Sequentia
Benjamin Bagby, director

Benjamin Bagby  voice and Anglo-Saxon harp
Hanna Marti  voice and harps
Stef Conner  voice
Norbert Rodenkirchen  wooden and bone flutes, harp

Words of Power
Charms, Riddles and Elegies of the Medieval Northlands  (8th-11th centuries)

The musicians of Sequentia present songs of magic, exile, of the uncertainty of fate, of longing and regret, of the healing power of magic herbs, of irony and just plain fun. The pagan roots of the recently christianized medieval north can still be discerned in some of the oldest manuscript sources known to us today: the Old English Beowulf epic (possibly 8th century), the Old Icelandic Edda, the poems surviving in ancient songbooks such as The 10th-century Exeter Book, and numerous fragments from Germany and Switzerland. Each of these chants, songs and spoken riddles gives us a glimpse into a time so distant from ours and yet near in spirit, a world of singing poets, warriors, valkyries and seeresses, healers and philosophers, whose creations were the first to be written down in English and other Germanic languages (in addition to Old English, we perform songs in Old High German and Old Icelandic, with a hint of Latin). In reconstructing lost musical traditions from this time, Sequentia searches once again to resonate again those long-silent, ancient voices, sometimes accompanied by harps and flutes, which would have been welcomed in any gathering of souls, pagan or Christian, those seeking help for their problems, entertaining their friends, or those giving voice to their longing for a lost partner, or a lost tribe.
Words of Power
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I. Incantations for Valkyries and a wounded battle-steed
(The Old High German 'Merseburg Charms')
Eiris sazun Idisi, sazun hera duoder
Phol ende Wuodan vuorum zi holza

An Anglo-Saxon Riddle:
Biþ foldan dæl

The Anglo-Saxon elegy called 'Deor':
Welund him be wurman wræces cunnade

Charms to bless a house, to manage a swarm of bees:
Wola, wiht, taz tu weist (The Old High German 'Zurich house blessing')
Fo ic under fot, funde ic hit (Anglo-Saxon charm 'for a swarm of bees')
Kirst, imbi ist hucze! (The Old High German 'Lorscher bee charm')

Beginning with the famous Old High German 'Merseburg Charms', we plunge into a northern world which was still immersed in its pagan past: warrior-women, magic battle-steeds and the god Odin himself attest to the power of these images. This is followed by the first of several spoken Anglo-Saxon riddles, about which the noted Anglo-Saxonist Craig Williamson writes: The riddles often describe, or are narrated from the point of view of, some creature or natural phenomenon (swan, moon, iceberg) and may be early environmental poems. They explore the relationship between the riddler and the solver, between the metaphor maker and the world being poetically described. Some riddles contain both a plain and a bawdy solution. In tonight's concert, the solution (or one possible solution) to each riddle will be displayed after giving the listeners a moment to reflect and perhaps guess the answer.

The Anglo-Saxon elegy called 'Deor' gives us a glimpse of the working world of the medieval tribal singer, recalling a pastiche of images from his mind's songbook before singing about himself. Williamson writes: The elegies are laments over the loss of a spouse, a child, a homeland, a dying culture. The elegiac speaker often ponders her or his past, wondering just how real the memories of an earlier life, now lost, might be. Together these poems bring to life an ancient language and culture and reaffirm the connection between past and present.

Finally, with a group of charms to bless a house, or to manage a swarm of bees, we enter a world of human desires, where both superstition and Saint Mary can cohabit happily. Again Williamson: The charms use magical words to effect health and healing (of rheumatism, a late pregnancy, a land to be planted and plowed) and often include folk medicines and ritual actions. These are working songs with a purpose, with power over human affairs, certainly not intended for performance in a concert.

