

UNSUNG HEROINE

THE IMAGINED LIFE AND LOVE OF TROUBADOUR COUNTESS
BEATRIZ DE DIA

A shortened online adaption of the concert/play by **Clare Norburn**

Performed by **The Telling**

Clare Norburn *soprano*

Ariane Prüssner *mezzo*

Joy Smith *medieval harp & percussion*

Giles Lewin *Vielle & bagpipes*

Anna Demetriou *as Beatriz de Dia*

Natalie Rowland *Lighting Designer*

Gerald Kyd *camera*

Jiva Housden *sound*

Ignacio Lusardi Monteverde *sound editor*

Madeleine Edis *costume*

Stephanie Williams *Administrator for The Telling*

Directed by **Nicholas Renton**

Written and Produced by **Clare Norburn**

Music & sound recorded at Holy Trinity Church, Stroud Green on 3 August 2020

Filmed at Asylum Chapel, Peckham (with thanks to Maverick Projects) on 4 and 5 August 2020 under Covid-19 restrictions

Music – all pieces are in versions created by and arranged by The Telling

Poz a saber mi ven e cres - Raimbaut D'Aurenga (troubadour)

Estat ai en greu cossirier – Text: Beatriz de Dia (troubadour) Melody: Loncx temps ai avut cossiriers, Raimon de Miravel (troubadour)

Estampie roial no 7 (instrumental) – anon (France, 13th century)

Kalenda maia - Raimbaut de Vaqueiras (troubadour)

Je chevauchioie l'autrier (Chanson de rencontre) (instrumental) - Moniot de Paris (trouvère)

Can vei la lauzetta mover – Bernart de Ventadorn (troubadour)

Ce fu en mai - Moniot d'Aras (trouvère)

Saltarello (instrumental) - Tuscan musical manuscript dating from the late 14th/early 15th century

Un petit davant lo jor: Text: La Duchesse de Lorraine (trouvère) Music: anonymous, arranged and reconstructed by Leah Stuttard from MS Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 5198

Amours, u trop tart me sui pris - Blanche de Castille (trouvère)

Lanquan li jorn - Jaufrè Rudel (troubadour)

Reis glorios (alba) - Guiraut de Bornelh (troubadour)

A chantar m'er do so qu'ieu non volria - Beatriz de Dia (troubadour)

The performance is 55 minutes

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***Unsung Heroine* – The idea** By Clare Norburn

The troubadours

Unsung Heroine was my first attempt at a concert/play in 2010. I didn't know if I could write and the whole experience was, and continues to be, a learning curve. That means the narrative has been through many versions – each shorter than the previous. For many years I had been fascinated by the troubadours, a large group of poet-musician/singer-songwriters, both men and women, who worked in southern France from approximately 1100 to 1270. The music and poetry is complex and I wanted to try and provide a way into it for a first time listener.

Many of our ideas about romantic love (including the concept of love at first sight) have pervaded down the centuries and stem from the idea of *Fin Amor* and the code of courtly love enshrined in troubadour poetry. Yet, many of the ideas integral to troubadour poetry also seem foreign to our modern ideals about what love can and ought to be. These include the idea that you can't truly be in love with the person you are married to, and that one can only be truly in love if one experiences jealousy.

Fin Amor, meaning "True" or "Pure Love", is bound up with the idea of chivalry and courtly love, and this is a particularly complicated area that has provoked debate amongst historians: much of the poetry is deliberately obscure – some is written in code – and some of the poetry is crafted as if only to be understood by the lover. There are also numerous references in the poems and songs to popular stories that haven't survived and therefore mean nothing to us. Who are the Seguis and Valenca to whom Beatriz refers in her songs? We simply don't know but they clearly have resonances. The differences and the oblique references mean that the poetry and songs of the troubadours need some explaining in order to be appreciated fully.

Yet, despite all these obstacles to our understanding, these poems also speak surprisingly directly and are unusually personal for the age. They are also heart-felt, and use powerful and breath-taking imagery – as exemplified by Bernart de Ventadorn's stunning poem: *Can vei la lauzetta mover*:

*When I see the skylark swoop in joy towards its love the sun,
then forgetting everything as it lets itself fall, for the sweetness that comes to its heart,
I feel a great envy come over me of everyone whom I see rejoicing,
I wonder that my heart does not melt from desire.*

The *trobairitz* and Beatriz de Dia

And then there is Beatriz herself and the collection of 20 or so *trobairitz* (the feminine term for *troubadour*) whose poetry survives. Amongst this group Beatriz stands out as special because more of her poems (four) survive than by any other woman. Moreover, her poem *A Chantar m'er de so quieu non volria* is the only one of all *trobairitz* poems considered important enough to be written down in a manuscript which survives today. But the fascination doesn't end there. The song itself is extraordinarily impassioned and forward for an age when women were generally treated as nothing more than the property of their husbands.

There has been some debate about why these women were able to participate in the troubadour tradition alongside men. Some historians think the explanation is due in part to the prevalence of the Crusades (and the consequent dispersal of large numbers of men). Others link the existence of the *trobairitz* to changes to the property laws in this period in Occitania, the area of southern France where the troubadours lived.

