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RECORDINGS
Recent releases of plainchant

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This year has brought new issues from several long-time contributors to the chant discography. Ranking with the abbey of Solesmes in sheer quantity of chant recordings is Schola Hungarica, whose new disc is titled 'The Holy Lady of Chartres' (no. 1 in the list below). Although this is not billed 'Magyar Gregorianum' as the last entry was (2001, no. 10), it does in fact include an Office originating in Chartres that is preserved only in Hungary. Matins responsories for the common of the Blessed Virgin include three responsories attributed to Fulbert of Chartres (two of which were recorded by Ensemble Venance Fortunat, 1993, no. 18, since reissued as L'Empreinte Digitale ED 13036). The third responsory, *Ad nutum Domini*, receives its first chant recording here. This is a set of Matins responsories in numerical modal order. Despite the neat fit of Fulbert's three pieces with the rest, the notes decline to assert that this integral set of responsories originated at Chartres. Masses for Purification and Assumption from two Chartres sources, Provins 12 and Chartres 520, fill out the disc.

The latest programme from Schola Gregoriana Pragensis is 'Adoratio Crucis' (no. 2). The chants are taken from Palm Sunday and Good Friday, including some chants that survive only in Cistercian and Premonstratensian books. A boys' choir joins in effectively for the first time in this series. Luis Lozano Virumbrales (no. 3) has been listed here earlier (1992, no. 23; 1993, no. 16), and this disc comes on yet another label. As a complete funeral rite, it includes three litanies (Vera Sophia, Miserere Jesu Christe, Sancte Petre) that are unfamiliar to me. Most interesting is the first recording of the offertory, *Domine Jesu Christe*, with all four verses, even if they are not as elaborate as some offertory verses. The singing is marked by *fermate* at the end of each phrase, more extended than even Konrad Ruhland used to do. The sources (four manuscripts and a Spanish printed gradual of 1506) are inadequately identified. Another Requiem (no. 4) is a reissue from a disc that is unknown to me. The singing is straightforward in the manner of Dom Gajard. The Mass includes several additional Propers that are permitted in the new *Graduale Romanum*. Both of these discs include the *Dies irae*.

Ensemble Venance Fortunat concentrates on medieval sacred music, though

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chant does not predominate in their programmes. Their latest disc (no. 5) is subtitled 'chants of Peter the Venerable' and offers more of the chants of Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, ms. lat. 17716 that we heard on an earlier disc (1999, no. 14). The Marian chants are mostly unfamiliar, and the performance style focuses more on the virtuoso solo than most other renditions. The ensemble has an individual approach that merits a listening.

Jan Boogaarts has a long list of recordings to his credit. The latest offers First Vespers and Mass of Sts Peter and Paul, revised after Vatican II (no. 6). (The antiphon for Magnificat is now *Gloriosi principes*.) Only three psalms are sung for Vespers, but otherwise the two liturgies are sung complete. Another Vespers comes from the Norbertines of Averbode, listed here before (1993, no. 4). The singing on this disc (no. 7) is improved over the earlier one, though still organ-accompanied, and the Premonstratensian rite of Easter Vespers and Compline is an interesting variant of the Roman rite, adding several unique features. It is not clear whether some psalms have been omitted (109 and 113 are sung). The prayers and readings are in Dutch.

The Italian label Tactus has added two more discs to the two reviewed last year, and both recall Italian sailors who stole relics. The famous translation of St Mark from Alexandria to Venice is commemorated in a thirteenth-century Venetian gradual (no. 8). The Mass of the feast is unremarkable, but the disc is completed with tropes and sequences not previously recorded. The singing of the third ensemble to be heard in this series is excellent in the Cardine manner. The other disc (no. 9), performed by the Ensemble Calixtinus, notes the translation of St. Nicholas from Myra to Bari. It offers Matins from a thirteenth-century Bari antiphonal – the most complete presentation I have ever heard of this office. In eighty minutes we hear the invitatory, nine antiphons with truncated psalms and nine responsories, putting *Ex ejus tumba* and its prosa *Sospitati dedit* as the climax of the disc. But the singing of this group, which released a disc last year (2001, no. 8), is even more excessive in its strenuous vocalism and heavy droning than the performance heard on the companion Tactus CD featuring the Ensemble Oktoechos (no. 8), even though the programme is liturgically superior to that of two previous Nicholas discs (2001, nos. 13 and 14).