II. Instrumental piece:
In modo Magni (Orkney)

Anglo-Saxon Riddles for scholars:
Ic seah wrætlice
Moððe word fræt

The Anglo-Saxon elegy called 'The Wife's Lament':
Ic þis giedd wrece bi me ful geomorre

Charms to cure worms, to cure a stabbing pain:
Gang uz, nesso (an Old High German charm against worms)
Hlude wæren hy, la, hlude (an Anglo-Saxon charm against a sharp pain)
This group begins with an instrumental piece based on one of the few surviving melodies from the northern islands: the so-called Saint Magnus hymn from the Orkneys. It is followed by two riddles which revolve around images from the world of clever scholars working in the monastic scriptorium and library, where parchment manuscripts, ink and pens were rare objects of mystery and wisdom. The Anglo-Saxon elegy called 'The Wife's Lament' describes a love-bond as disturbing and complex as life itself, where hope and anger mingle with images from nature, to create a dark portrait: the tribal woman's world of waiting, longing and regret. The charms which end this group are centered on the living body and its ailments, bringing hope to those plagued by worms or by alarming pains. The spirits of these invaders are invoked and urged to leave, in a never-ending negotiation with fate itself.

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III. Instrumental piece

Lilia (Iceland)

Anglo-Saxon Riddles: the natural world

Wiht cwom æfter wege
Frod wæs min from cym

The elegy called 'The Song of the Lone Survivor' (from the Beowulf epic):
Paer waes swylcra fela in ðam eorðhuse

Anglo-Saxon charms to cure a fever, to cure a boil or cyst:
Her com in gangan in spider-wiht (against a fever)
Wenne, wenne, wen-chichenne (against a wen, boil or cyst)

Following an instrumental piece based on an ancient Icelandic tune called 'Lilja', with its own special tuning system, we hear two riddles from the natural world, elemental images of great power, wonder and sometimes terror. In an elegy from the Beowulf epic, we learn that an entire unnamed northern tribe has been decimated by war, with only one man left alive, the lone survivor. He carries the people's treasure, weapons (and even a harp) into a nearby barrow, returning them to their origins as a final gesture of remembrance, singing to the earth itself before he, too, is carried off by a lonely death. Returning to the human body for the charms which end this group, we once again encounter a pre-modern world which knew only charms and folk remedies, often combining both for ceremonies of healing.

IV. Instrumental piece

Stans a longe (Notker the Stammerer)

Anglo-Saxon Riddles: Joy in the kitchen

Ic on wincle gefrægn
Ic eom wunderlicu wiht
Hyse cwom gangan

The Anglo-Saxon elegy called 'Wulf and Eadwacer' :
Leodum is minum swylce him mon lac gife

Charms to stop bleeding and protect against poisons:
Tumbo saz in berke ('The Strassburg Tumbo-Charm against bleeding')
Christ unde Johan giengon zuo der Jordan ('The Jordan Nosebleed Charm')
Wyrm com snican (The Anglo-Saxon 'Nine Herbs Charm' against poisons)
Genzan unde Jordan keikan sament sozzen ('The Strassburg Blood Charm')

The Old Icelandic Grottasöngr ('The Mill-Song of Frodi's Slave-Girls') :
Nú erum komnar til konungs húsa

The instrumental piece 'Stans a longe' is a version of an early medieval sequence, transcribed and reconstructed by Norbert Rodenkirchen as part of his ongoing research into the earliest possible written sources of instrumental music: Christian vocal compositions, called sequences, from the time of Notker 'the Stammerer' of St. Gall (9th century). Some of these tunes have titles which may well refer to a pre-existing melody, possibly indigenous and pre-Christian, adapted in a new Christian context, as their original purpose as instrumental pieces in oral tradition began to fade.
The final riddles bring us into the kitchen, or the bedroom, or both. The creators of these texts had enormous fun working around the possible offensive (and sinful) nature of their texts, and so every listener can hear what he/she prefers to hear. Following our performances, and for obvious reasons, only the culinary solutions will be proposed.

The Anglo-Saxon elegy called 'Wulf and Eadwacer' is one of the most mysterious texts known to us, sung by a lonely woman whose anger and longing are overwhelmed and frustrated by memory. Her haunting refrain ('It is different with us') points to a relationship confronted with obstacles and strife, shrouded in secrecy and separation ('Wulf is on an island ; I am on another'). Half-spoken situations are left unexplained, and in the end she laments ‘...it’s easy to tear the thread of an untold tale, the song of us two together.’ This reconstruction was made by Hanna Marti.

