

Early Music Foundation presents

EARLY MUSIC NEW YORK  
FREDERICK RENZ – DIRECTOR

# ISTANPITTA

A Medieval Dance Band

Saint James Chapel  
Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine, NYC

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Saturday, November 10, 2012 at 8:00 PM

Sunday, November 11, 2012 at 2:00 PM

# EARLY MUSIC NEW YORK

## FREDERICK RENZ – DIRECTOR

Wayne Hankin	bagpipes, flutes, shawm
Lisle Kulbach	vielles, rebec, flutes
Christa Patton	shawms, bagpipes, harps, flutes
Yousif Sheronick	frame drums, nakers
Charles Weaver	plectrum lute, organistrum
Thomas Zajac	bagpipes, flutes, slide trumpet, dulcimer

## ISTANPITTA

A Medieval Dance Band

Nota I	“Harley MS”
Chominciamento di Gioia (The Commencement of Joy)	“Visconti MS”
La Tierche Estampie Roial	Chansonnier du Roi
La Seconde Estampie Royal	Chansonnier du Roi
[English Dance]	“Coventry MS”
Saltarello [4]	“Visconti MS”
La Septime Estampie Real/La Uitime Estampie Real	Chansonnier du Roi
La Manfredina, La Rotta della Manfredina	“Visconti MS”
[Nota 2]	“Harley MS”
Saltarello [1]	“Visconti MS”
Saltarello [2]/Trotto	“Visconti MS”
Danse [3]	Chansonnier du Roi
Parlamento (“Dialogue”)	“Visconti MS”
La Seste Estampie Real	Chansonnier du Roi
Belicha (“War” from It. “bellico;” “billiq” = a popular or licentious Arabic poem)	“Visconti MS”

## NOTES

**MEDIEVAL DANCES** – The complete corpus of surviving instrumental dance music from before 1430 consists of fewer than fifty pieces and fragments of pieces, most of which have been recorded in a monumental two volume set by EARLY MUSIC NEW YORK (formerly New York’s Ensemble for Early Music).

Given the prominence of dancing in the society of the late Middle Ages, our knowledge of the music repertory and the dance steps is surprisingly small. References abound in the literature of the period, and dance scenes are portrayed in the art works, but most of this provides us with only general information; it informs us that dancing was a part of every-day life during those centuries, but is of only modest help with the details. Descriptions of dance music come down to us in a single musical treatise of the time, *De Musica*, written by Johannes de Grocheio around the year 1300.

**ESTAMPIE** – Sixteen textless compositions are identified in their sources as “estampies,” eight in a thirteenth-century French manuscript (“*Chansonnier du Roi*”), labeled “estampies”, and eight from a late fourteenth-century Italian manuscript, following the heading “*Istanpitta*” (“*Visconti MS*”). The theoretical treatise by Grocheio tells us that an estampie is made up of several repeated puncta (verses) of different lengths, each with an open and close ending and a common refrain. All sixteen estampies agree with that general description, but the two sets of music are quite different from one another in terms of length, meter, internal formal design, and melodic style. The French estampies have relatively short puncta of eight to twenty units of measure and are all in simple triple meter, while in the dances from the Italian sources the puncta vary in length from twenty to over a hundred units of measure, and are mainly in a basic duple division, either simple or complex. Even more striking are the differences in formal plot and tonal orientation.

Each repeated punctum of a French estampie begins with completely new melodic material and ends with a refrain that also serves as the open and close endings, as in the following formal plot (x = first or open ending, y = second or close):

Verse		Open ending		Repeated verse		Close ending
A	-	x	-	A	-	y
B	-	x	-	B	-	y
C	-	x	-	C	-	y
etc.						

