A WORTHY MIRROR



ALKEMIE


"Give up? Never!!"
"Then do as I tell you:
be open and sociable;
do what seems right,
and don't hang back,
for that's the way
a friend should act."

ALKEMIE

A WORTHY MIRROR

LI Qi

1 **Dompna...** 4:24

Elisa Sutherland, voice
Sian Ricketts, voice
Tracy Cowart, voice, bray harp
Ben Matus, voice, recorder
David McCormick, vielle
Niccolo Seligmann, vielle
Amanda Gookin, cello

Patricia van Ness

2 **Dompna / The Lady** 2:04

Elisa Sutherland, voice
Sian Ricketts, recorder
David McCormick, vielle
Ben Matus, dulcian
Amanda Gookin, cello
Niccolo Seligmann, psaltery
Tracy Cowart, harp

Tis Kaoru Zamler-Carhart

3 **Ar em al freg tems vengut** 3:59

Elisa Sutherland, voice
Tracy Cowart, voice
David McCormick, vielle
Ben Matus, dulcian
Niccolo Seligmann, viola da gamba
Amanda Gookin, cello

Hai-Ting Chinn

4 **Bels dous amics**..... 3:41

Madeline Apple Healey, voice
Elisa Sutherland, voice
Tracy Cowart, voice
Ben Matus, dulcian

Maya Bennardo

5 **neither flower nor leaf**..... 6:14

Sian Ricketts, voice
Elisa Sutherland, voice
Tracy Cowart, voice, harp
Amanda Gookin, cello

Raquel Acevedo Klein

6 **A great fog seeping into my veins** 5:10

Sian Ricketts, voice
David McCormick, vielle
Ben Matus, dulcian
Niccolo Seligmann, viola da gamba
Amanda Gookin, cello
Tracy Cowart, harp

Gelsey Bell

7 **Oy Dieus** 7:17

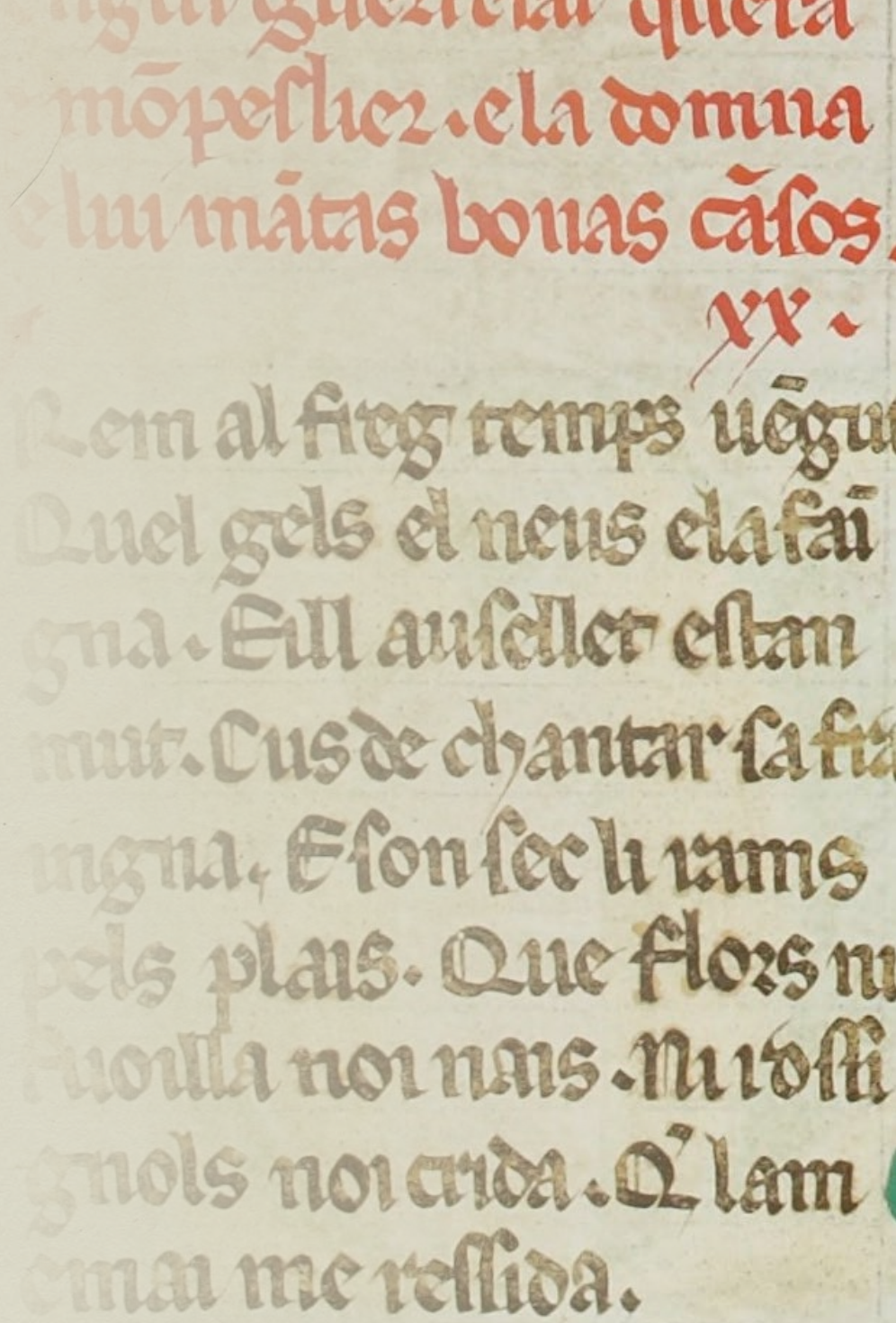
Elisa Sutherland, voice
Tracy Cowart, voice, harp
Sian Ricketts, recorder, douçaine
Ben Matus, recorder
David McCormick, vielle
Niccolo Seligmann, vielle
Amanda Gookin, cello

