

About the Program

The 17th century in France was a century of dance. Would this still have been the case without the influence of Spain? When he married the Spanish Infanta Anne of Austria, Louis XIII not only infused the royal line with Spanish blood through his son Louis XIV, he also brought *folias*, *sarabandas*, *españolas* and *españoletas* north of the Pyrenees. Illustrious strolling players, the two monarchs ushered in a golden age of ballet in which Spanish dances and motives had a role to play. When Briceño wasn't asked to produce an aria, Le Bailly was called on to invent a *Locura* for the *Ballet de la Folie*. Guest musicians or characters in royal spectacles, the Spanish took their place in the salons of the day. The city, in imitation of the court, demanded its share of this Spanish magic, which included vocal and instrumental music, and contemporary concerts might feature the *tono humano* rather than the *air de cour* or the guitar rather than the lute. With his audiences under the spell of Spanish poet Calderón, composer Moulinié swallowed his French pride and tried his hand at the style then in vogue with *El baxtel esta en la playa*.

Served by the ardour of its songs and the witticisms innate to its language, the Spanish influence was soon being felt in large swathes of the French musical arts. From the palace to the street, through a multitude of genres and imaginary scenes, the same spirit haunted its sounds: the beat of the dance, relentless like the Andalusian sun, bewitching like madness.

Following the success of its CD and concerts devoted to Luis de Briceño, Le Poème Harmonique has taken its Spanish journey along a festive and choreographic path. Vincent Dumestre associates the guitar and vocals with a broad range of percussion instruments, infusing existing works with new tones and the freshness of improvisation.

About the Artists

Formed in 1998, Le Poème Harmonique is a group of soloists, gathered around its artistic director Vincent Dumestre. Its artistic activity, centered on vocal and instrumental music of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, is regularly enriched by interaction with other disciplines. This, together with real teamwork – working together as a company – is Le Poème Harmonique's hallmark in Baroque performance today.

Actors, dancers, circus artists and puppeteers join its singers and musicians in large-scale stage productions such as *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* (a comédie-ballet by Molière and Lully; stage director Benjamin Lazar) and *Baroque Carnival* (directed by Cécile Roussat) or more recently Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* (directed by Cécile Roussat and Julien Lubek). Although Poème Harmonique has performed concerts across France and in most of the world's major capitals, it has forged a special relationship with Normandy, where it gives a quarter of its performances.

The ensemble's recordings for the Alpha label have met with rare public success: Grand Prix de l'Académie Charles Cros, the Diapason d'Or, recommendations from Opéra International, Classica, Le Monde de la Musique, a Prelude Classical Award in 2003, the Antonio Vivaldi International Award (Cini Foundation, Venice), the Caecilia Press Prize, and others.