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Recent recordings of plainchant

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In a notably skimpy year for chant recordings, a major label has set out to create a best-seller in the pattern of EMI's successful reissue of recordings from the monastery of Silos. Universal, the largest record company in the world, chose the Cistercian monastery of Heiligenkreuz near Vienna to record a programme of chant that would be widely publicised (no. 1 in the list below). The programme is more unified than some, beginning with three funeral antiphons and the Requiem Mass, followed by Compline, concluding with three chants for Pentecost. Everything is sung from the Cistercian edition, the first time the frequently recorded Requiem has been heard this way. Along with the expected melodic alterations, the *Dies irae* is omitted and *Pie Jesu Domine* is sung as an elevation. In Compline the hymn is placed at the beginning according to the latest order of the Divine Office. *Veni Creator Spiritus* is interesting because the Cistercian version is closer to *Liber Hymnarius* than to *Antiphonale Monasticum* or *Antiphonale Romanum*. The singing is typical of the traditional Solesmes style, for semiology seems not to have affected Cistercian chant interpretation. Drawn from among seventy-seven monks, a schola of about seventeen young monks is notably musical and the twelfth-century Romanesque church is a warm venue for singing.

A Premonstratensian abbey in southern California, founded by Hungarian refugees in 1957, now numbers almost seventy members. A recent recording of the Propers of the three Masses of Christmas, adding the sequence *Laetabundus*, has been acquired by Jade for wide distribution (no. 2). Their edition of chant, like the Cistercian edition, has melodic variants, and the singing is in the traditional Solesmes style. While there are several other discs offering a similar programme, the others use the standard Gregorian edition. The playing time is unfortunately short.

Unnoticed all these years for lack of publicity is the first recording of a Mass for St Martial the Apostle, composed by Adémar de Chabannes in 1029. While James Grier has treated this subject extensively in this journal (2003 and 2006), *Early Music History* (2005) and his book on the monk (2006), his cooperation in preparing this recording and writing the notes has escaped my attention. Vocal and instrumental drones are added to the singing.

A recreation of the Midnight Mass in Rouen cathedral in the thirteenth century escaped notice until the discography of Mary Berry – also in this issue of *Plainsong & Medieval Music* – was compiled (no. 4). The Mass was recorded during a liturgical celebration, preceded by a Ceremony of the Shepherds from a local source, the latter

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using choristers from King's College Chapel (they also sing the Sanctus). The Ordinary is troped. It is unfortunate that the Latin texts are not printed.

The complete Vespers of the Blessed Virgin is sung with the interpolation of Marcel Dupré's *Les Vêpres de la Vierge*, op. 18 (no. 5). Dupré's music, played by Philippe Lefebvre on the grand organ of Notre Dame, consists of antiphons that follow the psalms and canticle (the antiphons are sung before) and alternate versets of the hymn and canticle. David Hill accompanies the singing on the choir organ.

Lanfranco Menga, who has made several previous chant discs for the same label, offers an unusual programme of chants for Lent, a polyphonic conductus, the motet *O homo considera*, a first recording of a Good Friday lamentation by Johannes de Quadris, and two villancicos in Spanish (no. 6). The only familiar chants are *Media vita* and the Ash Wednesday introit. The programme of rarities is sung with considerable attention to the mood of the season.

Another reconstruction of a medieval Mass (without the cantillations this time), reminiscent of several discs from Anonymous 4, includes the first recording of a Mass by Thomas Packe, who is known only as the organist in Exeter cathedral in the last decade of the fifteenth century, with the Propers of the Blessed Virgin (no. 7). The sequence *Nativitas Mariae Virginis* is new to discs. The schola, made up of four Swedish women, is a professional ensemble reminiscent of the more famous American group.

The polyphony heard in Vespers of St Michael and St Martin (both Offices incomplete) is taken from a 1571 collection donated to St Martin's collegiate church in Bratislava (no. 8). The chants include antiphons as well as four Mass Propers for St Martin, including the sequence *Sacerdotem Christi Martinum*, heard earlier on Motette's Mass for the saint (**50310** in my book and 1997, no. 15 for the CD), and the first recording of the responsory *Martinus sacerdos*. The short playing time left room for a fuller representation of the Offices.

