

Cantigas

Songs of Mystic Spain



Camerata Mediterranea
(France -- USA)
and
L'Orchestre Abdelkrim Rais
(Morocco)

Joel Cohen, director

Ensemble biographies

The European-based sister ensemble to the Boston Camerata, **Camerata Mediterranea** was founded in 1990 by **Joel Cohen** with assistance from the late Michel Garcin of Erato Records and the Festival Méditerranéen. The “Cam Med”’s mission is to explore the early music repertoires of the mediterranean bassin, employing musicians with personal, musical, and linguistic roots in the geographic area of study and performance. Earlier projects by Camerata Mediterranea, centered around the music and poetry of the Provençal troubadours, toured France, Italy, Spain, Morocco, and the United States,. The ensemble’s first two CD’s won critical press honors in France and England (Gramophone Editor’s Choice).

L’orchestre Abdelkrim Rais, based in Fez, Morocco, is one of that country’s most eminent practitioners of the centuries-old Arabo-andalusian, classical Spanish repertoire that has been passed down in North Africa, by oral tradition, since the fifteenth century. Led for many years by the great Abdelkrim Rais, the ensemble is now led by the late master’s chief disciple, **Mohammed Briouel**. Mr. Briouel is also director of the Conservatoire de Musique of Fez and the author of published transcriptions of Arabo-andalusian noubas music. His group has toured the world in recent seasons, including stops in the Far East and the United States, and has made numerous commercial recordings in Morocco and France.

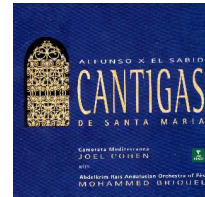
Songs of Mystic Spain



Spain in the Middle Ages, like contemporary America, was a nation of diverse religions and cultures. In the thirteenth century, Alfonso X the Wise (1221-1284) called himself “King of the Three Religions,” and welcomed Jewish, Christian, and Muslim musicians, artists, and thinkers to his multi-ethnic court.

The concert program “Cantigas: Songs of Mystic Spain” is an attempt to recreate the unique musical, poetic, and spiritual climate of Iberia in the thirteenth century. Using King Alfonso’s magnificent collection of songs to the Virgin Mary as its central element, the program

weaves Jewish and Islamic elements around the Christian songs. The performers, all recognised experts in their fields of medieval and/or Andalusian music, come, like the musicians at Alfonso’s court, from the different musical and religious traditions that made up the court orchestra of the Wise King. Two internationally famous ensembles, the Camerata Mediterranea (Joel Cohen, director) and the Orchestre Abdelkrim Rais of Fes, Morocco (Mohammed Briouel, director) unite in this unique project. Their Erato recording of this repertoire was crowned with the Netherlands’ Edison Prize in April 2000.



THE

ENSEMBLES

CAMERATA MEDITERRANEA

(direction: Joel Cohen)

Françoise Atlan, Hayet Ayad, Anne Azéma, Equidad Bares, *voice*
Shira Kammen and/or Robert Mealy, Joel Cohen, *Medieval strings*
(*vielle, harp, lutes*)



L'ORCHESTRE ABDELKRIM RAIS

(direction: Mohammed Briouel)

Aziz Chentoufi Alami, *taâr*, Mustapha Amri, *viola*, Abdeslam Amri,
darbouka, Mohammed Briouel, *viola and violin*, Jamal Eddine Ben
Allal, *lute*



Language

consultant: Pierre Bec (France)

Production coordination: Catherine von Mutius (Europe) Marc Baylin Associates (USA)

Presented in the USA in association with The Boston Camerata Inc, a non-profit corporation



Musician nationalities: **France** (Atlan, Ayad, Azéma, Bares);
United States (Cohen, Kammen, Mealy); **Morocco** (Alami, Amri,
Amri, Briouel, Ben Allal)

Songs of mystic Spain the: concert Program

(as of 2000, subject to change)



