

# Notes from the Choir

A PUBLICATION OF THE PATRONS OF SACRED MUSIC - ST. JOHN CANTIUS CHURCH, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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THE PATRONS OF SACRED MUSIC WORK WITH THE AD MAJOREM DEI GLORIAM FOUNDATION  
TO RESTORE THE SACRED MUSIC OF THE CHURCH "FOR THE GREATER GLORY OF GOD."

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### WHY GREGORIAN CHANT ROCKS

Today we can scarcely go to a clothing store, a health club or even a gas station without being besieged by a variety of thumping, agitating and jarring music blasting from speakers above. While I appreciate a variety of music, I have found that Gregorian chant stands in stark contrast to the fatigue of today's popular tunes which tends to dominate music charts across the globe. By its very nature, Gregorian chant supersedes the entertainment value of music by allowing us to step out of our fast-paced world and instead focus on the sacred. Standing the test of time, this early Christian song continues to enrich our Catholic culture and rouse the soul with holy inspirations. Originating as a form of plainchant, this great treasure of the Church flourished under the auspices of Pope Gregory the Great (540-604) who referred to it as "the song of Angels." Early art depicts Pope Gregory as a music loving saint who received the gift of chant from a dove, representing the Holy Spirit, who came to sit upon his shoulder and began to sing in his ear. Born in the Church, its lyrics come from the Latin Vulgate, Mass ordinaries, divine office hymns, antiphons, and responsories. For centuries it has been sung in Latin as pure melody in unison without musical accompaniment, meter or time signature. It is music composed for the soul in which the words of God are lovingly sung back to him.

Gregorian chant continues to be kept alive in monasteries, convents, and some cathedrals and parishes, while also remaining a subject of study among a small group of dedicated academics. Over the past



Visit Solesmes Monastery (near Paris, France) on a pilgrimage with Fr. Scott A. Haynes, S.J.C., Chaplain of the Patrons of Sacred Music, to hear the soothing sounds of monastic chant from the Benedictine Monastery where the revival of Gregorian Chant began in the 19th century. Trip highlight include also a rare viewing of the Shroud of Turin, sights in Milan, Shrines of Saint Thérèse of Liseux, Saint Vincent de Paul, Saint Catherine Labouré, organ concerts at Notre Dame de Paris, tours of Chartres Cathedral, the opulent Saint-Chapelle Chapel, and much more. Contact Peter's Way Tours for a brochure; contact Amy Choi at 800-225-7662 ([amy@petersway.com](mailto:amy@petersway.com)). The tour, "Northern Italy and Shrines of France," goes from April 26-May 4, 2015. Do not miss it!

few decades, the world has seen a resurgence of chant. In the 1990's, an album aptly named Chant, performed by the Benedictine Monks of Santo Domingo de Silos (Spain) became the best-selling record of Gregorian chant ever. Emerging in 1994

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as an antidote to the stress of modern life, Chant peaked at number three on the Billboard 200 chart. Similarly, the Cistercian Viennese Monks of Stift Heiligenkreuz, also shot to the top of classical music charts with their #1 selling album which also hit number nine on the pop charts!

So why does Gregorian chant rock? One reason is that it conveys the sacred to the secular. Contrary to the agitating sounds of hip hop, hard rock and heavy metal, Gregorian chant is instead a soothing balm for weary souls and a source of comfort for unsettled hearts. Inspiring and edifying, simple and poignant, this music of paradise slows our racing minds, renews our vigor, and eases the tensions of a harried world. Its ethereal quality elevates us from the temporal and transports us to the spiritual.

Dr. Alan Watkins, a senior lecturer in neuroscience at Imperial College London noted that “the musical structure of chant can have a significant and positive physiological impact,” and that chanting has actually been shown to “lower blood pressure, increase levels of DHEA and also reduce anxiety and depression.” Similar studies also suggest that Gregorian chant can aid in communications between the right and left hemispheres of



the brain more effectively, therefore creating new neural brain pathways. Benedictine nun, Ruth Stanley, head of the complementary medicine program at Minnesota’s St. Cloud Hospitals also says she’s had great success in easing the chronic pain of patients by having them listen to chant. “The body can move to a deeper level of its own inherent, innate healing ability when you play chant. It’s quite remarkable.”

