

## **A priceless illuminated fifteenth-century French songbook from the Library of Congress**

Laborde Chansonnier. France, ca. 1470. 5 inches x 3 7/16 inches (127 x 87 mm), 302 pages, illuminations throughout.

This fifteenth-century French songbook is perhaps the most intricately illustrated surviving secular music manuscript of the Renaissance. In addition to containing scores for songs by Binchois, Busnois, Dufay, Ockeghem, and other celebrated early music masters, it is also a vibrant gem of Renaissance illumination. It contains a total of one hundred and six pieces, more than other manuscripts of secular music, and twenty-three of these are unique to this chansonnier.

The whimsically illuminated vellum pages include a bright panoply of minutely detailed characters painted in tempera and gold: Renaissance nobles, dragons and other fantastic creatures, monks, nuns, angels, and cupids, offset with ornate floral and decorative motifs. The illumination style is similar to that of Jean Colombe, who is associated with the Tours School. There are roughly ninety extant chansonniers of this period, but only a dozen or so have more than a trifling amount of colored decoration.

This unique work from the Music Division of the Library of Congress is in a contemporary plain vellum binding that belies its ornate interior. The manuscript takes its modern name from its discoverer, Léon Emmanuel Joseph Simon de Laborde (1807–1869) — artist, art scholar, archaeologist, ambassador, and marquis — who purchased the manuscript in 1857. (No previous owners can be identified, although “Louyz Teiller” is written in various places in the chansonnier.)

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