

## Musical Lives Performance Workshop

### Instructions, aims & questionnaires developed and written by Emma Dillon

#### Song group 2

**Rebekah Jones** (mezzo soprano), **Don Greig** (medieval music, baritone, film history)  
& **Alice Hazard** (medieval French literature)

#### Your songs

Songs all three singers will learn:

1. Blondel (Jean II) de Nesle (d. 1239), *A l'entrant d'esté*  
[Try stanzas 1, 6 & E]

2. Hugues III d'Oisy, *En l'an que chevalier*  
[Stanzas 1 & 4]

Songs only Rebekah will learn:

3. Châtelain de Coucy, *La douce voiz du louseignol*  
[Try stanzas 1, 2, 3 & 5]
4. Conon de Béthune, *L'autrier avint en cel païs*  
[Try 1, 2, 3 & 5]

#### Your team

**Rebekah (Jones)** is one of three singers from *Siglo de Oro*, dir. Patrick Allies, joining our *Musical Lives* collaboration. Rebekah's musical background covers everything from chant to bel canto to Elgar, with considerable experience performing Baroque and Renaissance repertory. Rebekah is also an experienced music educator. You can read (and hear!) more about Rebekah here:

<https://www.rebekahjonesmezzo.com/about>

**Don (Greig)** is a bass-baritone, with a wealth of experience performing early music repertories (as a founder and former member of the Orlando Consort), and also a writer and scholar with background in film studies. He recently completing a PhD on the soundtrack he created for Carl Dreyer's film, *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*. You can read more of Don's work here:

<https://nottingham.academia.edu/DrDonaldGreig>

**Alice (Hazard)**, joining us from KCL, is a scholar of medieval French literature and art, with wide-ranging interests, from a recent book on the concept of the face in medieval literature, to her work the history of queer readings of medieval text to the role of digital technology as mediation of the Middle Ages. Alice is also actively involved in language training and contributes extensively to teaching Old French to new generations of students. You can read more about Alice's work here:

<https://www.kcl.ac.uk/people/dr-alice-hazard>

## Aims & research questions

As well as creating performances to share and enjoy, our singers are also contributors to research questions of the *Musical Lives* project. The suggested approach for preparing songs may thus be a little different from regular musical engagements, reflecting that dual contribution. It may help to keep in mind the main aims/questions motivating our collaboration:

### **Aims for performers/scholar-collaborators:**

1. To develop performances you are excited and confident to share
2. To get a feel for different styles of trouvère melody and poetry
3. To get a preliminary feel for Old French pronunciation
4. To have a go at looking at a song in its manuscript format
5. To get used to the two score formats developed for the project
6. To try routes into learning a song that may be a bit different to your usual practice (though you always have the modern performance score there as a fall-back)
7. Get used to working with a team of performer-scholar-collaborators
8. To be open to experimenting

### **Some research questions our collaboration will help unlock:**

1. How does medieval poetry sound? How is it musical, even without its melody? How does melody work with – or potentially against – the shape and sound of the poetry? As *Musical Lives* develops, we will also consider these questions/approaches in traditions of Arabic, Hebrew and Occitan poetry/song. The aim is to widen the understanding of the sound worlds of song/poetry (as performed), also as a way to better understand how songs network to one another through their sounds.
2. What sounds are unscripted (poetry/music), in either medieval or modern notation systems? Can we develop new systems for recording these as we study the texts together? (These will be useful for our research but also in how we may develop resources to help make the songs accessible to other performers.)
3. Can performance make different tones and styles of poetry and melody more distinct? For example, how do you deliver a narrative-driven song with lots of melodic repetition as opposed to a song with more abstract themes and a more meandering melody?

## How to prepare your songs (Rebekah)

Locate the song packs and support materials in your dropbox folder

Before you begin, please skim your '**Orientation to the Songs**' document and locate your **song packs** in your Dropbox folder. You can also refer to the '**Introduction**' document for more information about the project and trouvère tradition. These materials contain everything you need to prepare your songs.

Your four songs -- why these ones?

Each singer has selections of **four songs** to learn.

- **Songs 1 & 2** in your pack are samples of songs all three singers will learn. They are chosen because of their contrasting styles (of both poetry and melody). Learning parts of same songs allows us to establish a baseline so we can discuss and compare how different singers/song teams approached their performances. **In the first instance, please do not discuss or compare your performances of songs 1 & 2 with your colleagues! Paddy will instruct singers as to a starting pitch for Song 2.**
- **Songs 3 & 4** in your pack are songs only you will learn. These two songs are very loosely similar in style to songs 1 & 2. The idea is for you to build on the experience of learning songs 1 & 2 as you engage with new materials.