The Masses of Nicholas Ludford were recorded earlier with chant Propers on the Gaudeamus label. The next disc (no. 9) offers one of the Masses sung by boys and men with a different set of Marian Propers. The familiar chants are well executed.

Even if too late for medievalists, the discovery in 1975 of a set of ten alternatim Vespers psalms by Victoria that were prepared for printing (though still not listed among his works) is the main attraction of the next disc (no. 10). Sung with chant verses from a 1622 edition, they have been recorded with chant antiphons. Five motets, a hymn and the canticle are added from the composer's published works. While this is admittedly not a Vespers service, it places the ten psalms in some kind of context.

The Society of St Gregory, which regularly sings a Tridentine Mass in New Haven, Connecticut, has recorded still another disc of a complete Mass (no. 11). This time the Ordinary is the first recording of Palestrina's *Missa Sacerdos et pontifex*, with Proper chants for the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. The chant is rendered solemnly in the traditional Solesmes style, while the Palestrina Mass is performed so well as to be a valuable addition to the still-incomplete Palestrina discography. Two motets fill out the offertory and communion.

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Recordings made by the monks of Silos for the Spanish label Pax from 1956 to 1960 or later have been reissued on a series of Jade CDs. The latest (no. 12), however, reassembles tracks from five previous discs. The chants are familiar for their romantic style of singing in the traditional Solesmes manner, using Castilian pronunciation and organ accompaniment.

Ad te levavi animam meam (no. 13) is a new book by Nino Albarosa and Aurelio Porfiri that explains the most basic ideas about liturgical chant in a question/answer format. First published in German in 2008, the English translation is notably fluent. Dom Columba Kelly contributed a preface. Attached is a CD containing about half of the chants from Albarosa's earlier disc (2005, no. 9), which are discussed in the later pages of the book.

Discography

All record numbers in the following list 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; m Magyar.

1 Chant – Music for the Soul
Cistercian Monks of Heiligenkreuz Abbey, dir. Fr Simeon
Decca B0011489-02. (Recorded 2008) Te

2 Christmas at St Michael's Abbey
Norbertine canons of St Michael's Abbey
Jade 73138-36394-2. (Issued 2006) Te

3 Mass for Saint Martial
Ensemble for Early Music, dir. Frederick Renz
Ex Cathedra EC-9002. (Recorded 1999) Te

4 The Ceremony of the Shepherds and Midnight Mass
Schola Gregoriana of Cambridge and Choristers of King's College Cambridge, dir. Mary Berry
Herald HAVPCD 180. (Recorded 1995) Te

5 Marcel Dupré: Fifteen Antiphons for Vespers
Schola Gregoriana of Cambridge, dir. Mary Berry
Herald HAVPCD 170. (Recorded 1994) Tef

6 Crucem Tuam Adoramus
Schola Gregoriana di Venezia, dir. Lanfranco Menga
Tactus TC 210001. (Recorded 2007) T

7 Gaudete in Domino
Schola Gothia, dir. Ulrike Heider
Gothic G-49259. (Recorded 2006) Te

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8 Polyphonic Vespers for St Michael's and St Martin's Days
Schola Hungarica, dir. László Dobszay and Janka Szendrei
BMC. CD 128. (Recorded 2006) Tem

9 Missa Benedicta (Ludford)
Choir of New College, Oxford, dir. Edward Higginbottom
K617. K617206. (Recorded 2007) Tef

10 Tomás Luis de Victoria
La Colombina
K617. K617209. (Issued 2008) Tf

11 Exaltation of the Holy Cross
Schola of the Society of St Gregory, dir. Nicholas Renouf and Britt Wheeler
Society of St Gregory (no number). (Recorded 2007) Te

12 The Definitive Collection
Benedictine Monks of Santo Domingo de Silos
Jade 73138-36393-2. (Recorded *c*.1956–60; reissued 2008) Te

13 *Ad te levavi animam meam* (ix + 64 pages)
Mediae Aetatis Sodalicium, dir. Nino Albarosa
Edition Music-Contact (book with CD). Recorded 1996; reissued 2008) Te

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