After presenting five recordings of the celebrated Christmas responsory *Descendit de caelo missus* at Cantus Planus in 2000, I was astonished to receive a newly issued version of the responsory that had been recorded several years earlier (no. 10). It is used as the processional for a liturgical reconstruction of the third Mass of Christmas using John Sheppard's Mass and chants from the Sarum Gradual, edited by Nick Sandon. The responsory is as different as the five earlier versions are different from each other. Somewhat similar is *Missa Salve intemerata* of Thomas Tallis (no. 11), filled out with his own polyphonic antiphons and seven chants, though four of the chants are antiphons that do not belong in the Mass.

The latest disc from Anonymous 4 (no. 12) is one of their finest in a series marked by excellence. A complete troped Mass for the Ascension (with the old

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offertory *Viri Galilaei*, including both verse and trope) has a connection with the expected end of the world in AD 1000. *Judicii signum* signals the theme of the last judgement at the opening of the programme. Chant specialists who may have passed over the medieval polyphony of this superb ensemble can revel in this group of Aquitanian chants. An unfamiliar schola of Swiss novices is also noted for the beauty of their singing (no. 13). The selections, ranging from less familiar Holy Week pieces to the Easter Propers, are sung with a firm and lovely vocal quality, caught up close in a warm acoustic space. Another disc resembles the programming of fifty years ago, a totally themeless collection of some familiar hymns and antiphons (no. 14). Unusual is its origin in a Brazilian monastery, with monks who sound much like other monks who recorded in that bygone era. The theme seems to come from the title volume, *Cantus Selecti* (Solesmes, 1949), where several unrecorded pieces can be found, but *Te Deum* is sung in the 'Roman' manner found only in the new *Graduale Romanum* (GR 844), and other selections are not found in the title volume at all.

Philip Cave, a member of various Oxford-based vocal ensembles, has also directed several recordings of medieval music, but his new disc (no. 15) is devoted entirely to chants from Anglo-Saxon manuscripts. David Hiley transcribed these unfamiliar pieces, but unfortunately no sources are identified. Chants for St Gregory the Great and St Augustine of Canterbury are legitimate reminders of the first mission. The rest honour Cuthbert, King Edmund, Dunstan, Ethelwold, Wolfstan and others. One antiphon for Edmund was mentioned last year (2001, no. 12), and another is related to a responsory on the same disc, but I have not traced recordings of any other chants. Three young women, students of Rebecca Stewart, have formed the ensemble Trigon (no. 16). The feast of Purification is sung in chant except for three organa and a conductus. The chants are taken from Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, ms. lat. 1112, sung with Latin pronunciation of the time and place. The tempos reflect a spirit of worship that is often lacking in secular ensembles. The disc is a notable début, promising further chant interpretations of great insight. Another disc of music in honour of the Blessed Virgin is directed by Stefan Engels (no. 17). The programme is evenly divided between chants from Austrian sources and other medieval pieces, including cantiones and songs by Hildegard and the monk of Salzburg. The singing is lovely and the juxtaposition of styles instructive.

The Heinrich-Isaak-Ensemble is usually heard in music of later periods, but their Cistercian Vespers shows a notable sympathy for chant (no. 18). The source is Colmar 318, a thirteenth-century manuscript from Pairis in Alsace. The singing follows semiological principles in a spirit close to monastic celebration. A medieval performance practice is suggested by the insertion of the antiphon halfway through the psalm and before the doxology, in addition to its usual function of framing the psalm. Only the hymn *Ave maris stella* seems to be interpreted with an unconventional rhythm.

In three extended sessions during January and June 1981 and January 1982, Godehard Joppich recorded ten major Masses of the liturgical year (**2565199** to

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2565203 in my discography). The box of five LPs was well documented with complete printed chants and extensive notes on semiology. All but one of the ten offertories included all the verses. The singing was more choppy than Joppich eventually achieved, but it was an important set. Except for a disc containing the First and Third Masses of Christmas, the CD reissues have not preserved the completeness of the original Masses, even going so far as to cut out the offertory verses. The latest reissue (no. 19) offers as much of the ten Masses as would fit on two well-filled discs, but only the First Mass of Christmas (already reissued twice) and Easter are complete as recorded. The Second Mass is reduced to its communio, while the Dedication of a Church is limited to the Ordinary (Mass XIV) that had been recorded among the proper parts of that observance. The offertories are uncut, but only five of the ten are included. The minimal notes are ludicrously elementary (starting with Pope Gregory's role), accompanied by a time line citing eleven mostly irrelevant dates. This is poles apart from the latest scholarship that informed the original notes. The complete set could be issued on four compact discs without dividing any feast between sides.

