

BELLS & MOTLEY OLDEN MUSIC, DANCE, & STORYTELLING -- ARTIST INFORMATION

Bells & Motley Consort brings an innovative and vibrant concert presence to the field of early and traditional musical performance. In their crossover program “**Bards, Bagpipes, & Rhymers,**” musicians Sondra & John Bromka begin by unraveling threads of evocative historic musics... weaving in and out of it rustic folk traditions, still heard even today in the remote corners of France, Germany, and the British Isles, and became the cornerstones of our American music and dance traditions. Side by side, these musical selections enrich each other to paint vivid living pictures that evoke the boisterous village festivals, the soulful shepherds’ complaints, the passionate love songs of noble troubadours, and richly embroidered mystical ballads that connected people of all levels of society.

The bridging of culture, literature, history, and community tradition has been the heart of the Bromkas’ efforts since they began their collaboration, now over 25 years in duration. Multi-faceted performers, Sondra and John are accomplished musicians, playwrights, storytellers. They are also dance historians, versatile and skilled visual artists, early instrument builders, and even former teachers. This combination of talents makes their programs resonate with the authenticity and energy of living history, attracting audiences of all ages, experiences, and interests.

Bells & Motley are most known for their uncommon instrumentation, and for this presentation they perform on a diverse collection of historic and folk instruments. You'll hear harps, lute, early keyed fiddles & nyckelharpa, recorders, crumhorns, various French & English bagpipes, hurdy gurdy, and much more. The hurdy gurdy (one of several historic instruments built by Mr. Bromka) is a sort of keyboard fiddle enhanced with resonant drones, invented way back in 10th century France, and still important across Europe today. Among the instrumentation the Bromkas use are one-of-a-kind copies that have not survived the ages, not to be found even in museums, but rather are careful reconstructions of images in the paintings, illuminations and sculptures the Bromkas seek out in their annual research pilgrimages to Europe.

MORE ABOUT THE PERFORMERS, SONDRA & JOHN BROMKA

Every May, Sondra and John Bromka embark on a month-long musical performance, teaching, research, and rejuvenation pilgrimage to Western and Eastern Europe. In addition to their own presentations, their travels bring opportunities for advanced studies in historic music, dance, traditional arts, and instrument building from international specialists....an excellent trade! Through these learning adventures, Sondra and John gain resources as well as inspiration, and a broad-based multicultural overview that allows them to contribute valuable insights and techniques to their field.

This ongoing exploration has garnered substantial fruits in their instrument, art, photo, and music collection --- a musicologists’ paradise. The artists use it throughout the school year to illuminate their arts-in-education integrated humanities programs. As performers, teachers, and workshop leaders, they maintain an active schedule in schools and communities throughout their home state of New York, the Northeast, and beyond.

INSTRUMENTS PLAYED, A PARTIAL LIST:

Medieval Instruments, Renaissance

Both artists: recorders; crumhorns; voice; percussion

Sondra’s specialties: Medieval wire, gut, and silk strung harps; shawms and early oboes, percussion

John: lute; hurdy gurdy; Medieval bagpipes; medieval fiddles; Medieval keyed fiddle

Traditional Celtic, French, European, and American Folk

Both artists: pennywhistles; 3-holed pipes (English, French, Spanish styles); international percussion

Sondra’s specialties: harps; hammered dulcimer; early button accordions; Breton bombarde, folkloric double reeds

John’s specialties: guitar; fiddle; banjo; French-style hurdy gurdy; cittern; mandolin; Swedish nyckelharpa; assorted bagpipes (Northumbrian Scottish, French...)

Publications & Recordings:

- “**Faires & Festivals-Medieval & Renaissance: How to Have a Successful Event**” – A Guidebook for teachers and communities hosting celebratory events
- “**Branslez!: An Array of Court & Country Dance Music 1450-1750**”
- “**Seasons and Lovers**” *A Cycle of magical traditional Musics that bring the seasons into alignment*
- “**Wassail! A Bells & Motley Christmas**” *Early music for the Yuletide Season*
- “**Popular Music of Our Grand Erie Canal**” *A collection of our favorite songs & tunes, with historic instruments*