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Plainsong and Medieval Music, **25**, 1, 103–106 © Cambridge University Press, 2016
doi: 10.1017/S0961137115000248

Recent recordings of plainchant

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The latest entry in the traversal of *Graduale Novum 1*, the AISCGre edition of restitutions of Mass Propers, arrived too late for last year's roundup of new recordings (no. 1 in the list below). It offers the Propers for the eleventh to the fifteenth Sundays in Ordinary Time. The title, 'Gustate et Videte', comes from the incipit of the communion for the fourteenth Sunday. The chants are sung in the best semiological interpretation with superb choral tone. The notes are interesting for a wry explanation of the lack of correspondence between the new liturgical calendar and the old. The first four sets of Propers on this disc match the fifth to the eighth Sundays after Pentecost, but the last set come from the tenth Sunday after Pentecost (with the exception of the communion). Because of the imprecatory introit of the ninth Sunday after Pentecost, *averte mala inimicis meis ... disperde illos*, this set was passed over. The editors of the 1970 Roman Missal, on second thought, decided, upon reaching the sixteenth Sunday of the Year, to restore the missing chants (except the communion) to that service, while removing the offending lines in favour of another verse from the same psalm. (As the *Graduale Triplex* shows, the text of the introit escaped the tampering.) At this moment, EOS has three more CDs awaiting issue by three of the directors who have contributed earlier discs to the series. The second volume of *Graduale Novum* is expected to be published in 2017.

We have never had, to my knowledge, any recordings from the proper feasts of the Carmelite order. I had to borrow a copy of the chant book from a nun, a longtime friend, in order to enter the next disc (no. 2) into Chantdiscography.com. I soon learned that these nuns from Pécs had made an earlier CD for the same label, but it has not arrived yet. (Pécs was the site of the first Cantus Planus conference that I attended in 1990.) The record, issued for the 400th anniversary of St Teresa of Jesus (of Ávila), includes chants from the proper office of the foundress, including First Vespers, Matins and Lauds. All these chants are first recordings. (There are additional tracks by a harpsichordist and an ensemble of voice and guitars.) The nuns' singing is beyond reproach.

Nursia, the place of St Benedict's birth (Norcia in Italian), was the site of a monastery until 1810. In 2000, a new Benedictine community, founded in Rome in 1998, restored religious life to the ancient abbey. The programme of their new disc (no. 3) consists of Marian chants. Five great responsories are each preceded, unusually, by the appropriate *capitulum* of the feast. The singing is very fine. The

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0961137115000248 Published online by Cambridge University Press

responsory *Beatissimae Virginis Mariae* is the first recording known to me. The singing is distributed among solos, a small schola and the entire community.

A recent disc from the Cistercians of Heiligenkreuz (no. 4) offers a complete Mass of Our Lady. Rather oddly, the four tracks that open the disc, familiar hymns and an antiphon, are sung with piano improvisations. The disc concludes with a Magnificat and its antiphon. The Mass includes Ordinary chants from Mass X, Mass VIII and Credo III (Credo II in Cistercian numbering).

While we have had three previous recordings devoted to St Columba, drawing on the Inchcolm Antiphoner (the source of the rhymed office CO23 in Andrew Hughes's catalogue), the new one (no. 5 on the list) has much to recommend it, though the use of instruments, often adopted in recordings of medieval liturgy as here, is not a practice that I endorse. The programme also uses Mass chants from St Gall (founded, to be sure, by Irish monks), unaccompanied except for a vocal drone in the gradual and alleluia verse. Seventh-century hymns are the most unusual part of the programme. *Altus prosator* is an alphabetic hymn lasting twenty-five minutes for the twenty-three strophes, marked at the nineteenth verse (*Tuba primi archangeli*) by obtrusive medieval Irish horns. *Adjutor laborantium* is unaccompanied but for an organal voice; only six strophes of this alphabetic hymn are heard. *Cantemus in omni die* is sung metrically with instruments. The notes are lengthy and dense, but also frank about the limitations of speculative recreation, and the hymn tunes are not claimed to be authentic. This is a serious effort well crafted.

A rhymed office not recorded previously honours St Thorlak (Hughes's TH81) with a responsory and a set of antiphons for Vespers (no. 6). The three Scandinavian women who assembled this programme of chant, medieval English carols and contemporary music describe their approach to Thorlak's Office chants as 'creative', adding spontaneous polyphony and instruments. The notes tell little about St Thorlak, nothing about his being a twelfth-century bishop and patron saint of Iceland, his home. While the chant component of the disc is meagre, the singers are serious artists.

