



THE NEW YORK OPEN CENTER
& LAPIS MAGAZINE

PRESENT

A C O N F E R E N C E

THE ITALIAN
RENAISSANCE
& THE ESOTERIC
TRADITIONS

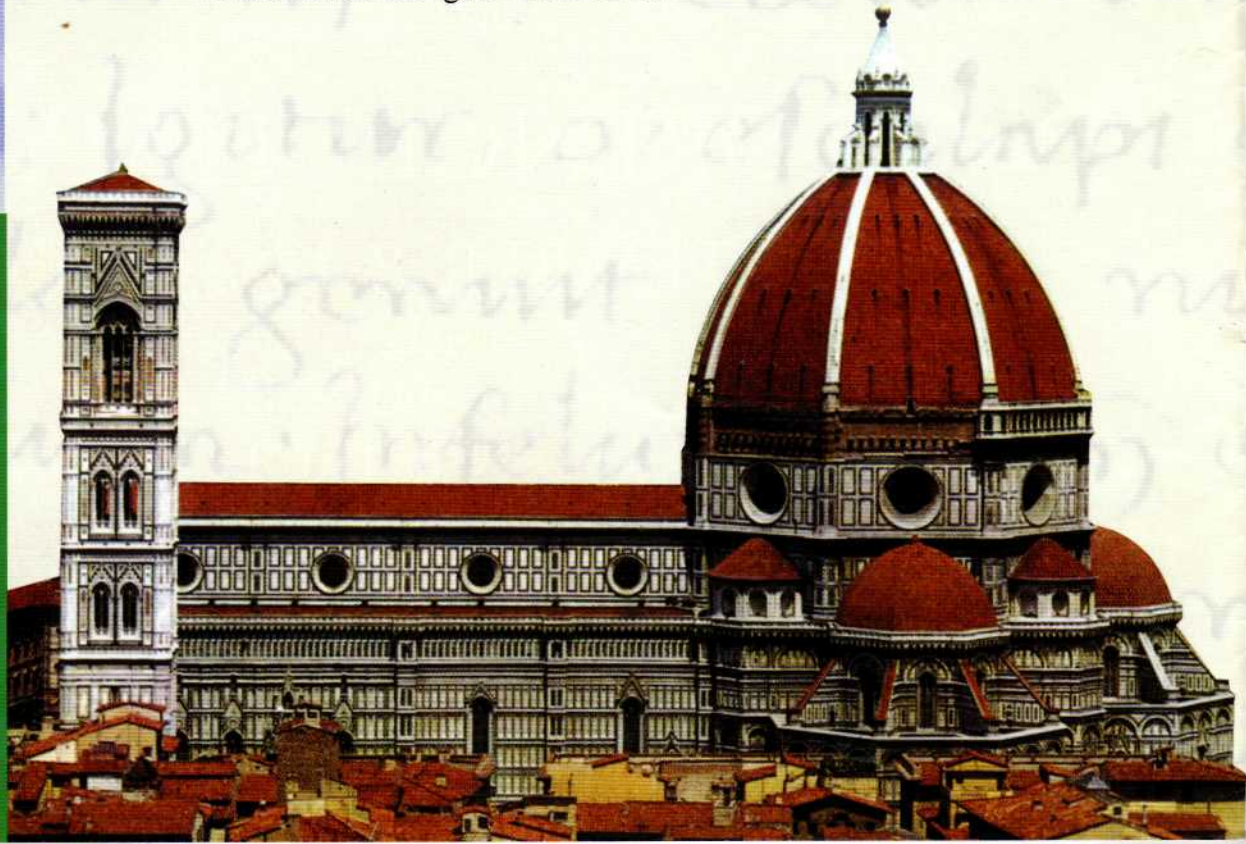
HERMETIC, CABALISTIC
& NEO-PLATONIC PHILOSOPHERS
& THEIR INFLUENCE TODAY

FLORENCE · ITALY

SEPTEMBER 8-13, 2000

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The Italian Renaissance was pervaded by a deep interest in the esoteric traditions and no aspect of it more so than its beginnings in Florence where the work of Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola created a powerful and lasting impact. Join us this September as we use the charm and ambiance of Florence as a stimulus to the spiritual imagination, as we seek to enter into the gracious world of philosophy and magic that surrounded the Platonic Academy. Meeting each day in a Renaissance palace on one of Florence's most beautiful piazzas, with some evenings at a serene and evocative castle in the Tuscan countryside, we aim to recreate the marvelous world of the Renaissance philosophers with its harmonious understanding of the microcosm and macrocosm and profound awareness of the presence of higher worlds. We will also consider the influence of this philosophy on such artists as Botticelli and Michelangelo, and go on to examine its value for the present moment. We will be guided by some of the most insightful scholars, writers and researchers in the field of Western esotericism. This event will, we trust, evoke the insight, conviviality, and sense of entering a long-forgotten but magnificent spiritual world that was experienced by attendees at our prior conferences in Bohemia and Wales on the alchemical, Rosicrucian and grail traditions.



PLENARY SESSIONS

The Mysteries of Florence: Alchemy & Hermeticism Under the Grand Dukes

Joscelyn Godwin

Cosimo I and his son Frances were obsessed with alchemy, both as part of their program of technology and as a source of symbolism to be displayed in art, architecture, and pageantry. This interest persisted among the Medici well into the "Age of Reason."

Cornelius Agrippa in Renaissance Italy

Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke

An attractive and gifted figure, Henry Cornelius Agrippa (1486-1534) combined the magic and Cabalah of Renaissance Italy with the humanism and piety of the Pre-Reformation in England and Germany. The friend of John Colet and the Abbot Trithemius, he authored the famous sourcebook of modern Western magic, *De Occulta Philosophia* (1533), and later generations cast him in the heaven-storming role of Faust. This lecture looks at Agrippa's life, travels, and his major contribution to the esoteric tradition in the light of his contacts among the hermeticists and Cabalists of Northern Italy.

