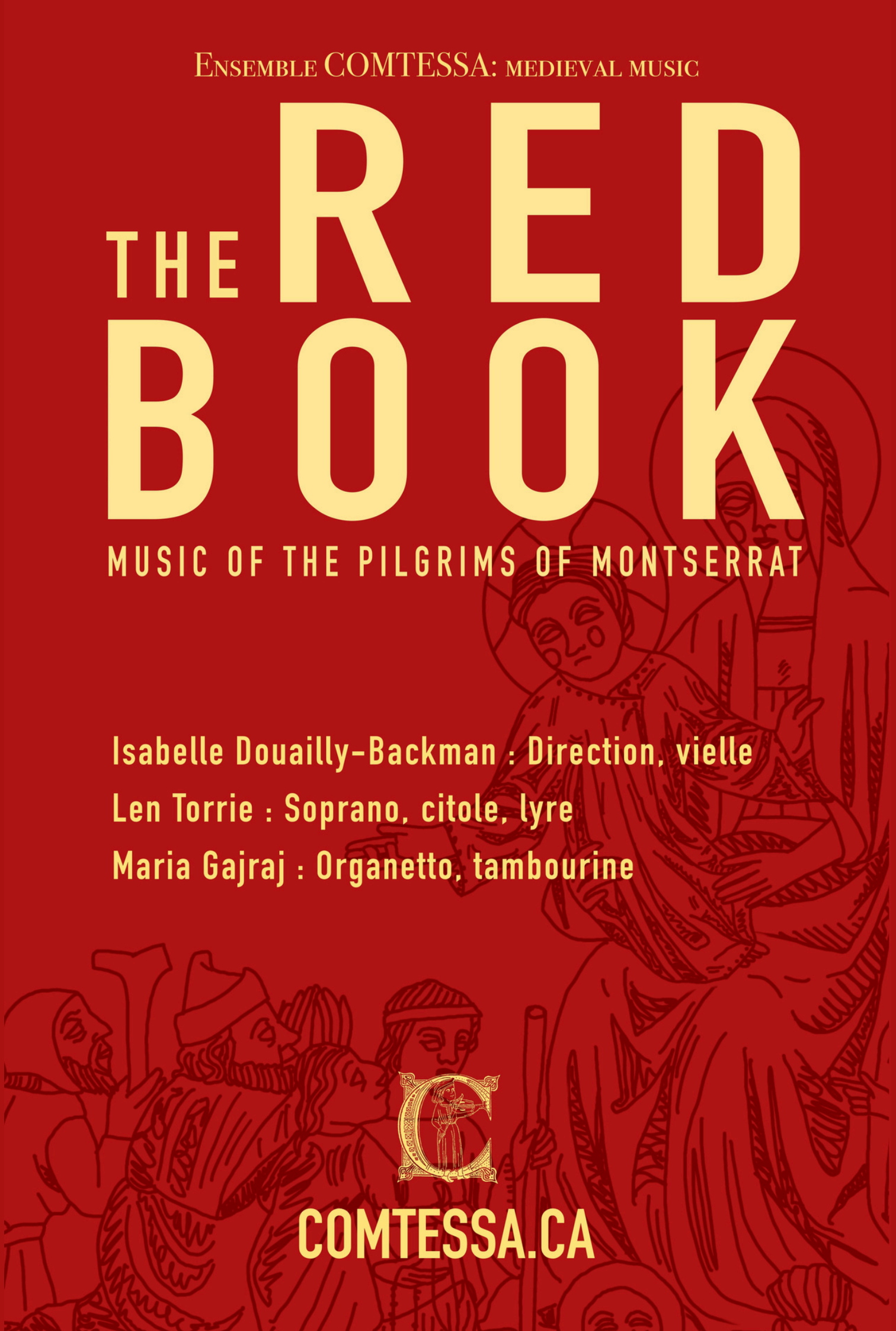
ENSEMBLE COMTESSA: MEDIEVAL MUSIC

THE RED BOOK

MUSIC OF THE PILGRIMS OF MONTSERRAT



Isabelle Douailly-Backman : Direction, vielle

Len Torrie : Soprano, citole, lyre

Maria Gajraj : Organetto, tambourine

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Ensemble COMTESSA : Medieval Music

The RED BOOK

Music from the pilgrims of Montserrat

This program explores the journey undertaken by medieval pilgrims en route to the monastery of Montserrat, one of the great devotional destinations of medieval Spain. The program features music from The Llibre Vermell de Montserrat, a 14th-century manuscript created specifically for these travellers replete with songs, prayers, and dances intended to guide their conduct and sustain their devotion upon arrival at the shrine of the Black Madonna.

