



Direction: Rebecca Bain

presents

Astonishing Saints

Lost and found sacred songs of the 12th century

Guest direction: Pascale Duhamel

June 1, 2019, 7 pm

Notre-Dame-de-Bon-Secours Chapel, Old Montreal

As the only professional vocal ensemble of women's voices in Québec dedicated to the sacred music of the Middle Ages, Ensemble Scholastica has created a unique place for itself in the field of medieval music. This year, to celebrate our 10th anniversary, we have invited our founder, musicologist **Pascale Duhamel**, to put together a special program for us to perform.

As part of her teaching activities at the University of Ottawa, Duhamel directed the research project of Sylvain Margot, whose research focused on the liturgical music of medieval Haute-Marche. Because of the many upheavals and wars that have marked its history, this region of France has preserved very little of its medieval musical heritage. Margot's research led him to the unexpected discovery of several manuscript fragments containing unpublished music for the liturgies of local saints. This discovery amounted to the exhumation of a long-lost regional culture.

These compositions grew out of a renewal of the older Gregorian chant repertoire during a period that medievalists refer to as the 12th-century Renaissance. This "first" Renaissance witnessed the development of polyphonic music, Gothic architecture and art, a resurgence in European scientific disciplines and the creation of Europe's first universities, as well as profound renewals in the fields of theology and literature. In the realm of sacred music, the 12th century also marked the innovative periods of such figures as Hildegard von Bingen, Peter Abelard and Pérotin. The repertoire that is the subject of this project, created by anonymous composers, now joins this musical and poetical corpus, invoking the lives of local saints and elegantly paraphrasing more universal Christian liturgies.

Music has a particularly privileged place in the reconstruction of lost heritage. Throughout time, humanity has seen countless losses of artistic work, much of which has been integral to the spirituality and community of different peoples. The music that has survived in manuscripts can guide us through conflicted times and help us to rediscover lost ages, like crumbs of bread left on a path to show us our way. Like the (now destroyed) Buddhas of Afghanistan, medieval sacred music is an important part of our artistic legacy, embodying the profoundly human aspiration to give meaning to our existence. Ensemble Scholastica's reconstructive work on this project—like all the work we have engaged in—reasserts the human and aesthetic value of historical sacred song. In spite of their religious context, these works are about "telling a good story," which, along with music, is one of the most universal ways for people to connect to one other.