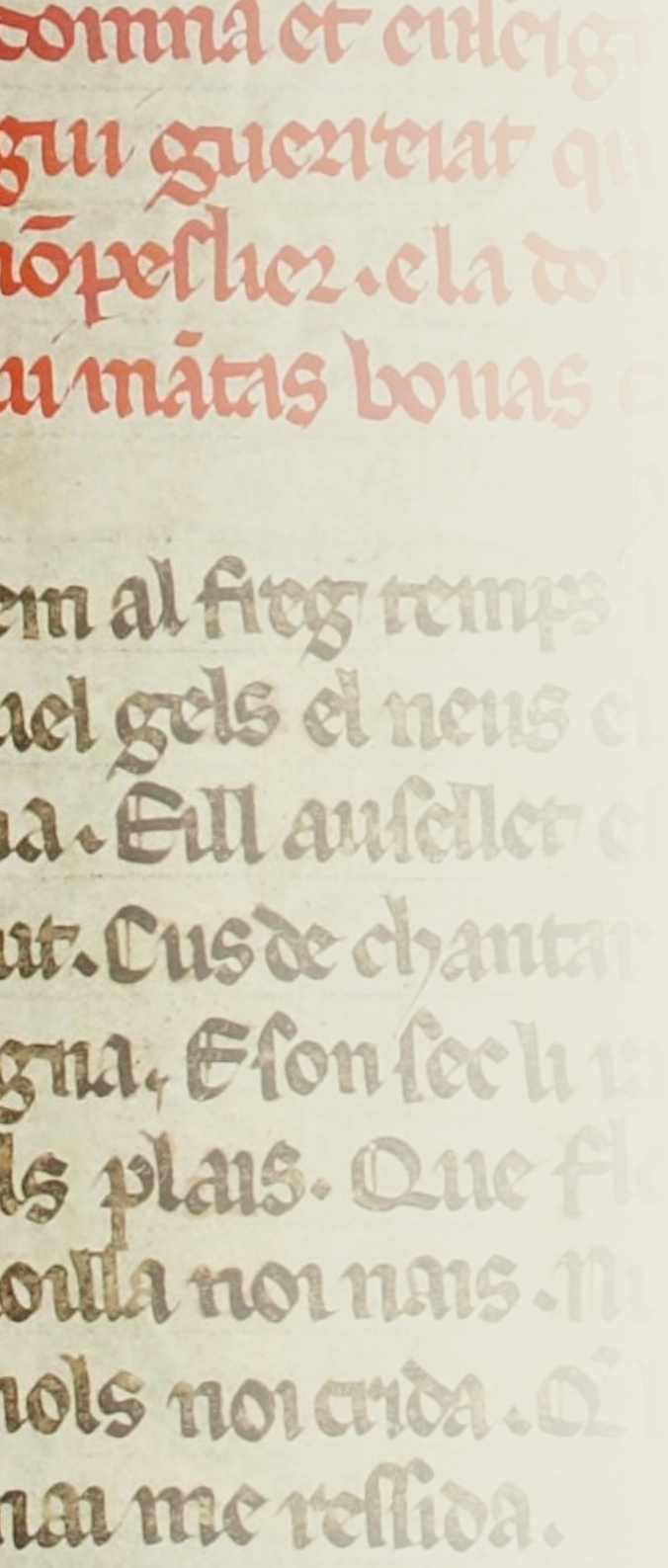
Niccolo Seligmann

8 **Ben volgra midons saubes** 5:01

Tracy Cowart, voice
Elisa Sutherland, voice
Sian Ricketts, voice, recorder
Ben Matus, voice, bagpipes
David McCormick, vielle
Niccolo Seligmann, vielle, scheitholt, triangle

Total Time: 37:53





A Worthy Mirror is a time-traveling conversation with the *trobairitz*, the women poet-composers associated with the troubadour tradition of 12th- and 13th-century Occitania. Music survives for only one of their approximately 23 to 46 extant lyric poems and fragments, but the remaining texts, which are by turns witty, ironic, heartbreaking, erotic, and sometimes tantalizingly incomplete, offer rare perspective within a literary culture whose conventions frequently made an idealized and silent woman the object of someone else's song.

As an ensemble, Alkemie is fascinated by multiplicity and often finds itself picking at the frayed edges of binary narratives. The trobairitz themselves also resist easy categories. Even the size and boundaries of their surviving repertory remain debated: authorship and attribution are uncertain, and a feminine poetic voice cannot always tell us the identity or gender of the person who created it. What survives gives us something between a record of Medieval women's experience and a literary depiction of "woman." These texts allow us to encounter voices negotiating desire, power, absence, pleasure, disappointment, and self-representation both within and in contrast to the conventions they inherited.

For *A Worthy Mirror*, Alkemie and cellist Amanda Gookin of Forward Music Project invited eleven female and non-binary composers to respond to surviving trobairitz poetry by entering into dialogue with the material

