

**Semester Opening • Concert & Apéro**

September 16, 2023 • 16:00

Stampfenbachstrasse 115, 8006 Zürich

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Entry Gratis

## **Bisclavret • The Lay of the Werewolf**

A Tale in Old French by the 12th-Century Storyteller

Marie de France (ca. 1135 – ca. 1200)



**Hanna Marti • Voice & Harp**

**Walther Giger • Glissantar**

- Music re-created by Hanna Marti
- A first-time musical collaboration



## About Marie de France


The 12th century was a turbulent time, starting with the second crusade – which brought Arabic and Byzantine culture to Europe, and made more of the cultural heritage of Antiquity re-accessible. The feudal system became stronger and there was a big economic surge. This enabled big productivity in writing, now also in the vernacular languages (not only in Latin). This is the time of *chansons de gestes* (*cantus gestualis*, musical storytelling), of *encyclopaediae* and bestiaries, of adaptations of myths and stories from antiquity, and of the *fin'amor/ amour courtois* (*troubadours*, *trouvères*, and *Minnesänger*). Among the written transmission of this immensely creative time, we find the lays of the elusive storyteller Marie de France.

Little is known about Marie, who received her name «de France» because she mentions in one of her works, a book of translated fables: “*Marie ai nun, si sui de France*” (My name is Marie, I am from France). Many attempts were made to link “Marie” to a historically traceable person with that first name, but none were entirely convincing. There are several theories about her origins: All agree that, given her high education and knowledge of the poets of antiquity, she probably came from a background of nobility. Marie de France composed her verses in Anglo Norman, a dialect of Old French spoken at the English court, so it is assumed that she lived and worked there. She translated some famous Latin works, such as Aesop's fables, into Anglo-Norman verse. She writes about the origin of her twelve lays, that she has heard

them told or sung by Breton minstrels and has translated them into her own language (Anglo-Norman), so that they “may be remembered forever.” In the last lines of several of her stories, Marie mentions that a song was made from that particular story, and that it was accompanied by certain instruments. It seems therefore appropriate to imagine that, from the beginning, music was involved with the storytelling.

## Re-Creating the Music • Hanna Marti

In my creative work with Marie's lays I used her hint in the ending lines of some stories, mentioning that a musical piece was created about the story, and what it was called. There are some anonymous lays that are transmitted with music notation, found in trouvère song manuscripts, e.g. the *Chansonniere de Noailles* (F-Pnm Français 12615, created ca. 1300). One of these lays is named *Li lais du kievrefoel*, another *Li lais des amans*. These lays I used to create my melodic material for telling Marie's stories, particularly in the two cases where there exists a story by the same name (i.e. the above mentioned *Chievrefoil* and *Les deus amanz*). Working with these anonymous lay-melodies, Marie's gripping texts, and my own creative instincts and intuitions, I propose a sung re-creation of Marie's Anglo-Norman lays, a musical storytelling that does not claim to sound exactly like it would have in Marie's telling, but that wants to give voice to her work in a historically informed and inspired approach, and with the same ultimate aim as the author: *pur remembrance a tuz dis mais* (to remember them for all times).



**Hanna Marti**, who lives in northwestern Switzerland, is a musician specializing in the music of the Middle Ages and in re-imagining and re-creating old songs and stories. She holds a Master's Degree in voice from the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis. Her artistic work explores the re-composing and re-constructing of ancient songs, texts and stories, often transmitted without melodies and/or in fragmentary form. She finds creative energy in that multi-faceted area between historical information and new composition, while employing methods typical of non-notational music traditions. In her music, Hanna Marti combines her love of ancient languages with her own musical imagination, strongly influenced by medieval modes. Imagining the context of the song gone silent, she aims to bring it back to sounding life, and express to her audiences its continuing relevance to the human experience today. She was co-director of the ensemble Moirai with flutist Mara Winter from 2016 until 2022. As a member of the ensemble Sequentia, she performs internationally in various projects. She also performs as a solo artist.

- <https://www.sequentia.org>
- <https://www.hannamarti.com>

**Walther Giger** upholds a wide spectrum of engagement as a guitarist, composer, and music teacher. Both as interpreter and composer he is especially influenced by folk music, rock, jazz, explorations of contemporary music, and a strong affinity with Asian music. Many of his own works incorporate artists from a variety of disciplines (chamber music, theater, dance) and have been performed internationally; among others, the chamber opera "Yuhi no mimi – das Ohr in der Dämmerung" (The Ear at Twilight); the dance opera "La Follia" (Madness); the scenic oratory "Tsunemasa (from an 11th Century Noh play);" and the Vietnamese song cycle, "Say Trang – Monddrunken" (Moon Drunk). For this first-time collaboration with Hanna Marti, Walther Giger contributes a backdrop to the dramatic narrative of "Bisclavret" (The Werewolf), thus providing a contrasting, modern sound formed by his own compositions, interjections, and interludes. • <https://www.walthergiger.ch>



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