In Song Alone is my Delight – Program Notes

Isaac in Italy: Heinrich Isaac's first period at Florence, which lasted almost a decade, was marked by his employment at the court of the Medici family. Lorenzo de' Medici himself was the one who summoned Isaac from Innsbruck in 1485 to work for him, and so followed a close working relationship between the two. During his years with the Medici family, he composed songs, motets, and masses in accordance with the Italian style, infusing some elements of his Flemish background as well. His court musician duties also included teaching the de' Medici children, including Giovanni di Lorenzo de' Medici, who would go on to become the future Pope Leo X. This was a mutually beneficial time of prosperity for both parties – Isaac would benefit from having stable employment in the court, and Lorenzo had one of the most coveted musicians in all of Europe at the time working for him. Evidence even shows that the Florentines were as fond of Isaac as he was of them, dubbing him "Master Arigo Ysach, our brother" in personal documents.

In 1488 Isaac composed a *canzona* in the *battaglia* style, titled *Alla battaglia,* for that year's Florentine carnival season, while under Lorenzo de'Medici's patronage. However, correspondences between multiple people involved in the preparations for the carnival indicate that at this point in time, Isaac and other musicians at the Cathedral of San Giovanni were operating at a distance from Lorenzo without much input from him directly. An anecdote describes Lorenzo's fury in learning that two singers had quit to work for a different court without his knowledge. This illustrates how the Medici's direct involvement with the musical institutions of Florence -- and by extension, Isaac himself -- waned significantly as the end of their reign neared. The piece premiered at the carnival but received a lukewarm reception by the public, and presumably by the Medici father and son themselves, who were financially invested in the project. The piece was considered a failure, perhaps due to it being too experimental and "refined" for the occasion. Several years after this, in 1494, and after Savonarola's rise to power and the exile of the Medici family, Isaac would leave Florence and eventually work for Maximilian I in Vienna.
(Julian Matthew Bernal & HongYi Li)

Isaac and Senfl in the Habsburg Court:
Isaac and Senfl were perfectly positioned in the beginning of the 16th century to be figures of musical influence, having both relative freedom in their musical decisions, and a great opportunity for their music to be maintained and kept. This is due to their employment in the Court of Emperor Maximilian I, and their stature among the Habsburg court musicians. Even with the short term of Senfl's tenure there, (his having left after only two years due to an injury), a steady supply of musicians and the maintenance of royal musical libraries allowed the works, and much information about the performance of both Isaac and Senfl's music, to survive to this day.

Around 1512, Ludwig Senfl (ca.1489-1543) took over duties as court composer from his predecessor Heinrich Isaac (ca.1450-1517) for Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I (1459-1519). He was not officially appointed *Kapellmeister* even though he had been appointed "Isaac's successor" on order of "His Imperial Majesty." He was also a copyist and publisher in the early days of that technology offering his first book of Lieder and Motets ca. 1512, and the *Liber Selectarum Cantionum* in 1520, the latter containing works of many other composers, including Isaac. Maximilian was a strong patron of the arts and sponsored music for many royal events like the various "Diets" being held around this time to discuss the future of the empire. Music was also part of everyday life in Maximilian's court, featuring a vast collection of the most modern instruments of the day. Maximilian died in 1519 and the dissolution of the court led to the release of the musicians, except for trumpeters, on order of the new emperor Charles V. Interestingly Senfl had contact with Martin Luther with whom he shared sympathies by way of music and texts. Senfl was overall a forward-thinking composer and used many modern compositional techniques like canons and quodlibets. His output includes motets, masses, lieder and instrumental works for the court.
(Apollo Appolito & Ambrose Philipek)

Isaac's contemporary fame, importance among German-speakers: The influence of Isaac was especially pronounced in Germany, due to the connection he maintained with the Habsburg court. He was the first significant master of the Franco-Flemish polyphonic style who both lived in German-speaking areas, and whose music was widely distributed there. It was through him that the polyphonic style of the Netherlands became widely accepted in Germany, making possible the further development of contrapuntal music there. (Bing Jiang & Minghao Hu)

Isaac's Use of Languages: Heinrich Isaac was a Franco-Flemish composer who wrote music in a variety of styles, including vocal music in multiple languages and instrumental music that was tailored to his audience. Isaac was known to set Italian and German texts for vocal performance, while his use of French text was more often found on scores meant for instrumental performances. Each language he set influenced the style of the piece and how the story was portrayed. Because it was common for vocal pieces to be performed by a group of viol players, the text aided instrumentalists in how to best play the piece in the absence of vocalists. When in Italy, he composed three- or four-part pieces, and *frottole,* which are comedic songs; *Alla Battaglia,* the most popular piece from his Carnival music, is now more often played as an instrumental piece. We see that Isaac was influenced by the French *chanson* in the many French titles of his instrumental compositions. In some works, we see that he borrowed pre-existing melodies from works of his contemporaries, such as Phillipe Caron. Though the works appear without texts, if we look carefully, we see the influence of the French language in his works. Many of Isaac's works were transmitted to England without text, and often performed by a viol consort. (Sé Brown, Guinevere Conner, Bek Zehr)

Quodlibet: The quodlibet (loosely translated from Latin as "whatever you want") is a subgenre of contrapuntal composition popular with composers such as Josquin, Busnois, and, of course, Ludwig Senfl, in the late 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries. Originally derived from the "disputatio de quodlibet" (discussion about whatever you want), a serious scholarly exam used at the Sorbonne, the Germans began parodying the practice and setting silly catalogue poetry (poetry that lists various types of some category of thing) to music in "catalogue quodlibets." This gradually morphed into the practice we know today, the simultaneous quodlibet, in which composers take pre-existing popular tunes, often, as we see with Isaac and Senfl,with wildly different meanings, and set them in counterpoint to each other. Other famous examples include J. S. Bach's Goldberg variation no. 30, and Orlando Gibbons' "Cries of London" in which he takes street vendors' calls and sets them to music against each other. In modern times,musical theatre often uses a similar technique in medleys and finales, combining each character's theme against each other. In this concert, you will hear several quodlibets by Senfl, setting the tunes of "Es taget vor dem Walde," "Ach Elslein," "Ich stund an einem Morgen," and "Fortuna" in various combinations.
(Cannon McClure & Kristine Caswelch)

Translating 15th century German: As singers we are often tasked with creating translations of the texts we sing to better understand the story being told. The text for Heinrich Isaac's "Ain frewlich wesen" is in a late medieval German dialect called Early New High German (ENHG). Our approach to translating a text from this time period included understanding how the medieval German dialect translated to a modern version of German, considering grammar and language structure, and translating the modern German version to English. The first step in our translation process was to find an inherent evolution of the pronunciation and spelling rules in the original text. For example, we inferred "frewlich" is "fröhlich" in modernized German, and learned that "ew" in the medieval dialect can be considered as "eu" in the modernized context. Although there is no word "freulich" in modernized German, we know "die Freude" means joy or happiness, and its adjective is "fröhlich." Through similar comparisons we were able to complete a translation from ENHG to modern German. Due to the variations in ENHG and limited resources on this subject, we made inferences on what we believed the text referred to based on context and similar structures in other texts. In better understanding the journey from medieval to modern German, we were able to make a literal English translation tracing the singer's mental journey in the song. To take the translation one step further, we looked at the rhyming pattern in the original text, and crafted a text that could replicate the effect the rhyme has on the listener. (Heming Cao & Regina Stroncek)