

# Notes from the Choir

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

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## SACRED MUSIC 'A MINISTRY OF BEAUTY'



On Sunday, February 13th, Fr. Pierre Paul, maestro di cappella (chapel master) at St. Peter's Basilica, Vatican City, celebrated the Sunday 11:00am Mass in the Ordinary Form. Fr. Paul heads the music program at St. Peter's under the guidance of Pope Bene-

The Mass, which was celebrated *ad orientem* in Latin, featured two of the parish choirs, the Schola Cantorum of St. Gregory the Great which sang the Gregorian Chant propers and the St. Cecilia Choir which sang the Madrid Mass by Domenico Scarlatti along with motets.

In his closing remarks at the end of Mass, Father Pierre Paul commented on how pleased he was with the music program at St. John Cantius. He thanked Father Frank Phillips, the priests and brothers, and the parishioners of St. John Cantius Church for the warm welcome he received and the opportunity to celebrate the Mass. Father remarked at how well the parishioners of St. John Cantius participate in the Mass—not just with their voices but also in their heart.

Father Paul shared with the parish how he has been able to introduce much more Gregorian Chant in the music program at St. Peter's Basilica and in the future he hopes to incorporate more Polyphony as well. "What you are doing here, I am trying to do in Rome," said Fr. Paul.

Father Paul also spoke about the upcoming events at the Vatican in which he is involved, referring particularly to the upcoming Mass of the Beatification of John Paul II in May. In closing, Father asked the people of St. John Cantius parish for their prayers, that the Church's ideal vision of Sacred Music will be realized in other places. Finally, Father thanked the people of St. John Cantius Parish for their "ministry of beauty."

Br. Joshua Caswell, S.J.C.

## HOW THE ST. CECILIA CHOIR BEGAN

The best things in life are unplanned. In 1992, when I was still relatively new to the parish, I was approached by Joe Kaczmarek, then sacristan and Master of Ceremonies for the liturgy at St. John Cantius. Joe had learned that I was a singer with His Majesty's Clerkes, a twenty-voice concert choir that performed regularly, mostly in church venues. The group was secular in nature but given to singing sacred music (since by far most of the best choral repertoire is sacred). Primarily they sang works of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: Byrd, Lassus, Victoria, Palestrina, and other composers whose names roll off the tongue.



In twelve years with the group, I had learned a lot of that repertoire and developed a taste for it. And it is to some degree an acquired taste, what with slow tempos, long durations, and sometimes complex writing. But like many things of quality, the more you learn, the more you appreciate. And the austerity of this music suits the Mass, since it was written to be sung in the context of the actual Mass and to complement it, not distract from it.

The Feast of Corpus Christi was approaching, and Joe asked if I might consider pulling together a small group of the Clerkes singers to sing a Mass at St. John Cantius. I'm no conductor. I'd taken Conducting 101 as a requirement for a music degree, but that was some years before, and hardly sufficient. Besides, my degree was in flute. Though I had a lot of choral experience, my schooling was with instrumental ensembles, not choirs.

Joe convinced me. It was an easy Mass and only eight singers. So I assembled them and held one re-

hearsal, and on June 21, 1992, the St. Cecilia Choir sang its first mass: the *Missa Secunda* of Hans Leo Hassler, along with the William Byrd Propers and the chanted Sequence. I sang as one of the eight while directing, finding this easier than standing outside the ensemble. The Mass was an easy one, but the Byrd was hard. Byrd can be very complex rhythmically and it was a stretch, particularly on one rehearsal. But the singers came prepared and it worked. "Whew," I thought. "That's that." Little did I know. Soon Joe returned, hat in hand. "Do you suppose," he asked politely, "that you could get an ensemble together for Assumption?" And away it went.

The next year, 1993, was the Church's Centennial, which generated extra musical activity. In addition to lots of sung Masses, we were asked to organize concerts by visiting ensembles for the occasion—the choir of men and boys from St. Luke's in Evanston, for example, and a brass ensemble that played antiphonal music from three of the church's lofts, as was done at St. Mark's in Venice in the time of Giovanni Gabrieli (c. 1554 -1612).

Years passed, and the activity increased. One year the Chicago Brass Ensemble came and did a year-long residency, so we had the pleasure of singing with them. And there were more and more sung Masses. For each service I would hire a group of singers, assemble music, assign parts, mail out the music, and prepare and hold one rehearsal. Since it wasn't a fixed ensemble that sang every Sunday, we had to engage singers according to their availability, drawing from a pool of about thirty singers we knew well.