Its repertoire combines sacred intent with popular forms such as virelais and rondes and features texts in Latin, Catalan, and Occitan to be understood and sung by pilgrims from many regions.

To further illuminate this portrait of the pilgrimage, we include two Cantigas de Santa Maria directly linked to Montserrat. One tells the story of a pilgrim struck by lightning on the road and miraculously saved by the Virgin. Another describes how she provides food for the monastery.
These stories show how music and faith shaped both the journey and the experience of arriving at the sanctuary.

Performed by COMTESSA on vielle, citole, organetto, tambourine, and medieval bells, this program brings listeners tangibly to this vibrant musical meeting point for pilgrims, monks, and travellers from various regions.



The RED BOOK
Programme



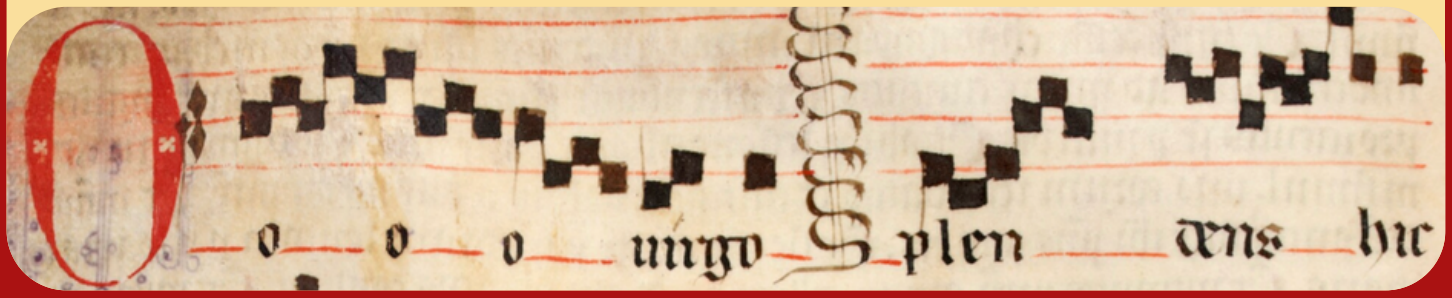
O VIRGO SPLENDENS
STELLA SPLENDENS IN MONTE
LAUDEMUS VIRGINEM
SPLENDENS CEPTIGERA

CSM 311 : “LE PÈLERIN FRAPPÉ PAR LA FOUDRE” [INSTRUMENTAL]

LOS SEPT GOYTS RECOMPTAREM
CUNCTI SIMUS CONCANENTES
POLORUM REGINA

CSM 52 : “LES BOUQUETINS QUI DONNÈRENT LEUR LAIT AUX MOINE DE MONTSERRAT” [INSTRUMENTAL]

MARIAM MATREM
INPERAYRITZ DELA CIUTAT IOYOSA
AD MORTEM FESTINAMUS



The ARTISTS



ISABELLE DOUAILLY-BACKMAN
Vielle / Artistic Director

Isabelle Douailly-Backman is a Montreal-based historical string player. Originally from Chicago, she moved to Montreal to pursue a degree in modern viola at McGill University. There she discovered a love for early music and has since completed a B.Mus in Baroque Viola and a M.Mus in Baroque Violin from McGill University.