In a 1978 documentary called “Chant,” French audiologist, Dr. Alfred Tomatis, related how he was called upon to help

the monks of a Benedictine monastery who suffered from fatigue, depression, and physical illness. He found that they usually took part in six to eight hours of chanting per day but due to a new edict, their chanting was halted. When Tomatis succeeded in re-establishing their daily chanting, the monks regained their well-being and were again full of life. His conclusion was that Gregorian chant is capable of charging the central nervous system along with the cortex of the brain thus having a direct effect on the monk’s overall happiness and health. Aside from noted physical, spiritual and mental benefits, Gregorian chant may even aid in the conversion of hearts. It is believed that well-known author and philosophy professor, Peter Kreeft listed the angelic chant music of Italian Renaissance composer Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina as one of the reasons he is Catholic today. Beyond this, Gregorian chant inspires and instructs. It allows us to regain our strength, our clarity and our focus on what is truly important in life.

“Sacred sounds charge the cortex of the brain and stimulate health and wellness.”



Dr. Alfred Tomatis

In his letter read at the 100th anniversary of the Pontifical Institute of Sacred Music, Emeritus Pope Benedict spoke about the vital role Gregorian chant has played in Church history along with countering the argument that Chant is a thing of the past. Instead he praised Gregorian chant as being “of huge value to the great ecclesial heritage of universal sacred music,” and that “Mass must convey a sense of prayer, dignity and beauty.” The Second Vatican Council also noted that Gregorian chant should be given “pride of place” in liturgical music. Unfortunately, finding a church where chant is still sung is a daunting task.

On a personal level, I listen to Gregorian chant regularly at home, at work and while driving. I’ve found the more I listen to it, the more I recognize its spiritual and mental benefits. It calms me and lifts my mind from the challenges of the day to what is above. I even noticed my pets are calmer and more relaxed when chant fills my home! A friend of mine says it peacefully lulls her baby to sleep. Still others find playing it at home creates a tranquil family atmosphere in which to converse, eat, pray and live. Like the rhythm of a calm heartbeat, Gregorian chant fosters peace within ourselves and those around us. It is not music for the sake of music – but rather prayer that inspires prayer.

Judy Keane

This Fall, Concert Organist Andrew Schaeffer, will record the famous orchestral work, “The Nutcracker Suite,” by Tchaikowsky, on our grand Casavant Opus 1130 pipe organ (nicknamed “Tina Mae”) at St. John Cantius. The recording will be available though Biretta Books this Fall at: [www.BirettaBooks.com](http://www.BirettaBooks.com)

This organ transcription is so exciting to listen to and will be a thrill for your family this Christmas. Kids will fall in love with this immediately; it’ll be a perfect Christmas gift.



The expertise and artistry of Mr. Schaeffer makes this highly complex composition sound like a cakewalk—his fingers sparkle as they dash over the keys of this four-manual console with the speed of lightning and his feet fly over

