



ICTUS

THE BOOK OF WOMEN is an ambitious, historical and speculative project,

a combination of medieval music for seven female voices,

alongside a new work for four amplified vocal bodies, chamber ensemble and electronic sounds, inspired by the Mahabharata, a commission to Riccardo Nova.

The premiere will take place in August 2025 at the Ma Early Music Festival in Bruges.

THE BOOK  
OF WOMEN



## MUSIC

**Perotin**, *Beata Viscera* (ca 1200)

Works from **Cantigas de Santa María** (ca 1220-1280)

Works from **Llibre Vermell de Montserrat** (ca 1399)

Works from the **Cyprus Manuscript** (ca 1420),

for seven female voices

**Riccardo Nova**, *The book of women / Stri parvam* (2025)

for four female voices (an Indian Carnatic singer and three Irini singers) and ensemble,

world premiere

## CAST

Lila Hajosi, conductor

Varijashree Venugopal, voice

Irini ensemble: six voices

Ictus ensemble: gut string trio (baroque violin, viola d'amore and viola da gamba), microtonal synthesizer and percussion

## PRODUCTION

Production: Ictus

Co-Production: Ma Festival

## EMPRESS OF HELL

Lila Hajosi's long-standing objective is to explore the theme of feminine power in the late Middle Ages, specifically during the Gothic period. The aim is to evoke the power of Mary\*, the courage of women and all the miracles performed by the (women) saints. The authentic image that Lila has put forward is marvellous (page 2 of this folder): the Virgin known as *plena di grazia*, who puts her fist in the Devil's mouth:



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*(With the cult of Mary on the rise, feast days and ceremonies devoted to the Virgin multiplied. She was adored in courtly love poetry, as fertility symbol recalling pagan rites, as Queen of Heaven, but also, largely forgotten now, as the Empress of Hell, whose pity could rescue even the murkiest of sinners from eternal damnation. While in theology Mary only brings about her salvations through intercession with Christ, in practice, myriad miracle stories circulating Europe between the 13th and the 15th centuries starred her as an autonomous all-powerful sorceress dominating angels and devils alike. The image of an all-powerful Mary rescuing sinners without Christ by her side wasn't obvious in the Christian tradition. Even though her sway over hell relied on her awe-inspiring sinless purity, Mary's autonomy as Empress of Hell was troubling to the Council of the Catholic Church and eventually led to a ban on this imagery.)*

## MEDIEVAL REPERTOIRE & BODY PERCUSSION

Lila Hajosi has already proved with her three outstanding CDs (listen to *Printemps Sacré! Now!*) that she knows how to put together a program that is both heterogeneous and unified, assembled with intelligence and fervor.

It won't be a mass at the *Ecole des Enfants de Marie*, this is guaranteed! Instead, it's going to be loud, very loud: seven passionate singers with body percussion in the mix.

Yulika Sève



### PEROTIN: BEATA VISCERA

*The first verse's explicit invocation of Mary's flesh (beata viscera translates to "blessed flesh") is intriguing when read against the negation of the sensuous, female body in the medieval church. Inspired by the 'fleshiness' of Pérotin's conductus, Hajosi and her Irini singers will turn that ascetic medieval ideal inside out. They perform the song with body percussion, letting the creative strength of their bodies speak, perhaps summoning a band of frenzied Bacchae rather than the more familiar image of the virgin who is "nothing but ears, with just a bit of mouth, eyes and as much hand and leg as is needed to reach out and follow after Him", to borrow words from feminist intellectual Luce Irigaray.*

### LLIBRE VERMELL DE MONTSERRAT

*Some parts of this work, like "Cuncti simus concanentes", have a tantalizing dance-like quality. A small note accompanying the manuscript's pieces suggests that the atmosphere among the streetwise visitors gathered at the shrine must have been quite exuberant: "Pilgrims who want to sing and dance should only sing chaste and devout songs. Therefore, some are written here." One can only imagine what went on before the arrival of these devout songs.*

### CYPRUS MANUSCRIPT

*Rarely performed early 15th century collection, destined for the French court.*

## NEW COMMISSION

Then there is the new commission by Riccardo Nova for Indian singer Varijashree Venugopal, three Irini singers, and chamber music ensemble\*.

After some very sulphurous, almost "noise" episodes, Nova is now returning to the counterpoint of his youth. He brings forth his 'hands-on' knowledge of South Indian carnatic music with its isometric rhythms, refined intonation and trance atmosphere. His latest productions are magnificent: they're *alta maturità*. Nova wants to work on the 'female' scenes from the Mahabharata\*\*.