The German and Anglo-Saxon charms to stop bleeding and protect against poisons freely mix pagan magic beliefs with Christian imagery and herbal remedies: Christ is just as likely to be invoked as a creature known as Tumbo. From the Anglo-Saxon 'Nine Herbs Charm', we hear a potent incantation against poison and boils which mentions both Christ and the Norse god Woden. In moments of crisis and pain, every helping force is welcome.

Finally, the Old Icelandic 'Mill-Song of Frodi's Slave-Girls' is part of a longer story recorded in Snorri Sturluson's 'Prose Edda' (13th century): King Frodi acquires two powerful young slave-girls, Fenia and Menia, and sets them to turning the magic millstone known as Grotti. At first they willingly grind out wealth and prosperity for Frodi, but when he refuses to let them rest, they remember their powerful ancestry (the mountain giants!) and then grind out an army which destroys their master. In this famous grinding song, we hear of their grisly exploits in human warfare, and sense the doom coming to their abuser. Here, prophecy and magic combine in a song of surreal foreboding.

Sequentia wishes to thank Swarthmore College (especially Prof. Craig Williamson and the William J. Cooper Foundation) which invited the ensemble to spend ten days in residence at the college in February 2019, preparing this program. The translations from the Old English and Icelandic projected as surtitles for Sequentia’s performance are adapted from Craig Williamson’s Complete Old English Poems (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017). Used by permission.

Details about sources and reconstructions for this program will be available on the Sequentia website beginning in mid-2020.
Sequentia is among world’s most respected and innovative ensembles for medieval music. Under the direction of Benjamin Bagby, Sequentia can look back on more than 40 years of international concert tours, a comprehensive discography of more than 30 recordings spanning the entire Middle Ages (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. The most recent CD releases include reconstructions of music from lost oral traditions of the Middle Ages (The Lost Songs Project), including 9th and 10th century Germanic songs for the Apocalypse (Fragments for the End of Time), 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 their creation of music-theater 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 9-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. Upcoming projects include a version of the 14th-century Roman de Fauvel, staged by Peter Sellars, and presented in co-production with the Metropolitan Museum/Cloisters (New York) and the Théâtre du Châtelet (Paris). After many years based in Cologne, Germany, Sequentia’s home was re-established in Paris in 2001.

www.sequentia.org
About the Sequentia Lost Songs Project:

In the mid-1980’s, Benjamin Bagby began his work on the reconstruction of the *Beowulf* epic, and since then he has been deeply involved with those European musical repertoires which have literally ‘vanished’, for which the surviving manuscripts do not provide enough information for a reliable transcription. Aided by musicologists and philologists (such as Sam Barrett and Peter Dronke of Cambridge University, Jan Ziolkowski of Harvard University, and Heimir Pálsson of Uppsala University), Bagby has built on his work with *Beowulf* to reconstruct the music of other early sources: Anglo-Saxon texts (such as *Deor* and the *Wanderer*); the deep reservoir of stories found in the Icelandic Poetic *Edda*; the Old Saxon *Heliand*; the Old High German *Muspilli*, the *Hildebrandslied* and Otfrid von Weissenburg’s *Evangelienbuch*; the Latin and German lyrics found in the 11th century manuscript known as the *Cambridge Songs*. Many of these have been recorded:

- **Words of Power**: Charms, Riddles and Elegies of the Medieval Northlands (9th-12th centuries)
  Sequentia concert program 2019
- **Boethius**: Songs of Consolation (Metra from 11th-century Canterbury)
  Sequentia concert program 2017-present; CD released in 2018.
- **Monks Singing Pagans**: medieval songs of gods, heroes and strong women (10-13th centuries)
  Sequentia concert program 2016-present
- **Frankish Phantoms**: Echoes from Carolingian Palaces (8th-10th centuries)
  Sequentia concert program 2011-present
- **Fragments for the End of Time / Endzeitfragmente**: (10th-11th centuries)
  Sequentia concert program 2005-present; CD released in 2008
- **Beowulf** (8th century)
  Benjamin Bagby solo concert 1990-present; DVD released in 2007
- **Lost Songs of a Rhineland Harper**: (9th and 10th centuries)
  Sequentia concert program 2000-2007; CD released in 2004
- **Edda**: Myths from Medieval Iceland (8th century)
  Sequentia music-theatre project 1995-1997; CD released in 1999
- **El Sabio**: Songs for King Alfonso X of Castile and Leon (1221-1284) [Andalusian kharjas]
  Sequentia concert program 1990-92; CD released in 1992

