



Johannes Ockeghem

COMPLETE SONGS VOLUME 2

Blue Heron

SCOTT METCALFE

JOHANNES OCKEGHEM (c. 1420–1497) • COMPLETE SONGS, VOLUME 2

Gilles de Bins, called Binchois (c. 1400–1460)
Johannes Cornago (?1420s – after 1474)

- 1 Prenez sur moi votre exemple amoureux MR SM JM 5:08
- 2 Tant fuz gentement resjouy JM DM SH 3:38
- 3 Ung aultre l'a, n'en querés plus SM JM sm 4:58
- 4 Baisiés moy dont fort, ma maistresse KL AS SH 5:44
- 5 *Binchois* Pour prison ne pour maladie SM lj sm 6:26
- 6 La despourveue et la bannye SM lj sm 8:29
- 7 L'autre d'antan, l'autrier passa JM DM PG 3:17
- 8 Ma bouche rit et ma pensée pleure SM JM sm 7:21
- 9 Presque transi, ung peu mains qu'estre mort CB JM ST 6:48
- 10 Les desloyaulx ont la saison RM AS sm 3:21
- 11 Je n'ay dueil que je ne suis morte MR KL ST PG 5:47
- 12 Je n'ay dueil (arr. anonymous) Dark Horse Consort 3:55
- 13 Il ne m'en chault plus de nul ame KL AS sm 4:40
- 14 *Cornago* ¿Qu'es mi vida preguntays? KL JM ST 4:09
- 15 *Cornago/Ockeghem* ¿Qu'es mi vida preguntays? SM dn sm ad 5:41

Total time 79:27

BLUE HERON

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cantus

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tenor

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bassus

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vihuela de arco

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fiddle

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douçaine

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Dark Horse Consort

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cornetto

Erik Schmalz
trombone

Greg Ingles
trombone

Mack Ramsey
trombone

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Scott Metcalfe & Eric Milnes, *session producers* • Matthew Bennett & Joel Gordon, *editing*



BLUE HERON

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1

Prenez sur moi vostre exemple amoureux :

Commencement d'amours est savoureux
 Et le moyen plain de paine et tristesse,
 Et la fin est d'avoir plaisant maistresse,
 Mais au saillir sont les pas dangereux.

Servant d'Amours, me suis trouvé eureux
 L'une des foiz, et l'autre malleureux,
 Ung jour sentant confort, l'autre destresse.

*Prenez sur moi vostre exemple amoureux :
 Commencement d'amours est savoureux
 Et le moyen plain de paine et tristesse.*

Pour ung plaisir cent pansers ennuieux,
 Pour ung soulas cent dangiers perilleux,
 Pour ung accueil cent regards par rudesse :
 S'Amours sert doncques de telz mets a
 largesse,
 Et les loiaux fait les plus doloureux,

Prenez sur moi vostre exemple amoureux ...

Take from me your amorous example:
 the beginning of love is savory
 and the middle full of pain and sorrow,
 and the end is to have a pleasing mistress,
 but on the way out the steps are dangerous.

The servant of Love, I found myself happy
 one moment and unhappy the next,
 one day feeling comfort, the next distress.

*Take from me your amorous example:
 the beginning of love is savory
 and the middle full of pain and sorrow.*

For every pleasure a hundred painful thoughts,
 for every solace a hundred perilous dangers,
 for every welcome a hundred harsh glances:
 since Love serves liberally from
 such dishes
 and makes the loyal the most woeful,

Take from me your amorous example ...

2

Tant fuz gentement resjouy,
 [Quand ce mot] par Amours j'ouy,
 Me tenir au vueil davant tous
 De vostre gentil cuer tresdoulx,
 Qu'oncques puis sur moy ne jouy
 Le mien tresdouloureux courroux.

Si haultement avez party
 Celuy qui de vous n'a party
 Son cuer de vous amer tousjours,

Par cy tresgracieux party
 L'avez plaisamment departy
 Du mal qu'il eust mis au dessoubs.

Mon leal cuer de dueil nercy,
 Taint en desesperé soucy,
 A loing de toute joye escoux,
 M'avez come aforcé rescoux
 De mort dont sans nulle mercy
 Actendoye les dangereux coupz.

Tant fuz gentement resjouy ...

Partially missing verse completed by Fabrice Fitch

So much was I graciously delighted,
 when I heard this word at Love's command,
 to submit myself before all to the will
 of your noble and most sweet heart,
 that nevermore can my most painful affliction
 triumph over me.

So highly have you honored
 him whose heart has never left off
 loving you always,

by this most gracious gift
 you have gently freed him
 from the woe he had borne concealed.

My loyal heart—blackened with grief,
 stained with desperate care,
 far removed from any joy—
 you have rescued as if by force
 from Death, from whom without any mercy
 I awaited fatal blows.

So much was I graciously delighted ...

3

Rondeau royal

Ung aultre l'a, n'en querés plus,
 Car dorenavant je conclus
 De garder en tout temps mon droit.
 Chascun se garde en son endroit,
 Car bien peu me chault du surplus.

Je ne vueil pas estre forcluz
 D'acorder ou faire reffuz,
 Mais ce que voulez orendroit

Ung aultre l'a, n'en querés plus,
Car dorenavant je conclus
De garder en tout temps mon droit.

Jamais en ce propos ne fuz
 Que mon vouloir fust si confuz
 D'entendre a tout ce qu'il voudroit.
 De ce faire on me reprendroit,
 Congnoissant que seroit abuz.