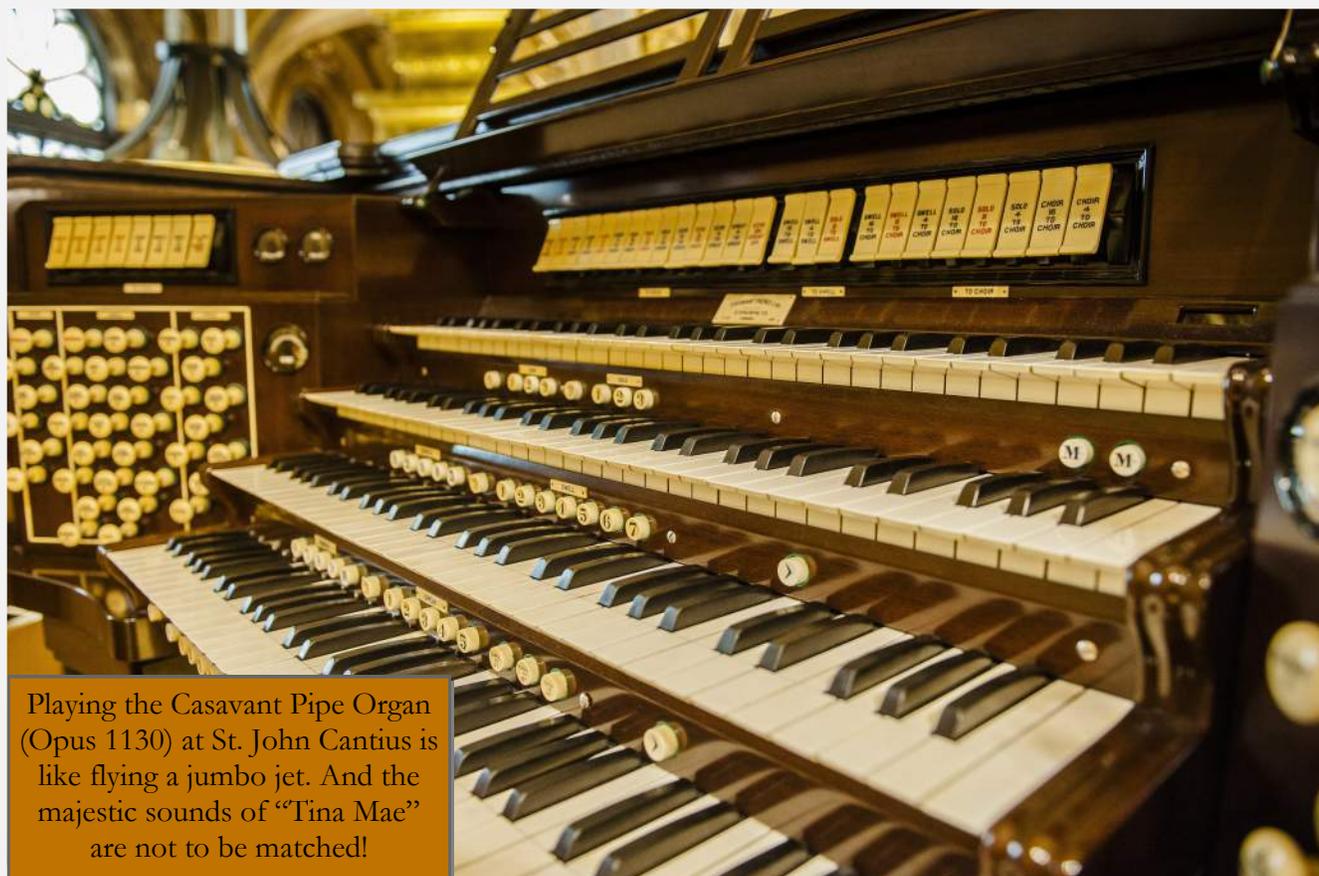
the pedal keyboard as if angel wings were on his shoes.

### “TINA MAE’S” CHRISTMAS GIFT - THE NUTCRACKER -

Andrew Schaeffer holds a Master of Music degree in organ performance from Yale. He holds a Bachelor of Music degree with distinction from St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota, where he studied organ with John Ferguson as well as Choral Conducting with Anton Armstrong.



A native of the Chicago area, Andrew is now working on his Doctor of Musical Arts Degree in Organ Performance at the American Organ Institute at the University of Oklahoma, but is glad to return home to Chicago to make this landmark recording on our beloved “Tina Mae.”



Playing the Casavant Pipe Organ (Opus 1130) at St. John Cantius is like flying a jumbo jet. And the majestic sounds of “Tina Mae” are not to be matched!