Invoking the Gods: Marsilio Ficino's Orphic Magic

Angela Voss

The practice of the "ancient singing of songs to the Orphic lyre" lay at the very heart of the esoteric activities of the Platonic Academy under Ficino and Pico della Mirandola. What were these songs, and how did Ficino and his friends perform them in the context of ritual magic? This presentation will explore the musical traditions, techniques and theories underlying Ficino's identification with Orpheus as divine healer.

Orpheus Reviv'd: The Re-making of Mythology in the 16th Century

Anthony Rooley

Renaissance men of philosophy knew their sources, yet chose to re-write ancient lore for "modern" consumption and comprehension. In the practical world of music-making and performance Orpheus played a leading role – yet one subtly changed from the ancient archetype. This presentation explores why this was necessary, and how changes were manifest. Some implications for the practical revival and use of orphic powers for today are also considered and demonstrated.

*The cover: a section of paneling from
Federico da Montefeltro's studiolo in
the Ducal Palace at Gubbio (1472).*

The Love That Moves the Stars: A Search for What Connects Dante's Florence with Ficino's

Christopher Bamford

About 130 years separate the Florence of Dante and his friends from that of Marsilio Ficino and his friends. Certainly, they are connected. Had they met, they would have had much to talk over as they walked by the Arno. They would have agreed on practically everything, except perhaps politics: love, friendship, God, beauty, truth, goodness, the divinity of experience and the exaltedness of the human state. But both men were revolutionaries, both effected a fundamental turn in the evolution of consciousness. How, as culture-changers (not philosophers) would they have regarded each other? If they met today they would view each other as co-workers in a single task, one still awaiting its full realization: the transformation of the lived and living world through the union of earth and heaven.

Sacred & Symbolic Gardens of the Renaissance

Christopher McIntosh

In this lecture Christopher McIntosh will introduce us to the idea of gardens as places of initiation, designed to convey a message of a religious, spiritual, philosophic, or esoteric nature. He will focus particularly on the gardens of Renaissance Italy, showing how their creators used plants, landscape features, iconography, and garden architecture to create a rich fabric of meaning. Examples will include the Boboli and the Villa Castello in Florence, the Villa d'Este near Rome and Bomarzo in the Latium.