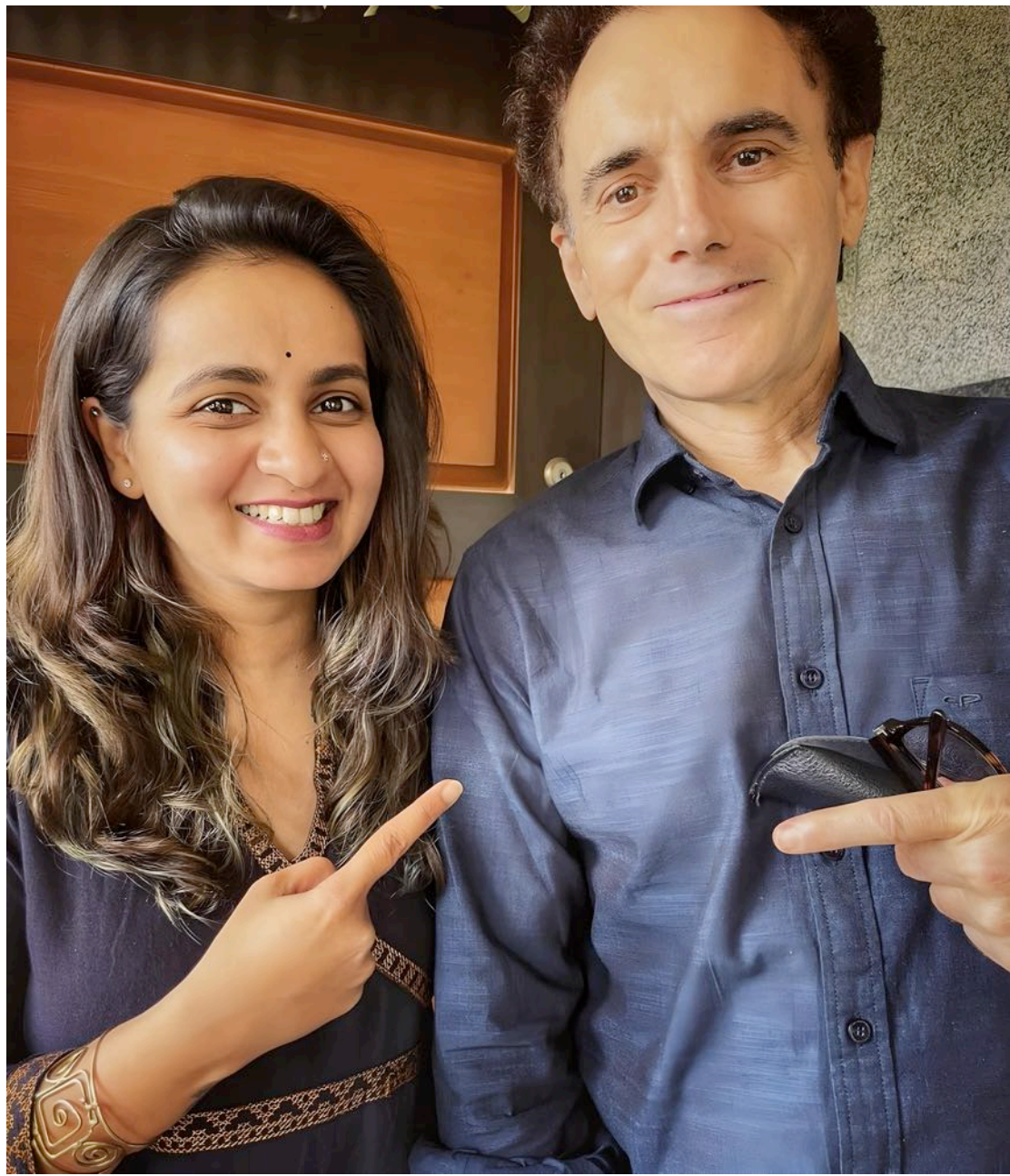
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The instrumental setup chosen by Riccardo: gut string trio (baroque violin, viola d'amore and viola da gamba), microtonal synthesiser and percussion

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Riccardo Nova's first idea was to write a great scene of deploratio (a *threnody*): the women are searching for traces of fathers and husbands on the battlefield after the battle. After a fascinating and funny conversation with Lila Hajosi ("Mmmh... I prefer warriors to weeping women!"), Riccardo chose to treat another scene from the Mahabharata: thanks to a magic mantra, Princess Kunti takes power over the male gods. (OUCH!)

Varijashree Venugopal  
with Riccardo Nova →



**VENUGOPAL,  
AZOULAY  
and all others**

So we'll be joined by Varijashree Venugopal, an extraordinary singer already featured in Nova's *Mantras, Fights and Threnody*, created in 2023 by MusikFabrik with Peter Rundel.

In addition to his incredibly singular voice, Riccardo Nova will be writing for three Irini singers, including the very special Julie Azoulay. Julie's particular background brings her closer to Indian vocal practices in many respects (portamento, for example).

Julie Azoulay →

The intuition for the project is strong and generates a lot of energy on all sides. There's the idea of an organic encounter between past and present, Europe and 'its Others', through the presentation of femininity as power. There's also the notion of transcendental, timeless feminism, that deserves to be investigated by the contemporaries: an investigation at the level of ideas, but also at the level of affects and passions.





Lila Hajosi ↑

Ictus ↓





## CONTACT

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▶ [complete programme notes](#)

▶ [ensembleirini.com](http://ensembleirini.com)

▶ [ictus.be](http://ictus.be)

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