Ung aultre l'a, n'en querés plus ...

Royal Rondeau

Another has it, seek it no more,
 for henceforth I resolve
 to protect my rights at all times.
 Let each look out for himself,
 for precious little do I care about the rest.

I do not wish my choice foreclosed
 to agree or to refuse,
 but as for what you want at present,

another has it, seek it no more,
for henceforth I resolve
to protect my rights at all times.

Never in this matter was
 my will so thwarted
 in its intentions toward everything it would like.
 I would be reproached for doing this,
 recognizing that it would be wrong.

Another has it, seek it no more ...

4

Baisiés moy dont fort, ma maistresse,

Acollés moy, mon vray refuge,
 Puis que je vous fais mon seul juge
 Pour pugnir mon cuer, si vous blesse.

[Ja nulle ochoison de tristesse
 Ne vous donnay, si Dieu me juge.]

Baisiés moy dont fort, ma maistresse,
Acollés moy, mon vray refuge.

[Si vous supplie en grant destresse
 Moy garantir de tel deluge,
 Car nul ne trouve qui n'adjudge
 Qu'aultrement me ferez rudesse.]

Baisiés moy dont fort, ma maistresse ...

Text completed by Fabrice Fitch

Kiss me ardently, then, my mistress,
 embrace me, my true refuge,
 for I make you my sole judge,
 who may punish my heart, if I offend you.

No cause of grief have I ever
 given you, may God be my judge.

Kiss me ardently, then, my mistress,
embrace me, my true refuge.

Thus, in great distress, I beg you
 to protect me from any such calamity,
 for none shall be found who will not judge
 that otherwise you do me wrong.

Kiss me ardently, then, my mistress ...

5

Pour prison ne pour maladie,

Ne pour chose que l'on me die
 Ne vous peut mon cuer oublier,
 Et sy ne puis ailleurs penser,
 Tant ay de vous veoir envie.

M'amour, ma princesse et amie,
 Vous seule me tenez en vie,
 Et ne peult mon desir cesser

*Pour prison ne pour maladie,
 Ne pour chose que on me die,
 Ne vous peut mon cuer oublier.*

Ne doubtés ja que vous oublie,
 Qu'onques nulle tant asouvie
 Ne fust qui me peult faire amer
 Que vous, belle et douce sans per,
 Dont Amours point ne me deslie.

Pour prison ne pour maladie ...

Not for prison, nor for illness,
 nor for anything one might tell me
 can my heart forget you,
 and thus I cannot think of anything else,
 so much do I long to see you.

My love, my princess and friend,
 you alone keep me alive,
 and my desire cannot cease

*for prison, nor for illness,
 nor for anything one might tell me
 can my heart forget you.*

Never suspect that I forget you,
 for never did anything come to pass
 that could make me love anyone
 but you, fair lady, and sweet without peer,
 from whom Love shall never unbind me.

Not for prison, nor for illness ...

6

La despourveue et la bannye

De cil qui me donne ma vie,
 Seulement par ung faulx raport :
 Ha, Fortune, n'as tu pas tort
 D'avoir sans cause ainsi pugnie ?

Le pouvre cuer ne pensoit mye
 D'estre de luy en telle haye,
 Puis qu'i luy plaist, elle est d'acort,

*La despourveue et la bannye
 De cil qui me donne ma vie,
 Seulement par ung faulx raport.*

El ne vieult plus de compagnie :
 Fortune l'a trop esbahye
 D'avoir ousté tout son confort.
 Plus ne desire que la mort
 S'il fault qu'elle soit faicte oublie.

La despourveue et la bannye ...

Destitute and banished
 from him who gives me life,
 solely on account of a false tale:
 ah, Fortune, do you not err
 to have punished me thus without cause?

My poor heart never imagined
 it would be so hated by him,
 but since it pleases him, she accepts it,

*destitute and banished
 from him who gives me life,
 solely on account of a false tale.*

She wants no more company:
 Fortune has too much appalled her
 by taking away her every comfort.
 She desires nothing more than death,
 if she must be be forgotten.

Destitute and banished ...

7

L'autre d'antan, l'autrier passa

Et en passant me transperça
 D'ung regart forgié a Millan,
 Qui m'a mis en l'arriere ban,
 Tant malvais brassin me brassa.
L'autre d'antan, l'autrier passa.

Par tel façon me fricassa
 Que de ses gaiges me cassa,
 Mais, par Dieu, elle fist son dan.

*L'autre d'antan, l'autrier passa,
 Et en passant me transperça
 D'ung regart forgié a Millan.*

Puis apres nostre amour cessa,
 Car onques puis qu'elle danssa,
 L'autre d'antan, l'autre d'antan,
 Je n'eu ne bon jour, ne bon an,
 Tant de mal en moy amassa.
L'autre d'antan, l'autrier passa.

L'autre d'antan, l'autrier passa ...

The other year, the other day, she passed by
 And in passing pierced me through
 With a glance forged in Milan*
 That knocked me into the rear ranks,
 So noxious a brew she brewed me.
The other year, the other day, she passed by.

She made such a fricassee out of me
 That she struck me from her payroll;
 But, by God, she did her damage.

*The other year, the other day, she passed by
 And in passing pierced me through
 With a glance forged in Milan.*

And then our love ended,
 For, ever since she did her dance,
 The other year, the other year,
 I've had neither good day nor good year,
 So much ill has piled up on me.
The other year, the other day, she passed by.