PLENARY SESSIONS

Philosophy & Politics: Reconciling the Irreconcilable? Marsilio Ficino's Approach to Practical Problems

Valery Rees

Ficino is best known as a contemplative thinker, and often spoke of the irreconcilability of philosophy and politics. Yet his letters abound in advice to his friends that frequently touches on political matters in an intensely practical way. Though at times he promotes a Platonic concept of government, he also displays a much wider sensitivity to political issues, as well as a profound grasp of the inner mechanisms of statesmanship and of psychology. This lecture will explore the interaction of philosophy and politics in his life and his writings, drawing out the continuing relevance of his ideas today.

Marsilio Ficino's Meditations on the Soul

Clement Salaman

The early part of Ficino's life coincided with a strong renewal of interest in both Plato and Aristotle. The later part saw the arrival in Florence of two highly influential thinkers in the shape of Pico della Mirandola and Savonarola. This lecture examines why in spite of this Ficino felt it necessary to pursue his own form of Platonic Christianity. The lecture also looks at some of the problems facing Florence at this time and how Ficino sought to resolve them. It concludes by considering the relevance today of what Ficino says in this context.

AFTERNOON WORKSHOPS

Marsilio Ficino & the English Renaissance

Paul Bembridge

What influence did Italian philosophers of the Ficino school have upon the leaders of the English Renaissance, such as the poets Sir Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser? Enormous. But how did Ficino's religion of the cosmic Muses go down in Elizabethan and 17th century England, newly Protestant and oppressively Anglican? Badly. The last thing English monarchs and Anglican bishops wanted to hear about was a new and esoteric religion whose priests were Muse-led poets in the grand Ficinian manner. But, then again, English monarchs and Anglican bishops were soon to disappear from the political scene... So, did the English Republic, guided by that Muse-driven poet, John Milton, and briefly achieved between 1649 and 1660, represent in some measure a triumph for the Ficinian cause and esoteric tradition?

The Dream of Gemistos Plethon

Christopher Bamford

Giorgio Gemistos, known as Plethon (a "second Plato") was the octogenarian magus, initiate and sage, who traveled as unofficial adviser to the Greek delegation to the ecumenical Council of Florence/Ferrara in 1437. On this trip, he met (among others) Cosimo do Medici, with whom he spent several evenings. Exactly what passed between them cannot be known. What is known however is that Plethon so inspired Cosimo with the idea of ancient wisdom and the "ancient theologians" – Orpheus, Hermes,

Zoroaster, Plato, Pythagoras, and so on – that Cosimo determined to read them for himself and commissioned Marsilio Ficino to begin translating. But Plethon is more than simply a bearer of books. He is one of the "hidden pillars" who changes history. He had the dream of a universal transformation of religion and culture. This dream, not fully realized, became the Renaissance itself.

"The Wonder-Working Word": Johannes Reuchlin & the Development of Christian Cabala

Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke

Johannes Reuchlin (1455-1522), known as "Pythagoras reborn", was an outstanding scholar of the German Renaissance. On a visit to Florence in 1490 he met Pico della Mirandola, who fired him with an interest in the Cabala as a powerful supplement to neo-Platonic magic and a key to Christian secrets. Reuchlin's *De Verbo Mirifico* (1494) was greatly indebted to Pico's ideas, while his *De Arte Cabbalistica* (1517) was the first full treatise on Cabala ever published by a non-Jewish author. This lecture looks at Johannes Reuchlin as a major disseminator of Christian Cabala from its origins in the Florentine hermetic Renaissance into the Western esoteric tradition.

From the Florentine Neo-Platonists to the Cambridge Platonists

Clare Goodrick-Clarke

Marsilio Ficino's translations of the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the works of Plato had an immense influence on subsequent generations.



AFTERNOON WORKSHOPS

But how exactly did the ideas of his Platonic Academy come to England? Who were the key figures who brought hermetic and neo-Platonic ideas to England? How did those ideas influence the great flowering of English literature in the 16th and 17th centuries? This lecture, illustrated by excerpts from Shakespeare, Milton, the Metaphysical Poets, and the Cambridge Platonists, looks at the English debt to Florentine neo-Platonism.

