

Three Beguine Motets

by Hadewijch von Brabant, Mechtild von Magdeburg

© Beatrijs von Nazareth ~ for a cappella SsAaTtBb

Maxwell Steer

The Beguines flourished for over a 100 years from the later 12thC across the whole german-speaking world. Arising spontaneously from the preaching of a certain Lambert 'le bégue' (about whom nothing more is known than his nickname 'the stammerer') the Beguine movement was one of deeply grounded mysticism, in character very similar to Sufism, yet anticipating it by a couple of centuries. Perhaps the association the Cole Porter song derives from a practice of spiritual dancing, for which the Sufis and the Shakers were also known?

Beguines were female but there was an equivalent male movement known as Beghards. The followers of le bégue lived in independent cooperatively-run communities – and the movement became so popular that at one point it was said that every town in the Rhine valley had more than one 'beguinage'. Of their lifestyle a later Bishop of Antwerp wrote: "They preferred to remain chaste perpetually than to vow perpetual chastity. Likewise they were eager to obey than to vow obedience, to cultivate poverty ... than to abandon everything, [that] they might be kinder to the poor."

Being a spontaneous self-regulating movement in a totalitarian age, it was inevitable that if conflict with the Catholic hierarchy did not arise it would be provoked. In 1311 the Council of Vienne declared the Beguines heretical and after some prominent members were burned at the stake the movement ebbed away, tho the Bishop of Antwerp's testimony indicates that their influence, if not their communities, must have persisted.

The first two writers are known only by their Christian names and towns of origin. Mechtild lived from c1212-c1282, while the dates of Hadewijch (whom I surmise is pronounced Haddevyqh) are unknown. The third, also from Brabant, we know more about, because Beatrijs later entered the Cistercian order, eventually becoming Prioress of the convent of Our Lady of Nazareth at Lier. All three were educated, and their studies may well have been conducted within the Beguine movement, as Beatrijs's were, for women's education was just one of the many progressive ideals the movement embodied. Some of the sentiments of these poems remain as startling today as they must have been when first written.

I came across these words in a book about mediæval women mystics called *Visions & Longings* by Monica Furlong, and the translations, which I have adapted, may be her own. To me, the Beguines are a fascinating example of an enormous popular spiritual network which has been rendered all but invisible to history because it was comprised of women and thus was irrelevant to the endless hierarchical power struggles which preoccupy historians. How wonderful, then, to discover that, just as nowadays, women were quietly and beautifully making the world go round while men theologised and pontificated and excommunicated and murdered each other on conceptual pretexts. The Beguines stand alongside Hildegard of Bingen and Clare of Assisi showing that women of conscience *could* have a distinct voice, even in a corrupt patriarchal era.

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The Immensity of Love

by Beatrijs von Nazareth (fl. 1200-1268)

SsAaTtBb

Maxwell Steer

♩ = 72 *Mysterioso*

Soprano
Just as the fish swims

Alto
(8va bassa)
Just as the fish swims in the vast-ness of the

Tenor
Just as the fish swims in the vast-ness of the

Bass
Just as the

Sop
in the vast o-cean & rests

Alto
o-cean & rests

Ten
o-cean & rests

Bass
o-cean rest

Sop in the deep, & as the

Alto in the deep, & as the

Ten in the deep, & as the

Bass in the deep, & the

Sop ¹³ bird bold- ly soars in the heit

Alto bird bold- ly soars in the heit

Ten bird bold- ly soars in the heit

Bass bird bold- ly soars in the heit

Sop ¹⁷ in the heit & vast- ness of the air,

Alto in the heit & vast- ness of air,

Ten in the heit & vast- ness of air,

Bass in the heit & vast- ness of air,

22 $\text{♩} = 70$ *Allarg al fine*

Sop in the same

Alto in the same way

Ten in the same way

Bass in the

26 $\text{♩} = 68$

Sop way we feel our spi-rits roam

Alto we feel our spir'ts roam

Ten we feel our spir'ts roam

Bass way we feel our spir'ts roam

30 $\text{♩} = 65$ $\text{♩} = 58$

Sop free throu the heits & depths

Alto free throu the heits & depths

Ten throu heits & depths

Bass free throu heits & depths

33 *ritenuto* fff $\text{♩} = 55$ *ritenuto* $\text{♩} = 46$

Sop of the imm- ense o- ceans of love.

Alto of the imm- ense o- ceans of love.

Ten of the imm- ense o- ceans of love.

Bass of imm- ense o- ceans of love.

38 $\text{♩} = 37$

Sop of love.

Alto of love.

Ten o- ceans of love.

Bass o- ceans of love.