The other year, the other day, she passed by ...

**Milan was renowned for the manufacture of swords.*

8

Ma bouche rit et ma pensée pleure,

Mon oeil s'esjoye et mon cueur maudit l'eure
 Qu'il eut le bien que sa sancté deschace
 Et le plaisir que la mort me pourchace
 Sans resconfort qui m'aide ne sequeure.

Ha cueur pervers, faulsaire et mansongier,
 Dicter comment avez osé songier
 Que de faulser ce que m'avez promis.

Puis qu'en ce point vous vous voulez venger,
 Pensez bien tost de ma vie abreger :
 Vivre ne puis ou point ou m'avez mis.

Vostre pitié vieult doncques que je meure,
 Mays rigeur vieult que vivant je demeure ;
 Ainsi meurs vif et en vivant trespasse.
 Pour celer le mal qui point ne se passe
 Et pour couvrir le dueil ou je labeure,

Ma bouche rit et ma pensee pleure ...

My mouth laughs and my thoughts weep,
 My eye rejoices and my heart curses the hour
 when it enjoyed the good that destroys its health
 and the pleasure that brings me death,
 deprived of comfort to aid or succor me.

Ah, heart! perverse, false, and lying,
 say how you dared to dream
 of breaking the promise you made to me.

Since you wish to avenge yourself to this degree,
 think of soon cutting short my life:
 I cannot live in the plight in which you've placed me.

Your pity, then, wants me to die,
 but your harshness wants me to survive,
 thus I die alive, and living pass away.
 To hide the woe which has no end
 and to conceal the grief in which I struggle,

My mouth laughs and my thoughts weep ...

**Presque transi, ung peu mains
qu'estre mort,**

Vivant en dueil sans avoir nul confort,
Veoir l'en me peut es liens de Fortune
Qui sans cesser pis qu'autre me fortune
Et me combat de plus fort en plus fort.

Helas! je suis contre mon vueil en vie,
Et si n'est riens dont tant j'aye d'envie
Que de povoir veoir ma fin bien prouchaine.

Morir ne puis et tousjours m'y convie,
Et m'est bien tart que du tout
je desvie
A celle fin que soie hors de paine.

Il m'est advis que la mort me tient tort,
Quant autrement elle ne fait son effort
De moy vengier de ma vie importune,
Car je languis sans avoir joye aucune
Par mon malheur qui me devoure
et mort.

Presque transi, ung peu mains qu'estre mort ...

On the verge of death, just less
than dead,
living in sorrow without any comfort:
one sees me in the bonds of Fortune,
who without cease treats me worse than any other
and fights me more and more fiercely.

Alas! against my will I remain alive,
and there is nothing I long for so much
as to see my end draw near.

Die I cannot, and yet always I seek to,
for it is well past time that I turn away from
everything
towards that end where I shall be free of pain.

It seems to me that Death does me wrong
when otherwise she makes no effort
to relieve me of my wearisome life,
for I languish without any joy whatsoever
because of the unhappiness that devours and
gnaws at me.

On the verge of death, just less than dead ...

Les desloyaulx ont la saison

Et des bons nesun ne tient conte,
Mays bon droit de trop se mesconte
De souffrir si grant desraison.

Je ne scay a quelle achoison
Fortune si hault les surmonte.

*Les desloyaulx ont la saison
Et des bons nesun ne tient conte.*

Pour parler de prince ou maison
Ce me seroit reprouche et honte ;
Pour ce m'en teys, mays fin de compte
Tout va sans rime et sans rayson.

Les desloyaulx ont la saison ...

The disloyal are in season
and no one cares for the good,
but Legitimate Right makes a terrible mistake
by permitting such great unreason.

I do not know for what occasion
Fortune raises them up so high.

*The disloyal are in season
and no one takes account of the good.*

For me to speak of a prince or noble house
would earn reproach and shame:
therefore I keep silent, but in the end
everything happens without rhyme or reason.

The disloyal are in season ...

11

Je n'ay dueil que je ne suis morte :

Ne doy je bien vouloir morir ?
 Dueil a voulu mon cueur saisir
 Qui de tous biens me desconforte.

Ma douleur est plus que trop forte,
 Car sans avoir aucun plaisir

*Je n'ay dueil que je ne suis morte :
 Ne doy je bien vouloir morir ?*

Je n'ay riens qui plus me conforte,
 D'ueil ne voy plus que desplaisir.
 Mort est le plus de mon desir,
 Car quelque chose que on m'apporte,

Je n'ay dueil que je ne suis morte ...

I have no grief but that I am not dead:
 should I not wish to die?
 Grief has seized my heart
 and deprives me of all things good.

My sorrow is more than too strong,
 for having no pleasure whatsoever

*I have no grief but that I am not dead:
 should I not wish to die?*

I have nothing that comforts me any longer,
 my eye sees nothing but chagrin.
 Death is my greatest desire,
 for whatever happens to me,

I have no grief but that I am not dead ...

12

Je n'ay dueil instrumental

13

Il ne m'en chault plus de nul ame

Fors de vous qui mon cueur enflame
 A vous bien loyaument amer,
 Sans jamais vous habandonner,
 A tousjours estre vostre dame.

Qu'on m'en loue ne qu'on m'en blame,
 Quoy qu'on en disoit, homme ou femme,
 Ilz en ont tous beau grumeller.