Today, Isabelle frequently performs on baroque violin, viola, and medieval vielle with ensembles and festivals in Canada, including Ensemble Caprice, Arion Baroque Orchestra, Tenet Vocal Artists, L'Harmonie des Saisons, Musique Royale, and Montreal Baroque Festival. She is also currently studying medieval vielle at the prestigious Schola Cantorum in Basel, Switzerland, under the tutelage of Baptiste Romain. She is the artistic director and founder of COMTESSA. Isabelle is the 2023 recipient of the Barbara Thorton Memorial Scholarship, a biennial scholarship awarded by Early Music America and members of Sequentia to "an outstanding and highly motivated young performer of medieval music."

MARIA GAJRAJ
Organetto / Production Manager



Maria Gajraj is a Montréal-based organist and co-founder of Sapphonix Collective, which promotes women, queer, and racialized classical musicians, and has been featured on CBC Radio. Her doctoral research focused on 20th-century Caribbean organ repertoire. Maria has performed internationally, at venues like Salle Bourgie, Maison Symphonique, and the Orgelpark (Amsterdam) and in series such as Cal Performances (USA) and Bergen Orgelsommer (Norway).

IAs Deirdre Piper wrote in "Pipelines", Maria's "spirited, clean, and colourful performance lent real meaningful significance" to this music. By creating engaging concert programs, and by featuring the organ in innovative and multidisciplinary contexts, Maria strives to break stereotypes, and to make the organ more accessible to everyone.



LEN TORRIE
Voice / Executive Director

Len Torrie is a Montréal-based soprano and performance curator known for their "crystalline tone, expressive versatility, and storytelling depth" (Opera Canada). A sought-after soloist, Len performs regularly with leading early music ensembles including L'Harmonie des Saisons, Studio de musique ancienne de Montréal, and Ensemble Caprice. Len holds a master's degree in early music vocal performance from McGill University, and has trained internationally with the Accademia Europea dell'Opera and the Internationale Bachakademie Stuttgart.

A queer, non-binary artist, Len draws on the wisdom of queer elders and ancestors in their research and performance of radically inclusive stories. Their work bridges early music and contemporary folk, with a growing focus on self-accompaniment on period and modern instruments.



The ENSEMBLE

COMTESSA is a Montreal-based ensemble that brings the music of the 11th to 15th centuries to life through dynamic performances and meticulous research. Using medieval period instruments, the ensemble offers audiences an immersive journey into the soundscapes of medieval music. Featuring women and nonbinary performers, COMTESSA showcases a fresh perspective on this timeless repertoire

Through collaborations with specialists, scholars, and performers, we craft programs that highlight the depth, beauty, and relevance of medieval music today. Whether through concerts, educational initiatives, or interdisciplinary projects, we're passionate about bringing this music to audiences in Montreal and across Canada.



Further reading on the Llibre de Vermell de Montserrat

The Llibre Vermell de Montserrat ("The Red Book of Montserrat") is a 14th-century manuscript from the Benedictine monastery of Montserrat, Catalonia, named for its original red velvet binding. It was created as a devotional guide for pilgrims visiting the Shrine of the Virgin of Montserrat, featuring music, prayers, and rituals to enrich their veneration of the Black Madonna.
The manuscript contains ten significant medieval musical compositions, blending sacred and secular traditions to enhance the spiritual experience. To address concerns about the inappropriateness of secular song and dancing amongst the pilgrims in a sacred context, the monastery adapted popular dance forms like virelais, ballads, and round dances into sacred works with multilingual texts in Latin, Catalan, and traces of Occitan, ensuring accessibility for pilgrims from diverse regions.

Alongside the Llibre Vermell, the Cantigas de Santa Maria, a 13th-century collection of Marian miracles set to song by King Alfonso X "el Sabio," feature two stories tied directly to Montserrat. In Cantiga 311, a pilgrim is miraculously resurrected by the Virgin Mary after being struck by lightning on his journey to the monastery. Cantiga 52 recounts how she provided goats to nourish Montserrat's monks. Like the Llibre Vermell, these tales frame Montserrat as a place where heaven touched earth through music, miracles, and the intertwined lives of pilgrims and monks.
Together, these works showcase Montserrat's unique artistic and spiritual legacy. Shaped by Catalonia's cultural diversity and its role as a crossroads of trade and pilgrimage, the Llibre Vermell and Cantigas de Santa Maria reflect the monastery's enduring significance. Preserved at Montserrat and revived in modern performances, they continue to inspire devotion and celebration of this sacred landscape.

