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RECORDINGS
Recent releases of plainchant

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In the century of recorded interpretation of Gregorian chant, the introduction of a new choir director at the abbey of Solesmes might be considered a moment of the highest importance, though the event seems not to have been reported widely. After all, we have heard only Dom André Mocquereau in 1904 (admittedly directing French seminarians in Rome), Dom Joseph Gajard from 1930 to 1971, and Dom Jean Claire from 1972 to 1996. The début of Dom Richard Gagné as choirmaster is marked by a pairing of two feast-day Propers (no. 1 in the list below), followed by a collection of popular chants from *Liber Cantualis* (no. 2). It would take a sharp eye to notice on Dom Claire's last recording (1997, no. 1) that Dom Gagné was listed as assistant to Dom Claire. If Dom Claire's interpretations were lighter and quicker than Dom Gajard's, it may be equally true that Dom Gagné is still lighter and quicker. The familiar sound of the monks has not changed much, though Jean Allard, the engineer who has recorded all of the Solesmes discs (and those of several other monasteries as well) since the Decca era, has been succeeded by Igor Kirkwood, a familiar engineering presence on French recordings.

The Propers of Epiphany and Presentation (the latter traditionally known as Purification) include both Masses (without offertory verses), several Office chants of Epiphany and the processional chants of Presentation. Among the unusual chants are the processional antiphon *Responsum accepit* for Presentation, seldom recorded, and the announcement of the movable feasts chanted on Epiphany, recorded only three times before this. The second Solesmes disc, entitled 'Gregorian Melodies, Popular Chants' on the Paraclete label, will be of more interest to those who promote the retention of some basic chants in liturgical use. The most ancient Mass Propers are uniformly missing from this disc, while a number of seventeenth-, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century compositions are prominent. One rarity is the antiphon *Magnificat*, once recorded by the nuns of Argentan. Errors in the two booklets include the timing of the Epiphany gradual and the date of Dom Pothier's death (1923).

Another recent issue from Solesmes (no. 3) offers English narration for the disc first released with French narration (1999, no. 21). This provides a very

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basic introduction to Gregorian chant, illustrated by excerpts from Solesmes recordings, for non-specialists who would not even read a short article on the subject. As such, it fits the educational mission of the monks in the same way that no. 2 above does. The history of chant origins presented in the booklet follows a theory that is widely disputed today.

We have had several attempts to present the chant modes on records. In 1936 the monks of St Benoît du Lac in Canada put eight brief antiphons on a single ten-inch shellac disc, illustrating modes 1 to 8 in order. In 1952 the Roger Wagner Chorale issued a ten-inch vinyl record entitled '8 Introits in 8 Modes', again arranged in numerical order. In 1970 Dom Gajard directed the nuns of Argentan in a survey of the four *maneriae*, or pairs of authentic and plagal modes, using several chants of each mode, including antiphons with psalmody and Mass Propers. In 1989 Dominique Vellard's Ensemble Gilles Binchois illustrated 'Les tons de la musique' with an introit and another piece from the Mass Proper for each of the modes. Now Juan Carlos Asencio Palacios (no. 4) has constructed a similar programme of three chants in each mode. The choice of chant genres is not rigidly uniform, but includes antiphons for the *Benedictus* or *Magnificat* framing a single verse of the canticle, as well as Mass Propers, responsories, and a hymn. The singing and interpretation are excellent. This must be the most thorough treatment of the subject yet, even if I would have preferred to hear an introit in each group (there are four).