*Il ne m'en chault plus de nul ame
 Fors de vous qui mon cueur enflame
 A vous bien loyaument amer.*

Car pour tout m'en vous tiens et clame
 Que tant je vueil et que tant j'ame
 Plus que nul sans riens excepter,
 S'ils en devoyent tous crever
 Et deusse perdre du corps l'ame.

Il ne m'en chault plus de nul ame ...

I care no more for any soul
 but you, who inflame my heart
 to love you most loyally,
 never to abandon you,
 forever to be your lady.

Whether I am praised or blamed for it,
 whatever anyone has said, man or woman,
 they can all grumble as much as they like.

*I care no more for any soul
 but you, who inflame my heart
 to love you most loyally.*

For I shall cleave to you forever and proclaim
 how much I desire and how much I love
 more than any other without exception,
 even if they all burst from hearing it
 and I should lose the soul from my body.

I care no more for any soul ...

¿Ques mi vida preguntays?

Non vos la quiero negar:
 Bien amar y lamentar
 Es la vida que me days.

¿Quien vos pudiera servir
 Tambien como he servido?

¿Mi trabajado bivar
 Quien pudiera aver sofrido?

¿Para que me preguntays
 La pena que he de passar?
 Pues amar y lamentar
 Es la vida que me days.

What is my life, you ask?
 I will not deny it to you:
 loving well and lamenting
 is the life you give me.

Who could serve you
 as well as I have served?

My troubled life—
 who could have endured it?

Why do you ask me
 the pain I have to endure?
 For loving and lamenting
 is the life you give me.

Translations by Scott Metcalfe

Johannes Ockeghem's early life probably differed little from those of the many fifteenth-century musicians who grew up in what are today the Franco-Belgian borderlands. He was born around 1420 in the small town of Saint-Ghislain, just west of Mons (where he is not forgotten: in the Grand-Place one now finds an elegantly austere monument in stone and metal honoring the town's most famous son). He doubtless learned the fundamentals of singing and notation in one of the region's churches known for their musical establishments. The earliest documentation of his career as a professional singer comes from the Church—later Cathedral—of Our Lady in Antwerp, where in 1443 he served as one of the singers of polyphony.

Then something changed, and by 1446 Ockeghem's career took a turn that would shape the remainder of his long life. In that year he joined the chapel of Charles I, Duke of Bourbon, in Moulins. How he came to make this move to central France has never been established. But Charles had long been related through marriage to Philip the Good, the powerful Duke of Burgundy, and in 1447 Charles's son and eventual successor, Jean II, married the daughter of Charles VII, King of France. It seems possible these various connections among the courts somehow played a role in Ockeghem first moving to France and ultimately joining the French royal chapel in 1452, when he was around thirty years old. He soon ascended to the position of *premier chapelain*, and by 1459 had also been appointed treasurer of the royal abbey of Saint Martin in Tours. With these lucrative posts that placed him at the center of musical life at the French royal court he would go on to serve three kings over a period of more than forty years, until his death in February 1497.

Ockeghem's reputation has undergone something of a sea change during the last few decades. For centuries, discussions of his music focused on a handful of dauntingly complex works admired above all for their contrapuntal wizardry. This admiration could shade into awe or exasperation depending on the writer's aesthetic leanings. Either way, though, the result was the same: a fascination with strictly technical aspects of a few pieces while mostly neglecting the rest, leading inevitably to a distorted, incomplete image of the composer. This is not to deny Ockeghem wrote some technically dazzling works, music that explored the outer reaches of what was possible within the notational and conceptual systems of his time. Nor did he restrict these intellectually

speculative procedures to large-scale works such as his Mass cycles: witness his canonic rondeau *Prenez sur moi* [1], features of which have puzzled theorists and performers since at least the sixteenth century (see Scott Metcalfe's essay below for an explication of the work's many subtleties). But two points are worth emphasizing here. First, that as contrapuntally impressive as *Prenez sur moi* is, surely its most remarkable feature is the elegance, the *esprit de finesse* with which he accomplishes his compositional high wire act. And second, that Ockeghem's contemporary reputation—established by around 1470 at the latest—as the leading composer of his generation (a group that included renowned figures such as Antoine Busnoys, Johannes Regis, and Firminus Caron) appears to have depended little on such overt demonstrations of contrapuntal skill. It is telling, for example, that when Johannes Tinctoris, the leading music theorist of his time and an accomplished composer himself, ends his 1477 treatise on composition by singling out six works worthy of emulation owing to their *varietas*, the first piece he cites is not one of Ockeghem's conceptually adventurous Masses, but rather the exquisite virelai *Ma maistresse* (included on Blue Heron's *Johannes Ockeghem: Complete Songs, Volume I*). And given the number of later works that quote, emulate, or otherwise allude to this particular song, younger composers appear to have heeded Tinctoris's recommendation.

Various kinds of quotation and allusion were common practice among both poets and composers of the period, and two songs recorded here show Ockeghem using the technique as a way of paying homage to Binchois (d. 1460), a leading composer of the preceding generation. The musical phrase setting the words “ne vous peut mon cuer oublier” (“nor can my heart forget you”) from Binchois's rondeau *Pour prison* [5] appears in slightly reworked form in Ockeghem's *La despourveue* [6], at the words “n'as tu pas tort”). Ockeghem would go on to compose a lament on Binchois's death (the ballade *Mort, tu as navré*, recorded on Volume I), a rare fifteenth-century example of one composer commemorating another. Taken with the gesture of affection found in *La despourveue*, it seems reasonable to think the two men knew one another personally, not merely by reputation. Given their difference in age, even some sort of teacher-student relationship is not out of the question.

