

SCIVIAS MEDIEVAL ENSEMBLE PRESENTS

# STAR OF THE SEA: HYMNS TO THE VIRGIN MARY

Directed by Dr. Heather Holmquest

NOVEMBER 16TH, 2019 | 7:30 PM  
CALVARY ST. ANDREWS SANCTUARY

Part of the Rochester Early Music Festival

# PROGRAM

Venite a laudare

Lauda, Cortona, 13th c.

Ave maris stella

Hymn, Liber Usualis

Ave beatissima/Ave Maria/  
AVE MARIS

Motet, Montpellier, 13th c.

O splendissima gemma

Hildegard von Bingen, 12th c.

Ave maris stella

Conductus, Notre Dame, 12th c.

Ave, Regina/Alma  
redemptoris/ALMA

Motet, Bamberg, 13th c.

Mater patris et filia

Conductus, Las Huelgas, 14th c.

Ave, vergene gaudente

Lauda, Cortona

O Maria davitica/O Maria  
maris/VERITATEM

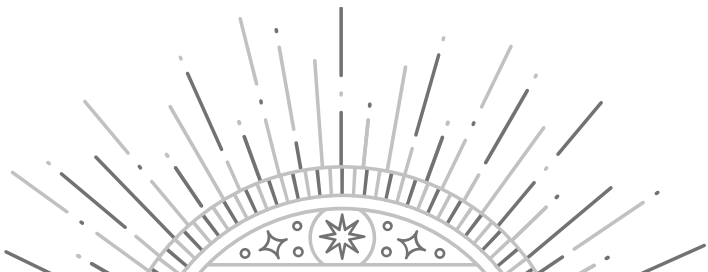
Franconian Motet, Montpellier

Ave, tuos benedic

Conductus, Notre Dame

Ave maris stella

Conductus, Notre Dame



# PERSONNEL

Anna Atwater

Juli Elliot

Gwen Gassler

Heather Holmquest

Maria Mastrosimone

Andrea McGaugh

# PROGRAM NOTES

Among the many images and titles associated with the Virgin Mary, the metaphorical “Star of the Sea” is one of the oldest and most pervasive. In this description, Mary’s nurturing nature combines with her uniquely human perspective; just as she leads adrift sailors to safe harbor, she brings the prayers of the faithful to God, interceding on man’s behalf. The astral imagery firmly situates Mary as a link between heaven and earth, an empyrean light offering hope and guidance for mankind. Based on the connection forged between Mary and the North Star in such lines, it is, perhaps, no surprise that travelers continue to rely on the prayer Ave Maris Stella and that many coastal churches share the name Stella Maris. It is also unsurprising that countless hymns and motets were composed to celebrate the Star of the Sea.

The pillars of our program are three settings of "Ave maris stella," each with entirely different musical textures. The first setting is the plainchant hymn dating from the 9th century and contains one of the earliest mentions of Mary as the “star of the sea.” The next setting is a conductus setting of a poem dating from the 12th century that borrows the first line of the original "Ave maris stella" chant. The conclusion of the concert is a conductus for three voices with intertwining rhythmic shapes.



# PROGRAM NOTES CONT'D

Two of tonight's selections are from a book of Italian "laude," or sacred Italian carols, set in Italian instead of Latin. These songs are reminiscent of troubadour songs in their construction and remained popular around in Italy until the 19th century.

The conductus style of polyphony was popular the world over but born in the Notre Dame school of composition. "Ave tous benedic," set for two voices, demonstrates a variety of rhythms and melodic interplay. Our other conductus, "Mater patris et filia", features three voices and comes from Las Huelgas Codex. Possibly our most challenging piece on the program, the music switches rhythmic modes a number of times during the piece.

We feature one stunning chant by Hildegard von Bingen on this program. "O splendidissima gemma," a psalm antiphon, is full of vivid imagery and poetic superlatives that depict Mary as a radiant jewel, bright as the sun. While the "star of the sea" image is not directly present, she is described as "bright and shining matter"—certainly these ideas and images are related.

The remaining pieces on our program are the fruitful conclusion of the development from chant to conductus to the inclusion of even more text: the double motet. The motet was a clever compositional puzzle, each with their own clever devices. Three of our selections are double motets, that is, a piece with two different texts occurring at the same time over a lower voice that sings in a consistent rhythm. The first of these, "Ave beatissima/Ave Maria/Ave maris," features a rhythmic version of the plainchant hymn as the lowest line. One voice above sings the incredibly familiar "Ave Maria, gratia plena" text; the other voice sings an acrostic poem where all of the words begin with each letter of the alphabet in succession. The second motet on the program is "Ave, Regina/Alma redemptoris/Alma," which contains two of the four seasonal Marian antiphons that are cornerstone to the Catholic tradition. Finally, the last motet on our program is referred to as Franconian motet in honor of the rhythmic advances of a scholar named Franco of Cologne. Franconian motets take advantage of his new rhythmic system by featuring an upper voice that moves twice as fast as the first texted line.