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Renowned vocal ensemble summons the sound world of 15th-century France in unique, acclaimed multimedia project

HANOVER, NH—The Orlando Consort, one of Europe’s highest-regarded early vocal music ensembles, transport us to the 15th-century in its enthralling multimedia project, Voices Appeared, on Wednesday, January 23, 7 pm, in Spaulding Auditorium of the Hopkins Center for the Arts at Dartmouth College.

In this project, these five superb voices perform a live soundtrack to The Passion of Joan of Arc, Carl Theodor Dreyer’s 1928 silent masterpiece about the peasant girl-turned-military commander whom authorities tried and burned at the stake. With the film projected above them on the big Spaulding screen, the Consort sings a continuous a cappella score created from excerpts of sacred and secular music from Joan’s time—amplifying the beauty and agony of the onscreen images.

Critics around the world have rhapsodized about this project. Wrote El Mundo (Spain), “The spectator was immersed in the fifteenth century...moved by the intensity of images and music.” Calling the project “the benchmark score for Dreyer’s masterpiece,” Classical Source noted how the singers’ "vocal beauty offered a respite from the intensity of the images.” Wrote The Church Times. “Even without Dreyer’s searing film, to hear music of this immensely early period sung with such purity, wisdom, and insight is an inspiration.”

Voices Appeared demonstrates the captivating entertainment, fresh scholarly insight; innovative programming and superb vocal skills the Orlando Consort is known for. Formed in 1988 and still including two founding members, the group has made an international reputation in the field of medieval and renaissance vocal music and also embracing jazz, film and world music. Wrote the Boston Globe: "The work of the Consort is equally remarkable for scholarship and imagination working on the past, and the skill and communicative immediacy it brings to the task of performance which lies in the present."

Consort founding member Donald Grieg, whose university studies included serious dives into film, meticulously pieced together the score for the nearly 50 scenes in the 82-minute film, pairing them with pieces of plainchant and polyphony, including works by Guillaume Dufay and Gilles Binchois and the anonymous Agincourt Carol.

For film aficionados, Passion is a must-see. Based on the actual court transcripts, it depicts the trial and immolation of Joan of Arc (1412-1431). The illiterate daughter of a tenant farmer in northeast France, Joan claimed she was directed by the voices and visions of saints, and persuaded rulers to let her command troops, which she led to victory. After fulfilling her mission of putting King Charles VII on the French throne, she was
captured by forces opposed to Charles, handed over to the British, and accused of a list of crimes and heresies (including that of cross-dressing as a man) so extensive that Charles made no attempt to negotiate her release. After a year in captivity, after being forced to sign a denial that she had received divine guidance, she was burned at the stake in the marketplace of the northern French city of Rouen. Twenty years later, Charles ordered a retrial which cleared her name. More than four centuries later, in 1920, Pope Benedict XV canonized her.

Released eight years after Joan was made a saint, Passion was an extraordinary collaboration between the Danish Dreyer and French actress Renee Maria Falconetti. Then in her 30s and an established Parisian performer when Dreyer cast her, Falconetti delivered a performance of incredible naturalness and nuance, even as it showed someone in extremes of torment and despair. "It may be the finest performance ever recorded on film," wrote New Yorker film critic Pauline Kael. Wrote critic Roger Ebert: “You cannot know the history of silent film unless you know the face of Renee Maria Falconetti. In a medium without words, where the filmmakers believed that the camera captured the essence of characters through their faces, to see Falconetti in Dreyer's The Passion of Joan of Arc (1928) is to look into eyes that will never leave you.”

Although previous scores exist, none equal this one, critics say. Wrote The Guardian (UK): “Greig fully understands the fluctuating nature of cinematic tension, and nothing is allowed to detract from Renée Maria Falconetti’s harrowing central performance as Joan, or the beauty of the young Antonin Artaud as her comforter Massieu. ...this is an exceptional achievement that reminds us just how potent the combination of silent film and live music can be.’

The cultural depictions of Joan began during her lifetime with French noblewoman/composer Christine de Pizan’s 1429 poem "Chanson en l’honneur de Jeanne d’Arc"-- which Orlando includes in Voices Appeared, sung to the tune of a song from that time. Joan has become the subject for some 50 works of literature, 25 vocal works and more than 40 films as well as countless works of visual art.

