



Charlie Bento

SEQUENTIA

GREGORIUS - THE HOLY SINNER

VOICE AND HARP, DIRECTION Benjamin Bagby

VOICE AND HARP Jasmina Črnčič

VOICE leiken

Philadelphia Episcopal Cathedral

Thursday, January 30 @ 7:30 PM

There will be no intermission.

Gregorius - The Holy Sinner

A medieval tale of incest and redemption by Hartmann von Aue (ca. 1200)

Hartmann von Aue's astonishing story, *Gregorius*, recounts how a young man, at first unaware of the curse of his incestuous origins, searches for his path in life, comes close to death and finally finds redemption, reunited in spiritual harmony with the woman who is at once his mother, aunt and wife.

The story in brief: Gregorius begins life as a nobleman's son in Aquitaine, secretly born of incest between twins, a brother and sister, and as a newborn is put out to sea in a small boat, left to fate, provided with gold and a note about his aristocratic origins. He is later found by a fisherman, survives and thrives in a monastery, a promising scholar and the favorite of the abbot who nurtured him. But he turns his back on a spiritual life, following instead his dream to become a knight. The young knight rescues an unmarried noblewoman and her people from an attacking army and marries her but later realizes that his marriage is incestuous – he has married his own mother, who had given him up as a baby. Horrified, he flees into the wilderness to live as a starving hermit, seeking forgiveness from God. A fisherman agrees to abandon him on a lonely rock in the sea, even locking him in leg irons. After 17 years of this cruel penitence, his presence is revealed in visions to high churchmen in Rome, who seek a holy man to become the next Pope. Discovered emaciated and near death, he is brought back to Rome and declared Pope, triumphing over his dark past. This humble penitent performs miracles and heals the sick, and Rome's church bells ring of their own accord in rejoicing. Finally, he is reunited with his mother/aunt/wife, who is also searching for release from her sins. They live out their days with forgiveness, grace and a completion of the circle of love.

This ancient story reaches far into the past, where we sense the tragic presence of Oedipus and even the unwavering, transformative spirit of Job in its most fateful moments. Hartmann confronts us with one of the most difficult transgressions imaginable (two cases of incest), a basic human taboo made more deeply painful, since it was unintentional and remained hidden. But he shows us that even such a dark sin can be forgiven, as long as the believer never yields to despair – it is despair alone which pushes all sinners outside the loving circle of divine forgiveness and grace. Hartmann shares through his powerful story, about the need of the soul to heal itself, responding to the worst snares of the Devil with the transformative power of self-knowledge, perseverance and love.

This tale has remained alive throughout the ages. As late as the mid-20th century, Hartmann's *Gregorius* inspired the Nobel Prize-winning author Thomas Mann to re-tell the story in modern prose, published under the title *Der Erwählte* (The Chosen One) in 1952.

Although the medieval version by Hartmann von Aue survives in multiple text manuscripts, his tale was not intended for silent reading. It was usually told orally: sung, spoken and accompanied, for courtly gatherings of sophisticated listeners who could never get enough of a good, long 'series' performed by professional minstrels. Sequentia's reconstruction of Hartmann's masterpiece features three singers (performing in the original Middle High German verse), two of whom also play Romanesque harps, to retell this story in the same style which captivated binge-listening courtly audiences in the years around 1200.

The musical sources for our reconstruction include the masterful large-scale creations of the *Minnesänger* Heinrich von Meissen (a.k.a. Frauenlob), who drew on a long tradition of modal music creation in Germany. His monumental setting of the *Song of Songs* is based on a repeating cycle of the eight musical modes and has inspired our work. We have also accessed the musical works of the itinerant *Spruchdichter*, including satirical and philosophical poets such as Meister Alexander.

Acknowledgements

Sequentia wishes to sincerely thank the following friends of the project who have helped enormously: Seth Cooper, agent, who made and makes everything possible, Lawrence Rosenwald (Wellesley College, emeritus) for the English translations of Hartmann's text (spoken prologue and supertitles), Philip Liston-Kraft of Harvard University for invaluable assistance with the pronunciation of Hartmann's German, Racha Kirakosian of the University of Freiburg for inspiration, advice and support and Yellow Barn Festival (Putney, VT) for providing Sequentia with a rehearsal residency Jan 2-9, 2025.

The performance text follows the published Middle High German edition and modern German translation by Volker Mertens, Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, Frankfurt (2008).

Romanesque harps based on a sculpture in the west portal of Chartres Cathedral (France, ca. 1180). Built for Sequentia by Geoff Ralph, London (1982 and 1983).

