

***A Millennium of Music
The Benedictine Tradition***

II

Celebration: Music of Devotion

**Gregorian Chant-inspired music
from the Baroque and Classical periods
performed by the
AmorArtis Chorus and Orchestra
of New York
conducted by Johannes Somary**

**Première recording of the Somary
Te Deum
commissioned for the Benedictine
Millennium Celebration**

CELEBRATION: Music of Devotion

***AmorArtis Chorus and Chamber Orchestra
Johannes Somary, Conductor and Organist***

1. G.P. da Palestrina	<i>Tu es Petrus</i>	3:15
2. G. Aichinger	<i>Regina coeli</i>	1:57
3. D. Scarlatti	<i>Stabat Mater</i>	25:34
4. J.S. Bach	<i>Pastorale in F Major</i> for Organ	9:12
5. W.A. Mozart	<i>Inter natos mulierum</i>	5:49
6. J. Somary	<i>A Te Deum</i> for the Millennium (First Recording)	23:23

Celebration: Music of Devotion
Liner Notes

Gregorian chant, the sung prayer of the Church, is a magnificent bringing into manifestation of God’s holy Presence. This is done through the human instrumentality of voice and breath. Traditionally the element of air has been closely connected with spirit. It is therefore the singers’ careful control of the breath that contributes so much to chant’s sense of wholeness and unity. Its melody is carried on the breath, moving within the restraint of one octave of sound and eschewing the rhythmical superimposition of meter. Like a Romanesque church, whose heavy stone walls and tiny windows are designed to keep spirit within, not to allow it to escape, chant exists only to protect and illumine the Word of God.

With the twelfth-century Renaissance begun in Suger’s Gothic abbey of St. Denis, near Paris, the philosophical equation moved from “God is air”—the undivided pneuma profoundly uniting all living things from within—to “God is light”—the radiance showered from

heaven and bathing all of creation in its rays. Like the mysterious melody of Gregorian chant the church's crypt continued to contain and embrace the divine pneuma while, above, its walls of windows reaching to the sky welcomed the light, refracted and magnified it into a glorious display of color and form.

Music, in turn, opened upward, embellishing the *cantus firmus* or firm song of the chant with an elaborate ceiling of pure, then ever more challenging harmonies.

This musical offering, the second CD of the set, features outstanding examples of devotional music inspired by the Gregorian liturgy so carefully preserved throughout the ages by Benedictine monks and nuns who not only chanted it regularly, day by day, but also based their lives upon its words. It includes historical selections by Palestrina, Aichinger, Scarlatti, J.S. Bach, and Mozart and presents *A Te Deum for the Millennium* by Johannes Somary. This new piece, commissioned especially for this project, recalls the earlier musical forms and draws upon traditional texts but hears them with contemporary ears and sensitivities. Aichinger uses the Gregorian chant melody as *cantus firmus* in his motet and Somary composes the *Sanctus* section of his *Te Deum* with melodic material in the style of Gregorian chant.

Palestrina's motet *Tu es Petrus* has a very strong sense of the Gregorian melody which was sung during the office of Matins as the Third Responsory for the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul. Although having the full palette of polyphonic styles from three centuries preceding him at his disposal, the composer chose a conservative, very tightly woven rendition of the text. This was done in obedience to

the wishes of the Church, expressed by the Council of Trent—to remove any elements common with secular music and to return music to its position as secondary to the scriptural words. By so doing, Palestrina gives us vocal polyphony in six parts which retains the purity, objectivity, and tranquil beauty of the chant. He allows no extreme contrasts of rhythmic movement, only subtle modifications of the line needed to better express a particular word or phrase and to render it clearer and more comprehensible.

Regina coeli, written a generation later by Gregor Aichinger, definitely moves out of the stillness and into the light and joy of the dance, but the focus is still on the universal feeling of jubilation shared with the Virgin upon the resurrection of her Son.

Scarlatti, composing his *Stabat Mater* more than a century after the two earlier pieces, employs a tremendous diversity of musical styles to express not objective but very powerful personal emotions of compassion for the sorrowing Virgin, impassioned desire to share in her grief, and joy at the prospect of joining her and her Son in heaven. Throughout the motet we experience the intermingling of the more austere counterpoint of Palestrina, the embellished *bel canto* style, and, at the end, a fugue of great intensity and drama.

It is significant that Bach's music is so often traditionally chosen by the Church to accompany worship. Like the Holy Scriptures themselves, it speaks to the mind, with its exquisitely and intricately crafted musical architecture, to the emotions through its capacity to evoke the season or paint a picture and point to the Creator from which it all comes, and to the body to join in the dance.

Everyone from mystic to merchant can listen and emerge enriched.

In Mozart's glorious choral masterpiece *Inter natos mulierum* we hear the music proclaiming the Gospel text. We smile as the choir calls again and again to the babe, John the Baptist, leaping in his mother's womb and marvel at the prophet's vocation to prepare the Lord's way in the wilderness. And yet, even here, there is the sense, as there is with Gregorian chant, where birth and death are presented with the same tranquil equanimity, that the music sets the scene and moves far beyond. From the depths of our being we are led into a place of unending joy, given a brief glance into the inner spiritual life of the world.

In *A Te Deum for the Millennium* Johannes Somary draws from a rich treasure house of musical styles, historical and personal, to compose a cantata inviting both celebration and serious reflection. The text is that of the ancient Latin hymn of thanksgiving with interpolations in various languages from the prologue to *The Rule of St. Benedict*, passages which the composer fervently hopes will speak to all spiritual people who reflect on God and mankind as we enter a new millennium.