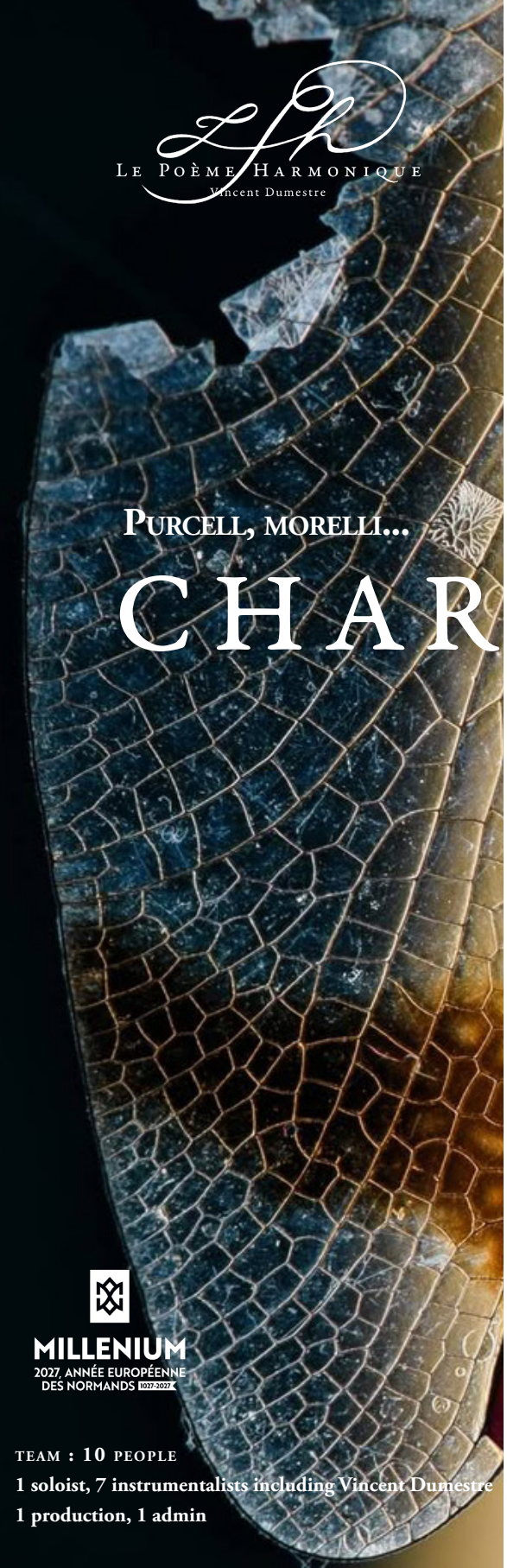


ONE CHARMING NIGHT

Night falls on London one evening towards the end of the 17th century, several centuries after William, Duke of Normandy, crossed the English Channel to change the destiny of England. In this city, which had become one of the great centers of the English imagination, Samuel Pepys – an inimitable public figure and author of a delightful diary – converses with Cesare Morelli, a musician born in Flanders and trained in Rome, whom he employs in his service. Singer, theorbo player, copyist and arranger, Morelli introduces Pepys to the art of accompanied singing, drawing on English, Italian and French repertoires, both secular and sacred.

Created as part of the *Millennium* celebrations, this programme invites us symbolically to cross the English Channel: not to recount the epic of William the Conqueror directly, but to bring to life one of the most fruitful echoes of this shared history between Normandy and England. Shakespeare and Purcell emerge here as two major voices of a kingdom shaped by legacies, transformations and dreams.

Led by the Franco-British countertenor William Shelton, winner of the Corneille-Normandie Competition, who is accompanied by Vincent Dumestre on the theorbo alongside six fellow musicians, this concert showcases the full expressive richness of Purcell's music. A musical interplay thus emerges in which speech becomes song, declamation gives way to improvisation, and Shakespeare and Purcell finally meet, having been separated by the passage of time.

Will we indeed hear the former's words set to the latter's music? It falls to the young Morelli to improvise on the spot a recitative based on none other than the most famous monologue in history: 'To be or not to be'.