

THE TORONTO CONSORT

The Marco Polo Project Teacher Resource

INTRODUCTION

What if Marco Polo (the famous medieval merchant who traveled across Asia to Cathay, and then back to his native Venice, Italy) had carried an iPod and kept a diary of the musical worlds he encountered? Inspired by this idea, Toronto Consort Artistic Director **David Fallis** has assembled the ultimate east-meets-west musical travelogue!

This 50-minute concert & lecture provides an introduction to medieval and renaissance music from Italy and the music found in some of the places Marco Polo visited. The Consort is joined by **Wen Zhao**, a virtuosa player of the Chinese lute known as the pipa, and by **Alan Gasser**, an expert in the art of traditional Georgian singing. *The Marco Polo Project* is a creative re-imagining of the extraordinary music he would have heard from other cultures, and includes a script with selected readings from *The Travels of Marco Polo*, the Venetian's own account of his adventures.

The impetus for this education concert came from the fact that students in Toronto today come from all around the world, and represent a wide range of cultures and musical backgrounds. The Consort wanted a way to connect early music with these other musical traditions. Marco Polo is a perfect vehicle, because he travelled so extensively through the Middle East and southern Russia to China. Students are invited to follow Marco Polo's travels, with an emphasis on the instruments and the singing style of the different cultures he might have encountered on his journey.

Explore examples of Chinese musical styles and instruments and traditional Georgian music, which features incredible vocal gymnastics, including nimble counterpoint and strident dissonant chord tunings. Around these pieces from Georgia and China, the Toronto Consort plays examples of the lively dances and haunting *laude* (Italian spiritual songs) which would have been known by Marco Polo and his family.

ABOUT THE TORONTO CONSORT

The Toronto Consort is Canada's leading ensemble specializing in the music of the Middle Ages, Renaissance and Early Baroque — roughly 1200 to 1675. Founded in 1972, The Toronto Consort was one of the city's first professional period music ensembles. Over the past four decades, the Toronto Consort has continued to expand listeners' appreciation through inventive programming that breathes life into period music. The ensemble has become internationally recognized for its excellence in live and recorded period music, and has collaborated on a number of film and television projects including Atom Egoyan's *The Sweet Hereafter* and three Showtime series, *The Tudors*, *The Vikings* and *The Borgias*.

For more information:

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The Toronto Consort gratefully acknowledges the support of the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, and the Toronto Arts Council.

TEACHER RESOURCE

The Marco Polo Project Teacher Resource is divided into two parts:

- Marco Polo Resources (for various subject areas)
- Early Music Resources (for music classes)

Marco Polo Resources

1) Timeline Activity

- Using the clues provided, students construct a timeline of significant events in the life of Marco Polo, either in groups of 10 or as an individual exercise.

2) Timeline Worksheet

- This one-page summary of Marco Polo's life is both review of the Timeline Activity and preparation for the Marco Polo Quiz.

3) Quiz: Marco Polo

- The quiz is available in two formats: online (at TorontoConsort.org) or as a student handout.

Early Music Resources

1) Listening Activity

- This outline provides contextual information and text translation of The Toronto Consort's recording of "*Ben pòde Santa Maria*" (available online at TorontoConsort.org)

2) Listening Worksheet

- The Listening Worksheet is a framework for analysis of the musical elements in this recording. It is a tool to guide the listening experience, and can be used by students individually and/or for classroom discussion.

3) Group Listening Activity

- This collaborative extension activity is an opportunity for students to explore the musical elements of texture, dynamics and tempo in relation to the text of "*Ben pòde Santa Maria*."

4) Quiz: Early Instruments

- After attending *The Marco Polo Project*, students can test their knowledge of early instruments with this quiz. It is available in two formats: online (at TorontoConsort.org) or as a student handout.

Additional Resources

Additional teacher resources, including links to relevant websites and answer keys for the worksheets and quizzes, are available on pages 12-17.

Timeline Activity

The boxes below can be cut out and rearranged to create the correct timeline of Marco Polo's life. This exercise can be organized as a group activity (in groups of 10, students each receive one piece of the timeline, allowing them to collaboratively form a line in the correct order) or as an individual exercise. Upon completion of the timeline, this information can be used to complete the Timeline Worksheet.

