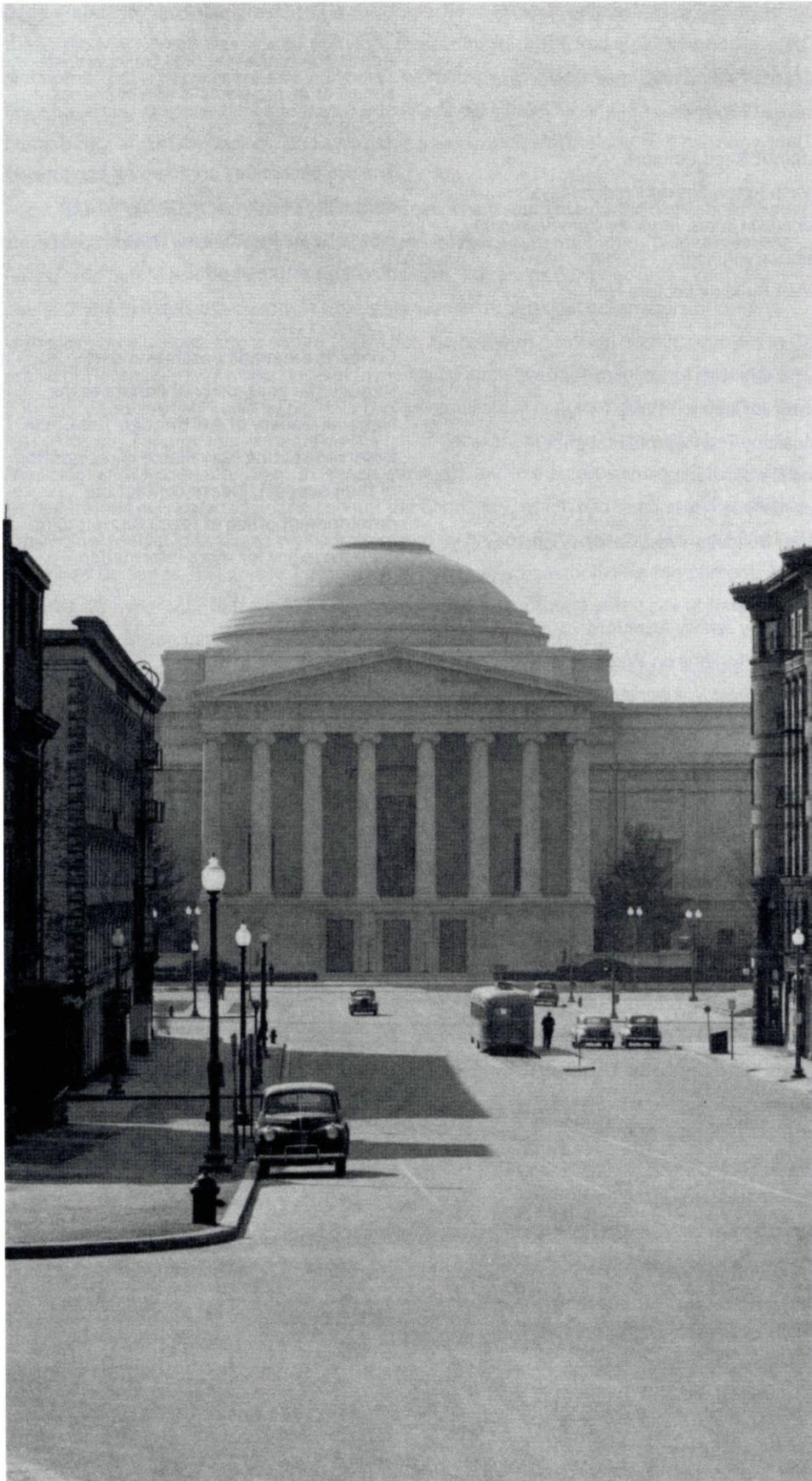


75TH SEASON OF CONCERTS

FEBRUARY 12, 2017 • NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART



PROGRAM



Blue Heron. Photo by Liz Linder

12:00 and 2:00 • West Building, West Garden Court

Blue Heron

Martin Near and Laura Pudwell, cantus
Michael Barrett, Owen McIntosh, Jason McStoots, and Aaron Sheehan,
tenor and contratenor
Paul Guttry and Sumner Thompson, bassus
Scott Metcalfe, vielle, director

Music by Du Fay and Binchois for Florence and the Medici

Guillaume Du Fay (c. 1397 - 1474)

"Salve flos Tusce gentis"

"Vos nunc Etrusce"

"Viri mendaces"

Gilles Binchois (c. 1400 - 1460)

"Pour prison"

"Margarite fleur de valeur"

"Mon cuer chante joyeusement"

Guillaume Du Fay

Mirandas parit

Gilles Binchois

"Seule esgarée"

"Votre tresdoux regart"

"Dueil angoisseus"

"Files à marier"

Music for the Dedication of Santa Maria del Fiore, March 25, 1436

Guillaume Du Fay

"Nuper almos rose flores" (sequence of the Mass for the Dedication)