Benvennas mayo (Cantiga
406) *Equidad Barres*

Loemos muit'a virgen (Cantiga 370) *Hayet Ayad & ensemble*

Como somos per consello (Cantiga 119) *womens' voices & ensemble*

Seventh Taouchia (Noubat Hijaz Lauchaki) *instruments*

Sola fusti senlleiira (Cantiga 90) *Equidad Barres*

Mui gran dereit (Cantiga 52) *Equidad Barres & ensemble*

Taouchia (Naubat Gribt Lahcine) *instruments*

Tod' ome deve dar loor (Cantiga 230) *Hayet Ayad*

Quen entender quiser (Cantiga 130) *Françoise Atlan & ensemble*

Gran Dereit (Cantiga 56) *Anne Azéma & ensemble*

Kouli Lmalihti (Mizane Darj Arak Al Ajam) *instruments*

INTERMISSION

Santa Maria leva (Cantiga 320) *Françoise Atlan*

Santa Maria loei (Cantiga 200) *Equidad Barres & ensemble*

Nobre don e muy precado (Cantiga 417) *Anne Azéma, Françoise Atlan & ensemble*

Sanaa "Kad Nilto Hibbi" (Mizane Bacit Gribt Lahcine) *voices and instruments*

A Santa Maria dadas (Cantiga 140) *Aziz Alami & lutes*

Sanaa "Allah hoo Yalamo" (Mizane Koddam Rasd Addayl) *Aziz Alami & ensemble*

Por nos Virgen Madre (Cantiga 250) *Anne Azéma*

Ahot ketana (Abraham, Cantor de Gerone, XIIe) *Joël Cohen*

Tant aos Peccadores (Cantiga 315) *womens' voices & ensemble*



What are the Cantigas?

High among the many achievements of the Spanish King Alfonso X, called "El Sabio" -- the Wise (1221-1284) is the superb collection of more than 400 sacred songs to the Virgin Mary, the celebrated Cantigas de Santa Maria. King

Alfonso's Cantigas are the most important examples of vernacular song from the Spanish Middle Ages; more than that, they are a summit of medieval Christian spirituality. They are preserved in several large and elaborate manuscripts prepared at the royal court; and while it is doubtful that the King composed all of the songs personally, it is clear that he was closely involved, emotionally and materially, in their compilation.



España es diferente.

And yet, while the theological and literary center of these pieces -- miracle ballads in their majority, interspersed with songs of praise to the Virgin -- is intensely Christian, any attempt to perform them anew needs, I believe, to take into account the special, polycultural situation of medieval Spain. The cultural and artistic context of Spain in the thirteenth century was unmistakably mixed, with strong Muslim and Judaic influences present everywhere. Alfonso's court was a reflection of the general situation of Spain during this period. Calling himself "King of the three religions," the liberal-minded Alfonso surrounded himself with scholars and artists of all faiths. The illuminated miniatures in the most elaborate of the Cantigas manuscripts bear witness to intense



cross-cultural interaction: musicians in typically Christian, Islamic, and Jewish garb are shown performing their instruments;

light-skinned and dark-skinned musicians make music together. And many of the instruments depicted in these miniatures, while now rare or extinct in Europe, are still current in the Muslim world of North Africa.

It is for these reasons that our performances of Alfonso's Cantigas attempt to integrate certain musical elements, and musicians, whose points of reference lie outside the mainstream of Western "classical" music.

A cross-cultural experiment.

While we can never be sure exactly how the musicians at King Alfonso's court might have interpreted these songs, we have everything to gain in our hypothetical reconstructions by calling on musical traditions currently outside, but once closely related to, European musical practice. Accordingly, we have asked an outstanding ensemble of current Moroccan masters to supply accompaniments to the vocal lines set out in the manuscript pages, using the instruments they currently employ in their own repertoire. These instruments are, in many cases (lute, percussion) virtually the same as those shown in the medieval manuscript, or, in the case of the Moroccan violin and alto, closely related thereto.



Furthermore, the possible relationship between Arabic musical art and the music of medieval Spain goes far beyond the question of instrumental morphology. The classical Arabic music of North Africa is called "Andalusian music," and its contemporary practitioners are conscious of perpetuating a system of musical thought and practice which is traced back to the Muslim courts of medieval Spain. Four hundred years after the "reunification" of Spain under a Christian



Kingdom, the once- closely-related traditions of Christian and Muslim Spain have, inevitably, grown apart. But what is astonishing to the "occidental" student of Arabic classical music is how much the current tradition contains that is self-evidently very ancient. The modes of Andalusian music as currently practiced in Morocco are very similar to those employed in the European Middle Ages. The exotic microtones associated with "oriental" music in the Western imagination, are absent from this classically-codified musical system. The scales are composed, like Gregorian chant, of tones and semitones arranged in different patterns according to the mode. Thus, the practitioner of Arabo-andalusian repertoire can assimilate the melodies of the Cantigas to his own instrument or voice with little disruption, and even with delectation. And, as we happily discovered during the weeks of preparatory collaboration, many melodic motifs, formulas and patterns found in the Cantigas are still employed in Arabo- andalusian music.



How were the Cantigas sung?

