



Another divine concert
from Ensemble Scholastica

Description

A sublime dive into ancient musicality where simplicity rhymes with perfection

By **Luc Archambault**

November 17, 2022

Rebecca Bain and **Ensemble Scholastica** invited music lovers to a new journey into ancient musicality, *Tout par compas*, with a selection of pieces ranging from the 13th to the 15th century, all collected through the exhaustive research of this undisputed leader in medieval music.

In the beautiful Notre-Dame-de-Bon-Secours chapel, six singers had the audience vibrate for an hour on melodies of an incredible richness. Six voices, six women in a capella incantations, nothing but voices, the purity of sound, an audience that held its breath so as not to break the spell. What a concert! What professionalism!

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Founded in 2008 and directed since 2012 by Rebecca Bain, a specialist in medieval music, Ensemble Scholastica brings together singers from Montreal's thriving ancient music scene. Some of them also play various instruments.

Ensemble Scholastica is the only Canadian vocal ensemble dedicated exclusively to the performance of medieval monophonic and polyphonic liturgical chant, a repertoire spanning the 9th to 13th centuries. It draws directly from medieval manuscripts for the study and performance of this repertoire.



Historical authenticity, however, is not its only objective. The Ensemble Scholastica also wishes to introduce the public to the gentleness and sheer beauty of medieval music, especially that of the liturgical traditions which are the source of Western music. In this respect, the Ensemble Scholastica has participated in numerous performances in recent years. In particular, it has been interested in the sacred music of New France.

The round is one of the oldest forms of polyphony and also one of the simplest. It is what children discover when they sing a basic melody that turns into a harmony when the voices follow one another. It is well known that Renaissance music adores melodic imitation, but the round had already gained favour with European composers in the 13th century, and it was in the second half of the 14th century that this musical form reached its peak in France, Italy and England.

Rounds are found in the most diverse medieval repertoires, both sacred and secular, and range from the simplest compositions to pieces of virtuoso complexity. If a medieval person were asked about the principles of a round, their answer would depend entirely on where and when they found themselves. There were different types of rounds and each used its own terminology.

Today, rounds are commonly referred to as “canon,” which was not the case in the Middle Ages. The related concept of “fugue” designates a post-medieval form that is more closely associated with Baroque music, and in particular with that of J.S. Bach. All these forms have in common the imitation of melodic material by voices or instruments.

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The repertoire of the *Tout par compas* concert is mainly devoted to the round of the late Middle Ages, in its most circular form: the rota (“wheel”). Each voice sings an identical version of the melody (and text) in its entirety, not in synchrony but out of step. The concert was punctuated by a few variants of this form, illustrating ingenious and truly medieval imitation techniques.



The concert was punctuated by a few variants of this form, illustrating ingenious and truly medieval imitation techniques. Each piece is sung by a group of voices, from a minimum of three to the full ensemble. Of the six voices, a few manage to stand out, notably **Ariadne Lih**, a young soprano whose breathtakingly pure tone ignites each lyrical soaring. **Élodie Bouchard**, like a storm, sweeps everything away with her clarion voice.

Not that the other four voices – **Luce Chamberland**, **Cynthia Gates**, **Rebecca Bain** and **Angèle Trudeau** – are not remarkable, but they are less penetrating than those of Lih and Bouchard. One thing to note, and which saddens me, is that this concert, as magnificent as it was, only managed to attract half the audience. Which is, in my eyes, a crime of lèse-majesté.

Coming soon

MIRAGRES FREMOSOS

Songs of medieval Spain

Concert presentation: May 13, 2023
with guest Lamia Yared

AUDI FILIE

Songs of female Christian communities, 12th-17th centuries

Concert presentation: November 12, 2023
Recording project: 2024

The Scholastica Ensemble

Historically, monastic orders offered women the opportunity to escape marriage and childbearing while receiving an education and opportunities to develop various skills and make a difference in their communities.

The Scholastica Ensemble is named after Scholastica, the sixth-century woman behind her famous brother St. Benedict, founder of the Benedictine Order. Scholastica founded the women's branch of this influential institution, which was responsible for the creation and dissemination of a vast body of music over several centuries.

The **Audi Filie** concert and upcoming CD celebrate this heritage and feature works composed (mostly anonymously), collected, and sung by women in their convents from the late medieval to the early modern era, from Europe to New France and New Spain.

The repertoire covered by these works will feature nine of Ensemble Scholastica's vocal performers, some of whom will also play period instruments such as the medieval fiddle, symphonia, and psaltery, and three guest musicians playing accompanying instruments (portative organ, lute/vihuela, and viola da gamba) for the later works.

The recording of these pieces will be released in late 2024 under the **ATMA Classique** label.

Images: Martin Jolicoeur



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Luc Archambault, writer and journalist, globe-trotter at heart, passionate about movies, music, literature and contemporary dance, came back to Montreal from an extended stay in China to pursue his unrelenting quest for artistic meaning.

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Date Created

November 2022