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Recent recordings of plainchant

JEROME F. WEBER[1]

FOREWORD. *The Editorial Committee extends its heartfelt thanks and warmest wishes to Rev. Jerome F. Weber, who is retiring as* PMM's *Audio Review Editor effective this issue. For a quarter century, Father Weber has regularly contributed reviews of hundreds of plainchant recordings to this journal, casting his net widely to capture Gregorian and post-Gregorian repertoires, monastic and regional traditions including Byzantine Chant, and chants on recordings devoted mainly to polyphony. Having published A Gregorian Chant Discography in 1990,* addenda et corrigenda *in PMM 19/1 (2010), he launched the website chantdiscography.com in November 2010, a relational database of sound recordings in formats ranging from shellac 78s and vinyl LPs to cassette tapes and compact discs. An enormously useful resource for scholars and music lovers alike, the online discography analyses well over a thousand new and re-issued CD recordings produced since 1990 along with data from the 1990 discography. We wish our colleague the very best in his well-earned retirement!*

My colleagues Alberto Diáz-Blanco and Dominique Crochu visited the abbey of Solesmes at the end of December 2015. They had been invited to inspect the collection of recordings that had remained there untouched for many years. Along with various issues of the Solesmes LPs was a box of test pressings shipped from His Master's Voice in England in 1930. Alberto looked for the unissued side, *Exsurge quare* filled out by *Hosanna*, that I first noticed in HMV's recording logs of the February 1930 recording sessions and mentioned in *A Gregorian Chant Discography*, 1990, volume 1, page 172. Indeed, there it was, as well as twenty-three alternate takes of the record sides that were issued on twelve double-sided discs. All were marked 'second choice' or 'refused'. (The unissued side was among those refused.) Now the two missing chants are listed in my database. Since April 2015, Dominique Crochu has digitised hundreds of analogue recordings and made them available for download on gregorian-chant.ning.com/groups/enregistrements. Limited to recordings of chant that have not been reissued on CD, this makes a significant number of older recordings available for listening.

Another unissued recording has appeared on CD (no. 1 in the list below). Mary Berry, in 'The restoration of the chant and seventy-five years of recording' (*Early Music*, April 1979, footnote 17), listed all the recordings that the nuns of Argentan made for Decca, ending with one that was about to be issued. Unfortunately, the French branch of Decca went out of business that year and it never appeared. Now the nuns, who possess a copy of the master tape, have issued it privately on CD. The chants include the two Mass Propers and antiphons from the Office for Mary Magdalen and Andrew. Two hymns for Lauds and Vespers of Mary Magdalen are also included. Her Mass

[1]jfweber1@verizon.net

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and Office as recorded here are not found in modern editions, though the chants can be found singly. Neither *Aurora surgit lucida* nor *Magdalae sidus* can be found among the hymns in *Analecta Hymnica*, but there are medieval manuscripts in the Cantus database showing that these Office antiphons were assigned to her.

The latest volume of *Liber Gradualis*, Alberto Turco's *editio magis critica* of the *Graduale Romanum*, has appeared. He has edited and recorded the Mass Propers for the first to seventeenth Sundays in Ordinary Time (no. 2). The three soloists he uses are the same singers who recorded volume V except for one track sung by the Nova Schola Gregoriana. Four communions are edited in sixth and eighth mode, with only the verse printed twice, and each is recorded as AVAVA in order to use both verses. In a similar case, the communion *Notas mihi fecisti* is edited in the first mode as well as the usual seventh mode, again sung as AVAVA, with the last phrase of the antiphon revised to provide a first-mode finalis. Another, *Mirabantur omnes*, is edited in eighth and seventh mode, sung as AVAVA, and then again in the first mode (a different melody found in *Graduale Novum 1* as well). *Comedite pinguia* is edited in the second mode as well as the usual eighth mode, sung separately. In another case found also in *Graduale Novum 1*, *Quod dico vobis* (fourth mode) is edited and sung twice with only minor melodic variants. The only such example found in previous volumes of *Liber Gradualis* is the alleluia verse *Crastina die* (about to be published in *GN2*), edited with the usual eighth-mode melody as well as a different seventh-mode melody.

