

## *Il Milione* alias *the Book of Marvels of the World*, Musical journey on the traces of Marco Polo



"Nobilis vir Marchus Paulo Millioni", as he was defined in a document of 1305, Marco Polo was born in Venice in 1254. In 1269 his father Nicolo and his uncle Matteo, returning from their first long journey to the Far East, found Marco fifteen years old and motherless. Two years later, in the summer they left again all together from Venice, reaching the Tartar court of Kublai Kan (called Great Khan) in May 1275, after a long journey by sea to Acre (Historical Palestine) and by land through Baghdad, and then Persia from there through all of Central Asia. To his court the young Marco was welcomed with honours and was commissioned to conduct diplomatic and administrative activities for which he continues to travel. Only in 1292 did the three Venetians restart back home, wherethey arrived in 1295. Three years later, taken prisoner by the Genovese during the battle at sea in Korcula (7 September 1298), Marco remained for one year in the prisons ofGenova, where he met Rustichello da Pisa. He entrusts the story of his journey to this poet, and in the same year the book "*Le Divisament dou monde*" (The Description of the World) was compiled, in a French language full of Italianisms and Venetianisms. After the first edition, there followed 150 copies and manuscript rearrangements in various languages, such as the *French Livre des Merveilles* (The Book of Wonders), wonderfully illuminated, before being printed in countless editions. After the peace between the two republics, Marco Polo went back to Venice in 1299, married, had three daughters and took care of his business until 1324, when he dictated his will and died.

This in brief is the story of a merchant and adventurer who spent his youth and his adulthood travelling through the Middle East and Central Asia until reaching China. He became so famous, unlike many others who had dared to face long and dangerous journeys for commercial purposes, because he left a rich documentation of this extraordinary life experience, a story that, filtered by the skillful pen of a poet of *Chanson de Geste* like Rustichello Da Pisa, alternated narrative descriptions of places to historical events and legends. The manners and traditions of the different regions that the protagonist goes through during his travels are described with scientific

exactitude, while giving voice to the “marvellous” in explaining the magnificence, unparalleled in the West, of the court of the Great Khan, but also the description of animals that seem to come from the "Fantastic Middle Ages" described by Jurgis Baltrušaitis. “Wonderful and daily life, history and legend, saints and robbers, kings and subjects were in a prodigious contiguity relationship with the traveler who never dealt with inaccessible practical and cultural barriers. " Reading this extraordinary work, far more known at the time of its protagonist – for his role of "guide" to the merchant in the lands of the East – than today, we had the idea of entrusting to a narrating voice the reading of some stages of the fantastic journey of Marco Polo, to build a sort of soundtrack where laReverdie provides sound for the story.

The point of view of Marco Polo, Venetian man, as well as the one of the chivalry poet Rustichello, tell of a wonderful and exotic world with a logic and a style deeply attached to the medieval Western world, while the music commenting upon the narration comes from the Venetian and medieval French world. But the atmosphere of the place, the colors, the scents, are evoked by the improvisations played by two musicians specialized in Oriental repertoire, a voiced counterpart that inevitably throws the listener into that wonderful and remote world, with the irresistible charm that so deeply impressed Marco and Rustichello and that still seduces audiences today. The repertoire of eastern music tradition performed by Ourania Lampropoulou (santour) and Elena Baldassarri (table) that fits into the story together with the medieval western repertoire, joins the richness of the middle eastern music traditions with the rhythms of the Indian classical music, towards the reconstruction of sound suggestions tried by Marco Polo along the **Silk Road**.

Anonimo italiano  
XIV sec. *Trotto* - danza  
London, British Library, MS. Add. 29987

*Lianohortaroudia* (traditional tune from Thrace)

*Hassapiko Politiko* (traditional tune from Istanbul)

Anonimo spagnolo  
XIV sec. *Stella splendens* – virelai  
Montserrat, Biblioteca del Monasterio 1 (Llibre Vermell)

*Improvisation in mode Kürdi*

Anonimo francese  
fine XIII sec. *Huic placuit Magi* - mottetto  
Montpellier, Bibl. Fac. Med., MS H 196

*Traditional Lullaby from Asia Minor*

Johannes Symonis Hasprois  
(1378-1428) *Puisque je suis fumeux* - ballade  
Chantilly, Bibliotheque du Musee Conde, MS 564

*Armenian tune Nubar Nubar*

Anonimo italiano  
XIV sec. *Belicha* - danza  
London, British Library, MS. Add. 29987

Jacopo da Bologna  
fl. 1340-60 *Per sparverare* - caccia  
Firenze, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Panciatichiano 26

Anonimo francese XIV sec.	<i>Pantheon abluitur/Apollinis eclipsatur/Zodiacum signis</i> - mottetto Strasbourg, Bibliothèque Municipale, 222 C. 22
Anonimo Italiano XIV sec.	<i>Salterello</i> - danza London, British Library, MS. Add. 29987
Anonimo italiano XIII sec.	<i>Benedicti e llaudati</i> - lauda Cortona, Biblioteca Comunale e dell'Accademia Etrusca, MS 91
Anonimo francese fine XIII sec.	<i>Pange melos</i> - conductus Firenze, Biblioteca Laurenziana, MS Pluteus 29.1
Anonimo spagnolo. XII sec.	<i>Congaudeant Catholici</i> – conductus Santiago de Compostela, Catedral Metropolitan, Codex Calixtinus
<b>improvisation in mode Hüseyini</b>	
Anonimo francese fine XIII sec.	<i>S'on me regarde / Prennés i garde / Hé mi enfant</i> – mottetto Montpellier, Université Faculté des Mediciens, MS H196
<b>Tune from the Black Sea</b>	
Johannes Ciconia c1370-1412	<i>Venecie mundi splendor</i> - mottetto Bologna, Museo Internazionale e Biblioteca della Musica, MS Q15

## laReverdie

Claudia Caffagni, voice, lute, bells  
 Livia Caffagni, voice, vielle, recorders  
 Elisabetta de Mircovich, voice, vielle, rebec, hurdy-gurdy  
 Matteo Zenatti, narrator, voice, harp, percussions

With:

Elena Baldassarri, tabla  
 Ourania Lampropoulou - santour