Singing Madrigals

Joscelyn Godwin

One of the most direct ways of access to past eras is through singing their music. In this workshop, those with even minimal musical experience are invited to form a madrigal group and to learn some simple part-songs from the Florentine Renaissance.

Pico's Oration on the Dignity of Man

Clare Goodrick-Clarke

Pico's *Oration On the Dignity of Man* (1486), described by the great historian of the Renaissance, Jacob Burckhardt, as "one of the noblest bequests of that great age," represents a profound turning point in outlook and self-consciousness. Through readings and discussion, this workshop looks at Pico's famous statement of the Protean nature of the human being and explores his ideas of free will and self-determinism in the light of his hermetic philosophy.

Creating a Garden of Meaning

Christopher McIntosh

In this interactive workshop, participants will explore ways of creating their own sacred and symbolic gardens. They will learn about the basic elements of the visual language used to convey meaning in garden, and about some of the contrasting approaches adopted in different cultural and religious traditions, including that of Renaissance Italy. They will have the opportunity to draw and discuss ways of applying these ideas for themselves, whether they have a garden of many acres or merely a shelf for a few potted plants.

The Platonists of Persia & Florence -Intellectual Fraternity between the Esoteric Traditions of the Persian School of Isfahan and the Florentine Neo-Platonists

Leonard Lewisohn

There was a remarkable spiritual contiguity and intellectual fraternity between Ficino's school of esoteric Platonism and the synthesis of

esotericism found in the famous school of Platonists in Isfahan in 16th and 17th century Persia. This school combined illuminative philosophy with the theosophy of Ibn' Arabi to form a humanistically universal Islamic philosophy. It held that love animates the natural and human cosmos, advocated the perennial philosophy and the unity of religions, and spoke of the omnipresence and immanence of the divine in nature. This workshop suggests that the Islamic contributions to the Renaissance were not insignificant.

Pico della Mirandola & the Rise of Christian Cabala

Frank Donnola

We will look at the origins of Christian Cabalah with Pico in the late 15th century, at the implications of his knowledge of Hebrew, and at the parallel rediscovery of ancient Greek sacred texts in Florence. After considering his brilliant but brief career we shall see how this new plant grew under the care of Francesco Giorgio and then further north the contributions of Giordano Bruno. We shall consider what the real spiritual implications of Christian Cabala are for today, not as something sectarian but rather as a deep stratum of the Perennial Philosophy, a universal Wisdom religion.

Fitting Your Life to the Heavens: Astrology as Natural Magic

Angela Voss

This workshop is an exploration of Ficino's use of astrology as a tool for self-knowledge, and examines his own horoscope in relation to his life and work. We will see how Ficino's hermetic and neo-Platonic translations and commentaries revived the tradition of classical astrology, with its role in divination and magic.

Western Hermetic Tradition in the Images of the Tarot

Ellen Goldberg

The ever evolving Tarot is unparalleled as a compendium of Western esoteric knowledge. Disguised as a pack of cards, this book of hermetic wisdom is like a river into which streams of Cabala, Alchemy, Pythagorean mathematics, and Astrology have flowed. In accord with hermetic ideals, the main object of the Tarot journey is the transformation of individual consciousness into unity with the One, aided by knowledge of the Archetypal figures pictured in the Major Arcana. In this workshop we will discuss primary philosophic themes, and aim to experience, in the manner of the Renaissance Mage, interaction with Archetypal images through meditation.



AFTERNOON WORKSHOPS

Since Singing is so Good a Thing, I wish all Men Would Learne to Sing! (William Byrd, 1588)

Evelyn Tubb

In eight beautifully stated precepts William Byrd exhorted his readers to begin the practice of music. Since music is such an integral part of Renaissance philosophy and practice, Evelyn Tubb will update the experience for anyone with the courage to stand up and perform. Listeners are welcome.