Texts and Translations

O VIRGO SPLENDENS

O virgo Splendens hic
In monte celso
Miraculis serrato fulgentibus ubique
Quem fideles consecndunt universi
Eya pietatis occulo placato
Cerne ligatos fune peccatorum
Ne infernorum ictibus graventur.
Set cum beatis tua
Prece vocentur

O Virgin, resplendent,
of the lofty mountain
studded with brightly shining miracles
where climb all the faithful
Ah, with the soothing eye of mercy
See those bound by their bonds of sin
Not weighed down by the blows of hell
But through your prayers
be amongst the blessed.

STELLA SPLENDENS IN MONTE

Stella splendens in monte
ut solis radium
miraculis serrato
exaudi populum.

Resplendent Star of the Mountain,
like the sun's light,
shining miracles,
hear your people.

Concurrunt universi
gaudentes populi
divites et egeni
grandes et parvuli
ipsum ingrediuntur
ut cernunt oculi.
Et inde revertuntur
gracilis repleti.

All people gather together,
rejoicing people,
rich and poor,
great and small,
climb the mountain
to see for themselves,
and then return,
full of grace.

Stella splendens in monte…

Resplendent Star of the Mountain…

Regine comitisse
illustres domine
potentes et ancille
iuvenes parvuli
virgines et antique
pariter vidue
consecndunt et hunc montem
et religiose.

Queens, countesses,
illustrious ladies,
the powerful with their servants,
small girls,
maidens and old women,
together with widows,
climb this mountain,
and nuns.

Stella splendens in monte…

Resplendent Star of the Mountain…

Cetus hi aggregantur
hic ut exhibeant
vota, regraciantur
ut ipsa et reddant
aulam istam ditantes
hoc cuncti videant
iocalibus ornantes
soluti redeant.

Stella splendens in monte…

Cuncti ergo precantes
sexus utriusque
mentes nostras mundantes
oremus devote
virginem gloriosam
matrem clementie
in cells graciosam
senciamus vere.

Stella splendens in monte…

Together they all gather
here to deliver
their vows, give thanks,
and to fulfill their vows
to this place
so that all see
Joy adorned,
and leave here free.

Resplendent Star of the Mountain…

So let all praise her,
both sexes,
admit our mundanities,
let us pray with devotion
to the Glorious Virgin,
Mother of Mercy,
and in Heaven
see true grace.

Resplendent Star of the Mountain…

LAUDEMUS VIRGINEM

Laudemus virginem mater est
Et eius filius Ihesu est.
Plangamus scelera acriter sperantes in
Ihesum iugiter.

Let us praise the Virgin mother
And her son Jesus.
Let us weep our guilt passionately
Hoping in Jesus perpetually.

LOS SEPT GOYTS RECOMPTAREM

Los set goyts recompiarem,
et devotament xantant
humilment saludarem,
la dolca verge Maria.

Ave Maria, gracia plena,
Dominus tecum Virgo serena.

I shall tell of the Seven Joys,
and sing of devotion,
humbly praise
the sweet Virgin Mary.

Hail Mary, full of grace,
the Lord with you, serene Virgin.

Verge fos anans del part,
pura e sens falliment.
En lo part e pres lo part,
sens negun corrumpiment.
lo fill de Deus verge pia,
de vos nasque verament.
lo fill de Deus verge pia,
de vos nasque verament.

Ave Maria, gracia plena…

Verge tres reys d'orient,
cavalcan ab gran corage.
ab l'estrella precedent,
vengren ab vostre bitage.
offerint vos de gradage,
aur et mirre et encenc.
offerint vos de gradage,
aur et mirre et encenc.

Ave Maria, gracia plena…

Verge stant dolorosa,
per la mort del fill molt car.
romangues tota joyosa,
can lo vis resuscitar.
a vos mare piadosa,
primer se volch demostrar.
a vos mare piadosa,
primer se volch demostrar.

