

— Chapter 2 —

The School of Chartres

Although helping to create viable social forms for the future is one of the avowed goals of IDRIART, it is also well-grounded in the spiritual and artistic legacy of the past and festival sites are often chosen "to revive the cultural and spiritual impulses of former times."⁴⁶ It is no coincidence that Idriart arose out of the impulses engendered by three festivals which took place in Chartres Cathedral in 1981, 82 and 83. IDRIART has been called, in fact, "the revival of the School of Chartres" by the mayor of that city. From the beginning, Idriart concerts have striven to realize "the spiritual meaning of the unity of art, science and religion."⁴⁷

The orientation and building of the cathedral and the founding of the School of Chartres were accomplished around the year 1000 by the first Chartres master, Fulbertus. The word "Chartres" is derived from the Celtic word "cairn," meaning "place of the altar;" and an essential part of the Celtic mystery tradition at Chartres was the cult of the Black Madonna. Legend has it that Joseph of Arimathea came to Chartres and was so moved by its beauty and the worship there that he sent a messenger to Mary, the mother of Jesus, asking permission to dedicate the place to her. In this way Chartres had its first connection with Christianity and the stream of Grail spirituality, receiving into herself the mystery streams of the past and giving birth to the Christian stream of the future.⁴⁸

The School of Chartres that Fulbertus founded continued until the death of the last of the Chartres masters, Alanus ab Insulis, about the year 1200. During these two hundred years, the School of Chartres sought to reconcile Celtic and Greek mysteries and the Arthurian and Grail streams with a Christianity based on the direct experience of Christ.⁴⁹ The cathedral itself is permeated by the

⁴⁶Hilde Tawil, Gundula Piene and Andreas Henning in *Idriart celebrated its tenth anniversary*, 1991.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

⁴⁸Wen Querido, *The Golden Age of Chartres: The Teachings of a Mystery School and the Eternal Feminine* (New York: Anthroposophic Press, 1987), p.40.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p.15.

image of the Virgin bearing the child, symbolizing birth rather than death (in contradistinction to most European cathedrals, there are no burials in Chartres) and the potential in each student to give birth to a higher self. At the School of Chartres the seven liberal arts became the basis of the curriculum, each approached in an attitude of reverence and leading to a gradual unfolding of the transformative soul forces within the individual.

The School of Chartres has a special relation to music in that Fulbertus was himself an innovator in music and inaugurated a new form of chanting. It was at Chartres that for the first time one melodic line was freed from the other, producing simultaneous notes of varying length that would become the descant, the first stage in the evolution of harmony.⁵⁰

It has been pointed out by René Querido that just as Chartres was the meeting point of many spiritual streams during the past, so today it may become an active center from which the three momentous questions facing humankind can be answered: "How can we, through our connection with the spirit, heal the soul? How can we, working on the earth, heal our planet? How can we, through a communion in the spirit, heal the body social?"⁵¹ These are, in fact, the very questions to which Idriart seeks answers in artistic and culturally inspired communication between people, radiating out from its beginnings at Chartres to embrace the globe in an artistic sense.



Program cover of the first Chartres Festival, 30 June - 2 August 1981.