rather than attempting any sort of reconstruction. This album includes some of those works, all of which approach that invitation very differently. Some set surviving Occitan texts directly; others place texts in juxtaposition, or create new lyrics inspired by them. Their musical languages likewise move between Medieval practices and contemporary ones, freely mixing elements of monody, organum, counterpoint, improvisatory gestures, and shifting timbres.

The title *A Worthy Mirror* draws on a poetic exchange between Lombarda and Bernart Arnaut d'Armagnac that is not itself set on this album. According to the narrative that accompanies their poems, Bernart sought Lombarda's love but departed Toulouse without seeing her, leaving behind verses in which he addresses her as a "Mirror of Worth." Lombarda answers in verse, artfully taking up his language of names and identities before turning his metaphor back upon him: which woman pleases him most, she asks, "and in which mirror you are gazing?"

For us, Bernart and Lombarda's literal and poetic exchange captures something essential about this project. These songs do not offer a transparent window onto those early centuries, nor do our contemporary counterparts simply remake the past in their own image. Instead, the past and present become mirrors for one another, reflecting, refracting, and expanding what we think we recognize. Across that distance, we can ask what feels foreign and what feels familiar, and consider how a voice inherited from another time might resonate in this one.

—Tracy Cowart



1. **Dompna…** — LI Qi

Dompna… is composed with the idea of creating a contemporary troubadour song. Its text consists of two poems set in a contrapuntal relationship, reflecting their dialogue-like nature.