Ockeghem's chansons include some of the most widely disseminated works of the period, further evidence of how the songs contributed to his contemporary reputation. But the enormous loss of fifteenth-century musical sources (especially those copied in France or the Low Countries) has

resulted in some works—including the rondeau *Il ne m'en chault pas* [3] and the virelai *Tant fuz gentement* [2]—surviving in just a single manuscript; a reminder of just how delicate the matter of preservation can be with this music. And of course not only notes, but also poems could go missing, as happened in the case of *Baisiés moy* [4], a beautiful, probably late rondeau for which we possess only the first four lines of text. Fortunately our colleague Fabrice Fitch has been able to restore the work, completing the poem in an idiomatic, utterly persuasive fashion.

As with most fifteenth-century French chansons, the authors of Ockeghem's song texts are unknown. The composer could conceivably have written them himself, though unlike Busnoys, he has no poems ascribed to him in contemporary poetry collections. A number of the texts recorded here display thematic conventions typical of much late-medieval “fixed form” verse—the *douce mélancolie* of the besotted lover, the humorous/rueful accounts of more rustic amorous encounters (cf. *L'autre d'antan* [7]), etc. But several of the chansons stand out owing to their ambiguity of language or to the affective force of Ockeghem's musical setting.

Two of the songs could be read as responses to (unnamed) political circumstances or perhaps the aggravations of courtly life more generally. In a copy of *Ung aultre l'a* [3] made probably in French court circles in the 1480s, one finds the curious heading *Rondeau royal* where normally one would expect the composer's name to appear (strangely, Ockeghem's authorship is instead noted in the lower left-hand corner). Royal or not, the author of the poem chose unusually ambiguous language. “Another has it,” we are told at the outset, “seek it no more,” but with no indication of what “it” actually is. There is mention of resolving “to protect my rights at all times,” but without revealing the nature of these “rights.” One might suspect *double entendre*, common in this kind of verse, but sexually suggestive references in these poems are rarely subtle or vague. In the end it seems impossible to say just what *Ung aultre l'a* is about. But one nonetheless admires Ockeghem's sleight of hand in capturing the dismissive sense of the phrase “for precious little do I care for the rest”: the cantus line, which up to this point has been so staid and moderate in its motion, suddenly joins the overactive contratenor in a musical flick of the wrist.

The language of *Les desloyaulx ont la saison* [10] appears even further removed from the domain of courtly love:

The disloyal are in season
and no one cares for the good,
but Legitimate Right makes a terrible mistake
by permitting such great unreason.

I do not know for what occasion
Fortune raises them up so high ...

For me to speak of a prince or noble house
would earn reproach and shame:
therefore I keep silent, but in the end
everything happens without rhyme or reason.

Complaining about life at court (with Fortune smiling on the unworthy or, as here, disloyal) is another common theme in such verse. Ockeghem uses musical means to reinforce the poem's distance from the fanciful world of unrequited love: more deliberate declamation, repeated gestures, and a paucity of melodic arabesques of the sort that decorate so many of his love songs.

Two of his most haunting songs, the virelai *Presque transi* [9] and the four-voice rondeau *Je n'ay dueil* [11][12], share an unrelieved sense of grief that goes well beyond that of a lover's lament. Even reading the poems on their own, one finds no offer of respite, no mention of a mistress whose favor might erase the longing for death. Ockeghem's music only further emphasizes the extreme nature of the texts. Interestingly, though, the two songs achieve their expressive intensity by quite different means, as is evident in their respective openings. Everything in the initial phrases of *Presque transi* conveys a feeling of restraint, closeness, and compressed emotion. By contrast, *Je n'ay dueil*, with its four-voice scoring, steadily ascends and unfolds until the highest and lowest voices are fully three octaves apart, a remarkable opening gesture without precedent. (For more on issues of scoring in the two surviving versions of this song, see Metcalfe's essay below.)

Even when setting poetry of a more conventional stripe, Ockeghem so carefully calibrates his musical gestures and their intertwining as to make even the most formulaic phrases take on new resonance (one thinks of comparable acts of musical alchemy in Schumann's and Brahms's settings of otherwise second-class verse). The text of *Ma bouche rit* [8], with its predictable antitheses (laughing/crying, rejoicing/cursing) and its apostrophized heart, sits comfortably within the poetic

conventions of the day. And at first Ockeghem's response is disarming in its seeming simplicity. But as can sometimes happen in works of great refinement, this simplicity manages to suggest a greater emotional complexity, here one made up of regret and loss.

Ma bouche rit was one of Ockeghem's most popular songs. This is reflected not only in its unusually large number of surviving copies, but also its use by later composers in their own music. Pierre de la Rue, Jacob Obrecht, and others of the next generation borrowed one or more parts from Ockeghem's setting and built new works around them. This practice of reworking pre-existing songs grew more common toward the last decades of the fifteenth century. Ockeghem's own four-voice arrangement of *Qu'es mi vida preguntays*, a three-voice *canción* by the Spanish composer Johannes Cornago [14] [15], probably dates from a bit earlier, perhaps around 1470, when the French court paid his expenses for traveling from Tours to Spain. (He seems to have been a member of a diplomatic embassy sent to the court of Enrique IV, king of Castile and León.) Ockeghem's version of the song replaces the contratenor part of Cornago's original with two new, lower voices. The transformation is striking: in Ockeghem's arrangement the airiness of Cornago's lovely three-voice original becomes not only denser in texture, but darker in color and somehow more expansive in character. Each version is beautiful, but listening to them back-to-back is an effective way of gauging those features that made Ockeghem the most distinctive musical voice of his time.