A recent three-disc compilation has only the Cistercian repertoire to unify it (no. 7). All the chants would fit on two well-filled discs. The sixty-three tracks (three have only monastery bells) offer chants recorded by eighteen monastic choirs (monks or nuns) in seven European countries, some with organ accompaniment, a few with zither or flute. They are sung in Latin or, more frequently, in the vernacular, sometimes harmonised. All the recordings have been issued previously on various labels. The occasion for the issue is stated to be the 900th anniversary of the founding of the Cistercian order at Citeaux, but more accurately, as mentioned further, it is rather the founding of Clairvaux in 1015. There are no notes or texts, just a paragraph printed in five languages that only hints at the programme. A table of contents gives the chant, the monastery and the country for each track, but not the original issue. The lack of texts, especially for the vernacular selections, is a significant failing (two are in Magyár!).

Of the seven vinyl discs made by the Deller Consort for Harmonia Mundi, the most unusual by far was 'Élégies pour les Rois et les Princes' (**237** in *A Gregorian Chant*

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Discography), later reissued on CD with most of the other recordings of the group in the well-filled Harmonia Mundi set (HMA 190235.37). Along with four Hispanic chants, there were four laments, three from MS Pa 1154 and another, the lament for William the Conqueror, from MS Pa 8625. (Michel Huglo directed Deller to these sources.) Only one of these, the lament for Charlemagne, had ever been recorded, a remarkably stylish version of 1915 by Reinald Werrenrath. A new interpretation of seven chants of this era has recently arrived (no. 8). It includes the three Carolingian chants on the Deller record; the other two are laments for Eric, duke of Friuli, and abbot Hugo, son of Charlemagne. It also offers a lament on the battle of Fontenoy, which resulted in the division of Francia into (eventually) France and Germany, a *versus* previously recorded by Gérard Le Vot. The three new selections are the lament for the destruction of the monastery of St Florent, Gottschalk's song for Walafried Strabo, and a passage from Boethius.

This last disc led me to discover an earlier recording (no. 9) of five of the seven selections, including Charlemagne, Hugo, Fontenoy, Gottschalk and Boethius, along with two settings of Horace, two of Vergil and a second passage from Boethius. Both of these programmes, unlike the Deller recording, use instrumental accompaniment, more restrained here than on the Ligia disc. All the contents of both discs are contemporaneous, around the ninth century. None of this is liturgical music, but its interest to medievalists is undeniable.

Attention must be directed to the book reviewed in the previous issue of this journal, which contains a CD of twelve relevant chants (no. 10). Vellard's ensemble, which is used so often in projects of this kind, renders the chants with unexceptionable skill.

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; g German; s Spanish; i Italian.

1 Gustate et Videte
Schola Gregoriana Monacensis, dir. Johannes Berchmans Göschl
EOS EOSCD 7698. (Recorded 2014.) Teg

2 Sancta Mater Teresia
Carmelite Nuns of Pécs (Hungary)
Jade 699 834-2. (Issued 2014.) Tf

3 Benedicta
Monks of San Benedetto, Norcia
Decca B 0023153-02. (Recorded 2015.) Tei

4 Stabat Mater
Cistercian Monks of Heiligenkreuz, dir. Simeon Wester
Obsculta OM 0003. (Recorded 2012). Teg

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5 In Praise of St Columba
Choir of Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge, dir. Geoffrey Webber
Delphian DCD 34137. (Recorded 2013.) Te
6 Aquilonis
Trio Mediaeval
ECM New Series 2416; B0022155-02. (Recorded 2014.) Te
7 Les Voix Cisterciennes
Various choirs
Studio SM D3168. (Reissued 2015.) -
8 Carmina Carolingiana
Ligeriana, dir. Katia Caré
Ligia LIDI 0202251-13. (Recorded 2012.) Tef
9 Epos – Music of the Carolingian Era
Ensemble Cantilena Antiqua, dir. Stefano Albarello
Passacaille 974. (Recorded 2009.) Tei
10 La Parole Chantée
Ensemble Gilles Binchois, dir. Dominique Vellard
In the book of the same title. (Published 2014.) -

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