Another reissue is a curiosity (no. 20), originally issued as a two-disc set in 1973 (**142** in my discography) as an evocation of past performance practice in two different types of parish church, one in the country and the other in the city. The use of cantor, choir and congregation singing chant and polyphony, along with octave singing, organ accompaniment and organ solos of Bach and Clérambault formed a typical eclectic mix. Mass VIII (strangely attributed to Palestrina for Kyrie and Gloria) and Credo III are sung in the country, while Palestrina and the neo-Gallican Credo and Sanctus of Du Mont's *Messe Royale* supply the Mass Ordinary in the city. Oddly, *Alleluia Ostende* is sung in the country, but *Alleluia Multifarie* is reduced to a psalm tone for the verse in the city (there are no other Propers). But perhaps the main interest of this disc is its strong dose of realism in the midst of idealized realisations of chant Masses as few Catholics ever experienced them.

Pierre Kaelin's collection, also eclectic, listed in my discography as **73046**, has been reissued with a new twist (no. 21). Five of the chants are repeated at the beginning of the programme, identified as 'the five enigma tunes in the original Gregorian versions', perhaps a reference to their use in a popular rock performance titled 'Le roi est mort, vive le roi!' which is unknown to me. Still other reissues come from the monks of Prinknash Abbey and the nuns of Stanbrook Abbey (nos. 22 and 23). They combine chants from **349** in my discography with two other discs made about the same time. There are English as well as Latin chants here, and the two choirs are recorded separately.

Brigitte Lesne's newest disc (no. 24) offers four brief liturgical plays. Annunciation-Visitation, Planctus Mariae and Resurrection are taken from different Cividale sources, while Pastores comes from Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, ms. lat. 904, the Rouen Gradual. Chants for Christmas and Good Friday are added appropriately, along with several conductus. The singing is superb, notably for Planctus Mariae, recorded several times earlier. A more elaborate play is the Easter play from

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Origny-Sainte-Benoîte (St Quentin, MS 86). On Dominique Vellard's programme (no. 25) it leads into troped chants for the Easter Mass, sung from Laon 239 and other early sources. The disc begins with the *Exsultet* from the Sarum Gradual. An earlier version of the same play (no. 26) suffers by comparison. The singing is less pleasing, and the play is interrupted several times by unrelated motets. The disc opens with sound effects befitting the context of the following fifteenth-century motet, *Tenebrae factae sunt*, even further removed from the period of the play.

A chant schola of mixed voices from Latvia recorded their disc at the Riga Dom, which houses a marvellous nineteenth-century organ (no. 27). The chants reflect semiological scholarship and include both verses of the offertory *Ave Maria*, but the great organ is used for interludes as well as accompaniment in the reverberant space of the cathedral. The added saxophone improvisations rule the disc out of court, but this remains a beautifully sung, if flawed, disc.

Finally, a disc subtitled 'The veneration of Mary in monastery and court' tries to do two things at once (no. 28). During a celebration of Vespers of the Blessed Virgin (beautifully sung by women's voices), the cantigas of Alfonso el Sabio are sung with lavish instrumental accompaniment after each chant. Certainly Mary was venerated in sacred and secular venues, but combining two very different types of music in one sequence is simply bizarre. Since the psalms are severely truncated and the cantigas are reduced to a few verses of each, neither celebration is adequately presented.

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; m Magyar; c Czech; s Spanish; d Dutch; p Portuguese; i Italian.

