

St Mary's Church, Fotheringhay - 8pm

Sirinu

A Muse of Fire - Music in England and France at the time of Henry V

"Our own musicians have taken me on the English way, and their music is so wondrously agreeable that it produces joy and fame." These lines, translated from a Burgundian courtly poem of about 1440, are a frank acknowledgement by a bitter political enemy of the pre-eminence of English musicians. Half a century later, while the musical Renaissance flowered around his ears, the great Flemish theorist Johannes Tinctoris still maintained that "of this miraculous new art, the English are held to be the source and origin". It is no coincidence that this high regard for English music was felt at a time when England's military and political fortunes were at their peak. The exploits of Henry V, particularly his victories at Crècy and Agincourt, carved out a formidable reputation for the King and his countrymen, and took their insular culture out into the mainstream of Europe.

The careers of England's greatest composers, such as John Dunstable, were closely linked with this expansion; whatever his purely musical merits, Dunstable's influence abroad can only have been helped by his service to the Duke of Bedford, Regent of France from 1422 to 1435. Sirinu takes English music from both court and field, their instruments the harp, pipe and tabor, bagpipe and hurdy-gurdy.

The Performers

Sara Stowe: *soprano, keyboards*

Jon Banks: *harp, sackbut, wind instruments*

Henry Stobart: *recorders, shawm, bagpipes*

Matthew Spring: *lutes, hurdy-gurdy, early guitars*

The four members of Sirinu perform not only on their principal instruments but also on a large number of unusual historical and ethnic instruments from around the world. These include shawms, sackbut, pipe and tabor, bagpipes, hurdy-gurdy, 'ud, dulcimer, charango and panpipes. Their concerts are theatrical events encompassing sound, spectacle, dance and mime.

Sara Stowe studied piano and harpsichord at the Royal College of Music, where she won a scholarship and harpsichord prizes. She went on to study singing in Italy with the aid of a British Council award, and sings regularly on Radio 3.

Jon Banks read music at Exeter College, Oxford, where he completed a D.Phil on fifteenth century Italian music. He sings professionally in various London choirs, and is active as a jazz pianist and guitarist.

Henry Stobart studied recorder and tuba at the Birmingham School of Music, followed by a period travelling in Bolivia and living with rural communities there, studying their music. He is currently a Research Fellow at Darwin College, Cambridge.

After completing his studies at Keele University and Magdalen College, Oxford, where he completed a D.Phil on the lute, Matthew Spring went on to study the lute at the Royal College of Music, and now follows parallel careers as performer and musicologist.

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