Dompna N'almulcs, si.us plages
be.us volgra preiar d'aitan
qe l'ira e.l mal talan
vos fezes fenir merces
de lui qe sospir'e plaing
e muor languen e.s complaing
e qier perdon humilmen,
qe.us fatz per lui sagramen
si tot li voletz fenir
q'el si gart meils de faillir.

Dompna N'Iseuz s'ieu saubes
q'el se pentis de l'engan
q'el a fait vas mi tan gran,
ben fora dreichz q'eu n'agues
merce, mas a mi no.s taing
pos qe del tort no s'afraing
ni.s pentis del faillimen,
qe n'aia mais chausimen,
mas si vos faitz lui pentir
leu podes mi convertir.

~ Almucs de Castelnou (c. 1140 – c. 1184) and Iseut de Capion (born c. 1140)

Lady Almuc, if you please
I'd like to ask this much:
may you mercifully put an end
to anger and ill will
toward one who sighs, laments,
dies fainting, complains,
and humbly begs your pardon;
for I would swear an oath on his behalf
that if you're willing to end all this
he'll better keep himself from failing you.

Lady Iseut, if I were sure
that he repented the grave wrong
he has done me,
it would be entirely right for me
to show him mercy; but it isn't proper
that I be more forgiving,
for he does not restrain his wickedness
nor does he repent the failure,
but if you make him repent
you'll find it easy to convert me.

2. **Dompna / The Lady** — Patricia van Ness

My goal was to express the Countess of Dia's fiercely sweet joy at finding a man worthy of her love, rather than rejoicing that a man loved her. It was a pleasure to take advantage of the virtuosic abilities of Alkemie and Amanda Gookin; my thanks and the dedication of this work go to them.

Dompna que en bon pretz s'enten
deu ben pausar s'entendenssa
en un pro cavallier valen
pois qu'ill conois sa valenssa
que l'aus amar a presenssa,
que dompna, pois am'a presen,
ja pois li pro ni li valen
no.n dirant mas avinenssa.

~ La Comtessa de Dia
(fl. late 12th – early 13th century)

The lady who knows about valor
should place her affection
in a courteous and worthy knight
as soon as she has seen his worth,
and she should dare to love him face to face;
for courteous and worthy men
can only speak with great esteem
of a lady who loves openly.

~ Translation by Meg Bogin

3. **Ar em al freg tems vengut** — Tis Kaoru Zamler-Carhart

First I through-composed the melody by recording myself singing how the text intuitively sounds to me, in one session from start to finish. Then I transcribed my recording into Sibelius, copied the same melody into the other instruments, and moved intervals around until I liked the color.

Ar em al freg tems vengut
el gels el neus e la fanha,
e li auselet estan mut,
qu'uns de chantar non s'afranha,
e son sec li rams pels plais
que flors ni fuelha noi nais
ni rossignols no'l crida,
que l'an mais me reissida.

Tant a lo cor deceubut
per qu'ieu sui a tots estranha,
e sai que l'om a perdut
molt plus tost que non gasanha,
e s'ieu falh ab mots verais
d'Aurenga mi moc l'esglais,
per qu'ieu n'estauc esbaïda
e pert solaz en partida.

We have now come to the cold season,
and the ice, the snow, and the mud.
The little birds are silent,
none venture to sing.
The branches are dry on the hedges,
no flower or leaf buds there,
and the nightingale, who wakes me up in May,
doesn't sing there.

My heart is so disillusioned
that I am estranged from all,
and I know that loss
is much quicker than gain.
I may mislead myself with honest words
but distress has come to me from the city of Orange,
and has left me stunned
so that I've lost some of my joy.

Domna met mout mal s'amor
qu'ab trop ric ome plaideia,
ab plus aut de vavasor,
e si'lh o fai ils foleia.
Car so dison en Velai
que ges per ricor non vai,
e domna que n'es chausida
en tenh per envilanida.

A lady invests her love very poorly
if she deals with a man whose rank is too high,
any higher than a low vassal.
And if she does it, it's folly.
For as they say in Velay,
it's not a matter of wealth,
and a lady who makes such a choice,
I consider her indecent.

Amic ai de gran valor
que sobre tots senhoreia,
e non a cor trichador vas me,
que s'amor m'autreia,
ieu dic que m'amors l'eschai,
e cel que dits que non fai,
Dieus li don mal' escarida,
quieu m'en tenh fort per garida.