Recordings of the other *editio magis critica*, *Graduale Novum 1*, now include the Sundays and feast days of the Temporale on thirteen CDs, leaving only eight more Mass Propers to fill the last two CDs in the series. 'Salvum me fecit' (no. 3) presents the sixth to tenth Sundays in Ordinary Time; the title is taken from the introit for the eighth Sunday. 'Refloruit caro mea' (no. 4) offers the sixteenth to twentieth Sundays, as well as two chants from the thirty-first Sunday (the last four Sundays are thus filled in throughout); the title is taken from the gradual of the seventeenth Sunday. 'Testimonia tua meditatio mea' (no. 5) includes the twenty-sixth to thirtieth Sundays, as well as the introit from the thirty-fourth Sunday; the title is taken from the communion of the twenty-eighth Sunday. 'Vocem iucunditatis' (no. 6) gives us six Masses from the Fourth Sunday of Easter to Pentecost (including Ascension); the title comes from the introit for the sixth Sunday. 'Mirabilia fecit Dominus' (no. 7) has the twenty-first to twenty-fifth Sundays and four chants from the thirty-second Sunday; the title comes from the melisma at the end of the alleluia verse *Cantate Domino* for the twenty-second Sunday. The three scholas directed by three members of AISCGre are equally adept at semiological intepretations of the restored melodies, as we have heard in previous issues. Contrast is provided by nine of Franz Karl Prassl's female students from Graz in their second contribution to this series.

Last year we had a recording for St Teresa of Ávila marking her quincentenary. The next disc (no. 8) comes from Polish Carmelite friars, duplicating only one of the chants from the previous issue. The Mass chants are from the standard repertoire, the Office chants from the Carmelite edition of Masses and Offices of the order. The singing is excellent in the traditional style.

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Damien Poisblaud has recorded two collections of offertories with their complete verses. The first (no. 9) was overlooked when it first appeared, though the six offertories included *Super flumina*, *Sanctificavit Moyses*, *Vir erat* and *Precatus est Moyses*. While all six had already been recorded, *Precatus est Moyses* includes both verses here, and the group of chants made an impressive programme. The second disc (no. 10) is similar in its approach; the ten offertories include the first recordings with verses of *Recordare mei* and *Perfice gressus*, also the first recording of all the verses of *Benedicite gentes*, *Iubilate Deo universa terra*, *Benedicam Dominum*, *Meditabor* and *Illumina oculos*. Poisblaud is an effective soloist and Les Chantres join him in the responds, but the drones that they also provide in both respond and verse may not satisfy all listeners. The tempos chosen lend an air of pomposity to the singing, only enhanced by the drones. Both recordings were made at the abbey of Le Thoronet, where the group sings Mass every Sunday. It may be noted that, in addition to the two record premieres noted here, only *Bonum est confiteri*, *Exsultabunt sancti*, *Immittet angelus*, *Laudate Dominum quia* and *Protege Domine* have been added to the list of recorded offertories with verses since the Trondheim discography listing seventy-one of Ott's offertories was published a decade ago.

In 1996 the Schola Sanctae Sunnivae recorded parts of the Office of *Susceptio Sanguinis Domini* (1999, no. 16). One of only a few manuscript sources of chant that survived the Reformation in Norway (now preserved in Denmark), the Office and Mass commemorated the reception at Nidaros (Trondheim) in 1165 of a gold ring containing a relic of the Precious Blood, presumably sent from the abbey of Fécamp, where a full bottle was kept. Now that Gisela Attinger has edited the complete Office in 2004, they have recorded it in complete form (no. 11). The antiphons, responsory and hymn of First Vespers are followed by the invitatory, hymn, nine antiphons and nine responsories of Matins, the antiphons and hymn of Lauds, and the Magnificat antiphon of Second Vespers. Barely a third of these chants were sung in the earlier version. This disc ranks with the best of any late medieval liturgical Offices.

Philippe Lenoble's latest recording (no. 12) presents Neo-Gallican chants for the feast of the Most Holy Rosary found in a manuscript dated 1698 from the parish of Notre Dame du Pré, now kept at Le Mans. The feast did not enter the Roman calendar until 1716, confirming the origin of these chants. The choir does not sing with the blended sound heard in its previous recordings.

The next recording (no. 13) is a collection of medieval cantor solos sung with drones. The drones enhance what is already a solemn, even pompous, rendition of the chants, sung with virtuoso flair. Every type of Mass Proper is included; the lesson *Surge illuminare* and a tract lack the drones. The hymn that concludes the programme does not seem properly to belong to a cantor. The second recording made by the same personnel (no. 14) claims to offer pieces seldom recorded, but begins with *Terra tremuit* of Easter, one of the most frequently recorded chants in the repertoire. Even with all three verses, as here, it has already been recorded four times, and many more times with one or two verses. *Ascendit Jesus* is also sung with all three verses. The style of singing, solo with drones, matches the first disc.

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The nuns of Varensell are familiar from two complete Masses recorded for Archiv in the early stereo era. Their new disc (no. 15) covers the entire day from a complete invitatory of Matins to the Office of Compline. Mass Propers are inserted throughout the day, as are several organ interludes and, on one track, the tower bells. The singing is lovely in the traditional style.