The chants on the next disc (no. 5) include examples of every mode, not only the usual eight of the octoechos but the three 'avant l'octoechos' modes based on the theories of Dom Claire. The conductor of the Consortium Vocale Oslo, Alexander M. Schweitzer, was at St Ottilien archabbey with Johannes Berchmans Göschl until 1994. In a career move reminiscent of Godehard Joppich, he then began to pursue chant studies in secular life, working with the International Association for Gregorian Chant Studies. He has worked on the revised chant editions that continue to appear in *Beiträge zur Gregorianik*, and has worked with this Oslo schola since 1998. The programme is offered as the 'oldest Gregorian compositions from Mass, Vespers and Compline'. The singing and semiological interpretations are superb. We are told that the recorded programme 'does not focus on any particular liturgical cycle', though the chants 'have a textual and thematic coherency'. The principle that might have guided the choice of selections is unclear. The Mass includes Ordinary and Proper chants and cantillations. The introit comes from Purification, the gradual from the nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost, the offertory and communion from the fourth Sunday after Pentecost, all combined with the Ordinary of the Mass for Easter. Even more inexplicably, Vespers begins with the psalm *Dixit* in the *tonus peregrinus* with an antiphon from Matins. It is claimed that Compline follows the pre-Vatican II format, yet it gives us the bowdlerized text of the hymn *Te lucis ante terminum* (no longer praying against nocturnal pollution). Most disturbing of all is Schweitzer's choice of psalm text version for the Office hours. These were sung unchanged for fifteen hundred years according to the version of the 'Gallican' Psalter, but are sung

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here from the Neo-Vulgate published in 1979 (published with musical notation as *Psalterium Romanum*, 1981). This unfamiliar kind of psalmody can be heard on the latest Solesmes recording of 'Vespers and Compline' (S 826), and *Dixit* alone is enough to illustrate how jarring the strange phrases are. While this is a commendable group, their programming needs to be more carefully worked out.

We have had several fine chant programs sung by the interdenominational religious community on Cape Cod, Massachusetts, and we have had many interesting programs (mostly on the Herald label) from Mary Berry's Cambridge schola. Now Mary Berry, who trained the leaders of the Cape Cod group, Gloriae Dei Cantores, at the beginning of their adoption of chant for worship and has held annual workshops at their home, has directed a group of three recordings with this choir on the theme of the life of Christ. The first one to be issued (no. 6) is made up of thirty-five chants, mostly brief, and mostly drawn from texts of the infancy gospel, laid out in historical order. Apart from the many short antiphons and Mass Propers, the larger pieces are the Advent responsory *Aspiciens* (sung in full), the two solemn canticles with antiphons, and the Advent hymn *Christe Redemptor*. The *Benedictus* is oddly framed by an antiphon for the *Magnificat*, probably out of a desire to include the chosen antiphons without singing the same canticle twice. Incomplete selections are the Christmas invitatory (with one verse) and the Advent hymn *Rorate caeli* (with two verses). The singing of both schola and soloists is uniformly lovely, alternating between men and women of the community (only five chants are sung in octaves). Six of the antiphons have not been recorded before. The whole programme is bookended by organ works of Guilmant and Widor on chant themes of the season.

Another programme that assembles a group of chants for their verbal content is Recordare (no. 7). The nuns of Bethlehem, Connecticut, offered a very different disc (1998, no. 4, soon renumbered as Sounds True STA M 004 D) that focused on Mass Propers of the earliest layer of chant. This time the framework is the mysteries of the rosary, represented by some of the most familiar chants on records. Two brief antiphons have not been recorded previously. Each mystery is described in a gospel quotation and a meditation, read by one of the nuns. Shortly before his death Theodore Marier directed the chants in the old Solesmes style of Dom Mocquereau.

The Riga schola (no. 8) made an unfortunate début (2002, no. 27) with organ interludes as well as accompaniment and saxophone improvisations. Now, away from the Riga Dom, they are unaccompanied, and their excellent singing and semiological interpretation make a much better impression. Several chants of Palm Sunday and Good Friday are almost as familiar as the Ordinary and Proper of Easter Mass, while the Mass Propers of St Benedict are less familiar, though they have been recorded at least three times. We may note that this choir is made up of adult mixed voices, but unlike some groups that alternate, perhaps joining in octaves only for the last strophe of a hymn, these sing together most of the time. They alternate sensibly in the Easter Gloria, Credo and sequence, and solo verses are assigned to excellent voices. I hear virtuosity in the soloists

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where prayerful contemplation can be heard elsewhere, but many will appreciate the quality of the singing nonetheless.