Guillaume Du Fay

"Nuper rosarum flores" (isorhythmic motet)

The Musicians

Blue Heron has been acclaimed by the *Boston Globe* as “one of the Boston music community’s indispensables” and hailed by Alex Ross in the *New Yorker* for its “expressive intensity.” Committed to vivid live performance informed and enhanced by the study of original source materials and historical performance practices, Blue Heron ranges over a wide repertoire, from plainchant to new music, with particular specialties in fifteenth-century Franco-Flemish and early sixteenth-century English polyphony. Blue Heron’s first CD, featuring music by Guillaume Du Fay, was released in 2007. In 2010, the ensemble inaugurated a five-CD series, *Music from the Peterhouse Partbooks*, including many world premiere recordings of works copied about 1540 for Canterbury Cathedral; four discs have been released to date and the fifth is due out in the spring of 2017. Blue Heron’s recordings also include a CD of plainchant and polyphony to accompany Thomas Forrest Kelly’s book *Capturing Music: The Story of Notation* and the live recording *Christmas in Medieval England*. Jessie Ann Owens (UC Davis) and Blue Heron won the 2015 Noah Greenberg Award from the American Musicological Society to support an eventual world premiere recording of Cipriano de Rore’s first book of madrigals (1542).

Founded in 1999, Blue Heron presents a concert series in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and has appeared at the Boston Early Music Festival; in New York City at Music Before 1800, The Cloisters (Metropolitan Museum of Art), and the 92nd Street Y; at the Library of Congress and Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, DC; at the Berkeley Early Music Festival; and in San Luis Obispo, Seattle, St. Louis, Chicago, Cleveland, Milwaukee, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia. Blue Heron has been in residence at the Center for Early Music Studies at Boston University and at Boston College. In 2015, the ensemble embarked on a long-term project to perform the complete works of Johannes Ockeghem (c. 1420–1497). Entitled *Ockeghem@600*, it will wind up in 2020–2021, in time to commemorate the composer’s approximate 600th birthday.

Program Notes

Writing in the mid-1430s, just before the dedication of Florence’s cathedral, Santa Maria del Fiore, and its splendid, newly completed dome, Leon Battista Alberti singled out five men whose works, he said, “are as worthy of esteem as any of the glories of antiquity”: Filippo Brunelleschi, Donatello, Lorenzo Ghiberti, Luca della Robbia, and Masaccio. Architects, sculptors, painters — these men represent the very best of Florentine arts under the Medici, and it is no surprise that all five are Italian. Everyone knows that Italy and Italian genius gave birth to humanism and what we now call the Renaissance. Had Alberti widened his gaze a bit to include music, however, his roster of aesthetic heroes would perforce have taken on a different national cast, for in fifteenth-century Italy the most highly regarded musicians were not Italians at all, but singers and composers trained in the choir schools of northern France and the southern Low Countries. Indeed, of the ten members of the papal chapel that sang at the dedication of Santa Maria del Fiore on March 25, 1436 — the Feast of the Annunciation and the first day of the New Year in Florence as elsewhere in Christian Europe — eight were French, and first and foremost among them was Guillaume Du Fay.

Du Fay arrived in Italy in the 1420s and was a member of Pope Eugenius IV’s chapel during the papal curia’s Florentine sojourn, from June 1434 to April 1436. (Alberti, too, was a member of the curia.) In Florence, Du Fay joined a dazzling community of artists and humanists flourishing under Medici rule and patronage. Luca della Robbia (the central subject of the exhibition that surrounds us today) created many of his most famous works for the cathedral, including the marble Cantoria or Singer’s Gallery (1431–1438), a series of marble reliefs for the bell tower (1437), two reliefs in colored, glazed terra-cotta depicting the Resurrection (1442–1445), the Ascension (1446–1451), and, in collaboration with Michelozzo, bronze doors for the sacristy (completed in 1469). Du Fay for his part composed a compact but spectacular motet, “Nuper rosarum flores,” for the ceremonies surrounding the dedication of the cathedral.

Rigorously constructed on a scaffolding of two cantus firmi, “Nuper rosarum flores” presents a dense network of numerological allusions. The text, which consists of four stanzas of seven lines of seven syllables (perhaps by Du Fay himself), is set to music in four sections, each of which consists of twenty-eight (i.e., 4×7) breves (or measures) for two upper voices, followed by twenty-eight breves for all four parts, in which the two tenors sing their interlocking cantus firmi, each quoting (at different pitch levels) the first four words and fourteen notes of the plainchant Introit of the Mass for the Dedication of a Church (“Terribilis est locus iste”). The speed at which the tenors sing the four iterations of their lines is controlled by mensurations (more or less equivalent to time signatures) in the proportions 6:4:2:3. Four and seven are numbers rich with significance in Christian tradition — seven has a particularly Marian resonance, recalling Mary’s seven sorrows, seven joys, seven acts of mercy, seven feasts, and so on — and, as has been shown by Craig Wright, the proportions 6:4:2:3 correspond precisely to those of the Temple of Solomon as it is described in the first Book of Kings. Furthermore, the building was begun in the fourth year of Solomon’s reign, completed in seven years, and dedicated in the seventh month of the year in a service which lasted “seven days and seven days, even fourteen days” (1 Kings 8:65). The proportions of the temple were held to have spiritual significance — “Six therefore represents the perfection of the work, two the dilection and proximity of God, three the hope of divine vision,” according to the Venerable