Gregor Baumhof has assembled an unusual programme (no. 16). In addition to twelve chants drawn from Mass Propers and responsories, there are three full psalms and three 'interventions', the last composed of instrumental, electronic and spoken elements. The concept is original and the singing in semiological style is fine. Baumhof has also directed Cistercian nuns from an abbey in Baden-Baden, joined by nuns from two other houses (no. 17). The schola of six nuns sings in semiological fashion with fine tone and unanimity a selection of chants from four Marian feasts and several antiphons with texts from the Song of Songs. This is the finest programme of Cistercian chants that I have heard in a long time.

Nicola Bellinazzo has recorded with other ensembles, but this appears to be the first recording with a schola of eight men based in Bologna (no. 18). Singing from Alberto Turco's editions of *Liber Gradualis*, they demonstrate fine unanimity in Bellinazzo's semiological interpretations. The programme is based on the liturgical year, but the selection of fifteen Mass Propers from Advent to Easter, some of the most familiar chants, is barely a sample. More unusual are the trope *Quem quaeritis in praesepio* for the introit *Puer natus est* and the concluding responsory *Stirps Jesse*.

David Eben's latest collection (no. 19) focuses on the life of Charles IV, the fourteenth-century Holy Roman emperor who made Prague his capital. While the programme includes secular music, the chants that occur are unusual and interesting. For the relics of the lance and nails that Charles venerated in a chapel built for the purpose, we hear the contrafactum *Pange lingua gloriose lancee preconium*.

The latest collection of Hildegard of Bingen's *symphoniae* comes from a new vocal ensemble, lightly accompanied by viele or harp (no. 20). Some of the most familiar selections are included, but the singing is lovely and the interpretations are knowledgeable. For example, Hildegard's responsories are not always sung with the repeat after the verse, as here, since the sources do not indicate it.

Alberto Turco has directed a Roman schola in chants from Ourense, 'the Athens of Galicia', a selection from those edited in three volumes by Dr Manuel Rey Olleros. Of interest is *Sancte Jacobe Christi*, a responsory not found in the Codex Calixtinus, but the invitatory *Venite omnes* is found there as well as in Ourense sources, the age of which is not stated. The singing of the schola is excellent.

Hendrik Vanden Abeele made four programmes of chant, three of them available here. 'Lambertus' (no. 22) presents Matins of the Office of St Lambert, bishop of Maastricht, venerated in Liège, where he was martyred. He uses the Utrecht manuscript, which is close to the content of Andrew Hughes's LA31. 'Ursula 11' (no. 23) is similar in content to previous recordings by Anonymous 4 and Ensemble Organum, using the pieces composed by Hildegard of Bingen for St Ursula, adding psalms for an Office of Lauds. 'Tenebrae' (no. 24) reduces the three days of Holy Week

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to twenty-one selections, from *Zelus domus tuae* with psalm to *Recordare Domine*, all sung from a thirteenth-century antiphoner from Fribourg.

The next recording (no. 25) is interesting not for the three chants on the programme, though they are sung well in semiological interpretation, but for the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century music of the Roman school, for the performances show how far the Sistine Chapel choir has come under its new director (since 2010), Massimo Palombella. This is the formation that exchanged visits in London and Rome with the Westminster Cathedral choir. It is said that each choir benefitted from the experience, but it appears that the Romans were the chief beneficiaries. In his notes, Palombella frankly distances himself from both the repertoire (Perosi, Bartolucci) and the 'late-Romantic, operatic' performing style of his predecessors. The sessions were held in the Sistine Chapel, though this is not (as claimed) the first recording ever made there, for the BBC made a liturgical reconstruction of the feast of St Sylvester using Gavin Turner's William Byrd Choir for its series of ten Masses of the Christmas octave broadcast in 1984.

Geert Maessen's approach to deciphering the neumes of Hispanic chant in León MS 8 by using a computer to find concordant and legible melodies in other traditions of chant (no. 26) has been published with a CD containing twenty-five tracks. The chants are arranged as a 'fictitious service' for St Fructuosus, an early Iberian martyr. Maessen does not claim to have recovered the medieval melodies but merely to have achieved a possible realisation of the neumes of León MS 8 by comparing their melodic contours with the contours of other Western chants set to the same texts. He has edited fifty chants in this way.

For the millennium of Solesmes, French television filmed a Sunday Mass at the abbey on 19 September 2010. With commentary, the DVD runs ninety minutes (no. 27). The copy I received has no booklet enclosed. The disc is not universally playable, but I was able to use a Blu-Ray player. I can attest that the video captures the experience of Sunday Mass at the abbey. The distributor has a website at www.laprocure.com.