When The Passion of Joan of Arc was first screened in Paris in 1928, it was accompanied by an orchestral score specially composed by Victor Alix and Léo Pouget. A subsequent version paired the movie with anachronistic post- Joan music from the Baroque period. The question of an appropriate score went away--presumably for good--in the 1930s when the original negatives were destroyed by fire. After a perfect print was discovered in 1981 in a Norwegian mental asylum, that whole issue was revived. Since then, the task has been shouldered by a long list of musicians, ranging from Dutch, Danish, Estonian and Lithuanian composers to electronic groups and rock bands (notably the Canadian group Joan of Arc).

In addition to Greig (baritone), Orlando Consort is Matthew Venner (counter tenor), Mark Dobell and Angus Smith (tenors), and, for this project, Robert Macdonald (bass).

Voices Appeared at the Hop has been funded in part by the Frank L. Harrington 1924 Fund No. 3.

MORE ABOUT...

Orlando Consort’s work successfully combines captivating entertainment and fresh scholarly insight; the unique imagination and originality of their programming together with their superb vocal skills has marked the Consort out as the outstanding leaders of their field. The Consort has performed at many of Britain’s top festivals (including the BBC Proms and the Edinburgh International Festival) and has in recent years made visits to France, Holland, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Poland, the Czech Republic, Estonia, the USA and Canada, South America, Singapore, Japan, Greece, Russia, Austria, Switzerland, Slovenia, Portugal and Spain.
The Consort's impressive discography for Saydisc, Metronome, Linn, Deutsche Grammophon and Harmonia Mundi USA includes a collection of music by John Dunstaple and The Call of the Phoenix, which were selected as Early Music CDs of the Year by Gramophone Magazine in 1996 and 2003 respectively; their CDs of music by Compère, Machaut, Ockeghem, Josquin, Popes and Anti-Popes, Saracen and Dove and Passion have also all been short-listed. Their 2008 release of Machaut's Messe de Notre Dame and Scattered Rhymes, an outstanding new work by the young British composer Tarik O'Regan and featuring the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir, was short-listed for a BBC Music Magazine Award. The Dart of Love (January 2015) is their second recording in a series for Hyperion exploring the polyphonic songs of Guillaume de Machaut; the first release (Le Voir Dit) was selected by New York Times critics as one of their favorite classical CD releases of 2013. Their most recent releases are a second anthology of music by Loyset Compère, shortlisted for a Gramophone Magazine Early Music Award, Volumes 3 and 4 of the Machaut Edition, A Burning Heart and Sovereign Beauty, the latter an Editor’s Choice for The Gramophone.

The Consort's performances also embrace the spheres of contemporary music and improvisation: to date they have performed over 30 world premieres and they have created striking collaborations with the jazz group Perfect Houseplants and, for a project exploring historic Portuguese and Goan music, the brilliant tabla player Kuljit Bhamra. The Consort currently holds a residency at Nottingham University and recent concert highlights include a return visit to New York’s Carnegie Hall.

The Hopkins Center for the Arts
Founded in 1962, “the Hop” is a multi-disciplinary academic, visual and performing arts center dedicated to uncovering insights, igniting passions, and nurturing talents to help Dartmouth and the surrounding Upper Valley community engage imaginatively and contribute creatively to our world. Each year the Hop presents more than 300 live events and films by visiting artists as well as Dartmouth students and the Dartmouth community, and reaches more than 22,000 Upper Valley residents and students with outreach and arts education programs. After a celebratory 50th-anniversary season in 2012-13, the Hop enters its second half-century with renewed passion for mentoring young artists, supporting the development of new work, and providing a laboratory for participation and experimentation in the arts.

CALENDAR LISTING
Orlando Consort in Voices Appeared
Five centuries after a French peasant girl was condemned to death for defying authorities, Carl Theodor Dreyer commemorated her in his unforgettable 1928 silent masterpiece, The Passion of Joan of Arc. This sublime film receives what critics say is its finest musical score from the Orlando Consort, one of Europe’s most highly regarded early music vocal ensembles. The Consort transports us to Joan’s world, accompanying the film live with a suite of meticulously assembled sacred and secular music from her time—including a poetic tribute to Joan by her contemporary Christine de Pizan.
Wednesday, January 23, 7 pm
Spaulding Auditorium, Hopkins Center for the Arts at Dartmouth College, Hanover NH
$30/20, Dartmouth students $10, 18 & under $17

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