Bede — and they are in turn reflected in the proportions of Florence's cathedral, dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Mary was herself seen as a temple in which the Son of God was conceived and borne, and was consecrated by Gabriel's word just as the Venetian Gabriele Condulmer, Pope Eugenius, consecrates Florence's Santa Maria del Fiore. Out of all this symbolism, numerology, and mathematics, Du Fay creates a work of playful melody, rich harmony, and imposing sonority.

Du Fay probably also composed the new plainchant sequence for the dedication, "Nuper almos rose flores," whose text shares words and imagery with the motet "Nuper rosarum flores," and before leaving Florence he would write, "Mirandas parit hec urbs Florentina puellas," which extols the beauty of Florentine women in classical hexameters brimming with classical allusions, and a motet, "Salve flos Tusce gentis," setting elegiac couplets in praise of Florence — two works hopeful to please an audience of humanists. (The texts of both pieces are probably also by Du Fay.) Du Fay remained in contact with the Medici for the rest of his life, sending four laments on the fall of Constantinople to Piero and Giovanni de' Medici in 1456 (his letter to them, in French, survives), and in the 1460s arranging for singers he had trained in France to join the choir of the Baptistery, which had been established by Cosimo de' Medici in 1438 and was administered by his son Piero. In 1467, Piero de' Medici described Du Fay as "the greatest ornament of our age" — an astonishing compliment, even allowing for hyperbolic flattery, from a patron of such discernment in the city at the very center of the Renaissance.

If Du Fay was the most technically skilled and innovative composer in Europe in this great age of innovation and technical advancement, the composer most renowned for crafting elegant and enchanting secular songs was his contemporary Gilles de Bins, known as Binchois ("the man from Bins"). Binchois spent most of his career in the service of the duke of Burgundy and never ventured south of the Alps, but his music spread far and wide in manuscript copies, including a small songbook owned by none other than Piero de' Medici, in which Binchois is represented by twelve of nineteen works. Binchois's graceful style established a standard that musicians not trained in the northern schools were hard put to achieve. A correspondence in 1445 among members of the Medici circle records the rather desperate efforts of an Italian, Antonio Squarcialupi, to devise an adequate setting for a ballata by Piero's brother Giovanni. After weeks of struggle, Antonio, a celebrated musician who was the cathedral's organist from 1432 until his death in 1480, manages to cobble together a song for Piero's wife Lucrezia Tornabuoni to learn, but he declares himself dissatisfied with the results and expresses his hope that with the help of a local French singer, Benoit, a replacement may be fashioned that might "be given a character approaching something not differing from Binchois."

Decades after they were composed, Binchois's songs remained in favor among the Medici. On a Florentine visit in 1460, Pope Pius II and his entourage were entertained by performances, both vocal and instrumental, of "Dueil angoisseux" and "Mon cuer chante" by Piero's daughters Bianca (then aged fourteen) and Nannina (eleven), and a third, unnamed girl. Both these songs are found in Piero's songbook, as are all the other songs on our program today, a small sample of Binchois's suave and memorable melodies, propulsive and varied rhythms, and perfectly judged balance between harmonic consonance and dissonance.

Program notes by Scott Metcalfe

Upcoming Events of the Seventy-Fifth Season of The William Nelson Cromwell and F. Lamot Belin Concerts

Atlantic Reed Consort
"Washingtonians on Wednesdays"
American Roots: Branches from Beginning
February 15, 12:10
West Building Lecture Hall

A Far Cry with Roomful of Teeth
Music in Common Time
Music by Ted Hearne, Prokofiev,
and Caroline Shaw
February 19, 3:30
West Building, West Garden Court

Works by Jeffrey Mumford
"Washingtonians on Wednesdays"
*"in soft echoes . . . a world awaits":
music for strings and piano*
February 22, 12:10
West Building, West Garden Court

New York Opera Society
American Inspiration, Norwegian Innovation
Program in collaboration with the
Norwegian Embassy
February 26, 3:30
West Building, West Garden Court

Carmen Balthrop, soprano,
José Cáceres, piano
"Washingtonians on Wednesdays"
Music by David DiChiera, Leslie Adams,
Charles Davidson, and others
March 1, 12:10
West Building, West Garden Court

General Information

Admission to the National Gallery of Art and all of its programs is free of charge, except as noted.

The use of cameras or recording equipment during the performance is not allowed. Please be sure that all portable electronic devices are turned off.

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Cover Luca della Robbia, *Madonna and Child* (detail), c. 1475, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Widener Collection

Back cover *West Building, Constitution Avenue entrance, viewed from Sixth Street NW*, 1941, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gallery Archives