How to approach learning your songs and timeline

By the time Rebekah arrives for our **pre-workshop meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> Feb**, we ask you to be comfortable with the Old French pronunciation of your song texts and to be able to sing your songs through in some fashion. [See the **TIMELINE** at the end of these instructions for suggested milestones culminating in performance and recording]. How you arrive at that point of readiness offers you plenty of flexibility. Each singer brings their own set of approaches and habits to learning new material and we want to know about those approaches! Please use any of the materials in the **song packs** and **orientation to songs** to help get comfortable with the songs. Use your **pre-workshop meeting with your song team** to brainstorm and problem-solve. **Emma and/or Paddy are available for any other song emergencies (!)**. Rest assured that there will be time to shape and polishing your songs, and resolve any problems with pronunciation, on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Feb during the workshop.

Pre-workshop experiments & questionnaire

As you prepare for the workshop, I would like you to try **three short experiments**. The first and second are the most important: they are step-by-step path to exploring Songs 1 & 2 (by Blondel de Nesle and Hugues d'Oisy). **Ideally, you should try those experiments before you do anything else with the songs**. The third experiment is very quick (and fun!), designed to inform final performances. (There are also two short tasks for Alice and Don included.)

The experiments are explained below with **short tasks & questionnaires** for you complete and return on 19/2/24. **It need not be epic or polished – just jot down notes as you work**. This will help inform our research discussions in the workshop.

## Experiment one

(for Rebekah – Alice and Don also review/try)

### A step-by-step approach to Blondel de Nesle, *A l'entrant d'esté* (Song 1 in your pack)

#### **Instructions:**

**Rebekah:** please follow this roadmap as far as possible & answer questions below

**Alice, Don:** feel free to try parts of this exercise, too; please be ready to discuss with Rebekah in your initial call

#### Step 1

##### Hearing and reading the poetry

1. **Read** the text and translation of stanzas 1, 6 and E a few times – **avoid the melody for now**
2. **Listen** a few times to Yolanda Plumley's beautiful reading of stanzas 1, 6 and Envoi [in your recording folder]
3. Peruse the pronunciation guidelines in the 'Orientation to Song' materials to clarify further; check in with Alice and Don, too, as needed
4. Try **reading a stanza or two aloud**, using Yolanda's version as a starting point. Use the collaborative score or text sheet to read from (still no melody!). Notice any points of vocal inflection, dynamics, speed, as you would a melody. If you can, really perform it – declaim it, ham it up, *whatever helps you get a feel for it as a text to be read aloud (ie still without melody)*

#### Step 2

##### Explore the song in the manuscript

1. Locate the **manuscript version** of the song (in your song pack).
2. Try follow the medieval text line with reference to the modern text.
3. If you feel inclined, try singing or transcribing the melodic line
4. Get out your **performance score (melody finally!)**– and use the modern line ending marks to navigate to compare the modern melody with the medieval
5. Vocalise or hum the melody for a while, without words

#### Step 3

##### Weave text to melody

1. Next – either with your performance score or collaborative score – try and sing the first stanza. All parameters of tempo, dynamics, vocal style and rhythm are open for you. Do this a few times until you feel like you know the song in some way. Try stanzas 6 and the envoi
2. Then, try a completely different way of singing it – as different from the first way as possible – slower, faster, bigger, smaller, with a different vocal style.

**Rebekah:** feel free to repeat or adapt this approach to learning the other songs in your song pack.

## TASK & QUESTIONNAIRE (Rebekah only)

### Task

Working from the **collaborative performance score** for Blondel's song, use the space above, below or adjacent the text to jot down some notes to yourself for the pronunciation or any other performance notes you made during STEPS 1, 2 or 3. Try it for one or both stanzas. There's no right or wrong way of doing this – the interest is in how you capture information about the un-notated/un-scripted sounds of the song. Add any further notes you'd like to the back of the sheet.

Questions (use the space below or add additional sheets if needed)

1. What was it like to read the poem aloud (or hear Yolanda read it)? Did you notice anything about the poem's musicality (changes in pace of the text, its phrasing according to sense/meaning, changes in vocal inflection)? Any practical reactions to reading Old French for the first time?
2. When you introduced the melody, how easily did it mesh with the phrasing/music of the poetry as you had spoken it, or heard Yolanda speak it? Did it draw attention to anything new in the poetry (rhyme sounds, vowel sounds)?

3. Did you notice anything about the manuscript version of the melody that you wanted to know more about?
4. As you got to know the song, is there anything about the melody/delivery you felt sure about -- (tempo, timbre, sense of meter or rhythm)? What were you not sure about?
5. Describe some of the different ways you tried singing the song (as requested in step 3).
6. How does this route into the song compare way you might usually learn an unfamiliar song?

## Experiment 2 (Rebekah)

### Disrupting the modern score

#### Hugues d'Oisy, *En l'an que chevalier* (Song 2)

##### Instructions

**Rebekah:** the aim is to repeat the steps you tried for Song 1 with your two allocated stanzas of **Song 2**, but this time to try and step out of the modern performance score as quickly as you can.

**STEP 1** [as before, using the recordings of the text by Sean Curran and Emma Dillon]

**STEP 2** [as before]

BUT this time, once you've got the hang of the melody, jump quickly from the standard score to the collaborative performance score.

Complete the next steps and **STEP 3** working with words only (and the collaborative performance score) as much as possible. If it's too tricky, don't worry, go back to the performance score.