One of the more vexed questions concerning the large and marvelous repertoire of secular song from Ockeghem's era is that of scoring: just how did fifteenth-century musicians decide what sort of voice or instrument to employ on the various lines? The sources of the music, alas, do not offer unambiguous guidance. Manuscripts from France and the Low Countries, including a half dozen chansonniers compiled during Ockeghem's lifetime in the vicinity of Tours,¹ where he resided from around 1450 until his death in 1497, generally supply text for the top voice only. The other parts usually lack text beyond an incipit, and no line is labelled with any indication beyond its contrapuntal function. Volume One of this two-disc set of Ockeghem's songs includes an essay exploring some of the rather sparse and ambiguous evidence we have of how fifteenth-century musicians may have performed songs on one occasion or another.² We can be quite sure that the upper part was meant to be sung (which is not to say that it might not also have been played in an all-instrumental rendition), but the lower parts may have been sung—and if sung, may have been texted—or played on an instrument a medieval musician would have classified as *bas* or soft, most commonly a bowed or plucked string instrument or a portable organ. All-instrumental performances could also have employed *haut* or loud instruments, such as shawm, trombone, or, towards the end of the century, cornetto.

Ockeghem was a composer of extraordinary technical accomplishment whose music tests the limits of the late-medieval system he worked within, and he seems to have set himself a new challenge with each piece. Each of his two dozen songs presents a slightly different set of questions and possibilities (aside from each being cast in one of the century's three fixed poetic-musical strophic forms, *rondeau*, *virelai*, or *ballade*). He wrote the first extant piece to exploit a compass of a full three octaves from the lowest note of the lowest voice to the highest of the upper; that song, *Je n'ay dueil* [1] appears to have remained without successor for decades, as vocal compositions continued to be confined to an overall range of two octaves and a sixth, corresponding to the

limits of the traditional medieval scale, the gamut.³ The ranges of Ockeghem's individual parts, too, demand more virtuosity than the usual from the performer: his contratenor lines often span an octave and a sixth or even (in *Presque transi*, [9]) an octave and a seventh. The song that opens the present recording, *Prenez sur moi*, on the other hand, is perfectly modest in its part ranges (a mere octave and a tone each, for a total compass of two octaves), but is unprecedented in its structure: it is a three-voice canon at the upper fourth, in which each of the three canonic voices sings a subtly different version of the melody due to its upward displacement. This may sound simple enough, but it is in fact a feat so difficult that no other composer, with the possible exception of Bach, has ever managed something quite comparable. The marvel is that all this wizardry lies beneath the surface of music that is so beguilingly melodic, harmonically rich, sensuous, and pleasing—sweet, to borrow the era's most commonly employed term of praise.

Since each song follows its own unique musical logic, each requires a fresh consideration of its scoring, moving from a broad consideration of the norms and possibilities to the specifics of the individual piece. Fifteenth-century songs are mostly for three parts, an upper part known as a *discantus* or *superius* combined with two lower. One of the lower, the *tenor*, generally lies about a fifth below the discantus; the other, the *contratenor*, either more or less shares its range with the tenor or occupies a third, lower range. The discantus and tenor form a very particular relationship in that they constitute a contrapuntally complete structure—that is to say, the two may be sounded together without the contratenor without violating any principles of counterpoint—and sometimes they also share and exchange melodic material. This tends to suggest that the tenor should be texted and sung, like the discantus, which will be sung with text in any performance involving a singer, as noted above. But not every tenor part works this way. Contra parts, meanwhile, are frequently quite distinct in character, with entirely different motives and more disjunct melodic lines. Some contras, however, are less clearly different from their fellow parts, the extreme case being the three-voice canon *Prenez sur moi*, in which all three voices sing the same material and only the final cadence permits a definite identification of discantus, tenor, and contra.

For this recording, we have made an individual decision for each song and, indeed, for each part, following the general principle that if a lower part shares material with the discantus and if it can

¹ The famous Loire Valley chansonniers, copied c. 1465-1480s, now known by the name of a former owner or their current location: Copenhagen, Dijon, Laborde, Nivelle, Wolfenbüttel, and the recently rediscovered Leuven.

² The CD booklet may be downloaded at <https://www.blueheron.org/recordings/cds/johannes-ockeghem-complete-songs-volume-1/>.

³ For a detailed investigation of vocal ranges before 1600, see my article "Clefs, pitch, and transposition in vocal music before 1600," *Journal of the Alamire Foundation* 14 (2022), 285-329.

possibly but not necessarily by the composer. There is, however, no trace of a three-voice version in any source and, on the other hand, a close examination of the musical evidence carried out in preparation for this recording shows that the story told by the manuscripts is almost certainly correct. Analysis of the majority version of the song lends strong support to the hypothesis that Okeghem conceived *Je n'ay dueil* for four voices in four ranges from the outset, characteristically challenging the bounds of contemporary musical possibility; at the same time, a side-by-side comparison of the main version's two contratenors with their transposed counterparts in the reduced-compass scoring demonstrates that the unique version of the Florentine manuscript is most parsimoniously interpreted as exactly what it seems to be, an instrumental adaptation.⁴ Unlike the Italian arrangements of *L'autre d'antan*, however, the Florentine *Je n'ay dueil* is well worthy of performance, though the style of its floridly decorated *contratenor altus* departs noticeably from Okeghem's and the overall effect is less arresting than the bold original. We offer it here performed on cornetto and three trombones, an ensemble that could have played it in Florence in the 1490s.⁵