The Five Orders of Classical Architecture, their Symbolic Geometry, Proportional Systems, Composition Theory, Ornament & Iconography

Alvin Holm

The Renaissance rediscovery of the single Roman treatise on architecture surviving from the Classical Era sparked the development of a comprehensive design theory that informed Western culture for the next 500 years. That Vitruvian system, based on the Classical orders of architecture, was fundamental to the training of painters, sculptors and architects, as well as to the apprenticeship of guildsmen in the building trades, until the middle of the 20th century when it was forced underground by a militant Modernism. As the new century begins, the Classical spirit is stirring again in all the arts, and the Renaissance principles are increasingly invoked to guide us back again to an aesthetics of harmony and wholeness.

Ficino's Magical Songs: Music & Magic in the Renaissance

Jeanne Martin

Marsilio Ficino was known as a Doctor of the Soul who could heal the individual using his own magical songs played on the lyre. This workshop will examine how "music speaks directly to the soul," and will consider the

Renaissance notion of the archetypes as tones on a scale, each bringing its own uniqueness to the creation of soul. Musical recordings and a live harp demonstration will be used to show how, in both ancient and Renaissance thought, music works to renew the anima mundi, the soul of the world.

The Giving & Receiving of Advice

Valery Rees

A chance to explore some approaches to counseling found in Ficino's correspondence. Using both published translations and new work, this workshop will take a closer look at some examples of the art of constructive suggestion and the resolution of conflict.

The Platonic Remedies of Marsilio Ficino

Michael Crisp

The Three Books on Life, a work produced by Marsilio Ficino toward the end of his life, put forth a system for the sustenance and development of a human being toward a more perfect physical, mental, and ensouled state. Refined in the heart, the spirit is considered to rise into the brain and divide into three basic forces of life: the natural; vital; and animal. These forces in sympathetic association with related natural substances and attunement to the hierarchy of being, can bring matter to the harmonies of the Ideas. By balancing the four humors of the body through the quickening of these spirits in sympathetic association, the robust human can perceive the harmony of the One. By methods culled from sources as varied as Stoicism, Hermeticism, and early Platonic Idealism, Ficino guides the aspiring philosopher toward unity.

Marsilio Ficino's Meditations on the Soul

Clement Salaman

AFTERNOON ACTIVITIES

There is free time each afternoon to explore the countless artistic and cultural beauties of Florence and the numerous galleries, museums and exhibits. In addition, the following options are available:

Walking Tour of the Boboli Gardens

Christopher McIntosh

This walking tour of the world famous Boboli Gardens will consider the sacred dimensions of the Renaissance garden and its numerous levels of symbolic meaning. Participants will be able to see how plants, landscape and iconography were used to create an environment filled with spiritual and philosophic significance.

Visit to the Villa Carreggi

Home of Ficino's Platonic Academy, the Villa Carreggi stands today on the outskirts of the city as a powerful if somewhat dilapidated reminder of the beauty and wisdom at the heart of the Florentine Renaissance. The grand paintings of Pico orating to Lorenzo de Medici and Ficino delivering his translations to Cosimo guide the imagination back to that magnificent era. A quick visit to the taverna reveals how joy and pleasure were also an integral part of the philosopher's world view.



EVENING EVENTS

La Musica Serena: 100 Years of Italian Solo Song 1520 1620

Anthony Rooley & Evelyn Tubb

This period firmly belongs to the neo-Platonic school, where man-made music was a reflection (all be it pale) of heavenly music, the Music of the Spheres. A period of conscious concern for heavenly harmony, and a taste for bliss. In the music of Verdelot, Arcadelt, Rore we find an equal balance of poise and grace. And in Tromboncino, Presenti, Giustiniani we are shown a glimpse of the almost lost, noble tradition of the ducal courts. Clearly our age has much to learn from this elevated art, where music was wholly feminine, wholly divine, and wholly uplifting. Tonight Lady Music will gently transport us, much as she did to the still-listening ears of long-dead courtiers.

A Hermetic Banquet

The final evening of the conference will be devoted to a hermetic banquet with food and music from the Renaissance period, and an effort to align with each course the various correspondences among flowers, plants, animals, symbols, scents and planets. Our aim is to begin to bring our time together to a magical and benevolent conclusion.

An Evening of Renaissance Poetry

Robert Bly

Drawing from both the esoteric streams that watered the Renaissance and from his own work, Robert Bly will present an evening of poetry in his own inimitable style. At our previous European conferences, his readings have been among the spiritual highlights.