### Questions

1. How was your experience of learning to singing this song different to **song 1** (specifically the experience of working largely away from the score)?

2. As you got to know the song, is there anything about the melody/delivery you felt sure about -- (tempo, timbre, sense of meter or rhythm)? What were you not sure about?
  
3. Hugues's song is narrative-driven in style and its melody more recitational, especially compared to Song 1. How could your approach to performing this song differ to Song 1? What considerations of vocal timbre and delivery come to mind for you?



## **Experiment 3**

### **(Rebekah; Alice/Don, feel free to make suggestions, too!)**

### **Finding your voice(s)**

### **Apply to all four songs**

During the workshop week, you will have the chance to refine your performances and 'fix' them for performance and recording. Part of our discussion will consider how different poetic and musical styles may invite different vocal deliveries. So as you live with your songs in the coming weeks, it will be helpful for you to jot down ideas for possible performance/vocal scenarios for your four songs. Feel free to respond to any and all aspects of the songs, including the stories they seem to tell, questions of 'who is singing' may also come up, when you hear some songs name their makers *in the songs*. Feel free to dramatize using whatever singerly resources you want to draw on. As with your first Blondel experiment, be as creative as possible when trying out matters of tempo, dynamic, vocal articulation.

Consider in particular, how you could make songs 1 & 2 sound different from one another; and similarly, how you could create different performance worlds for songs 3 & 4.

Feel free to discuss with your song collaborators and other singers (though don't yet share your performances with the other singers).

As you ponder, jot down a few ideas for each song and why you think they might work:

Song 1

Song 2

Song 3

Song 4

## Short tasks for Alice & Don

You will already have had a chance to peruse the song dossiers. I'd be grateful if you could take a closer look at your four assigned songs ahead of the workshop to familiarise yourselves with the transmission history. You may find it helpful to try some of the Rebekah's experiments, particularly the reading aloud exercise (and singing, too, if you feel inclined). When you meet Rebekah, it will be helpful to share your thoughts on the sound of the poetry versus the line of the music. And to suggest some ways of shaping melody to text. If you've time to chat for 30 mins before your hour with Rebekah, even better!

There are two more targeted tasks to try before the workshop:

### TASK 1

#### Scripting the unscripted sounds of songs

Along with Rebekah, please could you also take a moment to annotate a stanza or two of **Song 1** using the collaborative performance script with any information about sound and performance that is un-notated in either medieval or modern systems. You can add a phonetic transcription, marks of accent for the poetry, invent your own signs whatever system helps you translate what you hear in the poetry of melody into marks to help the performer and to record what you hear.

### TASK 2

#### Introducing variants

##### 1. Don

Ahead of the workshop, please explore **Song 1's** musical variants (you can use Tischler or go into the sources through the Dossier) and use the collaborative score to pick one or two things you could try out with Rebekah and Alice in the workshop. (Feel free to try with Song 3, too, if time!)

##### 2. Alice

Likewise, take a look at the text variants or order of stanzas for **Song 1** (you can use the Song CV and critical commentaries of older editions provided in the dossiers to explore) – pick one or two examples to share with Rebekah and Don in the workshop. (Feel free to try with Song 3, too, if time!)

**And finally....**

**Have fun!**



## Timeline for singers our Jan/Feb collaboration

1.

### **Encounter**

(Jan 17<sup>th</sup>)

[Introduction to *Musical Lives* and the Feb collaboration in zoom meeting with Emma Dillon and Don Greig; followed by release of individual song packs & team intros]

2.

### **Discover**

(Jan 17<sup>th</sup>-Feb 19<sup>th</sup>)

[Preparation: Take time to explore the materials and to record your discoveries; you'll also have a session with your individual scholarly teams to go over any puzzles and to look at pronunciation together]

3.

### **Inhabit, secure**

(Feb 19<sup>th</sup>)

[Day Zero: by this point you should have the bare bones of your song 'fixed' (eg pronunciation, familiarity with the melodies); our time at KCL will give you space to rehearse, ask questions, and engage in a short interview with Emma Dillon about the process so far]

4.

### **Experiment**

(Feb 20<sup>th</sup>)

[Day 1: workshop day, starting with a short meeting of all three song teams, followed by some small, focused tasks with your individual song teams, designed to run some short experiments and to develop your performances, and final discussion with all three teams]

5.

### **Make them your own**

(Wednesday, Feb 21<sup>st</sup> – morning/early afternoon)

[Day 2: Rehearsal time at KCL to finalise your performances]

6.

### **Share & Record**

(Feb 21<sup>st</sup>/22<sup>nd</sup>)

[Day 2/3:

On the afternoon of Wednesday, 21<sup>st</sup> Feb (4.15-5.30) we have invited friends of the project to join us for tea, scones, an introduction to the project, and to hear parts of your songs. This is NOT a formal performance – rather the chance to get used to performing the songs and to gather reactions.

On Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup>, you will record your songs at St. Augustine's Church, Kilburn. Rosie Goodall will be producing in collaboration with two sound engineers, Andy Fell and Chris Kalcov.]