

Idrîsî Ensemble

Cheltenham College Chapel

Thursday 10 July

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| Mallorcan traditional | Sibilla Mallorquina (15th c.) |
| Corsican traditional | Kyrie Eleison |
| Guillaume de Machaut (14th c.), Thrace traditional | J'aim sans penser / Zonaradikos |
| Thomas Fournil, Corsican trad. | Dieus sal la terra (paghjella) Li lais du Kievrefoel (12th c.) |
| Epirus traditional | Μαριόλα / Κλαίν' οι πέρδικες στα πλάγια |
| Corsican traditional | U Lamentu di Filicone |
| Corsican traditional | Paghjella Orezzinca |
| Herophile (6th c. BCE), Anon. (10th c.) | Ellinida Sibylla |
| Finnish traditional | Tervetuloo |
| Epirus traditional | Αλησμονώ και χαίρομαι |
| Corsican traditional | Tribbiere |

About the Programme

On 17 October 2003, UNESCO ratified the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage - a landmark commitment to preserving the traditions, rituals and oral expressions that define humanity. Tonight, we honour that spirit by reviving endangered musical forms and placing them in dialogue with medieval repertoire.

At the heart of our programme is the Song of the Sibyl, beginning with a UNESCO-protected Mallorcan version that has endured from the Middle Ages to the present day.

Ellinida Sibylla is a world premiere setting of the ancient Greek prophecy attributed to the original Erythraean Sibyl, reuniting the 10th-century melody with the female, pagan voice it once displaced.

We also present Li Lais du Kievrefoel (The Lay of the Honeysuckle), one of the earliest musical notations of narrative singing - a pre-medieval tradition of self-generative music capable of sustaining the performance of vast epics, from the Iliad of ancient Greece to the Fenian Lays of early medieval Gaeldom. Although written in Middle French, this lay is one of only four surviving examples that may preserve echoes of the Gaelic tradition.

Corsican improvised polyphony - particularly the UNESCO-protected paghjella - preserves techniques of voice placement, ornamentation, harmonisation and faux-bourdon described in early treatises. In specific cases, Corsican memory illuminates medieval, Renaissance and Baroque oral traditions, revealing aspects of singing absent from musical notation.

In a world where grief is often suppressed and confined to the private sphere, keening traditions from Greece (Μαριόλα) and Corsica (U Lamentu di Filicone) offer time-tested strategies for expressing, metabolising and transcending sorrow.

Tervetuloo is a rare example of kelketys, a Karelian singing tradition sung exclusively by women and now nearly extinct.

The Corsican tribbiera is both an ancestral agricultural technique and a song associated with this practice. It involves husking wheat after the harvest on a threshing floor, known as the aghja, to separate the grains from the ears. During

this process, men turn the straw in song while two oxen pull a heavy stone to promote separation. The aghja also serves as a sacred site where various signs and omens are observed, offering insights into the community's future. This intersection between agrarian techniques and circumambulation rites (or the act of moving around a sacred object) is representative of heterogenous spiritualities, existing in a continuum, bridging divides between populations and their designated others. Anthropologist Wade Davis describes the ethnosphere as "the sum total of all thoughts and dreams, myths, ideas, inspirations, intuitions brought into being by the human imagination since the dawn of consciousness." He calls it humanity's greatest legacy, an oldgrowth forest of the mind, an ecosystem of spiritual possibility now eroding faster than the biosphere.

According to The Language Conservancy, one language vanishes every 40 days - a loss driven not by modernisation but by power imbalances. The ancient repertoires we share tonight invite us to expand our allegiances, reclaim, protect and reimagine heritage. They are symbols of resilience, freedom and potential solutions for humanity's future.

©Thomas Fournil

Artist Biographies

Thomas Fournil – *direction, voice, portative organ, composition*

Thomas Fournil is a Corsican composer, researcher, singer, portative organ and hurdy-gurdy player based in London. He founded the Idrîsî Ensemble during his fellowship at the Guildhall School of Music, after completing the Guildhall Artist Masters course (distinction) under James Weeks. His current doctoral research is concerned with practical applications of postcolonial medievalism in music making/pedagogy, with a unique conflation of spectral techniques and queer spectrality. Thomas specialises in Roman, Occitan and Corsican heritage. He believes in the crucial role of medievalism in our structures of knowledge production and its potential for driving transformative change in contemporary investigations of identity, gender, class, ecology, pedagogy and history. He is supervised by James Weeks, Julian Anderson, Marcel Pérès and Nye Parry. His studies are supported by the City of London Corporation and The Guildhall School Trust.

Idrîsî Ensemble

Pioneering a fresh approach to historical performance, the Idrîsî Ensemble performs medieval repertoire from period manuscripts, together with UNESCO-protected and endangered traditions. They sing the Mediterranean, not as a border between distinct identities but as a space of exchange, communion and evolution. Through their research in medieval literature, music archaeology and postcolonial historiography, they aim to complicate modern notions of identity and alterity.

As the sole UK ensemble specialised in the performance of Old Roman chant, they offer a unique glimpse into the vocal traditions of late antiquity. Jams Weeks, director of the internationally renowned vocal ensemble EXAUDI, described their music as a "total gamechanger" and "not mere escapist nostalgia but a living, exploratory art of real power"

Performers

Choir

Irini Arabatzi
Noémie Ducimetière
Sam Meredith
Kerttu Sormunen
Henry Tozer
Dunja Botic
Elsa Hackett Esteban
Eliza Oakes

Instrumentalists

Oliver Dover *kaval, ney, clarinet*
Konstantinos Glynos *kanun, voice*
Lucine Musaelian *vielle*