Ave Maria, gracia plena…

Verge lo quint alegrage,
quen aques del fill molt car.
estant al munt d'olivage,
al cell lon vehes puyar.
on aurem tots alegrage,
si per nos vos plau pregar.
on aurem tots alegrage,
si per nos vos plau pregar.

Ave Maria, gracia plena…

Virgin, before giving birth
you were pure and without sin;
During and after birth
without corruption.
The son of God, pious Virgin,
was in truth born of you.
The son of God, pious Virgin,
was in truth born of you.

Hail Mary, full of grace…

Virgin, three kings of the Orient
rode with great courage,
followed the star
and came to your dwelling
offering you gifts
of gold, myrrh and incense.
Offering you gifts
of gold, myrrh and incense.

Hail Mary, full of grace…

Virgin, grieving
at the death of your dear son
your joy returned
when seeing him resurrected.
To you, kind Mother,
he first wished to show himself.
To you, kind Mother,
he first wished to show himself.

Hail Mary, full of grace…

Virgin, your fifth gladness
from your dear son
was on the Mount of Olives,
when you saw him ascend to Heaven.
We shall be filled with gladness
if for us you pray.
We shall be filled with gladness
if for us you pray.

Hail Mary, full of grace…

Verge quan foren complits,
lot dies de pentacosta.
ab vos eren aunits lot,
apostols et de costa.
sobre tots sens nuylla costa,
devalla l'espirit sant.
sobre tots sens nuylla costa,
devalla l'espirit sant.

Ave Maria, gracia plena…

Verge'l derrer alegrage,
quen aques en aquest mon.
vostre fill ab gran corage,
vos munta al cel pregon.
on sots tots temps coronada,
regina perpetual.
on sots tots temps coronada,
regina perpetual.

Ave Maria, gracia plena…

Tots donques nos esforcem,
en aquesta present vida.
que peccats foragitem,
de nostr'anima mesquina.
Et vos dolce verge pia,
vuyllats nos ho empetrar.
Et vos dolce verge pia,
vuyllats nos ho empetrar.

Ave Maria, gracia plena…

Virgin, when at the end
of the days of Pentecost
you were united
with the Apostles and friends.
Over all, freely,
descended the Holy Spirit.
Over all, freely,
descended the Holy Spirit.

Hail Mary, full of grace…

Virgin, the last gladness
you had of this world
was when your son with great courage
took you to Heaven
and for all time crowned you
Queen, for ever more.
And for all time crowned you
Queen, for ever more.

Hail Mary, full of grace…

All, let us strive
in this present life
to banish sin
from our wretched souls
and you, sweet Virgin,
help us in our prayers.
And you, sweet Virgin,
help us in our prayers.

Hail Mary, full of grace…

CUNCTI SIMUS CONCANENTES

Cuncti simus concanentes Ave Maria.
Cuncti simus concanentes Ave Maria.

Virgo sola existente en affuit angelus.
Gabriel est appellatus atque missus celtius.
Clara facieque dixit Ave Maria.
Clara facieque dixit Ave Maria.

Cuncti simus concanentes Ave Maria…

Clara facieque dixit, audite karissimi
Clara facieque dixit, audite karissimi.
En concipies maria. Ave Maria.
En concipies maria. Ave Maria.

Cuncti simus concanentes Ave Maria…

En concipies maria, audite karissimi.
En concipies maria, audite karissimi.
Pariesque filium, Ave Maria.
Pariesque filium, Ave Maria.

Cuncti simus concanentes Ave Maria…

Pariesque filium, audite karissimi.
Pariesque filium, audite karissimi.
Vocabis eum Ihesum. Ave Maria.
Vocabis eum Ihesum. Ave Maria.

Cuncti simus concanentes Ave Maria…

Let us all sing together, 'Hail Mary'.
Let us all sing together, 'Hail Mary'.

When the Virgin was alone an angel appeared
Gabriel was his name and was sent from Heaven.
Brightly shone his face as he said, 'Hail Mary'.
Brightly shone his face as he said, 'Hail Mary'.