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Benjamin Bagby (Voice and Harp, Direction)

Vocalist, harper and medievalist Bagby has been an important figure in the field of medieval musical performance for over 40 years. Since 1977, when he and the late Barbara Thornton co-founded Sequentia, his time has been almost entirely devoted to the research, performance and recording work of the ensemble. Apart from this, Bagby is deeply involved with the solo performance of Anglo-Saxon and Germanic oral poetry: his acclaimed performance of *Beowulf* has been heard worldwide and was released as a DVD in 2007. In 2017, he was awarded the Artist of the Year Award by REMA, the European Early Music Network. In addition to researching and creating over 75 programs for Sequentia, Bagby has published widely, writing about medieval performance practice. As a guest lecturer and professor, he has taught courses and workshops all over Europe and North America. Between 2005 and 2018, he taught medieval music performance practice in a master's program at the Sorbonne – University of Paris. Between 2018 and 2024, he taught medieval music performance in a master's program at the Folkwang University of the Arts in Essen, Germany.

Jasmina Črnčič (Voice and Harp)

Črnčič is a singer from Maribor, Slovenia. Drawing on her rich experience in choral and theatre work as well as a classical formal education, she now specializes in the performance of music from the Middle Ages. She is a member of the critically acclaimed ensembles for medieval music, Sequentia and Per-Sonat, and devotes much of her time to developing new pedagogical approaches which are especially suited for the study of the music of the Early/High Middle Ages. Črnčič is currently a faculty member of the International Course on Medieval Music Performance of Besalú. As a member of the Slovenian ensemble Carmina Slovenica, she has performed in numerous staged and concert productions both as a part of the vocal ensemble as well as a soloist at many festivals and concert venues around the world (New York's Prototype Festival, Melbourne Festival, Operadagen Rotterdam, Radialsystem V Berlin, Holland Festival, Ruhrtriennale and others). She is based in Ljubljana, Slovenia.

Lukas Papenfusscline, a.k.a. leiken (Voice)

leiken is a singer and performance-maker based in Brooklyn, NY. A specialist in both medieval and new music, their practice fuses these disparate worlds exclusively through collaboration and frequently explores queer spirituality, identity and ephemera. A sought-after vocalist for concert, opera and theatre, leiken has performed all over the world alongside iconic artists such as Ran Blake, Sequentia, Eve Beglarian and Four Larks. Their extensive performance experience has brought them to legendary venues like the Getty Villa Museum, Carnegie Hall, Hong Kong's Queen Elizabeth Stadium, the Théâtre du Châtelet and the Hirschhorn Museum. leiken also loves fermentation, textiles and swimming.

Sequentia is among the world's most respected and innovative ensembles for medieval music. Under the direction of Benjamin Bagby, Sequentia can look back on more than 45 years of international concert tours, a comprehensive discography of more than 30 recordings spanning the entire Middle Age, including the complete works of Hildegard von Bingen, film and television productions of medieval music drama, and a new generation of young performers trained in professional courses given by members of the ensemble.

Sequentia, co-founded by Bagby and the late Barbara Thornton, has performed throughout Western and Eastern Europe, the Americas, India, the Middle East, East Asia, Africa and Australia, and has received numerous prizes, including a Disque d'Or, several Diapasons d'Or, two Edison Prizes, the Deutsche Schallplattenpreis and a Grammy® nomination for many of its thirty recordings on the BMG/Deutsche Harmonia Mundi (SONY), Raumklang, Glossa and Marc Aurel Edition labels. CD releases include reconstructions of music from lost oral traditions of the Middle Ages (*The Lost Songs Project*), 9th and 10th-century Germanic songs for the Apocalypse (*Fragments for the End of Time*) and the ensemble's acclaimed program of music from the Icelandic *Edda: The Rheingold Curse*, as well as the earliest-known European songs (*Lost Songs of a Rhineland Harper*), medieval liturgical chant (*Chant Wars*, a co-production with the Paris-based ensemble Dialogos), and most recently, *Boethius: Songs of Consolation*. Sequentia has created over 80 innovative concert programs which encompass the entire spectrum of medieval music, giving performances all over the world, in addition to the group's creation of music-theatre projects such as Hildegard von Bingen's *Ordo Virtutum* and the medieval Icelandic *Edda*. In 2017, Sequentia's 30-year project to record the complete works of Hildegard von Bingen was released by SONY as a nine-CD box set. The work of the ensemble is divided between a small touring ensemble of vocal and instrumental soloists and a larger ensemble of voices for special performance projects. Recent projects include a version of the 14th-century *Roman de Fauvel*, staged by Peter Sellars, and presented in co-production with the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris. After many years based in Cologne, Germany, Sequentia's home was re-established in Paris in 2001. sequentia.org

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