A puzzling rondeau

Prenez sur moi is often referred to as a "puzzle canon" due the way it is notated without standard clefs. David Fallows, Peter Urquhart, Peter Woetman Christoffersen and others have shown that the notation was not so much a puzzle to fifteenth-century musicians as it was a shorthand whose meaning was long lost. Another puzzle does remain, however: the piece being a continuous three-voice canon without a cadence midway, it is not clear where one should pause at the end of the short strophe or the short refrain before returning to the top in accordance with the rondeau's strophic form, ABaAabAB. (The letters *a* and *b* refer to the first and second sections of the music of the form; capital letters identify the repeated text of the refrain.) As it happens, what appears to be the end of the medial phrase in the third and topmost voice dovetails contrapuntally with the beginning of the first phrase in the first and lowest voice, and so the canon may begin again while it is trailing off partway through, producing a musically enjambed, "wrap-around rondeau."⁶

4 I present the case in detail in "The original version and adaptation of Okeghem's *Je n'ay dueil*," *Journal of the Alamire Foundation* (forthcoming, 2025).

5 We are indebted to Keith Polk for invaluable information and advice regarding the constitution of Florentine wind ensembles towards the end of the fifteenth century.

6 The phrase was coined by John Andrew Bailey and Beth Anne Lee-De Amici.

Singing fifteenth-century French

As on Volume One, here we have aimed to pronounce and declaim the French poetry of the songs as a professional French singer of Okeghem's era might have. (See the notes to Volume One for more detail, including references to scholarly works.) The most noticeable differences from standard modern French are a shift towards brighter vowels (those of middle French are closer to those heard nowadays among French-speaking Canadians, in Quebec or Acadia) and the pronunciation of final consonants at verse endings and poetic caesuras, while eliding certain others: thus "Presque transi" is pronounced without the internal *S* in *presque*, but "un peu mains qu'estre mort" with final *T*. The result is a carefully articulated, distinct, and rhetorically heightened pronunciation which reflects and may help the listener to better appreciate the poetry's concern with structure, the play of sound, and syntactic artifice.⁷

7 For a stimulating study of the aesthetics of the era's poetry, see Leonard W. Johnson, *Poets as players: theme and variation in late medieval French poetry* (1990), especially chapter 1, "Les Règles du jeu."

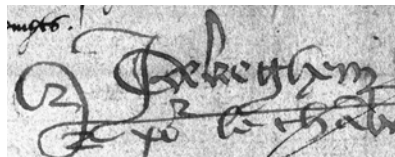


Ockeghem — or Okeghem?

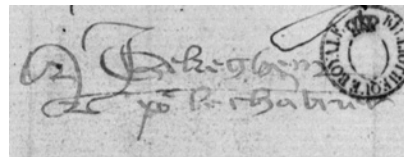
OUR COMPOSER'S Flemish family name was a source of endless confusion to speakers of French, Italian, German, and other languages, and it may be found spelled in a bewildering variety of ways in contemporary manuscripts: Okeghem, Ockeghem, Okegheem, Ockegheem, Okeghen, Okeghan, Okenghem, Ockenheim, Okekam, Obekhan, Obergan, Hockeghen, Hoquegan, Hocquergan, Hoiquergan, Holreghan, Okegus.... Modern scholars have mostly tended to prefer "Ockeghem," as we did when we undertook our complete-works project *Ockeghem@600* in 2015, and for the first volume of our two-CD set of his songs, released in 2019. The spelling with *c* is lent some support by the Chigi Codex, a manuscript copied in the Low Countries not many years after the composer's death, which is the single most important source of his Masses, the unique copy of four of them and of one of his motets as well. Here ten out of thirteen ascriptions above individual works spell the name "Ockeghem" and one has "Ockegem." But two read "Okeghem"

without *c*, and the index, added later by a Spanish scribe, is consistent in giving "Okeghem" no less than fifteen times. In fact, the spelling "Okeghem" is the one most frequently found in contemporary documents from the French court (where the composer worked) and the Papal chancellery (where numerous documents survive that deal with benefices assigned to him), as well as in song sources from central France.

So the matter rested until 2019, when David Fiala published an article describing two documents he had discovered in the Department of Manuscripts at the Bibliothèque nationale de France: a pair of receipts, dated July 8th and 9th, 1480, signed by the composer in his capacity as canon and treasurer of the collegiate chapel of Saint-Martin of Tours.



Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS fr. 2904, f. 28



Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS fr. 2904, f. 29

Here, according to Fiala's interpretation, the fancy loop on the far left is an ornament to the stroke which underlines the signature and has no alphabetical meaning. The first component of the signature proper is a capital O crossed by a capital J. The O is formed from two strokes, the righthand one of which doubles as the stem of a lower-case *d*, to the right of which is a lower-case *e*. The combined J-de-O is followed by "keghem": the meaning is "[ehan] de Okeghem."⁸ Voilà! Henceforth, then, we will prefer the spelling Okeghem—but for this Volume Two of the songs we've stuck with Ockeghem so as to match 2019's Volume One. The resulting diversity, if rather confusing to modern eyes, is a characteristically 15th-century state of affairs.