In contrast, the formal plots of the Italian estampies are far more complex. There are a number of variants, with verses containing two to four sections each and involving different combinations of sections from verse to verse. In addition to the obvious formal differences, the two sets of estampies are melodically quite different. The French dances have relatively narrow ranges and are diatonic, emphasizing a single mode. Their phrases are short, and within each estampie all the phrases are generated from a small number of melodic-rhythmic motives. In contrast, the ranges of the Italian estampies are wide, and the melodies are not modal but based on a contrast of tetrachords that include chromatic variation. The phrases are long and involve a large number of melodic-rhythmic motives that bear a much closer resemblance to the dance music of the eastern Mediterranean than to European music of the same period.

## INSTRUMENTS

Although we can learn about the use of specific musical instruments from medieval literary sources and iconographic representations, care must be taken because of the nature of the information. Poetic/artistic license is always present to varying degrees, and the writers and painters assumed that their audience would be well aware of current performance practices, thus allowing additional poetic leeway and lack of historical precision. For example, the following passages from the mid-fourteenth-century “Remede de Fortune” by Guillaume de Machaut list a large number of musical instruments associated with dancing:

But you should have seen after the meal the minstrels who entered in generous number, with shining hair and simple dress! They played many varied harmonies. For I saw there all in a group *vielle*, *rebec*, *gittern*, [thirteen additional lines of instruments] and certainly, it seems to me that never was such melody seen nor heard, for each of them, according to the tone of his instrument, without discord, plays on *vielle*, *gittern*, *citole*, *harp*, *trumpet*, *horn*, *flageolet*, *pipe bellows*, *bagpipe*, *nakers*, or *tabor*, and every sound that one can make with fingers, quill and bow I heard and saw in that park. When they had finished an estampie...

Machaut tells us that all instruments one can finger, pluck, and bow could be used in the performance of dance music; but he does not say that they were all equally good choices for all kinds of dances. Although the poet does not mention it, we know from other evidence that it is unlikely that all the instruments listed would have been played at the same time; and indeed

there is no implication in the poem that a single ensemble is being described. But we do not know whether, or to what extent, certain instruments might have been considered appropriate only for specific types of dances and not for others. A perusal of several literary sources yields a list of instruments found in the company of dancing that includes virtually all instruments known to have existed at the time. But, as in the poem, the information is unrefined and leaves numerous questions unanswered.

Above all others, the one most frequently mentioned as performing for dances, especially for the estampie, is the vielle. This is true in the literature of France, England, Italy, Germany, and the Low Countries. Grocheio states that the vielle is the ideal instrument for all secular music. Vielle players are mentioned performing alone, in pairs, and, in one account, in four: "Then the servants hurried and quickly took away the napery. Four minstrels of the vielle played a new estampie before the lady."

Iconographic sources augment our information in terms of viable instruments and ensembles. We can find illustrations of nearly all the instruments mentioned in Machaut's poem. Solo instruments most frequently depicted with dancers include the vielle (and rebec), plucked strings of various sizes and shapes, the harp, the bagpipe, the shawm (or similar wind instrument), and the tambourine (with vocal dances). The ensembles shown often consist of two or more vielles, two lutes, lute and harp, pipe and tabor (single player or two players), and a shawm band - two or three shawms with slide trumpet.

Timothy J. McGee  
Faculty of Music, University of Toronto

The above information is extracted by the author from his *Medieval Instrumental Dances*, Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana Univ. Press, 1989. Used by permission.

## **DIRECTOR'S OBSERVATIONS**

By way of contemporary iconography and literary reference, we know that dance musicians were frequently engaged in groups. But we have but a clue regarding how they went about playing in ensemble. Assuming that dance music was played by more than one instrumentalist at a time, the musician's options were to play in unison; to alter the memorized or rarely notated tune by inventing simultaneous variations (heterophony); to provide a sustained or rhythmic drone to back up the lead player; or to improvise a simultaneous complementary counter melody - polyphony.

The fact that some extant instrumental music is bound in manuscripts together with vocal polyphony of two or more voices might suggest that the instrumentalist's craft included an ability to improvise a second or a third missing part not unlike the written vocal examples at hand. Whereas courtier/singers might be expected to extemporize or write poetic lyrics, they were not called upon to improvise music; polyphonic accompaniments were therefore provided for the singer.