The latest disc from Schola Hungarica (no. 9) touches on a peripheral repertory that no one else on records has discovered. There were several medieval chant repertories in northern Italy, including Aquileia and Ravenna as well as Milan. What survives from Aquileia is one fragment of chant for a local baptismal rite. A complete repertory of Milanese chant is still in use to the present day. Ravenna, however, kept just a few of its own chants imbedded in Gregorian chant books, much as Benevento did. The earliest surviving Graduals from Ravenna are Padova, Biblioteca Capitolare A 47 and Modena, Archivio Capitolare O. I. 7, both from the turn of the twelfth century. Kenneth Levy has published articles on the subject, and he wrote the 'Ravenna' entry for *The New Grove Dictionary, Second Edition*. This disc also focuses on the sixth-century mosaics and the polyphonic works of Costanzo Porta, who directed music at the cathedral from 1567 to 1575. The chants at the heart of the programme belong to Christmas and Epiphany as well as Good Friday and Easter. Most of these are necessarily variant Gregorian chants found in the two Graduals. Of the few Ravenna chants found there, *Otin to stauron / O quando in cruce* was sung in both Greek and Latin, but only the Greek is sung here. *Alleluia Confitemini* for the Easter vigil is preserved in Gregorian and Ravennate versions, but only the Gregorian version is sung here. *Prositnomen tu stauron / Crucem tuam* is sung here in both languages. Another pair, *Osoi eis Christon* / [*Omnes*] *qui in Christo* is omitted, perhaps because the Latin chant is found on the Schola's Benevento disc. The most famous chant to be included is the sequence *Lux de luce*, the subject of one of Levy's articles, which was sung to the jubilus of the vigil alleluia. The Sanctus as sung in Greek on Easter is also heard. This superb disc continues the Schola's long tradition of excellence.

As this review appears, the Eighth International Gregorian Festival will be in session at Watou, Belgium. After the tapes of the Fourth Festival were pirated, the sponsors issued their own recordings of the Fifth Festival of 1994 (1997, no. 9) and Sixth of 1997 (1999, no. 23). Now we can hear the Seventh Festival of 2000 (no. 10). Only sixteen of the twenty-four participating choirs are included, but they come from most of Europe as well as Korea. Seven are men's choirs, seven are women's, along with the adult mixed choir from Riga and the Cantate choir of boys and girls from Budapest. The chants are largely unfamiliar, at least half of them not recorded previously. It would have been helpful to identify the unusual chants. The singing is uniformly fine. At the end, the massed choirs sing the hymn *Veni Creator* at a celebration of Vespers. This triennial event should be even better known.

Chant sung along with related polyphony is so common on records that no full accounting can be attempted here. One of the best programmes is a set of three discs for Tenebrae, the first two issued earlier (1999, no. 27, and 2001, no. 15). The final disc (no. 11) completes Palestrina's Book 3 of Lamentations (I wrote Book 4 erroneously last time) with their chant responsories, along with

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three other works of Palestrina for the triduum. The responsories are sung from the Holy Week chants published by Guidetti in 1587.

Two more discs (nos. 12 and 13) offer Nicolas Gombert's final work, regarded as his masterpiece even if it has been almost entirely neglected on records. The set of eight *Magnificats* is sung by the Tallis Scholars in alternating chant and polyphony, one in each mode, preceded and concluded by appropriate antiphons. In the case of his settings for the third and sixth modes, the composer sought to make them more useful by adding optional conclusions (a few added bars) for the eighth and first modes respectively, since these modes occur so frequently. Unwilling to omit those extra phrases of music, Peter Phillips had to use alternate antiphons in the eighth and first modes, so the sequence of eight modes is lost. The antiphons are sung from neither *Antiphonale Monasticum* nor *Liber Usualis* (the unidentified source may be from the composer's era). An unusually appropriate cover on both discs offers Botticelli's 'Madonna of the Magnificat'.