An Evening of Renaissance Music & Dance.

POST-CONFERENCE OPTIONAL TOUR

The conference will be followed with an optional four-day journey to the sacred sites of Tuscany with visits to special places of Medieval, and Renaissance significance. The group will depart after lunch on Wednesday, 13th and return to Florence, for a final night, on Saturday, 16th.

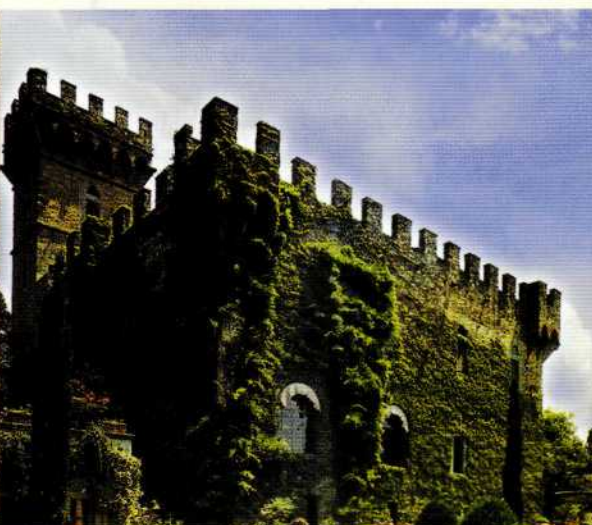
The countryside of Tuscany is one of the most beautiful regions in the world, with its graceful hills and valleys, olive orchards and vineyards, and numerous sites of sacred significance. The background to countless Renaissance paintings on spiritual themes, it has a unique capacity to evoke a sense of paradise and harmony in the Western imagination. This post-conference four-day journey will visit sites of great beauty from the Etruscan, Medieval and Renaissance periods.

We will begin with the evocative hill town of San Gimignano, with its numerous medieval

towers, and move on to the high plateau of Volterra, with its cobbled streets and walled gateways. We will visit Siena, with its cathedral floor portraying Hermes Trismegistus, and stop in the tranquil world of San Galgano, heartland of medieval monasticism. The highest of the Tuscan hill towns, Montepulciano, offers some of the loveliest walking country in Italy, and Pienza provides one of the most complete Renaissance environments in the world. In restful Cortona we can gaze out on the villages of Southern Tuscany, and we then return to Florence to visit the Medici Villa. This tour should provide a conclusion to our conference that is relaxing, informative and exhilarating.

Early registration is recommended as space is limited. \$595 cost includes all travel, accommodations, entry fees to sites and museums, breakfast and dinner.

Call Maria Rodriguez (212) 219-2527 ext. 135 for more information.



BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Christopher Bamford is founder of Lindisfarne Press and editor-in-chief of the Anthroposophic Press. He is a long-time scholar and writer on the Western esoteric tradition and a contributing editor to *Lapis* magazine.

Paul Bembridge, M.Phil., is a university lecturer specializing in Elizabethan and 17th century poetry. Paul has a life long interest in the Western esoteric tradition and is a Fellow of the Royal Society for the Arts.

Robert Bly is one of America's best-known poets. Winner of the National Book Award, he is author of many books, including *The Soul Is Here for Its Own Joy*, *The Sibling Society*, *Iron John* and *Eating the Honey of Words*.

Michael Crisp is an independent scholar seeking to discover the roots of language, religion, and philosophy. His work explores the intertwined movements of Hermeticism and Gnosticism, an historical and practical study of alchemy; and a re-reading of the Platonic movement in its various guises, and its renaissance in 15th century Italy.

Frank Donnola is an independent scholar in comparative mythology and ancient religions. With a background in theatre and poetry, he has performed with the Magic Theatre, the Theatre of Man, and the poetry art-band The Palace Monkeys. He has lectured in Moscow and St. Petersburg, and has written articles, interviews and book reviews for *Gnosis* magazine.