We can assume that courtier/singers were literate and therefore able to read these written out vocal parts at sight while, as a rule, professional dance musicians depended on memorized repertory and ensemble improvisation skills. Using the above hypothesis, this writer has invented an accompanying part or two for some of the estampies whose melodies are too complex for either heterophonic treatment or inflexible drone accompaniment. Taking a cue from the multi-canonic, ostinato devices found in the well known 'Sumer is icumen in' (Harley manuscript), the final three-voice punctum of the otherwise monophonic English dance and the skeletal third voice in the Robertsbridge fragment intabulations, this author has applied accompanying voices for some of the dances.

Unlike their Italian counterparts, the few French estampies that exist are minute in length and complexity. Melodic material from which these short puncti are spun invites improvised interplay. This author has invented supporting accompaniments incorporating the medieval practice of voice exchange that attempts to suggest improvisation upon the infectious melodic bits inherent in these tunes.

The arrangements are this writer's realizations along with further improvisations by the members of EARLY MUSIC NEW YORK and, in the spirit of extemporization practiced by dance musicians from the Middle Ages to the present, will be interpreted anew in performances to come.

Frederick Renz

**EM/NY's  
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albums are available at the CD table**

**Today's Early Music New York "Istanpitta" performance is in 'Media Partnership' with WQXR. Please visit the WQXR membership table.**

## SOURCES

**Oxford, Bodleian Library, Douce 139, fol. 5v ("Coventry MS").** In addition to a single untitled [English] dance, the manuscript contains thirteenth-century English statutes, many referring to Coventry, the probable place of the manuscript's origin.

**Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, fonds français 844, fols. 5r, 103v-104v.** The manuscript dates from the second half of the thirteenth century and is known as the "Chansonnier du Roi" It contains trouvère repertory as well as a few troubadour songs, eight estampies (one mutilated beyond restoration) and three carols. Several pages have been partially cut away, probably in order to remove the illuminated initials. It is for this reason that the first several partes and the endings of "La Prime Estampie Royal" have been lost.

**London, British Library, Harley 978, fols. 8v, 9r ("Harley MS").** This is a miscellaneous English manuscript from the late thirteenth century containing five musical compositions in addition to the three two-part notas, the famous rota "Sumer is icumen in."

**London, British Library, Additional 29987, fols. 55v-63v ("Visconti MS").** This manuscript was assembled in the scriptorium at Pavia (near Milan) between 1390 and 1410. Page numbers indicate that it was once a much larger manuscript. Presently it contains more than a hundred compositions, all of them fourteenth-century Italian, including ballatas, madrigals, caccias, three Mass sections, a hymn, some dance tenors titled "Chançoneta tedescha," and the eight istanpittas, four saltarellos, a trotto, and two titled dances paired with rottas. The composers of the dances and some of the vocal pieces are unknown, but eighty of the vocal works have been identified as the music of Francesco Landini, Niccolo da Perugia, Jacopo da Bologna and various less-known Italian composers of the fourteenth century. The rather fanciful names for some of the dances probably had specific local reference, but nothing is presently known on that subject.

### **EARLY MUSIC NEW YORK's 2012-2013 SEASON continues -**

**FALL 2012 - Medieval & Renaissance Chamber Ensemble**  
Cathedral St. John the Divine, Amsterdam Ave & 112th St.

**A Tudor Christmas: Renaissance England**  
Sunday, Dec. 16 at 2 PM, Saturday, Dec. 22 at 8 PM,  
Sunday, Dec. 23 at 2 PM, Tuesday, Dec. 25 at 2 PM & 8 PM

**SPRING 2013 - Baroque & Classical Orchestra**  
First Church of Christ, Scientist, Central Park West at 68th St.

**Mediterranean Meditations: Madrgial & Monody of the Italian Baroque**  
Saturday, March 16 at 8 PM

**London's Musical Bridge: The Enlightened English**  
Saturday, May 4 at 8 PM

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Private funding has been generously provided by  
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