I have a friend of great valor
who rules over everyone.
He doesn't have a cheating heart towards me
and he grants me his love.
I say that my love belongs to him,
and whoever says it doesn't,
may God give him bad luck,
which I consider myself quite safe from.

Bel amic, de bon talan,
sui a vos totsjorns engatge,
cortesa de bel semblan,
sol no'm demandes outratge.
Tots en venrem al assai,
qu'en vostra merce'm metrai,
vos m'avetz la fe plevida
que no'm demandetz falhida.

Handsome friend, I willingly
commit myself to you forever,
I'm courteous and of good countenance,
just don't ask me for anything obscene.
We will soon get to the test
where I put myself at your mercy,
and you have promised
not to ask me to sin.

A Dieu coman Belesgar e plus
la ciutat d'Aurenga,
e Glorieta e'l caslar,
e lo senhor de Proensa,
e tot quand vol mon ben lai,
e l'arc on son fait l'assai.
Celui perdiei qu'a ma vida,
e'n seretz totsjorns marrida

Joglar qu'avetz cor gai,
ves Narbona portatz lai
ma chanson a la Fenida,
lieis cui jois e jovens guida.

~ Azalais de Porcairagues (fl. late 12th century)

To God I commend Belesgar,
and also the city of Orange,
and the Glorieta and the castle,
and the lord of Provence,
and everyone there who wishes me well,
and the arch of trials.
I lost the one who holds my life,
and I will be forever disconsolate.

Juggler, since you have a cheerful heart,
carry my song in closing
to Narbonne over there,
to that lady who is guided by joy and youth.

~ Translation by Tis Kaoru Zamler-Carhart

4. **Bels dous amics** — Hai-Ting Chinn

I was drawn to this poem because of its incompleteness. The simple statement of lasting love and desire, from a woman's perspective, shaped by the unusual grammar of "Since I met you, I have never… —Nor ever…—" left hanging at the end of the extant text, felt like an invitation to imagine whatever we ourselves want to say or hear about love and desire. The wordless dulcian line that follows and entwines with the incomplete ni anc ("nor ever") evokes whatever each listener wants to hear.

Bels dous amics ben vos puosc en ver dir
qe anc no fo q'eu estes ses desir
pos vos conosc ni.us pris per fin aman,
ni anc no fo q'eu non agues talan,
bels dous amic, q'eu soven no.us veses,
ni anc no fo sasons qe m'en pentes,
ni anc no fo si vos n'anes iratz
q'eu agues ioi tro que fosetz tornatz,
ni anc…

~ Tibors de Sarenom (c. 1130 – aft. 1198)

Fair, sweet friend, I can truly tell you
I have never been without desire
since I met you and took you as a true lover;
nor has it happened that I lacked the wish,
my fair, sweet friend, to see you often,
nor has the season come when I repented,
nor has it happened, if you went off angry,
that I knew joy until you returned,
nor…

5. **neither flower nor leaf** — Maya Bennardo

To me, longing has a way of accentuating the elasticity and stickiness of time; in *neither flower nor leaf* I use fragmented phrases in the voices and harp over an ever-shifting timbral cello chord to bring the listener into that malleable yet still space.

neither flower nor leaf
Now we
The time
Birds mute
Not one
Sprouting there
Calling
Wakes my soul
Birds mute
Sprouting there
Bare.

~ Text by Maya Bennardo based on Ar em al freg tems vengut

6. **A great fog seeping into my veins** — Raquel Acevedo Klein

With original text inspired by trobairitz writings, *A great fog seeping into my veins* features voice, dulcian, vielle, harp, viola da gamba, and cello. Through canonic gestures, rhythmic counterpoint, unison figures, unpredictable harmonic progressions, and wide timbral effects, each instrument acts as an echo and mirror for the voice, to reflect the emotional despair of loving someone who has left you for another person.

A great fog seeping into my veins
How foolish of me! Love had seized me so.
The gift of your kisses, a great fog seeping into my veins.
You pledged and swore that in all your days, you'd love me without wavering.
But you murdered and betrayed me, you foul tongued, wicked man.
Love is the death of me. I must depart.
You no longer prize me. I've been killed by painful thoughts.
If it doesn't please you to retain me, obey me this one, last, time.
If you're attending to another, leave me with your smile.
Before I die of grief, and consider you a beast.
For no joy comes to the bereaved.
If my heart was ever fickle, let evil take me.
If I was dreadful or untrue, forget my love.
If ever you have failed me, I pardon you in all good faith.
I pray that you will come to me as soon as you have heard my song.
I promise you will find in me a tender warmth, a fond embrace.

~ Text by Raquel Acevedo Klein

7. **Oy Dieus** — Gelsey Bell

Oy Dieus is a song about exploring carnal pleasure with a dear friend in the blue hour before dawn. If you thought French was a sexy language, just wait till your ears are tickled with early Occitan.

Oy Dieus

In an orchard under hawthorn leaves the lady holds her lover by her side until the watchman cries.
I see the dawn!
Oh God, oh God, the dawn, it comes so soon!

Would to God the darkness were not ending and my lover were not leaving me;
and the watchman saw no day nor dawn. *Oh God, oh God, the dawn, it comes so soon!*

Fair, sweet friend, kiss me and I'll kiss you in the meadow where the songbirds sing.
Let's do all this despite the jealous one.
Oy Dieus, oy Dieus, the dawn, it comes so soon!

Bels dous amicx, let's play a fresh game in the garden where the songbirds sing
until the watchman pipes his warning.
Oy Dieus, oy Dieus, de l'alba tan tost ve!

In the sweet wind that comes from there del mieu amie belh e cortes e gay
I've drunk the sweet light of his breath.
Oy Dieus, oy Dieus, de l'alba tan tost ve!

La dompna es agradans e plazens per sa beutat la gardon mantas gens et a son cor en amar leyalmens.
[The lady is agreeable and lovely, admired by many for her beauty while her heart stays loyally in love.]
Oy Dieus, oy Dieus, de l'alba tan tost ve!

~ Anonymous (13th c.), adapted by Gelsey Bell

8. **Ben volgra midons saubes** — Niccolo Seligmann

My setting of *Ben volgra* bursts with playfulness, joy, and love for Alkemie. This piece celebrates and plays with medieval styles such as strophic monody, dance music, and organum.

"Ben volgra midons saubes
mon cor ayssi cum yeu.l say,
e que'l plagues q'ieu fos lay
on es sos guays cors cortes.
E si dic sobransaria?"
"Diguas, e cuias qu'o sia?"
"Yeu non, que no.m sent tan ricx."
"Suefre e no t'amendicx
que de ben leu s'avenria."

"Avenir pot? No pot ges."
"Si pot lo." "Per Dieu, no fay."
"E quom? Yeu vos o diray."
"Diguatz cum." "S'a lieys plagues."
"Plazer? A lieys, cum plairia?"
"Levet, s'amors o volia."
"Amors?" "Yest li enemicx?"
"Yeu no, ans estauc enicx
a quascun que la gualia."

"I really wish my lady knew
my heart as well as I know it:
I wish she were pleased to have me
near her fair, gracious body.
Is this presumptuous speech?"
"Speak! Do you think this might be?"
"I? No, for I don't feel so proud."
"Endure; don't put a friar's cloak on,
for it could easily occur."

"It can occur? Not at all!"
"Yes it can." "No, by God."
"How? I'll tell you."
"Tell me how." "If it please her."
"Please? How would it please her?"
"Easily, if love willed it."
"Love?" "Are you its enemy?"
"Not I! Rather, I'm the foe
of anyone who might betray it."

"Suefre e venra t'en bes."
"E cum? Que.ls mals ades n'ay."
"Mal? non ho diguas iamay."
"E per que?" "Quar non o es."
"Non es mals qu'ayssi m'aucia
languen?" "Non ges, quar un dia
er tos bes, si non t'en gicx,
ab sol que no la cambicx."
"Ey morray?" "Oc si.s volia."

"Si.s vol?" "Oc." "Valra.m merces
ab lieys?" "Per Dieu, non o say."
"E per que?" "Quar non s'eschai
que trop t'iest en ric luec mes."
"Ric, per crotz, ben o sabia."
"E doncx no fezist follia?
L'aissa t'en." "No m'en casticx,
qu'aisso no t'es mas desticx
que ia no m'en layssaria."
"No t'en laissarias ges?"