Joscelyn Godwin was born in England and educated at Cambridge and Cornell Universities. He has taught at Colgate University since 1971. Joscelyn has written, edited, and translated numerous books of music, esotericism, and intellectual history including *Robert Fludd*, *Harmonies of Heaven and Earth: Mysticism in Music from Antiquity to the Avant-Garde*, and *The Theosophical Enlightenment*. His latest publications is first complete English translation of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (1499) by Francesco Colonna.

Ellen Goldberg, MA, is a psychotherapist, artist, and mystic who has been exploring the language of the unconscious and working within the Western hermetic tradition for 25 years. She is also an internationally known tarot teacher.

Clare Goodrick-Clarke, MA, is a Council member of the Scientific and Medical Network and a practitioner of Homeopathy and reflexology. Her scholarly interests include the Western esoteric tradition, alchemy's contribution to homeopathy, and the influence of Platonism on the English Renaissance.

Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, D.Phil., has lectured internationally on Renaissance philosophy, German mysticism, and Paracelsian medicine. He is the editor of the *Essential Readings* series on thinkers in the Western esoteric tradition, recently relaunched by North Atlantic Books. His books include *Paracelsus*, *Hüler's Priestess* and *The Occult Roots of Nazism* and he is a contributor to the recently published *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment Revisited*.

Alvin Holm, AIA, is an architect practicing and teaching in the Classical Tradition. Alvin teaches Classical Drawing and Composition at the National Academy of Design in New York and at Moore College of Art and Design in Philadelphia. His latest

work includes the new galleries for the 19th century European Collection at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Leonard Lewisohn, Ph.D., is an author, translator and lecturer in Islamic Studies, specializing in the Persian language and Sufi literature. Editor of *The Heritage of Sufism* in three volumes, he lectures at the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London and is the author of *Beyond Faith and Infidelity: the Sufi Poetry and Teachings of Mahmud Shabistari*.

Jeanne Martin is a writer, research scholar, and speaker on ancient mythology and the mythic imagination. She is a musician especially interested in the harp as a healing instrument, connecting it to her studies in archetypal psychology. Her work also involves re-imagining the Renaissance idea of the City as a place for soul-making.

Christopher McIntosh, D.Phil., is author of two books: *The Rosicrucians*, and *The Rose Cross and the Age of Reason*. Formerly a journalist and editor in London, he spent four years in New York with the United Nations Development Program. He now lives in Hamburg, Germany, where he works for UNESCO. Christopher has a special interest in the symbolic dimensions of garden design and has visited gardens in many parts of the world.

Valery Rees read History at Newnham College, Cambridge. For 25 years she has been a member of the team at the School of Economic Science translating the Letters of Marsilio Ficino, and in 1999 organized the international conference held in London to mark Ficino's Quincentenary. Her current research is on Ficino and the Hungarian court.

Anthony Rooley is Director of the Consort of Musicke. He has produced over 100 CDs and has traveled the world—a seasoned modern-day minstrel—for thirty years, playing the lute to an amazing variety of audiences. His most recent passion is for the repertoire created for Mrs. Anne Bracegirdle, the singing actress of the 1690s who took the London audiences by storm.

Clement Salaman is a graduate in Modern History from Trinity College, Oxford. For over 25 years he has led a team of translators, members of the School of Economic Science, who have been engaged in translating the letters of Marsilio Ficino. More recently he has been engaged in translating the *Poimandres*, attributed in the Renaissance to the Egyptian sage Hermes Trismegistus. Clement also gave a lecture at the London conference on Ficino in June, 1999, the proceedings of which are to be published in 2000.

Evelyn Tubb studied at the Guildhall School of Music and is admired throughout the world as an expressive and influential interpreter who combines period style with the use of gesture and dramatic characterization. She is a member of the Consort of Musicke, and has made dozens of recordings and given concerts and broadcasts throughout the world.

Angela Voss, Ph.D., is a musician and astrologer. She has devoted many years to the study of Ficino, completing a PhD in 1992 on his astrological music therapy. She currently teaches a course on Ficino and Renaissance thought at the University of Kent, and has recently directed the Marini Consort in a CD recording of the *Hymns of Orpheus* to the planetary gods, in the spirit of Ficino's own Orphic singing.