Nothing concrete is really known about Beatriz, Comtessa de Dia. Historians think she may have been born in the early 1140s and died around 1212.

Many of the troubadours have short stories, known as *vidas*, which are the medieval equivalent to a biography. However, unlike modern biographies, the *vidas* all too often blur the

boundaries between fact and the myth of the troubadour. The *vidas* are also 13th century marketing hype, proclaiming each troubadour to be “the best singer in the world and the best lover”. So it’s often difficult to tell which statements are true and which are marketing embellishment – or downright fiction.

Beatriz’s *vida* is very short: “*The Countess de Dia was the wife of Guillem de Peitieu (Poitiers), a beautiful and good lady. She fell in love with Raimbaut d’Aurenga (Orange) and made many good songs about him.*”

Beatriz’s *vida* raises more questions than it answers: there is no wife of a Guillem de Peitieu who held title to the county of Die. Guillem de Peitieu is also the name of the first great troubadour who died some 15 years before Beatriz was born! There are also many Raimbaut d’Aurengas in the heraldic annals of the 12th century, including the troubadour who was a direct contemporary of Beatriz.

Dramatic choices

All this has meant that in crafting a story around Beatriz, I had a bewildering amount of “uncertain freedom”. I had to make a number of choices as to how to interpret the historical uncertainty. I started by trying to base my story around what we know of life in the region in this period: for example I had Beatriz marry Guillem at the age 13, which was quite commonplace.

I have also tried to ground the script in troubadour concepts and ideas: for example, in the original (cut for our shorter film version) Beatriz’s mean-spirited in-laws become the *Lauzegeirs*, the whispering gossips who pervade troubadour poetry, who conspire against a lady and her knight.

I have assumed that the Raimbaut D’Aurenga mentioned in Beatriz’s *vida* was the troubadour. That made it possible for me to imagine that Beatriz’s poem *A chantar* was a response to the break-up of her relationship with Raimbaut. I have based the character and appearance of Guillem de Poitiers/Peitieu on the jealous red-headed husband with a horrible cough who keeps his beautiful wife in a tower in the trouvere song “*Un petit davant lo jor*”. All other “characters” mentioned are completely invented but I have chosen Occitan 12th century names.

The music and musical choices

Troubadour songs are notated in similar way to chant, without notated rhythm. They are nearly all full of melancholy and so I wanted to involve other musical material to lift the piece: the repertoire of the Trouvères (the northern French counterparts to the troubadours) tends to be more light-hearted. We are also performing a collection of anonymous French medieval dances called the *Estampie roial*.

The Trouvère tradition also included women poets/song-writers/performers, and the collection of Trouvère songs we will perform also includes one melody and text by a woman (Blanche de Castille) and a poem by La Duchesse de Lorraine. Language is also a key difference between the Trouvère and Troubadour traditions. Troubadour poetry is in Occitan, the old language of Provence and the Alpes Maritime and the south of France, the modern equivalent of which is still spoken in some hilltop villages today. The Trouvère tradition is in Old French, the precursor to the modern French language.

The troubadour songs survive today because they were written down by scribes in the latter part of the 13th century. There are 3 main large manuscript collections. In many cases, therefore, the songs were written down some 50-100 years after they were first sung. Some of the popular songs survive in more than one manuscript and it is clear in these cases that the songs have been taken on different musical journeys with different embellishments and

amendments made by different singers. The process is like a form of musical Chinese whispers and the melodies are often quite different. So the melodies we have today in only one edition are almost certainly only one possible musical interpretation of the song.

For all the repertoire we are performing, a single line melody is all that exists. To bring the music off the page, we have made our own arrangements. We know, from texts and pictures, about the instruments that would have been used in this period for dances, but we don't know whether singers would have performed with instrumental accompaniment or not. The instruments generally provide a drone or shadow the vocal line. For many of the texts a vocal line doesn't exist. We know that the troubadours often borrowed melodies from poems with the same meter (known as a *contrafactus*) and to bring some of the songs to life we have used the same method. This includes one of Beatriz's poems: *Estat ai en greu cossirier*.

Translations

Poz a saber mi ven e cres - Raimbaut D'Aurenga (troubadour)

Now that I have learnt the craft
Of song, and claim a poet's rank,
To hide my words would be a shame.
.....Now I rejoice; we're safe from cold,
And in the shelters everywhere
Each bird begins his song without delay.....

Estat ai en greu cossirier – Text: Beatriz de Dia (troubadour) melody: *Loncx temps ai avut cossiriers* by Raimon de Miravel (troubadour)

Lately I have been in great distress over a knight who once was mine...
Now I see I'm betrayed because I didn't sleep with him (lit: give him my love)
How I wish just once I could caress that knight with my bare arms....
My heart and love I offer him, my mind, my eyes, my life.
Know this, that I'd give almost anything to have you in my husband's place.....