Detail of a panoramic view of Tours around 1625 showing the basilica of Saint Martin from the north. C. Visscher, copper engraving, c. 1625, *La fort ancienne et noble ville de Tours appellée le jardin de la France*: Musée de la Société archéologique de Touraine, Tours; Société archéologique de Touraine

⁸ See David Fiala, "La très véritable signature de J. de Okeghem et ses implications philologiques," *Revue de musicologie* 105 (2019), 145-58. The documents with the signatures may be examined on Gallica, the digital library of the Bibliothèque nationale, at <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9009496c/f34> and <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9009496c/f35>.

Blue Heron has been acclaimed by *The Boston Globe* as “one of the Boston music community’s indispensables” and hailed by Alex Ross in *The New Yorker* for its “expressive intensity.” The ensemble ranges over a wide repertoire from plainchant to new music, with particular specialities in 15th-century Franco-Flemish polyphony and early 16th-century English sacred music, and is committed to vivid live performance informed by the study of original source materials and historical performance practices.

Founded in 1999, Blue Heron presents a concert series in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and has appeared at the Boston Early Music Festival; in New York City at Music Before 1800, The Cloisters (Metropolitan Museum of Art), and the 92nd Street Y; at the Library of Congress, the National Gallery of Art, and Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, D.C.; at the Berkeley Early Music Festival; at Yale University, the University of Chicago, and the University of California, Davis; in Cleveland, Kansas City, Milwaukee, Montreal, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Providence, St. Louis, San Luis Obispo, Seattle, Tucson, and Vancouver; and in Belgium, England, and Germany. Blue Heron has been in residence at the Center for Early Music Studies at Boston University and at Boston College and has enjoyed collaborations with A Far Cry, Dark Horse Consort, Les Délices, Parthenia, Piffaro, and Ensemble Plus Ultra.

Blue Heron’s first CD, featuring music by Guillaume Du Fay, was released in 2007. Between 2010 and 2017 the ensemble issued a 5-CD series of *Music from the Peterhouse Partbooks* (also available as a set entitled *The Lost Music of Canterbury*), including many world premiere recordings of works copied around 1540 for Canterbury Cathedral and restored by Nick Sandon; the fifth CD in the series was awarded the 2018 Gramophone Classical Music Award for Early Music. Jessie Ann Owens and Blue Heron won the 2015 Noah Greenberg Award from the American Musicological Society to support the world premiere recording of Cipriano de Rore’s *I madrigali a cinque voci*, released in 2019. In 2015 Blue Heron inaugurated *Ockeghem@600*, a multi-season project to commemorate the circa-600th birthday of Johannes Ockeghem (c. 1420-1497) by performing his complete works, finishing up in 2023; Sean Gallagher served throughout as musicological adviser. A parallel recording project bore its first fruits in 2019 with the release of *Johannes Ockeghem: Complete Songs, Volume I*, which was named to the *Bestenliste* of the *Preis der deutschen Schallplattenkritik*. Blue Heron’s recordings also include a CD accompanying Thomas Forrest Kelly’s book *Capturing Music: The Story of Notation*, the live recording *Christmas in Medieval England*, a compilation of medieval songs entitled *A 14th-Century Salmagundi*, and (in collaboration with Les Délices) a live recording of a concert production of Guillaume de Machaut’s *Remede de Fortune*.



CODY BOWERS



ANNA DANILEVSKAIA



PAUL GUTTRY



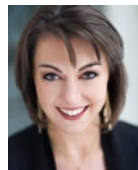
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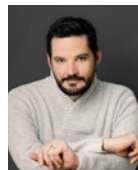
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Scott Metcalfe is widely recognized as one of North America's leading specialists in music from the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries and beyond. Musical and artistic director of Blue Heron since its founding in 1999, he was music director of New York City's Green Mountain Project from 2010-19 and has been guest director of TENET (New York), the Handel & Haydn Society (Boston), Emmanuel Music (Boston), the Toronto Consort, The Tudor Choir and Seattle Baroque, Pacific Baroque Orchestra (Vancouver, BC), Quire Cleveland, and the Dryden Ensemble (Princeton, NJ), in music ranging from Machaut to Bach and Handel. He also enjoys a career as a baroque violinist, playing with Les Délices (dir. Debra Nagy), L'Harmonie des Saisons (dir. Eric Milnes), and other ensembles. Metcalfe's scholarly work, centered on the historical performance practice of medieval and Renaissance vocal music, has been published in numerous program and recording notes, and he is the author of essays in a long-forthcoming book on the Peterhouse partbooks and articles in the *Journal of the Alamire Foundation*. He has edited music by Francisco de Peñalosa for Antico Edition (UK) and songs from the Leuven chansonnier for the Alamire Foundation (Belgium); other editions are in the works, including a new edition of the songs of Gilles Binchois (c. 1400-1460). He has taught at Boston University and Harvard University, served as director of the baroque orchestra at Oberlin Conservatory, and been a visiting member of the faculty of Music History at the New England Conservatory. He received a bachelor's degree from Brown University (1985), where he majored in biology, and a master's degree in historical performance practice from Harvard (2005).

All songs edited from original sources by Scott Metcalfe.

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Thanks to the staff and parishioners of the Church of the Redeemer, Chestnut Hill, where the music was recorded.

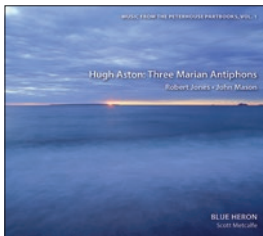


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