Let us all sing together, 'Hail Mary'…

Brightly shone his face as he said, 'Listen dearest one'.
Brightly shone his face as he said, 'Listen dearest one'.
'You shall bear a child, Mary'. 'Hail Mary'.
'You shall bear a child, Mary'. 'Hail Mary'.

Let us all sing together, 'Hail Mary'…

'You shall bear a child, Mary, Listen dearest one'
'You shall bear a child, Mary, Listen dearest one'
'You will bring forth a son'. 'Hail Mary'.
'You will bring forth a son'. 'Hail Mary'.

Let us all sing together, 'Hail Mary'…

'You will bring forth a son. Listen dearest one'
'You will bring forth a son. Listen dearest one'
'You shall call him Jesus'. 'Hail Mary'.
'You shall call him Jesus'. 'Hail Mary'.

Let us all sing together, 'Hail Mary'…

POLORUM REGINA

Polorum regina omnium nostra
Stella matutina dele scelera.

Ante partum virgo deo gravida
Ante partum virgo deo gravida
Semper permansisti inviolata.
Stella matutina dele scelera.
Semper permansisti inviolata.
Stella matutina dele scelera.

Polorum regina omnium nostra…

Et in partu virgo deo fecunda.
Et in partu virgo deo fecunda.
Semper permansisti inviolata.
Stella matutina dele scelera.
Semper permansisti inviolata.
Stella matutina dele scelera.

Polorum regina omnium nostra…

Et post partum virgo mater enixa
Et post partum virgo mater enixa
Semper permansisti inviolata.
Stella matutina dele scelera.
Semper permansisti inviolata.
Stella matutina dele scelera.

Polorum regina omnium nostra…

Queen of Heaven, Queen of us all,
Star of the Morning, remove our sins.

Before bearing your child, Virgin, pregnant by God
Before bearing your child, Virgin, pregnant by God
You always remained untouched.
Star of the Morning, remove our sins.
You always remained untouched.
Star of the Morning, remove our sins.

Queen of Heaven, Queen of us all…

Whilst bearing your child, Virgin, fertile by God
Whilst bearing your child, Virgin, fertile by God
You always remained untouched.
Star of the Morning, remove our sins.
You always remained untouched.
Star of the Morning, remove our sins.

Queen of Heaven, Queen of us all…

And after bearing your child, Virgin, Glad Mother
And after bearing your child, Virgin, Glad Mother
You always remained untouched.
Star of the Morning, remove our sins.
You always remained untouched.
Star of the Morning, remove our sins.

Queen of Heaven, Queen of us all…

MARIAM MATREM

Marian matrem virginem attollite.
Jhesum Christum extollite
concorditer.

Maria seculi asilum defende nos.
Jhesu tutum refugium exaudi nos.
Jam estis nos totaliter dittugium
totum mundi confugium realiter.

Marian matrem virginem attollite…

Jhesu suprema bonitas verssima.
Maria dulcis pietas gratissima.
Amplissima conformiter sit caritas
ad nos quos pellit vanitas enormiter.

Marian matrem virginem attollite…

Maria facts seculis salvatio.
Jhesu damnati homilis redemption.
Pugnate quem viriliter pro famulis
percussis duris iaculis atrociter.

Marian matrem virginem attollite…

To Mary, Virgin Mother, give praise.
Jesus Christ, extol with harmony.

Mary, Sanctuary of the world, defend us.
Jesus, refuge for us all, hear us.
Now you are our entire hope, all the world's last recourse.

To Mary, Virgin Mother, give praise…

Jesus, supreme Good and Truth.
Mary, sweet Kindness and Grace.
May your love be as full to us
As the world's vanity impels.

To Mary, Virgin Mother, give praise…

Mary grants salvation to the world,
Jesus redeems all the damned.
Fighting with vigour for their followers
Enduring beatings and cruel attacks.

To Mary, Virgin Mother, give praise…

INPERAYRITZ DELA CIUTAT IOYOSA

Imperavritz de la ciutat ioyosa
de paradis ab tot gaug eternal.
Neta de crims de virtutz habundosa
Mayres de dieu per obra divinal
Verges plasen ab fas angelical.
Axl com sote a dieu molt graciosa.
Placuas estar als fizeis piadosa.
Prevan per lor al rey celestial.