2'20"

composed & computerized 0915-1400 6 xi 2003

A Dialog twixt the Soul & God

by Mechtild von Magdeburg (c1212-c1282)

SsAaTtBb

Maxwell Steer

=55 *The Soul Addresses God:*

Soprano *mf* My des- i- re, My flow- ing

Alto *mp* Lord, you are my lov- er, My des- i- re, My flow- ing

Tenor *mp* Lord, lov- er, My des- i- re, My flow- ing

Bass *mp* Lord, lov- er, My des- i- re, My flow- ing

Trattenuto

Sop *mf* wet- ness, My sun: I

Alto *mf* wet- ness, My sun: I'm

Ten *f* wet- ness, My sun: I'm

Bass wet- ness, My sun: I'm

Calando

♩ = 82 How God Answers

Sop am your re- flex- ion. It is my nat- ure that
Alto your re- flex- ion. It is my nat- ure that
Ten your re- flex- ion. It is my nat- ure that
Bass your re- flex- ion. It is my nat- ure that

Sop makes me love you con- stant- ly, For I am love its- elf.
Alto makes love, For I am love.
Ten makes love, For I am love.
Bass makes love, For I am love.

Sop It is my long- ing that gives my love in- ten- si- ty, For love's
Alto It is my long- ing that gives love, For love is
Ten It is my long- ing that gives love, For love's
Bass It is my long- ing that gives love, For love's

21

Sop from heart ----- It's my e- ter- ni-

Alto from my heart It is my e- ter- ni-

Ten from heart It is my e- ter- ni-

Bass from heart It's my e-

27

Sop ty ni- ty that makes me love

Alto ty that makes me love

Ten ty that makes me love

Bass tern- i- ty that makes me love

33 **Trattenuto Allarg molto**

Sop for ev- er, For I have no end.

Alto for ev- er, For I have no end.

Ten for ev- er, For I have no end.

Bass for I've no

end. 27 x 2003
1'50"

Two Poems

by Hadewijch van Brabant (mid 13th C)
& Mechtild von Magdeburg (c1212-c1282)
SsAaTtBb

Maxwell Steer

Soprano $\text{♩} = 72$ *Flowing rubato* *mf*

From the beg- inn- ing love ful- filled me.

Alto *mp*

From the beg- inn- ing love ful- filled me.

Tenor *mp*

From the beg- inn- ing love ful- filled me.

Bass *mp*

From the beg- inn- ing love ful- filled me.

Sop *p*

Yet when Love first spoke to me of

Alto *mf*

Yet when Love first spoke to me of

Ten *mf*

Yet when Love first spoke to me of

Bass *p*

Yet when Love spoke of

Sop *mf* love – how I laughed at her in re-

Alto how I laughed in re-

Ten love – how I laughed in re-

Bass *mf* love – how I laughed in re-

Sop *mf* ply! But then she made me

Alto *mf* ply! But then she made me

Ten *mf* ply! But then she made me

Bass *mf* ply! But then she made

Sop *f* like the haz- el trees, which bloss- om *mf*

Alto *f* like haz- el trees, which bloss- om *mf*

Ten *f* like the haz- el trees, which bloss- om *mf*

Bass *f* me like the haz- el trees, which bloss- om *mf*

18 *mp* *ritenuto*

Sop — earl- y in the dark seas- on,

Alto *f* earl- y in the dark seas- on,

Ten 8 earl- y in the dark seas- on,

Bass earl- y in the seas- on,

24 *larghetto* *mp*

Sop & bear fruit slow- ly.

Alto *mf* & bear fruit slow- ly.

Ten 8 & bear fruit slow- ly.

Bass & bear fruit slow- ly.

30 *mp* ♩ = 90 ah...

Sop And God said to the soul: I des- ired you

Alto *p* And soul: I des- ired you

Ten *mf* And God said to the soul: I des- ired you

Bass *mf* And God said to the soul: I des- ired you

37

Sop
fore the world be- gan.

Alto
be- fore the world be- gan.

Ten
be- fore the world be- gan. I -----

Bass
be- fore the world be- ga. I -----

f

41

Sop
ff I des- ire you now as

Alto
ff I des- ire you now as

Ten
fff des- ire you now as

Bass
fff des- ire you now as

45

Sop
you des- ire me; And

Alto
you des- ire me; And where the des-

Ten
you des- ire me; where the des- ire

Bass
you des- ire me; where the des- ire

50 *Allargando* f =72

Sop come to- geth- er there their

Alto ires of two come to- geth- er there their *ff*

Ten come to- geth- er there *f*

Bass of two come there *f*

55 *ritenuto* *tempo 1*

Sop love is per- fect-

Alto love so there their love is per- fect- ed.

Ten *f* love, so there their love is per- fect-

Bass love, so there their love is per- fect-

59 \checkmark

Sop ed - per- fect- ed.

Alto (2°) per- fect- ed.

Ten ed - is per- fect- ed.

Bass ed - is per- fect- ed.