After 24 long years of travelling the world, from their brief stop in Jerusalem to their long stay in the Mongol empire, the Polos finally return home to find political unrest in Italy.

Only 2 years after meeting his father and uncle, Marco joins them on a journey. One of their first stops is Jerusalem, where they may have heard the ancient Georgians singing 2 or more melodic lines simultaneously – known as *polyphonic* music.

Recent scholarship suggests that although there is some exaggeration in the book written by Polo and Rustichello, there is also much corroboration of the events and locations described. Today, *The Travels of Marco Polo* continues to captivate and delight scholars and artists alike!

In 1254, Marco Polo is born in Venice, Italy, into a family of merchants. Around this time, Marco's father (Niccolo) and uncle (Maffeo) set off on their first voyage to the Mongol empire.

Marco Polo dies in Venice, Italy, at 69 years of age. He is survived by his wife, Donata, and three daughters.

Marco Polo is released from prison in 1299, not because the ransom was paid, but by the terms of a peace treaty.

The Polo brothers leave the Mongol court, after working for the Mongol emperor Genghis Khan, and return to Italy. Upon arriving in Venice, they meet 15-year-old Marco for the first time.

The rivalry between two major Italian city states, Venice and Genoa, has resulted in political unrest. Marco is captured by the Genoese during a sea battle between the two powers, and is held for ransom.

Marco spends 4 years in a Genoese prison, and while there, dictates the story of his travels to a fellow inmate, Rustichello. Although the original manuscript of this book has been lost, it was a sensation – with various versions appearing with many titles, in many diverse languages.

The Polos arrive at the Mongol court and meet the new emperor Kublai Khan. The Khan is impressed by Marco, and he sends the young man on a number of missions, including some to China. While in China, Marco may have encountered music being played on the lute-like traditional Chinese instrument, the pipa.

Timeline Worksheet

In what order did the following events occur? Please number each from 1 – 10.

_____ After 24 long years of travelling the world, from their brief stop in Jerusalem to their long stay in the Mongol empire, the Polos finally return home to find political unrest in Italy.

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_____ Marco Polo dies in Venice, Italy at 69 years of age. He is survived by his wife, Donata, and three daughters.

QUIZ: Marco Polo

1. Where was Marco Polo was born in 1254?

- A) Jerusalem
- B) Georgia
- C) Scarborough
- D) Venice

2. The members of the Polo family shared which occupation?

- A) Merchants
- B) Plumbers
- C) Musicians
- D) Priests

3. Which of the following places did the Polos visit on their journey?

- A) Jerusalem.
- B) Turkey.
- C) Georgia.
- D) All of the above.

4. While in the region of Georgia, Marco Polo probably heard which style of Georgian liturgical (religious) music?

- A) Hip-hop
- B) Polyphonic singing
- C) Percussion ensemble
- D) All of the above.

5. What is “polyphonic” music?

- A) Simple musical texture, with one melody, and without harmony.
- B) Musical texture with 2 or more melodic lines played/sung simultaneously.
- C) Music played by the pipa.
- D) Music performed by the Polo String Quartet.

6. For whom did Marco Polo work during his years in the Mongol Court?

- A) Bilbo Baggins
- B) William Shakespeare
- C) Kublai Khan
- D) Henry III

7. The Khan sent Marco on missions to many places. In which of the following regions would Marco have heard the musical instrument, the pipa?

- A) Italy
- B) England
- C) China
- D) Jerusalem

8. Where was Marco Polo when he dictated his famous book, The Travels of Marco Polo?

- A) In the bathtub
- B) In a Genoese prison
- C) In a restaurant
- D) In a hospital

9. Why did Marco Polo spend 4 years in prison?

- A) His cell phone rang during a concert.
- B) He had greatly exaggerated his memoirs.
- C) He was captured by the Genoese and held for ransom.
- D) He forgot to renew his passport.

