



## MUSIC FOR THE MYSTERIES

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### NORDIC-BALTIC-BRITISH MELANGELL PROJECT - IDEA, PROCESS, VISION

The production THE TESTIMONY OF MELANGELL explores boarderlines between concert and ritual. As total art, it includes music and visual art, integrating performers as well as audience in a visual setting. Through a network of organisers it is to be staged firstly in Nordic & Baltic countries, secondly on the British Isles, at each venue with participation of a local choir and an actress in collaboration with Ensemble Music for the Mysteries.

#### PROCESS

- 1a. Choreographer Sara Ekman (S), scenographer Eva Sommestad Holten (S) and composer Hanne Tofte Jespersen (DK) together with Music for the Mysteries (DK) develop a choreography for the 1 hour composition "The Testimony of Melangell" which integrates ensemble, choir singers and audience in visual artist Alison Michell's (UK/DK) visual setting "The Magical Clearing".
- 1b. Music for the Mysteries (MftM) invites festivals and cultural agencies into a network of participants and organisers, with the objective of staging the production in each region / country. For each venue / region / country, its co-organisers identify a choir (12-20 singers) to participate.
2. Each participating choir sends its choir leader and 2-3 of its singers to participate in joint workshop in DK with ensemble MftM incl. actress Annika Hoydal (DK/FO) and choreographer Sara Ekman.
3. The workshop concludes with a performance (28.10.12) for which the network of co-organisers are invited, together with actresses - one from each country. The role of the actress is the one of storyteller, reciting extracts of author Mike Harris' manus (UK), integrated into the composition, translated to mother tongue of each country. A follow up seminar for organisers and participating artists is held (29.10.12)
4. Each choir leader subsequently takes up repetition with their own choir.
5. The project tours in each country. Ensemble MftM rehearses and performs with the participating local choir and actress in venues defined by the network partners.  
The visual setting is in each case adjusted by the scenographer to fit the various venue.

#### INFO ON THE TESTIMONY OF MELANGELL

(Danish) [www.musicforthemysteries.org/melangell\\_info.html](http://www.musicforthemysteries.org/melangell_info.html)

(English) [www.musicforthemysteries.org/melangell\\_info-UK.html](http://www.musicforthemysteries.org/melangell_info-UK.html)

#### summary:

4 singers, 4 musicians and 1 actress perform in an artwork, and the audience is seated in the same artwork, with choir singers placed right behind audience. The music as well as the visual setting stage the tale of the female hermit and mystic Melangell. She lived in wild nature around 500 AD, in a remote valley in Wales. Later ages made her saint. Her name means "honey-angel".

#### Ensemble Music for the Mysteries:

Agnethe Christensen, mezzo-alto - *Melangell*  
Teit Kanstrup, bass-baritone - *Prince of Brochwell*  
Bente Vist, soprano; Christian Berg, tenor  
Kuno Kjærbye, violin; Ida Bach Jensen, contrabass  
Anders Hvidberg-Hansen, percussion  
Hanne Tofte Jespersen, piano, vocal.



The tale of Melangell is like a celtic knotwork - labyrinthine circular rather than linear. The composer has unfolded its dramaturgy into a composition in 14 movements for 5 voices (SAATB), violin, contrabass, piano, percussion and recital; dur: 1 hour. [LISTEN](#)

*The magical clearing* by Alison Michell is a combined scenography and performance ground: An open circular "room-in-the-room" squared in four as a Celtic cross. Audience is seated in two opposite sections, close to the musicians who perform in the two other sections. In the centre, glass drops reach from the ceiling down to an iron dish with water and lights. [VIDEO..](#)



## WHY MAKE A WELSH LEGEND the THEME OF A NORDIC-BALTIC PROJECT?

The project draws inspiration from a vision of the seas between the Nordic, the Baltic countries and the British Isles as bridges rather than separations:

Melangell is both a historical and a mythic female figure. She is associated with a shrine in the highlands of Northern Wales where later ages made her a saint and built a small church. The legends about Mel-angell / The Honey Angel are wellknown locally. With one leg in Celtic heritage and the other in early Christian she is of a time when the two were still closely related. In a landscape often hidden in mist like the islands of the North Atlantic, she settled and founded a place of peace and sanctuary which is still visited by local people and travellers, pilgrims as well as tourists.

Has this hermit and mystic from 500 AD anything to tell modern man and woman? In 1989 she spoke at least this much to the author Mike Harris who were sitting on the doorstep of the small church that, when returned home, he immediately found himself writing down her tale as had it been told by Melangell herself:

*Who knows where I come from?  
who am I or what I am?  
I am old and I am young.  
I am the wild woman older than time.....*

The introduction reaches both across ages and out of time. The Melangell legends have her as part of a threefold female deity which under different names is part of a common cultural heritage in the Nordic and Baltic Countries as well as on the British Isles - norms in Nordic mythology, weird sisters in Shakespeare, Bridget/ Brigid in Ireland, Wales.....:

*I came over the mist cloaked water in fulfillment of some ancient wish....  
On that morning I was all women that ever came from the Western Sea.  
I was Venus, I was Bridget, I was you....*

In Western mythology, the Western Sea holds what lies beyond time. In present times ancestral tracks and trails in the landscapes as well as numerous archaeological finds remind of the fact that the seas inbetween us - the North Atlantic, the North Sea, the Baltic Sea - were bridges rather than separations.

The Testimony of Melangell as artistic production explores the bridges in our inner landscapes.

For the composer, an inspiring encounter with Harris' recreation has led to a music which according to one reviewer is "mystery music in modern shape", to another creates "a condensed atmosphere of almost ritual magic" and concurrently is seen as making up an own perfect universe capturing its audience.

The Testimony of Melangell as a "total art production" places both audience and performers in a contemporary visual artist's version of Melangell's valley. The room-in-the-room is created on basis of the same manuscript as is also set to music, in a parallel creative process.

The boarderlines between concert and ritual are explored by:

- placing both audience and performers in a circular "magical clearing" so that the performance unfolds in the very artwork in which both parties find themselves;
- including among the performers local choir singers affiliated with the various Nordic/ Baltic / British Isles performance grounds / cultural organisers; the choir singers will be placed immediately behind audience;
- translating the recited extracts from the English manus into the various languages and having them performed by actors from each country / region, in their own language;
- creating a choreography in which singers and musicians move in the setting according to the dramaturgy which the music unfolds;
- leaving the room-in-the-room open to audience inbetween performances.