1 The Holy Lady of Chartres
Schola Hungarica, cond. László Dobszay and Janka Szendrei
Hungaroton HCD 31922. (Recorded 1999) Tem

2 Adoratio Crucis
Schola Gregoriana Pragensis with Boni Pueri, cond. David Eben
Supraphon SU 3488–2. (Recorded 1999) Tefgc

3 Ritual Carolingio
Grupo de Musica Alfonso X el Sabio, cond. Luis Lozano Virumbrales
Sony SK 62820. (Recorded 1996) Ts

4 Requiem
Scola Gregoriana Bruges, cond. Roger Deruwe
Talent DOM 291040. (Recorded 1989) T

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5 Cluny: La Vierge
Ensemble Venance Fortunat, cond. Anne-Marie Deschamps
L'Empreinte Digitale ED 13109. (Recorded 1999) Tef

6 Aurea Luce
Utrechts Studenten Gregoriaans Koor, cond. Jan Boogaarts
KRO Mirasound 299299. (Recorded 1998) Td

7 Pasen
Norbertine abbey choir of Averbode, cond. Marc Fierens
Eufoda 1217. (Recorded 1995) Td

8 Vir Dei Beatus [Marcus]
Ensemble Oktoechos, cond. Lanfranco Menga
Tactus TC 100003. (Recorded 1999) T

9 Nicolaus
Ensemble Calixtinus, cond. Gianni de Gennaro
Tactus TC 100004. (Recorded 1999) T

10 John Sheppard Missa Cantate
Gabrieli Consort and Salisbury Cathedral Boy Choristers, cond. Paul McCreesh
Archiv 457658–2. (Recorded 1996) Te

11 Thomas Tallis
Winchester Cathedral Choir, cond. David Hill
Hyperion CDA 67207. (Recorded 2000) Te

12 1000, A Mass for the End of Time
Anonymous 4
Harmonia Mundi France HMU 907224. (Recorded 2000) Tefg

13 In a Cloister
I Cantori della Turrita, cond. Eros Beltraminelli
Arts 47541–2. (Recorded 1997) T

14 Cantus Selecti
Monks of San Bento, São Paolo, Brazil, cond. Rocco Fraioli
MCD World Music MCD 138. (Recorded 2000–01) Tp

15 Chant in honour of Anglo-Saxon Saints
Magnificat, cond. Philip Cave
Griffin CGCD 4004. (Recorded 1995)

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16 Music for Candlemas
Trigon
Passacaille 932. (Recorded 2000) Te

17 Salve Regina
Women of the Salzburg Virgilschola, cond. Stefan Engels
Salzburger Virgilschola SVS 1998 02. (Issued 1998) Tg

18 Gesänge zur ersten Vesper für das Fest Maria Geburt
Heinrich-Isaak-Ensemble, cond. Hans-Georg Renner
Christophorus CHR 77199. (Recorded 1996) Tefg

19 Gregorian Chant
Monks of Münsterschwarzach, cond. Godehard Joppich
Archiv 469241–2. (Recorded 1981–82, reissued 2000)

20 Messes des Paroisses avant Vatican II
Ensemble Polyphonique de Montparnasse, cond. Victor Martin
Arion ARN 58463. (Recorded *c.* 1972, reissued 1999) T

21 In Paradisum
Fribourg Cathedral Choirs, cond. Pierre Kaelin
Tudor 8129. (Recorded 1979, reissued 1996)

22 Compline and Other Chant
Monks of Prinknash Abbey, cond. Charles Watson; Nuns of Stanbrook Abbey, cond. Paul Inwood
Saydisc CD-SDL 422. (Recorded 1982, 1985) T

23 Chants and Psalms
Monks of Prinknash Abbey, cond. Charles Watson; Nuns of Stanbrook Abbey, cond. Paul Inwood
Saydisc CD-SDL 423. (Recorded 1985, 1986) T

24 Quem quaeritis?
Discantus, cond. Brigitte Lesne
Opus 111. OP 30269. (Recorded 2000) Tefg

25 Les trois Maries
Ensemble Gilles Binchois, cond. Dominique Vellard
Virgin Veritas VC 5 45398 2. (Recorded 1999) Tf

26 Les trois Maries
Madrigal de Paris, cond. Bernard Gagnepain
Koch Schwann 3–1425–2. (Recorded 1993) Teg

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27 Medieval chants and improvisations
Schola Cantorum Riga, cond. Guntar Pranis; Laurentius Schlieker, organ; Artis Gaga, saxophone
Centaur CRC 2456. (Recorded 1999) Te

28 Nigra sum sed formosa
Ensemble San Felice, cond. Federico Bardazzi
Bongiovanni GB 5611–2. (Recorded 2000) Tei

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