The place of the soloist in singing chant has changed, judging by the recorded evidence. In the past, we might have heard a small schola used in the verse of a gradual, but a solo voice would be heard only in a lamentation, a lesson, the *Exsultet* or the celebrant's prayers of the Mass. In recent decades, however, the need for a soloist in solo verses has been recognized, but we have also heard the solo voice in almost every form of chant. Certainly Marie Pierik (Fidelity **GC1** in my discography) made a poor choice in singing Mass Ordinaries, and Magdalith (**2401122** in my book) was not much better in Mass Propers. More recently, Iégor Reznikoff and Damien Poisblaud have sung solo, while Marie-Claire Billecocq and Dominique Vellard have employed one or two additional voices to differentiate the respond from the solo verse of a gradual, alleluia or offertory.

Reznikoff has just made his sixth recording, this time in the resonant space of Mont Saint Michel (no. 14), as he used Thoronet, Fontenay and Vézelay previously. His voice is certainly the most individual of any chant soloist I have heard. A basso profundo in conventional terms, his technique involves letting the voice resound in the space, making the walls of the church the sounding board of his vocal instrument. This requires extremely slow tempos, but the unique interpretative quality of his singing wins over the willing listener. A professor of philosophy in Paris, he has written extensively on aspects of art, music and spirituality. His first recording (Harmonia Mundi France **1044** in my discography) was not made in a Romanesque space, hence four of those chants devoted to St Michael have been remade here. Sadly, the recording was made just as the last three monks were departing, leaving the monastery to a modern young religious community. The Benedictines had resumed their way of life there only in 1969, a hundred and eighty years after their expulsion in 1790.

The disc credited to an ensemble directed by Raúl Mallavibarrena (no. 15) is actually a collection of twenty-six solo chants, divided evenly among the three members of the group. Criticism is disarmed when the notes state that there is no intention to interpret Gregorian chant authentically. (Yet it goes too far in stating

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that 'little is known about how it might have been authentically interpreted in its day', since the Mass Ordinaries, hymns and Marian antiphons that are included on this disc were hardly solo pieces in any circumstance.) The purpose of the disc, rather, is to select chants familiar from their use as cantus firmi in polyphonic music. (Indeed, the last piece is the chanson *'L'homme armé'*.) Within the limits of solo singing, the interpretations are quite acceptable. Perhaps there is more virtuosity than contemplation in the genuine solo verses.

Richard Crocker, professor emeritus of musicology and author of *An Introduction to Gregorian Chant* (New York and London: Yale University Press, 2000), has embarked on a project (no. 16) to record the repertory of 600 chants, the Propers of the Mass that are common to the Old Roman Graduals, *Antiphonale Missarum Sextuplex* and the earliest Frankish Graduals, all sung from the *Graduale Triplex*. Professor Crocker has been singing chant for a lifetime, and in recent years singing the chants daily from *GT*. He acknowledges that directing a schola would be a better approach to this project, but for this number of chants he has despaired of teaching even a few singers to incorporate the nuances of the neumes into their interpretation of the staff notation. He is offering the recordings as a study of chant interpretation, much as an editor would publish his transcription of a manuscript. The first five discs group the graduals by mode – first and seventh, third and fourth, fifth (temporal cycle), fifth (sanctoral cycle), and second and eighth – for a total of 107 graduals. Each disc is enclosed in a handsome booklet that contains an essay on the specific group of chants, followed by text, English translation, scriptural or other source of the text, *GT* page number, original liturgical assignment, and place in *AMS* for each chant, concluding with a bibliography. Further information can be obtained from *rgcrocker@attbi.com*.

