

# Lenten program offered with zeal

*GLORIAE DEI CANTORES, a concert of Lenten music, yesterday afternoon at St. Joan of Arc Roman Catholic Church, Orleans. One performance only.*

By ANNA CREBO  
SPECIAL WRITER

ORLEANS — It is rare to hear liturgical music — particularly the sonorous, spiritually resonant polyphonies of Giovanni Palestrina and other 16th century church composers — as impressively and soulfully sung as it was in yesterday's concert by *Gloriae Dei Cantores*. The 44-voice internationally touring choral ensemble is made up of members of the Community of Jesus, based in Orleans' Rock Harbor.

Perhaps it is because Latin chant and other forms of sacred music are such an integral part of the daily prayer life of the 350-member community that the chorale, expertly directed by Elizabeth Patterson, sings with such authority and devotional zeal.

But the ensemble is by no means limited to early church music.

In yesterday's concert, the singers showed their versatility and stylistic range with moving performances of such divergent works as Sergei Rachmaninoff's profoundly stirring "All-Night Vigil," from the Russian Orthodox liturgy, and contemporary American composer Dominic Argento's exhilarating "Let All the World in Every Corner Sing."

Performed as an encore for the highly receptive capacity crowd, the Argento work was especially effective in its balancing of instrumental forces (two trumpets, two trombones, timpani and organ) with the strong, mostly unison or

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## REVIEW

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two-part singing of the chorale. The well-schooled instrumentalists are also drawn from within the Community of Jesus.

In addition to opening the program with Sir Arthur Bliss's crisp and effective "Royal Fanfare No. 1" for six heraldic trumpets and tuba, the *Gloriae Dei Brass Ensemble* performed 16th century Venetian composer Giovanni Gabrieli's antiphonal "Sonata octavi toni," composed for two six-part brass choirs. Despite some slight fluctuations in pitch and synchronicity — probably due in part to the unusually "live" acoustics in St. Joan of Arc church — the work was performed with appealing zest.

Combining the formal intricacies of Renaissance polyphony with the more emotionally colored harmonic elements of 19th century music, German composer Joseph Rheinberger's "Mass in E-Flat" was not only a highlight of the afternoon concert but provided an effective bridge between the 16th century church music and the 20th century American and Russian music. Also, since his works are so infrequently performed, it was a rare and welcome opportunity to hear something by Rheinberger, who was one of the foremost composers of church music of his day.

The Sanctus was both eloquent and dramatically effective, with its soft descending opening motif for treble voices gradually expanding to a resounding exclamation of "Hosanna in Excelsis Deo" by the full chorus. The Benedictus, set in

graceful, siciliano-style tempo, and the poignantly expressive *Agnus Dei*, were like balms for the spirit.

*Gloriae Dei Cantores* has a strong contingent of male voices, particularly its tenors, several of whom have an unusually high range and smooth control of the upper register. These voices were showcased in late 15th-early 16th century Spanish composer Juan de Anchieta's "Salve Regina," which was, for the most part, compellingly sung by a 13-member male ensemble. Only occasionally were there some slight tendencies toward strident, overly bright vowel sounds in the middle and lower voices.

The deeply expressive Rachmaninoff work — one of the best-received on the program — featured tenor Peter Logan in extended solos that required both intensity and unusual breath control. Logan's delivery was, except for one slight lapse at the end of a very long phrase, ringingly eloquent and emotionally stirring.

Twentieth century American works on the program included, in addition to the Argento piece, Randall Thompson's thoughtfully warm and elegant setting of Elizabethan poet Robert Herrick's "The Best of Rooms;" the spirited, folk-like Southern hymn "I Will Arise and Go to Jesus" in a setting by John Carter; and Paul Manz's poignantly expressive motet, "E'en So Lord Jesus Quickly Come."

The 11-member *Gloriae Dei Bell Ringers*, employing 71 bells, provided a delightful diversion on the Lenten-oriented program with its expert performance of American composer Donald Allured's cleverly conceived "Prologue, Fugue and Finale."

*Gloriae Dei Cantores*, together with the 11-member brass ensemble, will embark in early April upon a two-month tour of Switzerland, France, Italy and Romania. This will be the ensemble's seventh European tour in five years.

# 'Sky's the limit' as monks' 'Chant' hits the charts

By Jeff Bradley

Denver Post Critic-at-Large

About once a generation, record and CD buyers discover the soothing purity of Gregorian chant, the medieval plainsong that forms the link between modern Western music and the oriental chants and Greek modes of the ancient world.

Usually this phenomenon takes the form of catapulting monks from some remote monastery into the international limelight.

Well, it's happening again.

The brown-hooded Benedictine Monks of Santo Domingo de Silos, near the town of Burgos in northern Spain, are challenging Aerosmith and Michael Bolton for a place in the Billboard charts.

Their CD simply entitled "Chant" (Angel 55138) offers 57 minutes of timeless Gregorian chant, sung in Latin to traditional Roman Catholic texts.

Resonantly recorded in their Romanesque cloister, the 20 singers are not pro-

fessionals. They are spiritual mendicants, repeating on disc what they do seven times a day, every day of the year.

Their unaccompanied chants consist of single melodic lines, free of normal bar line restraints and sung in unison within a limited scale of notes.

For some reason, their album soared to No. 1 on Spain's pop charts and has already chalked up worldwide sales of some half a million.

"Even my toughest sales reps are telling me the sky's the limit on this one," said Steve Murphy, president of Angel Records, which plans a promotion campaign with the slogan "Prepare for the Millennium."

Sales are especially brisk among Generation X youngsters, ages 16 to 25, encountering the haunting beauty of plainchant for the first time, and among baby boomers drawn to the New Age bins at record stores.

These medieval songs of worship are

called Gregorian chant because Pope Gregory I (the Great), who lived from 540 to 604, preserved the tradition by collecting and standardizing chants for specific church rites and feasts. (Similar Byzantine chants survive in the Orthodox Church.)

The legend often illustrated was that of Gregory dictating chants to scribes as they were sung into his ear by a dove.

Believed derived from ancient Hebrew cantorial chanting, for centuries Gregorian chant was not accurately documented. The earliest attempt toward the end of the 8th century was to use neumes, a set of shorthand grammatical marks indicating the direction of the melody.

The Italian monk Guido d'Arezzo is credited with introducing the use of four lines, the first staff, in the 11th century, and soon after written notes took shape. Gradually over several centuries, second and third melodic lines were added, creating polyphony and leading to the true

birth of expressive Western music.

The origins of Gregorian chant had faded into oblivion when, in the 19th century, the Benedictine monks of Solesmes researched and documented early chants, preserving them for posterity.

Also try **THE CHANTS OF EASTER: Gloriam Dei Cantores (Gloriam Dei 015)**.

This devotional 73-minute CD offers the more professional, scholarly sound of a 16-member American choir dedicated to singing Gregorian chant both in their daily lives and in performances around the world.

The music includes the traditional "Propers" for Easter Day and the following week.

If hard to find locally, order by calling 1-800-451-5006.

Joanne Ostrow

Denver Post TV and Radio Critic  
Joanne Ostrow is on assignment.

Excerpts From:  
"The Improper Bostonian"  
"Chant - Musical prayers"

### Community of Jesus

One of the centers for chant in this country is nestled in a suburb of Cape Cod. One wouldn't guess it — for many, the closest thing to a site for a religious pilgrimage on the Cape is the Christmas Tree Shops — but there, hidden within the clogged arteries of that genuflecting arm in the Atlantic, lies the Community of Jesus, where some of the greatest choral conductors and chant theorists in the world have met to teach an untrained choir the mysteries of this esoteric art.

The choir at the Community of Jesus started out, in the late 1970s, as an average church choir attached to a loosely-knit Christian community in Orleans. It was around that time that the founders of the Community heard Gregorian chant while on a visit to Bethlehem, and decided to make it a goal to revive the form in their own community.