Unlike the musical accompaniments, which are not notated in the Cantigas manuscript and which need to be re-imagined anew, the melodies are clearly set out in the medieval source. While the intervallic relationships and (to a somewhat lesser extent) the rhythms are clearly exposed in the original notation, the questions of stylistic nuance and interpretation are not. And in fact, given the heterogeneous makeup of King Alfonso's court (the King himself was half German!), a broad range of options and singing styles may have been available, as it is today in vital and diverse "crossroads" centers like New York or Marseilles. We have therefore recruited accomplished vocal soloists from a variety of backgrounds. All of our singers have Mediter-

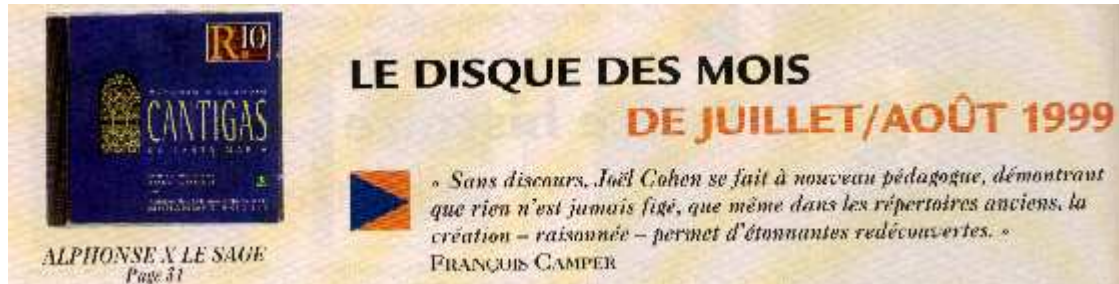
anean roots -- Occitanian, Spanish, Kabyll, Arabic, and Judeo- Berber -- and all the women soloists have sung Cantigas and other medieval repertoires prior to coming together for this project. But we have tried, while creating a unitary framework, to allow for and encourage the diversity inherent both in our selection of soloists and (we believe) in the song repertoire itself.



The preparation of these Cantigas has been a large undertaking, as exhilarating and passionate in its human interactions as it has been on the scholarly and musical front. In proceeding as we have done, have we reproduced the music of Alfonso's thirteenth-century court in every detail? No, for that task is clearly impossible for us, or for anyone else. On the other hand, have we perhaps come closer to the spirit of the Cantigas, and to that extraordinary, humane, and convivial moment of our collective past? Such is our wish as we send this beautiful music forth into the world, and to you.

Joel Cohen

Production history



1997: Joel Cohen and Mohammed Briouel meet in Cambridge, Ma.

1998: Cohen's first study period in Fez, Morocco; group rehearsals and first concerts in Fez and Casablanca; CD recording in Fez ; first European concerts in Metz and Nancy, France

1999: Concerts in Norway (Bergen Festival), France (Routes Romanes Festival) and Germany (Palatinate Festival).

Cantigas CD program released in Europe and the U.S.

2000: Cohen, Briouel and cast members receive the Edison award, Amsterdam. Featured concerts in the Netherlands (Utrecht Festival).



2001-2: Concerts scheduled in France (Abbaye de Silvanès), Germany (Dresden, Berlin).

Preparations for first U.S. Tour. Initial planning for *Cantigas II*, in collaboration with Glissando Records and German radio.

... some Press excerpts

“A moment full of emotion, bearing a message of love, friendship and tolerance.” -- *Le Matin du Sahara* (Casablanca, Morocco)

Rating: 10 of 10 -- *Oude Muziek* (Netherlands)

“Bethlehem’s star shines over Abraham” -- *Stavanger Aftenblad* (Norway)

“One scarcely had the feeling that one was exploring the past, so much does this music speak and vibrate in the present” -- *L’Est Republicain* (France)

Rating: 10 of 10. Record of the Month. “A sublime reinterpretation”-- *Repertoire* (France)

“A heartstopping moment of beauty and earnest devotion...an excellent recording on all levels.” -- *Goldberg Magazine* (Spain).

“The approach registers powerfully...marked by a vigour and intensity of performance that more than justifies the premise of this experiment.” -- Gramophone (England)

“An unforgettable evening...the Cantigas were sung, played, even danced by musicians whose talents are as strong as they are diverse...Anne Azéma, whose tone is miraculously pure; Françoise Atlan, who uses her voice in the most varied ways; Hayet Ayad, the Kabyll, who lives the music with her body; and Equidad Bares the Spaniard who dances and makes you listen through gesture as well as singing...Astonishing.” -- *Ouest-France* (France)

...And some listener Reviews from the Internet (Amazon.com)

***** Wonderfull fusion, June 7, 2000

Reviewer: Angela Maria Alvarez, Tampa, Florida.

This is the best example of three cultures living together in harmony....this music is just perfect.

***** Transcendent, May 16, 2000

Reviewer: moshe-mantega from California

Just to add a note to the previous reviewer's comments: the last song--"Por nos virgen madre," a

solo by Anne Azema with harp--is the most beautiful song I have ever heard in my life; it brought tears to my eyes with its tender passion.... This great recording is NOT to be missed.

Reviewer: Jessica Knauss from Leeds, England

This is one of the finest performances I have heard of the Cantigas de Santa Maria.