10. Who actually wrote The Travels of Marco Polo, while Marco was in prison?

- A) Rustichello, a fellow inmate
- B) Michelangelo, a prison guard
- C) Leonardo, a Georgian singer
- D) Donatello, a lute player

Listening Activity

The *Cantigas de Santa Maria* (CSM) are a collection of 420 poems and narratives, almost all set to music, from the late 13th century. Composed at the Court of King Alfonso X (also known as “Alfonso the Wise”), the compositions are in Medieval Galician, a dialect similar to Portuguese. The poems praise the Blessed Virgin Mary (Santa Maria) and offer extraordinary miracle stories, such as the narrative in “*Ben pode Santa Maria*” (poem 189).

As a class, listen to the Toronto Consort’s recording of “*Ben pode Santa Maria*” (available at TorontoConsort.org), using the Listening Worksheet as a guide for classroom/group discussion and/or individual reflection.

Ben pode Santa Maria

*Ben pode Santa Maria guarir de toda poçon,
pois madr’ é do que trillou o basilisqu’ e o dragon.*

1. Dest’ aveo un miragre a un ome de Valença
que ya en romaria
a Salas soo senlleiro, ca muit’ ele confiava
na Virgen Santa Maria;
mas foi errar o camynno, e anoiteceu-ll’ enton
per u ya en un monte, e viu d’ estranna faicon
Ben pode Santa Maria...

2. Assi viir hua bescha come dragon toda feita,
de que foi muit’ espantado;
pero non fugiu ant’ ela, ca med’ ouve se fogisse
que seria acalçado;
e aa Virgen b’eeita fez logo ssa oraçon
que o guardasse de morte e de dan’ e d’ ocajon.
Ben pode Santa Maria...

3. Ca o poçon saltou dela e feriu-o eno rosto,
tornou atal come gafo;
e des que chegou a Salas chorou ant’ a altar muito,
e tan toste tornou são.
E logo os da eigreja loaron con procisson
a Virgen, que aquel ome guarui de tan gran lijón.
Ben pode Santa Maria...

*Santa Maria is well able to cure all poisons for she is
mother of him who crushes monsters and dragons.*

1. In this one, a miracle happens to a man from
Valencia who went on a pilgrimage
to Salas, alone without company, for he trusted much
in the Virgin Santa Maria.
But he lost his way and night came on suddenly
as he went by a mountain, and he saw a strange
shape.
Santa Maria is well able...

2. A beast come toward him in the shape of a dragon
which frightened him greatly.
But he did not flee because he feared that if he fled
the beast would catch him.
And to the Virgin he made his prayer, that she might
save him from death and harm and misfortune.
Santa Maria is well able...

3. But the poison had sprayed onto his face
and he became leprous;
but when he reached the shrine at Salas he wept a
great deal before the altar and immediately he was
cured. And later, those in the church praised in
procession the Virgin who had cured this man of such
lesions.
Santa Maria is well able...

Listening Worksheet

1. Describe the FORM of this piece.

- *Is it strophic (the same melody repeated) or is there a theme with variations?*
- *Is there a binary form (AABB) or ternary form (ABA)? Or neither?*

2. Describe the TEXTURE or INSTRUMENTATION of this piece.

- *What instruments (including the voice) do you hear? How are they used?*
- *Which instrument groups (bowed strings, plucked strings, winds, percussion) are included?*
- *Would you describe this music as monophonic (one melodic line) or polyphonic (2 or more melodic lines)?*

3. Describe the DYNAMICS of this piece.

- *How would you describe the degree of dynamic contrast in various sections of this piece?*
- *What musical terms (forte, decrescendo, etc.) would best describe the dynamics in this piece?*

4. Describe the TEMPO of this piece.

- *How would you describe tempo of this piece? What is the tempo marking (adagio, presto, etc.) that best fits your description?*
- *Is the tempo consistent? Or does it change throughout this piece?*

5. Describe the METRE of this piece.

- *Try to tap the beat while listening – how many beats do you think are in each measure?*
- *How would you describe the metre of this piece? Is it regular or irregular?*

Other observations:

Group Listening Activity

The *Cantigas de Santa Maria* manuscripts only contain the melody and the text. Therefore, performers (such as the members of the *Toronto Consort*) make many musical decisions regarding the rhythm, texture/instrumentation, tempo, dynamics and more!