By the late 1980s, the Community's choir, now called the *Gloria Dei Cantores*,

or "Singers for the Glory of God," had transformed itself into a professional choir, studying with well-known choral conductors both here and in the United Kingdom. In Cambridge, England, they studied with Stephen Cleobury of King's College, and with George Guest of St. John's, a robust conductor so passionate about his church music that his flailing Welsh knuckles often seem to narrowly miss concussing choristers. The choir also studied with Mary Berry of the *Schola Gregoriana*, one of the world's experts on chant.

They've toured in Western and Eastern Europe; they sang the first Mass celebrated in the Cathedral of the Resurrection in the Kremlin since the Revolution; they've released fifteen CDs, several which are excellent, including a highly recommended performance of Gregorian chant for Christmas (*The Chants of Christmas*, Paraclete 005). Long before the *Chant* craze, Paraclete Press, their publishing house, started a line in plainsong recordings of the most influential monastic schola in the world — that of the abbey at Solesmes. Richard Pugsley, conductor of the *Gloria Dei Cantores Schola* (the chant division of the choir) has studied both in Rome and at Solesmes itself.

Every day, the ancient monastic Offices are celebrated at the Community's church, some officiated by the monks attached to the Community, some by the nuns, and some by the *Schola* (which includes monks, nuns, and plainclothes folk). Although the choir studied in England, their sound, both in their chant and full-fledged choral singing, is distinctly, robustly American. This brings a different kind of intensity to their chant than one might hear elsewhere. Their plainsong is more musical than most, as they are all, at this point, trained singers. Their line is faster, more flowing and liquid, and also more directed than that of other *scholae*. When they sing "Quare fremuerunt gentes?" ("Why do the nations rage together?") they sound like they really want to know.

One can tell they take a very active view of what chant is doing — it's not simply floating disembodied. Sister Chris Helfrich, one of the cantors for the *Schola*, says, "This is not passive music by any means. It is exciting, revelatory." And "it's hard work to do it well. It's all based on unison singing — so if you're bugged with the person sitting next to you, you have to forget about it. Your goal is to sing as one. Your goal is not passive."

Brother Tim Pehta, another cantor for the choir, also believes in the importance of community in chanting. "It unifies. It brings people together. It's not a solo thing. The whole *Schola*, the whole congregation, is united.... Uniting with people from the past, with monks and nuns through the ages, Episcopalians united with Catholics...."

Brother Tim attributes the *Schola's* more active sound to recent breakthroughs in chant scholarship at Solesmes. "Chant was seen as a kind of slow, lugubrious sound," he says, but now it's "lighter and faster."

The singers stress the importance of the words in energizing this musical line. "Chant originated with the words," says Brother Tim, "Music was the handmaid of the text." Sister Chris agrees: "It's a wedding of text to melody and music."

While this conclusion has led many to chant in English — as at the Monastery of St. John — the *Gloria Dei Cantores Schola* began by chanting in English, and unanimously decided to switch over to Latin, to return to the original rhythms of the text. A translation is provided for visitors in the *Diurnal*, or daily prayer book. Brother Tim chuckles, "The purpose isn't to zone out."

And what is the purpose? On this point, they are emphatic. "Chant is definitely prayer," says Sister Chris. Brother Tim agrees. "It brings one into a place of prayer. I think it's wonderful more people are listening to chant."

More people will be listening still, if the Community's plans go ahead. The choir has rather outgrown their church, an acoustically dead space that eats the sound with all the rapacity of a Benedictine guzzling lentil stew. Though they haven't complained of this, it is undoubtedly a factor in their decision to build a new, large sanctuary for the Community soon, one that will show off this unusual choir's talents to best advantage.

It will be a mystical sight when completed. Picture the Cape Cod coast, wave washing in from a series of blackened naval hulks out in the bay, little gray houses clustered among the sandy grape-vines and, sprouting out of all of it, a lofty cathedral-size bell-tower, with sea-gulls wheeling around it, crying their own unsettling Offices.

So if you're fond of sand dunes and salty air, quaint little villages here and there, boiled lobsters and old dirt roads and ancient hymnody in Dorian modes — yes, you'll find it all on old Cape Cod.