Finally, an extraordinarily interesting CD-ROM has arrived from the Interuniversity Library of Montpellier. This library, known until recently as the library of the faculty of medicine, now serves all three universities in the city. It occupies the fourteenth-century building of a Benedictine monastery that became the bishop's palace in 1536 and a school of medicine in 1794 (medicine had been taught in Montpellier since 1220, when Aragon governed the city). The disc (no. 17) is devoted to forty-three manuscripts – twenty-seven with illuminations (including H.196) and thirty with music (including H.159 and H.196). Fourteen, obviously, are counted twice. There is a choice of French or English textual commentary. Clicking on a manuscript will give selected illuminated pages on screen and selected music recorded expressly for the purpose by Ensemble Gilles Binchois under Dominique Vellard. Music of medieval instruments is also heard. A photo and video tour of the facility is also included, and much more. A Pentium PC and Windows 95/98 are required with 16 MB of RAM. Every aspect of the disc represents the highest technical standards.

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DISCOGRAPHY

All record numbers refer to the compact disc format unless otherwise noted; record retailers will be able to advise about the availability of other carriers. 'T' indicates that the accompanying booklet includes full texts of vocal works in the original language. Where translations are also supplied, these are indicated as follows: e English; f French; g German; s Spanish; d Dutch; m Magyar

1 Epiphanie et Présentation
Monks of the abbey of St Pierre de Solesmes, cond. Dom Richard Gagné
Solesmes S 840. (Issued 1998) Tef

2 Chants populaires de la liturgie latine, vol. 1
Monks of the abbey of St Pierre de Solesmes, cond. Dom Richard Gagné
Solesmes/Paraclete S 844. (Issued 2000) Tef

3 Learning about Gregorian Chant
Monks of the abbey of St Peter of Solesmes, cond. Dom Jean Claire
Paraclete S 843. (Recorded 1980–86, issued 2001) –

4 Octoechos Latino
Schola Antiqua, cond. Juan Carlos Asensio Palacios
Pneuma PN 380. (Recorded 2000) Tes

5 Laus Mea Dominus
Consortium Vocale Oslo, cond. Alexander M. Schweitzer
ASV Gaudeamus CD GAU 304. (Recorded 2000) Te

6 The Coming of Christ
Gloriae Dei Cantores Schola, cond. Mary Berry
Gloriae Dei GDCD 033. (Recorded 2001 and 2002) Te

7 Recordare
Benedictine Nuns of the Abbey of Regina Laudis, dir. Theodore Marier
Sounds True STA MM 00123D. (Issued 2000) Te

8 Holy Week, Easter, St Benedict
Schola Cantorum Riga, cond. Guntars Pranis
Centaur CRC 2542. (Recorded 2000) Te

9 Ravenna the City of Mosaics
Schola Hungarica, cond. László Dobszay and Janka Szendrei
Hungaroton HCD 32014. (Recorded 2000) Tem

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10 Cantus Gregorianus
16 choirs
Gregoriaans Festival van Watou DC 0101055 (2 discs). (Recorded 2000) Td

11 Palestrina: Music for Holy Saturday
Musica Contexta, cond. Simon Ravens
Chandos Chaconne CHAN 0679. (Recorded 2001) Tefg

12 Gombert Magnificats 1–4
The Tallis Scholars, cond. Peter Phillips
Gimell CDGIM 037. (Issued 2001) Tefg

13 Gombert Magnificats 5–8
The Tallis Scholars, cond. Peter Phillips
Gimell CDGIM 038. (Issued 2002) Tefg

14 Le chant du Mont Saint-Michel
Iégor Reznikoff
Studio SM. D 2914. (Recorded 2001) Tef

15 Cantus Firmus
Musica Ficta, direction Raúl Mallavibarrena
Enchiriadis EN 2005. (Recorded 2001) Ts

16 A Gregorian Archive
Richard Crocker, solo
Emeritus Press (5 discs). (Issued 2002) Te

17 Cantor & Musicus
Ensemble Gilles Binchois, cond. Dominique Vellard
Bibliothèque Interuniversitaire de Montpellier BIU 7437–1. (CD-ROM, issued 2000) Tef

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