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; p Polish; c Czech; n Norwegian.

1 Ste Marie Madeleine – Saint André
Nuns of Argentan, dir. Abbé Pelluet
Private issue, no number. (Recorded 1978.) Tf

2 Liber Gradualis VI: Tempus per Annum I–XVII
Soloists, dir. Alberto Turco
Edizioni Melosantiqua LG VI/1-2-3-4-5 (five discs). (Recorded 2015.) T

3 Salvum me fecit

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Consortium Vocale Oslo, dir. Alexander M. Schweitzer
EOS EOSCD 7784. (Recorded 2014.) Teg

4 Refloruit caro mea
Schola Gregoriana Monacensis, dir. Johannes Berchmans Göschl
EOS EOSCD 7770. (Recorded 2015.) Teg

5 Testimonia tua meditatio mea
Schola Gregoriana Monacensis, dir. Johannes Berchmans Göschl
EOS EOSCD 7797. (Recorded 2016.) Teg

6 Vocem iucunditatis
Ensemble Graces & Voices, dir. Franz Karl Prassl
EOS EOSCD 7592. (Recorded 2012.) Teg

7 Mirabilia fecit Dominus
Consortium Vocale Oslo, dir. Alexander M. Schweitzer
EOS EOSCD 7796. (Recorded 2016.) Teg

8 Sancta Mater Teresia
Chorały Karmelitańskie (Kraków), dir. Ewa Domagała
STJ 500. (Issued 2015.) Tp

9 Les Grands Offertoires Grégoriens
Chantres du Thronet, dir. Damien Poisblaud
Psalmus 010. (Recorded 2009.) Tef

10 Les Grands Offertoires Grégoriens II
Chantres du Thronet, dir. Damien Poisblaud
Psalmus 024. (Recorded 2014.) Tef

11 Fingergull
Schola Sanctae Sunnivae, dir. Anne Kleivset
2L-114-SACD. (Recorded 2014.) Ten

12 O Maria
Maîtrise de la Cathédrale et Choeur Grégorien du Mans, dir. Philippe Lenoble
Private issue, no number. (Recorded 2014.) Tf

13 In medio Ecclesiae
Geoffrey Dudouit, solo with ensemble
Art & Musique AM/CD 107/31102. (Recorded 2011.) -

14 In omnem terram
Geoffrey Dudouit, solo with ensemble
Art & Musique AM/CD 107/31503. (Recorded 2015.) -

15 Ein Tag, ein Lied, ein Leben
Nuns of Varensell, dir. Ruth Ochmann
Diamo CD-L 30491. (Recorded 2014.) Tg

16 Stimmen des Staunens
Münchner Scholaren, dir. Gregor Baumhof
Klangschritte 67918. (Recorded 2014.) Tg

17 Tota pulchra es
Cistercian Nuns of Lichtenthal, dir. Gregor Baumhof
Diamo CD-L 30441. (Recorded 2012.) Tg

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18 Per Anni Circulum
Schola Gregoriana Benedetto XVI, dir. Nicola Bellinazzo
Brilliant 95286. (Recorded 2013.) T
19 Carolus IV
Schola Gregoriana Pragensis, dir. David Eben
Supraphon SU4193-2. (Recorded 2015.) Tegc
20 O Eterne Deus
Vajra Voices, dir. Shira Kammen
Music & Arts CD 1291. (Recorded 2015.) Te
21 La Música Medieval en Ourense
Gregoriani Urbis Cantores, dir. Alberto Turco
Armonia Universal, no number. (Issued 2010.) -
22 Lambertus
Psallentes, dir. Hendrik Vanden Abeele
Le Bricolour LBCD 02. (Recorded 2011.)
23 Ursula 11
Psallentes, dir. Hendrik Vanden Abeele
Le Bricolour LBCD 03. (Recorded 2011.)
24 Tenebrae
Psallentes, dir. Hendrik Vanden Abeele
Le Bricolour LBCD 04. (Recorded 2011.)
25 Cantate Domino
Sistine Chapel Choir, dir. Massimo Palombella
Deutsche Grammophon 00289 479 5300. (Recorded 2015.) Te
26 Calculemus et Cantemus
Gregoriana Amsterdam, dir. Geert Maessen
In the book of the same title. (Recorded 2015.) -
27 Solesmes – Un dimanche matin à l'Abbaye
Monks of Solesmes, dir. Yves-Marie Lelièvre
DVD distributed by La Procure, 60552 Chantilly Cedex. (Recorded 2010.) -

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