Flor de les flors dolca clement et pia.
L'angel de dieu vesem tot corrocat.
E par que dieus lamentat quens aleia.
Don ell es prest ab lesioch affiat.
Douche placa vos queí i sia comandat.
Qu'estoyg lesioch e que remes nos sia.
Tot fallimen tro en lo presen dia.
Ens done gaug e patz e sanitat.

Estel de mar qui los perillans guia.
Eis lhy venir a bona salveart.
Si ihess chutti dolosir no volia.
Co que per vos li sera supplicat.
Monstratz llis pitz don lavertz alletat.
Et tots santz ab la gran ierarchia.
De paradis quius faran companya.
Tot quan volrets vos er ben autreyat.

Empress of the Joyful City
Of Paradise where all is eternal joy
Free of crimes with virtue abounding
Mother of God with divine work
Virgin, gentle with angelic face,
And so to God, most gracious
Have pity on the pious faithful
And pray for them to the Celestial King.

Flower of Flowers, sweet, gentle and pious
Who knelt before the Angel of God
Who God ordered to go
and be ready with sharpened sword.
Let it be your will that he commands
That the sword be kept from us.
Let all our faults be forgiven to the present day
And give us joy and peace and health.

Star of the Sea, guide us through perils
So that we are safe in the harbour.
If Jesus Christ obeys not the wishes requested through you
Reveal the breasts that fed him
And all the saints of the Great Hierarchy
Of Paradise who will be in your company.
All that you wish will be granted.

AD MORTEM FESTINAMUS

Ad mortem festinamus.
peccare desistamus.
peccare desistamus.

Sembere proposui
de contemptu mundano
ut degentes sceili
non muleentur in vano.
Iam est hora surgere
a sompto mortis pravo,
a sompto mortis pravo.

Ad mortem festinamus…

Vita brevis breviter
in brevi finiteur.
Mors venit velociter
que nenniem veretur.
Omnia mors perimit.
et nulli miseretur,
et nulli miseretur.

Ad mortem festinamus…

Ni conversus fueris
et sieut puer factus
et vitam mutaveris
in meliores actus
intrare non poteris
regnum dei beatus,
regnum dei beatus.

Ad mortem festinamus…

To death we hasten
Let us desist from sin.
Let us desist from sin.

I propose to write
Of the contempt of the world
So that this degenerate age
Is not charmed by vanity.
Now is the hour to rise
From the sleep-like dance of death.
From the sleep-like dance of death.

To death we hasten…

Short life gets shorter
And shortly ends.
Death comes faster
Than anyone fears.
All, death destroys
And on none has pity
And on none has pity.

To death we hasten

If you do not turn around
And become as a child
And change your life
By bringing forth good deeds
You will not be able to enter
The blessed Kingdom of God
The blessed Kingdom of God.

To death we hasten…

Tuba cum sonuerit
dies erit extrema
et iudex advenerit
vocabit sempiterna
electos in partis
prescitos ad inferna,
prescitos ad inferna.

Ad mortem festinamus…

Quam felices fuerint
qui cum christo regnabunt
facie ad faciem
sie cum spectabunt.
Sanctus sanctus dominus
Sabaoth conclamabunt,
Sabaoth conclamabunt.

Ad mortem festinamus…

Et quam tristes fuerint
qui eterne peribunt.
Pene non deficient
nec propter has oblbunt.
Heu heu heu miseri
nunquam inde exibunt,
nunquam inde exibunt.

Ad mortem festinamus…

When the trumpet sounds
On the last day
And the judge comes
And calls the chosen
Everlasting to his Kingdom
And those forewarned to Hell
And those forewarned to Hell.

To death we hasten…

How happy will be those
Who with Christ reign
And face to face
They will see him
"Holy, Holy Lord of
Sabaoth", they will call.
"Sabaoth", they will call.

To death we hasten…

And how mournful will be those
Who are eternally damned,
Whose punishment will never lessen
But will never cause their death.
Ah, ah, ah! The wretched
They will never be released.
They will never be released.

To death we hasten…



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COMTESSA
musique médiévale

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