

# LIONHEART

## Il Laudario di Cortona: Christmas in Medieval Italy

(THIS PROGRAM WILL BE PERFORMED WITHOUT INTERMISSION)

Ave dei genitrix Cortona  
Laudiamo Yhesu Venice  
Christo è nato Cortona

### **Virgin and Child**

Vergene bella, gratiosa e pura Venice  
Ave mater, O Maria Bologna University  
Laudiam lamor divino Innocentius Dammonis (publ. 1508)  
Tutti debiam cantare Dammonis

### **The Angel's Message**

Da ciel venne messo novello Cortona  
Liturgical drama: The Annunciation Padua  
A Deacon, Gabriel, Mary  
Gaude virgo, mater Christi Venice  
Gaude, flore virginali Bologna Museum  
Gaude virgo, mater Christi Florence  
O Maria, domelia Cortona

### **Bethlehem**

Glorian cielo Cortona  
Verbum caro factum est Bologna University  
Liturgical drama: The Nativity Padua  
Two Midwives, Two Shepherds, Mary, Joseph  
O dolce amor Yhesu Venice  
Dilecto Yhesu Cristo Bologna Museum  
Troppo perdel tempo Cortona  
In natali domini Trier  
In natali domini Bologna Museum  
Amor, Jesu, divino Dammonis

### **Saint Francis**

Laudiamo Yhesu (reprise) Venice  
O Francisce, pater pie Venice  
Con desiderio io vo cerchando Bologna University

### **Adoration of the Magi**

Stella nuovan fra la gente Cortona  
Liturgical drama: The Epiphany Padua  
The Three Magi  
O Jesu dolce Florence  
O Jesu dolce Dammonis  
Cum jubili damore Dammonis  
Salutiam divotamente Cortona

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### **Il Laudario di Cortona: Christmas in Medieval Italy** **Program notes**

*Laudiamo Yhesu e la sua sancta madre  
Lo humele Fransisco nostro devoto padre.*

"Let us praise Jesus and his holy mother,"  
Thus humble Francis our devoted father.

Saint Francis of Assisi was born to wealthy parents in 1182. As a young man he renounced worldly riches and embraced poverty, devoting himself to God and the poor through prayer, humility, charity and penance. His preaching and ascetic example provoked many to become his followers, and by the time he died in 1226 these numbered in tens of thousands. The spiritual movement he initiated continued to grow in the following years, and is still very much alive today.

Francis and his followers may have denied themselves many things, but they indulged heartily in artistic pleasures, especially music and poetry. Franciscan concepts of humility, devotion, and above all joy find perfect expression in the medieval Italian tradition of the lauda, or song of praise. Laymen in cities and towns all over Italy organized performances of laude as part of town and church celebrations throughout the year. Taking part in the singing of laude, and giving financial support to singing societies (called laudesi) became an important part of social life. Following the exhortation of St. Francis to "praise Jesus and his holy mother," the laudesi produced hundreds of songs addressed to Jesus, and hundreds more dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The most remarkable theme running through all the poetic texts of these laude is that of passionate, personal love, and a burning, all-consuming desire: the love of Christ for his people, the love of the faithful soul for Jesus, and an overwhelming, sometimes ecstatic devotion to Mary his mother. Of the laude that celebrate particular feasts of the Church year, many of the most joyous are for Christmas. The earliest surviving collection of laude is known as "Il laudario di Cortona" (The laudabook of Cortona). Produced sometime between 1250 and 1300, this manuscript represents the earliest recoverable layer of a laude tradition that continues through the centuries, into the Renaissance, even into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (modern examples of the form include Respighi's *Laud to the Nativity* and *Gesu Bambino* by the Italian-born New Yorker Pietro Yon). The music and poetry of the Cortona manuscript exhibit a freshness and spontaneity in common with the best of the world's folk music.

The most difficult aspect of deciphering the musical notation of this source is that it gives only the pitches of the melody, and not the rhythm. Lionheart's performance of these pieces is based on original transcriptions which make use of rhythmic patterns and a general rhythmic approach that we know from later Italian music, as well as French and English music of about the same time. This produces lively and elegant phrases that may not be exactly those of the thirteenth century Cortona laudesi, but the listener may judge whether they capture convincingly the spirit of that age.

As the lauda developed in the following centuries, it incorporated new ideas of harmony, counterpoint, and form. Laude began to be written in two parts, then three, four, and more. Manuscripts from Venice, Bologna, Florence, and Trier serve as sources of fourteenth and fifteenth century polyphonic laude for this program. All the music in these collections is handed down anonymously.

Finally in the sixteenth century laude began to appear with the names of composers (and poets) attached. The only surviving music of composer Innocentius Dammonis, a monk of the Congregation of San Salvatore in Venice, was published in 1508 by Ottaviano Petrucci, as "*Laude Libro Primo*" (The first book of Laude). This was indeed the first printing of laude musical texts, as Petrucci was the first to publish typeset music (as opposed to manuscript copies).

Finally, the three liturgical dramas come from thirteenth century manuscripts from the church in Padua. These books contain words, music, and rubrics (stage directions) for liturgical dramas produced on major feasts throughout the year. Liturgical drama grew out of the liturgy in the middle ages as a way to present the stories of Christ's birth, death, and resurrection "in the flesh." No realistic imitation of the persons or events is intended, rather, a picture is made to be held in the memory, like an image in stained glass.

*Richard Porterfield, © Lionheart 2000*

*Sources:*

*Cortona, Bibl. Comunale, 91 (CORT), "Il laudario di Cortona."*

*Venice, Bibl. Marciana, Ital. Cl. IX, 145 (VEN)*

*Bologna, Bibl. Universitaria, 2216 (BU)*

*Padua, Bibl. Cap. C 55, 56*

*Bologna, Civico Museo Bibliografico Musicale, Q 15 (olim 37) (BL)*

*Florence, Bibl. Naz. Centrale, Panciatichi 27 (FP 27)*

*Trier, Stadtbibl., Ms. 516/1595 (TR 87)*