In small groups, create your own version of “*Ben pode Santa Maria*” using the chart below. For each stanza and refrain, make musical decisions with your “consort” regarding how you would perform this piece, and explain WHY you made each choice.

Consider including the following musical elements:

- TEXT – how do your musical decisions reflect what is happening in the narrative?
- TEXTURE – which instruments and vocal parts would you include?
- DYNAMICS – Which dynamic markings would you choose for each verse and refrain?
- TEMPO – do you prefer a faster or slower tempo? Would you change the tempo between verses, or keep it consistent for the entire piece?

	Musical Decisions (example: this verse is <i>pianissimo</i>)	Why this choice? (example: the soft dynamic reflects the sleeping character)
Refrain (<i>Ben pode Santa Maria...</i>)		
Stanza 1 (<i>Dest’ aveo un miragre...</i>)		
Refrain (<i>Ben pode Santa Maria...</i>)		
Stanza 2 (<i>Assi viir hua bescha...</i>)		
Refrain (<i>Ben pode Santa Maria...</i>)		
Stanza 3 (<i>Ca o poçon saltou...</i>)		
Refrain (<i>Ben pode Santa Maria...</i>)		

QUIZ: Early Instruments

1. This period of European history, around the 15th century, followed the Middle Ages (also known as the medieval period):

- A) Renaissance
- B) Baroque
- C) Classical
- D) Romantic

2. The bulk of the music written in the Medieval and Renaissance periods was written for:

- A) Professional orchestras
- B) Schools
- C) Movie soundtracks
- D) The church

3. Musical instruments from the Medieval and Renaissance eras are often classified into instrument groups, including bowed strings, plucked strings, percussion, and this group (which still plays an important role in modern bands and orchestras):

- A) Wind instruments
- B) Electric instruments
- C) Medical Instruments
- D) Jazz Instruments

4. This wind instrument was made entirely of wood, with sound produced by blowing across the mouth hole.

- A) Hurdy-gurdy
- B) Flute
- C) Lute
- D) Lyre

5. Unlike the flute, this wind instrument is end-blown, with a beak-shaped mouthpiece.

- A) Trumpet
- B) Piano
- C) Fiddle
- D) Recorder

6. Bowed string instruments, such as the medieval fiddle, often have strings made of which material?

- A) Plastic
- B) Metal
- C) Sheep gut
- D) Yarn

7. Originating from the Middle East, this plucked string instrument arrived in Europe in the second half of the 13th century - primarily playing single lines of music rather than chords.

- A) Clarinet
- B) Fiddle
- C) Tambourine
- D) Lute

8. Which lute-like traditional Chinese instrument has four strings and has been played in China for about two thousand years?

- A) Pipa
- B) Flute
- C) Bagpipes
- D) Viol

9. This instrumental group includes frame drums, tambourine, darbuka and many other instruments!

- A) Bowed strings
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10. This special instrument produces a drone (from the turning of a wheel against the strings) and a melody (using keys to play on another string):

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Timeline Worksheet – ANSWER KEY

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Additional Resources

An interactive map of Marco Polo's journey:

http://www.eduplace.com/kids/socsci/books/applications/imaps/maps/g2_u5/index.html

National Geographic's "The Marco Polo Odyssey," with sights and sounds from his adventures:

http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/data/2001/07/01/sights_n_sounds/media.2.2.html

An interactive quiz that displays Marco Polo's route on a map as the questions are answered:

http://edsitement.neh.gov/sites/edsitement.neh.gov/files/M_Polo_Rte_Quiz_Revsd02.swf

A complete online edition of the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*:

<http://cantigasdesantamaria.com/>

Oxford University's *Centre for the Study of the Cantigas de Santa Maria*:

<http://csm.mml.ox.ac.uk/>

The Society of Strange and Ancient Instruments:

<http://strangeandancientinstruments.com/index.html>