"Endure and good shall come to you."
"But how? What I have now is evil."
"Evil? Never say that."
"And why not?" "It isn't so."
"It isn't evil that she lets me die
languishing?" "Not at all! One day
all will be well if you persist,
provided you don't turn from her."
"And I'll die?" "Yes, if she wills it."

"If she wills it?" "Yes." "Will she be merciful
to me?" "God, I don't know."
"And why?" "Because it isn't fitting
that you've presumed to rise so high."
"So high! By the cross I knew it!"
"Wasn't it foolish on your part?
Give it up." "Don't reproach me for it!
You're only damaging your case,
for I would never give it up."
"You wouldn't give it up?"

"Non yeu." "Doncx aissi o fay
cum ieu t'o ensenharai:
sias adreitz e cortes,
francx e de bella paria,
e fay so que ben estia,
quan poiras, e no t'en tricx,
qu'aissi due renhar amicx,
oc, e miehls si mielhs podia."

"Na Felipa, s'ieu avia
tals ricatz don ieu fos ricx,
atressi.us seri'amicx
de ben dir, si cum solia."

Chanso, en Castella ten via
al rey qui dobla.ls destricx
qu'om pren ab los avols ricx
quant es en lor companhia.

"Not I." "Then do
as I tell you:
be nimble and courteous,
open and sociable;
do what seems right,
when you can, and don't hang back,
for that's the way a friend should act,
yes, and still better, if they could."

"Lady Felipa, if I had
the high rank that would make me rich,
then I'd be your friend
in speaking well, the way I used to."

Song, go out to Castille
to the king who doubles the injuries
one suffers from the wicked rich
when one is in their company.

~ *Filipa and Arnaut Plagues (fl. c. 1230–1245)*

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ALKEMIE DELIGHTS IN EXPLORING AND celebrating the vibrant sounds of the Medieval past. Moving freely among the worlds of court, cloister, and folk music, the ensemble brings historical traditions into conversation with the present through performances grounded equally in scholarship, curiosity, and experimentation.

Alkemie's singer-instrumentalists perform on more than two dozen instruments, including vielles (early fiddles), harps, psaltery, scheitholt (early zither), recorders, douçaines and dulcians (early double reeds), bagpipes, and percussion. Known for its "characterful playing" (*The New Yorker*) and "superb ensemble skills" (*Limelight*), Alkemie's performance at the Indianapolis Early Music Festival was applauded for "indicating [the] future health of the field of early music."

Since 2018, Alkemie has commissioned new works for early instruments and created projects including the dream-pop, shoegaze, and psychedelic-rock album *A Fine Companion*, which *Early Music America* praised for "skillfully transform[ing] troubadour texts into dreamily contemporary journeys."

Based in New York City, Alkemie self-presents an annual concert series and has appeared at the Amherst Early Music Festival, Arizona Early Music Society, Berkeley Early Music Festival, Brooklyn Public Library, Cambridge Society for Early Music, Five Boroughs Music Festival, the Met Cloisters, the Morgan Library, and Music Before 1800, among others. Collaboration is central to the ensemble's work, with partners including Chanticleer, InSeries Opera, Rose of the Compass, and TENET.

with Amanda Gookin, cellist

Praised for her "expert technical work" (*The Strad*), cellist AMANDA GOOKIN "pushes Classical forward" (*LA Times*) and champions the future of music through the creation and bold performance of new works, and a dedication to education, culture, and community engagement.

Her initiative, Forward Music Project, commissions new multimedia works for solo cello that elevate stories of feminine empowerment. Her album, *Forward Music Project 1.0*, was celebrated by the *NY Times* as "communal joy embedded in a music of cooperation."

Amanda was the founder and decade-long cellist of the contemporary improvising string quartet, PUBLIQuartet. In pursuit of socially-conscious programming, her GRAMMY-nominated album with PUBLIQuartet, *Freedom and Faith*, addressed the resilience of the female spirit throughout history.

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Mastering: Mike Tierney

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