The musicians

Vocalist, harper and medievalist Benjamin Bagby, who was captivated by medieval music as a boy, has been an important figure in the field of medieval musical performance for over 35 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, Mr. Bagby is deeply involved with the solo performance of Anglo-Saxon and Germanic oral poetry: an acclaimed performance Beowulf has been heard worldwide and was released as a DVD in 2007. In 2010 he received the Howard Mayer Brown Lifetime Achievement Award from Early Music America. 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, Mr. 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 at the Sorbonne – University of Paris. He currently teaches medieval music performance at the Folkwang University of the Arts in Essen, Germany.

www.BagbyBeowulf.com

Hanna Marti is a native of Switzerland. At fifteen, she was a rock guitarist and wrote songs for the band she started. She discovered singing, taking voice lessons with Dorothea Galli (Zürich) and, after getting interested in early music, studied at the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis in Basel. During those years Hanna Marti also became acquainted with the lute – studying with Peter Croton – and discovered the medieval harp. In 2015 she completed a Masters Diploma (voice) at the Schola Cantorum as a student of Evelyn Tubb. Hanna Marti has focused most of her artistic work on medieval song. She has taken part in numerous concerts and recordings in Europe and in the United States. With her own ensemble, Moirai, she is currently performing medieval reconstructions of the Icelandic poetic Edda. Hanna Marti’s most recent solo project is a musical recitation and reconstruction of stories in Ovid’s Metamorphoses, sung in Latin and accompanied on a 12th century harp.


Royal Philharmonic Society Prize-winning composer Stef Conner draws on ancient poetry and song to create contemporary music shot through with imagined sounds of the distant past. Despite fancying herself as a female Indiana Jones as a child, she studied music at the University of York, graduating with a starred first and going on to complete a PhD in composition. In 2008, she joined the Mercury Prize-nominated folk band the Unthanks, whose honest, affecting approach to musical storytelling brought a deeper insight into the delicate relationship between words and music. Performers of her work include the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the Ligeti Quartet, Juice, Blossom Street, and the Philharmonia Orchestra. Her compositions and performances have been released on Naxos, Delphian, and Discovery Records, and are published by the University of York Music Press. She was fortunate to be the first Composer in Residence with the charity Streetwise Opera, which uses music to help homeless people make positive changes in their lives. Her current Leverhulme Early Career Fellowship at University of Huddersfield allows her to indulge her passion for ancient soundscapes in greater depth, moving beyond composition into the dangerous but enticing realm of reconstruction, with a focus on the music of Antiquity.

www.stefconner.com

Norbert Rodenkirchen, who studied flute and Baroque traverso with Günther Hoeller and Hans Martin Mueller at the Musikhochschule Koeln, has been the flute player of Sequentia since 1996 and also works regularly with the French ensemble Dialogos directed by Katarina Livjanić. With both ensembles and also with his medieval soloprograms Norbert Rodenkirchen has been invited to numerous international festivals beween Vancouver, London, Melbourne, Paris, Boston and Moscow. He is also much in demand as a composer of music for theater and film as well as a producer for CD projects. Additionally, he founded the ensemble Candens Lilium which specializes on a dialogue between medieval music and modern avantgarde. With the acclaimed singer Sabine Lutzenberger the flautist works regularly in an intensive duo combination, focussing on very rare repertoire like in their CD In forgotten tones" / Sangsprueche of Meister Frauenlob. From 2003 to 2011 Norbert Rodenkirchen was the artistic director of the concert series „Schnuetgen Konzerte – Musik des Mittelalters“ in the renowned museum for medieval art in Cologne. Currently he is a member of the board at Zentrum fuer alte Musik Koeln, ZAMUS, and has given many workshops on medieval instrumental improvisation and related topics as an unconventional lecturer and coach, f.e. at the Mozarteum Salzburg, the Schola Cantorum in Basel, the University of Oregon, Eugene, at Texas Tech in Lubbock and at the Musikhochschule in Cologne.

https://www.norbertrodenkirchen.org/