One of my favorite “viral videos” that circulates around the world through the Internet takes place in a food court in a mall, presumably in Canada. As people are eating and resting from the hustle and bustle of Christmas shopping, suddenly a woman with a scarf on, who appears as an ordinary shopper, stands up and starts singing the “Hallelujah Chorus.” Clearly, this is a professional musician, who is soon joined in by another professional musician singing a different counterpart to the first soloist. Then come other singers, one after another. These are high quality musicians, and the whole act is well choreographed. What throws off the average viewer is the inconspicuous appearance of the singers. They fit right in with the frazzled shoppers. This video has had more than 43 million views.

I have heard that the opening lines of the “Hallelujah” Chorus are the most recognizable piece of music the world over. Of course, the “Hallelujah Chorus” comes from “Messiah,” an oratorio (a sacred opera without staging based on Biblical texts) by George Frederick Handel. The whole work is heavenly, and its highlight is the “Hallelujah Chorus.”

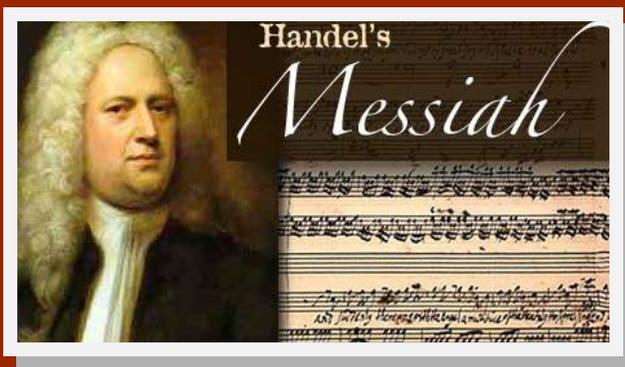
In his book, *Spiritual Lives of the Great Composers*, Patrick Kavanaugh tells how Handel barely ate during the 24 days he wrote “Messiah.” At one point, the composer had tears in his eyes and cried out to his servant, “I did think I did see all Heaven before me, and the great God Himself.” He had just finished writing the “Hallelujah Chorus.”

**THE BIRTH OF A CLASSIC:  
HANDEL’S MESSIAH**

Amazingly, “Messiah” came at a time in his life when the 56-year-old Handel was facing bankruptcy and complete failure. By 1741 he was swimming in debt. It seemed certain he would land in debtor’s prison,” and he also had serious health problems. But writing “Messiah” proved to be the positive turning point in his life. What was the secret of Handel’s success? “He was a relentless optimist whose faith in God sustained him through every difficulty.” So out of one genius’s pain and low point in his life came a work of beauty that continues to uplift millions

A sense of humanity imbues Handel’s music—he beautifully captures the human response to the God’s grace. Laurence Cummings, Director of the London Handel Orchestra says, “The feelings of joy you get from the Hallelujah choruses are second to none...how can anybody resist the Amen chorus at the end? It will always lift your spirits if you are feeling down.”

When King George II was present at the first performance of “Messiah” in London, he sprung to his feet at the sound of the “Hallelujah Chorus,” and since the King stood, the whole audience stood. About 100 years later, even the aged Queen Victoria, who sat in her wheelchair as the chorus began, struggled to her feet as the choir sang, “King of kings and Lord of lords.” She said, “No way will I sit in the presence of the King of kings.” At the end of “Messiah,” Handel wrote the letters “S.D.G.” for *Soli Deo Gloria* (“To God alone be the Glory.”)



**NEW CD FROM  
ST. JOHN CANTIUS**

*Available this Fall - 2014*

The Christmas Festival Choir and Orchestra of St. John Cantius, conducted by Fr. Scott Haynes, S.J.C. has recorded Handel’s “Messiah” in the Baroque splendor of St. John Cantius Church.

“Handel’s Messiah for Christmas” features the “Messiah’s” Christmas Section, The famous “Hallelujah Chorus,” and other famous movements from Handel’s “Messiah.”

The CD of Handel’s Messiah for Christmas will be released this Fall and will be available at:

