

Faenza 117

Keyboard Music in Fourteenth-Century Italy

David Catalunya · *clavisimbalum*

Short presentation

The manuscript Faenza, Biblioteca Comunale, MS 117, is the earliest and largest surviving collection of keyboard music in Western Europe. Compiled around 1400-1425, it contains music dating back to the 1340s. Since its rediscovery in the early twentieth century, the Faenza keyboard repertoire has long been admired for its very high degree of virtuosity and its boundless musical fantasy.

In this recital, David Catalunya presents a fresh look at this outstanding source of instrumental music. The chosen instrument is a newly reconstructed hammered *clavisimbalum*; a sort of medieval 'pianoforte' able to produce a wide range of dynamics. This instrument, described by sources from the period as a 'mechanized psaltery', thus adds an unsuspected layer of expressivity and refinement to the fourteenth-century keyboard music. The selection of pieces covers the wide variety of musical genres represented in the Faenza manuscript: Italian madrigals, French virelais, dance music, and the most ornamented and virtuoso settings of sacred music. The program also includes a few pieces from other contemporaneous manuscripts transmitting Trecento instrumental music.

Program

<i>Io me son uno</i>	after Jacopo da Bologna (Codex Faenza 117)
Istanpitta: <i>In pro</i>	anonymous (London, British Library, MS Add. 29987)
<i>No na el so amante</i>	after Jacopo da Bologna (Codex Faenza 117)
Istanpiptta: <i>Isabella</i>	anonymous (London, British Library, MS Add. 29987)
<i>Elas mon cuor</i>	after an anonymous French <i>virelai</i> (Codex Faenza 117)
<i>Non ara may pieta</i>	after Francesco degli Organi (Codex Faenza 117)
Bassadaça [no 17]	anonymous (Codex Faenza 117)
<i>Belfiore dança</i>	anonymous (Codex Faenza 117)
Dança [no 18]	anonymous (Codex Faenza 117)
<i>Biance flour</i>	anonymous (Codex Faenza 117)
Istampitta [no 23]	anonymous (Codex Faenza 117)
<i>Constantia</i>	after an anonymous French <i>virelai</i> (Codex Faenza 117)
<i>Pour dieu vous prie</i>	Matteo da Perugia (Modena, Biblioteca Universitaria Estense, MS α.M.5.24)
<i>Un fior gentil</i>	after Zacara da Teramo (Codex Faenza 117)
<i>Aquila altera</i>	after Jacopo da Bologna (Codex Faenza 117)
<i>Benedicamus domino</i>	anonymous (Codex Faenza 117)

(Program duration: 60 min., without intermission)

David Catalunya

Conductor, keyboard player and researcher specializing in repertoires from the Middle Ages, David Catalunya cultivates a double profile as a performer and a musicologist. He began his education at the Conservatory of Toulouse (France) and completed his studies at the *Conservatoire national supérieur de Lyon* (France), the *Escola Superior de Música de Catalunya* (ESMUC, Barcelona) and the University of Rome *Tor Vergata* (Italy).

Leading his own group, *Canto Coronato*, and as a member of other notable ensembles in the field of late-medieval music, David Catalunya pursues a prolific artistic career mainly focused on musical repertoires from the 13th to the 15th centuries. He collaborates with the renowned ensemble *Mala Punica*, directed by Pedro Memelsdorff, and is a founding member of the ensemble *Tasto Solo*, directed by Guillermo Pérez. In 2006 Pérez and Catalunya were awarded the First Prize of the Festival *Laus Polyphoniae* (Antwerp, Belgium) for an outstanding *organetto-clavisimbalum* duo performance. Catalunya's discography includes most notably the CDs "Faventina" (the sacred repertoire of the Codex Faenza, with *Mala Punica*), "Meyster ob allen Meystern" (15th-century keyboard music, with *Tasto Solo*) and "Le chant de l'eschiquier" (Dufay and Binchois songs in the Buxheim manuscript, with *Tasto Solo*), which together have been awarded more than 30 international prizes and distinctions, including *Choc du Monde de la Musique*, *Amadeus*, three *Diapason d'or* and one *Diapason d'or de l'année*.

His exploration of performance techniques specific to late-medieval keyboard instruments has made him an artist of reference in the field of pre-Renaissance music. During the last decade, David Catalunya has brought the sound of his *clavisimbalum* to the most renowned festivals and concert halls throughout Europe and America. He has also been invited to give courses, master-classes and guest lectures at international centres of Early Music, such as the *Schola Cantorum Basiliensis* (Switzerland), the *Haute école de musique de Genève* (Switzerland), the *Conservatorium van Amsterdam* (The Netherlands), the *Grieg Academy* (Bergen, Norway) and the ESMUC (Barcelona, Spain). He is a faculty member of the Organ Academy of Cuenca (Spain), where he has taught since 2011.

Parallel to his artistic activity, David Catalunya holds a research position at the University of Würzburg (Germany), where he works as a co-editor of the volumes devoted to the repertoire of 12th-century Latin songs in the monumental series *Corpus Monodicum*. As a specialist in the study of musical manuscripts from the 12th to the early 15th centuries, he is a member of the research board at the Universidad Complutense of Madrid and an Associated Director of DIAMM (Digital Image Archive of Medieval Music, Oxford Faculty of Music). His publications include the discovery of new sources of medieval polyphony. Currently he is preparing the release of his book *Music, Space and Ritual in Medieval Castile, 1250-1350*.

Program Notes

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In this recital, David Catalunya presents a fresh look at this outstanding source of instrumental music. The chosen instrument is a newly reconstructed hammered *clavisimbalum*; a sort of medieval 'pianoforte' able to produce a wide range of dynamics. This instrument, which sources from the period describe as a 'mechanized psaltery', adds an unsuspected layer of expressivity to the fourteenth-century keyboard music. The selection of pieces covers the wide variety of musical genres represented in the Faenza manuscript: Italian madrigals, French virelais, dance music, and the most ornamented and virtuoso settings of sacred music. The program also includes a few pieces from other contemporaneous manuscripts transmitting Trecento instrumental

music, such as the so-called London Manuscript (British Library, MS Add. 29987), which preserves a repertoire of Italian monophonic *istanpitta* originating in 1360s Milan (the *istanpitta* is a complex, labyrinthine form, which derives from dance music).

We have long known that the boundaries between composition and improvisation in medieval times are sometimes difficult to define. Both singers and instrumentalists were trained within unwritten traditions based on memory and counterpoint realizations *ex tempore*. However, while European libraries preserve a substantial repertoire of vocal compositions from the late Middle Ages, written sources of instrumental music are extremely rare among the surviving musical manuscripts from this period. The Faenza manuscript is therefore an exceptional testimony that allows us to glimpse the richness of a mainly unwritten tradition of instrumental music in Trecento Italy. For all of these reasons, in this recital the Faenza manuscript is regarded as an 'open text', whose performance requires a major degree of 'interpretation'. Thus, new voices are sometimes added to the two-part Faenza arrangements; and the same occurs with the London manuscript's monophonic *istanpitta*, to which a polyphonic texture is added by the performer according to the counterpoint precepts found in theoretical-pedagogical sources from the period.

A Note on the Hammered Clavisimbalum

The instrument presented in this concert is the result of an innovative reconstruction project carried out by David Catalunya in collaboration with the instrument maker Paul Poletti. There is ample evidence that small strung keyboard instruments were very popular in the second half of the 14th century and in the 15th century. Chief among these sources is Arnaut de Zwolle's well-known treatise (ca. 1440), which describes a number of different instrument layouts, as well as two different harpsichord-like plucking actions, a clavichord-like tangent action, and a simplistic piano-like hammered action. Arnaut's text has provided a great source of inspiration for modern craftsmen wishing to recreate such instruments, given the relatively high degree of detail it provides. The purpose of Catalunya's and Poletti's reconstruction project was to explore the territory beyond Arnaut, with the ultimate aim of imagining a design for a hammered keyboard instrument within the confines of medieval musical instrument making. This organologic research was published in the *Journal of the Alamire Foundation* 2012 (Brepols Publishers).