Kalenda maia—Raimbaut de Vaqueiras (troubadour)

Not May Day, not the beech leaves,
nor the birds' songs, nor the gladiolus,
None of that can please me,
Good lady, Until I have a quick messenger
From your fair person singing me
A new song that Love sends my way.
And I rejoice, and I go forth unto you, true lady.
And may the jealous one fall over, wounded,
Before I make my getaway.

O, beautiful loved one,
For God's sake may it never happen
That the jealous one laugh at my misfortune,
For he would sell dear his jealousy
If he could separate such a pair of lovers.....

Can vei la lauzetta mover – Bernart de Ventadorn (troubadour)

When I see the skylark swoop in joy towards its love, the sun,
then forgetting everything as it lets itself fall, for the sweetness that comes to its heart,
I feel a great envy come over me of everyone whom I see rejoicing,
I wonder that my heart does not melt from desire

Ce fu en mai - Moniot d'Aras (trouvere)

It was in May, in that sweet time of joy
When the weather is fine;
I rose early and went to seek pleasure
Near a fountain.
In an orchard, enclosed by wild roses,
I heard a fiddle;
There I saw dancing – a knight
And a young lady.

They had gracious, pleasing bodies,
And goodness how well they danced!
Embracing, and kissing each other,
They took their very sweet pleasure.
To a hidden spot, at the end,
They went off hand in hand;
On a bed of flowers, they played games of love,
Exactly as they pleased...

Un petit devant lo jor—Text: La Duchesse de Lorraine (trouvère)

Music: anonymous, arranged and reconstructed by Leah Stuttard from MS Paris, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 5198

[A lady in a tower is imprisoned by her bald, scrawny, coughing, red-haired husband; her lover knight laments her fate as she gazes on him from above; and a voyeur listens to their tale of woe just as day dawns.]

Just before daybreak I rose the other day,
Smitten by a new love that had kept me awake.
.....in a secluded spot, I heard a knight,
And above him, in a tall tower, a lady who loved him much
She had a fresh complexion and was singing so sweetly
A sweet, poignant song mingled with tears
Then she said, as a loyal lover:
“Beloved, you have lost me,
the jealous one has imprisoned me”

When the knight heard the lady with the radiant face,
From the great anguish he felt, he began to weep.
Then he said, sighing: “Woe, lady, that I ever saw
Your gracious body confined, which I cannot help loving!.....
If we must endure it for long, dear God, what will become of us?
I cannot survive without you
And you, how can you survive without me?”

The lovely one replied: “Dear friend, love sustains me;
Whoever suffers anguish is more dead than alive.
Besides me lies my enemy; I have to comply;
And yet, I have no joy nor pleasure, unless it comes from you.
I have my heart so placed in you that you are always on my mind.
Even if my body is denied you, my heart remains bound to you.....

Beloved, if you desire the death of the jealous one,
I desire it a hundred times more than you do!
He is old and besotted, gluttonous as a wolf,
And scrawny and bald, and he has a cough.

He has so many foul traits, the perfidious redhead;
The greatest merit he has is to be a cuckold.
.....How can a lady without her love heal when love torments her?

Amours, u trop tart me sui pris: Blanche de Castille (trouvère)

Love, to which I have been drawn so late,
Has instructed me by its nobility,
Dear lady of paradise,
To wish to sing a song to you:
For everlasting joy, it is you one should serve and love.

Lanquan li jorn - Jaufre Rudel (troubadour)

When the days are long in May
I love the song of birds from afar
And when I've left there
My distant love is on my mind.
I go with a bowed head, without hope, sad and forlorn,
Then the song of the birds and the hawthorn flower
Seem just like winter's bitter cold.....

But what I want is so difficult
May the godfather be cursed
Who decreed by fate that I should not be loved.

Reis glorios (alba) - Guiraut de Bornelh (troubadour)

Glorious King, splendour and true light,
Almighty God, Lord, if it pleases you
To my good friend be a steady help
For I've not seen him since night descended
And soon it will be dawn.

Fair friend, go over to the window
And look upon the sky and see the stars.
Thus you will know I'm a true messenger.
If you don't, then harm will come to you,
And soon it will be sunrise.

.....

Now you disdain my song and my good faith,
And soon it will be sunrise.

A Chantar m'er do so qu'ieu non volria— Beatriz de Dia (troubadour)

Now I shall sing a tune I do not like,
So bitter am I towards the man I love,
I love him more than any living being,
Yet I've no help from grace nor from kindness,
No use to me, my beauty, rank or wit,
For I am cheated and betrayed as much
As I would be if I lacked all appeal.

I take comfort because I never did anything wrong,
Friend, towards you in anything,
Rather I love you more than Seguin did Valensa,
And I am greatly pleased that I conquered you in love,
My friend, because you are the most worthy;
You are arrogant to me in words and appearance,

And yet you are so friendly towards everyone else.

My worth and my nobility should help me,

My beauty and my fine heart;

Therefore, I send this song down to you

So that it will be my messenger.

I want to know, my fair and noble friend,

Why you are so cruel and savage to me;

I don't know if it is arrogance or ill will.

Messenger, most of all I want you to tell him
that great pride has brought distress to many men.