No, the singers generally aren't Catholic. That's not a problem, it's an opportunity (more on that later). They are engaged for their skills. They are strong singers who sight-read well—that is, sing the music off the page without help, a necessary skill when there's little or no rehearsal. I would guess that about half the singers have "day jobs" of some kind, though they are still very busy as singers. The other half might combine singing jobs such as Symphony Chorus or Lyric Opera chorus with a bit of teaching, and so earn their living as singers, something that's possible in a city the size of Chicago.

Today, the St. Cecilia Choir has a library of more than a hundred Masses that it has sung, and probably 300 motets (the pieces that are sung at Offertory and Communion after the Schola Cantorum of St. Gregory has sung the Propers for those times). So among the many riches at St. John's is its music library.

Things haven't always gone smoothly. There was the time on a Palm Sunday when we were to be in the far upper rear loft at an appointed time to sing the *Ingrediente Domino*, which heralds Christ's entry into Jerusalem. Bad weather caused the pre-service outdoor procession to end early. We were at ground level when we heard—to our horror—the bell ring, which was our cue. We raced up two long, double flights to our places and launched the piece, utterly out of breath. The performance was not definitive.

Years passed, and while directing was a privilege and a pleasure, it was growing to be more than I could handle alone. My friend Dan Robinson, a true conductor, was between engagements and restless, I knew. We ran into each other at a wedding. "We have to talk," I said. By this time the church was requesting that instrumental accompaniment be added on occasion, which required a capable conductor standing out of the ensemble.

Dan was delighted to help. He has a conducting degree from Stanford University, and I knew was a very high-caliber musician. And his energy is boundless. So we shared the directing for a few years, he singing for me when I directed and *vice versa*. At first, Dan conducted a larger ensemble (with instruments, and with more voices added to the original eight for balance) and though it was formed of the same singers, that group was called the Sine Nomine [No Name] Ensemble. We continued happily to share the conducting duties, something that was especially helpful during Holy Week when the singing load is heavy. Later, when I opted just to sing and leave the conducting to Dan, the Sine Nomine name was dropped and it was all the St. Cecilia Choir.

The idea arose to launch a Lessons and Carols service modeled on those heard in the great English cathedrals each Christmas Eve. King's College Choir, Cambridge (U.K.) is undoubtedly the most famous; their service is broadcast around the world. Thanks to the leadership of parishioner Joseph Phelps, our first, in 2005, was a great draw. Part of the rationale behind Lessons is to pull new people in to the parish through the music, since many music lovers are familiar with the King's service. It worked. The church was packed. Dan and I co-conducted the service for the first three years, though it was tricky sharing limited rehearsal time, not to mention continually swapping places in the tight space in the choir loft without knocking over music stands and lights. So I opted just to sing for Lessons, too.

Around this time Dan lost his day job. That was unfortunate, but the cloud had a silver lining. Father

Phillips, having observed Dan's talent for years, brought him on to the staff part-time to conduct. Dan handles not only the St. Cecilia Masses, but some of the larger services requiring orchestras or organ, such as Requiem Masses by Faure and Duruflé.

One of Dan's strengths as a conductor is in baroque music—he had founded and directed a baroque period instrument ensemble that was well respected—so in time we added occasional performances of Handel's *Messiah*, which doubled as fund raisers. Instead of the rather loud and brash renditions of the work that are fairly typical, Dan's was small and lean and elegant. It sounded great in the church and made a wonderful start to the Christmas season. Again, the pews were full.

All this time, the singers were growing familiar with the church and with a few exceptions, began to feel at home. They became friendly with some of the brothers who sing with the schola, and with whom we share the loft. They heard Father Phillips' sermons over time. They smelled the incense. It's hard to spend years at St. John Cantius and remain unaffected. And so in 2010, lo and behold, the first singer announced a decision to convert. All unplanned.

St. John Cantius has a reputation for fine music, a rarity in the American Catholic Church. People ask me "Who is the music director there?" I reply: "No one." Tom Zeman, Dan Robinson, Father Scott Haynes, Brother Chad McCoy, Joe Urbaszewski and Joe Kaczmarek patch it all together, and it works. We are blessed.

Terry Sullivan



## TOMÁS LUIS DE VICTORIA

2011 marks the 500th anniversary of the death of Tomás Luis de Victoria (1548-1611).

Here at St. John Cantius, Victoria has been a staple since sacred choral music first sounded in the sanctuary after Father Phillips arrived more than 20 years ago. This is especially true during Holy Week, where we are accustomed to hearing his responses during the very moving *Tenebrae* service on Wednesday of Holy Week and his *Improperium* during the Good Friday service. But, his masses and motets dot the sacred music schedule every year. For instance, during the Christmas season we did both his very famous motet *O Magnum Mysterium* and the mass based upon it. Over the years we have done 8 or 10 of his masses and a couple dozen of his motets. And during this, the four hundredth anniversary of his death, we are planning to perform more such works during Sunday services.

### His Life

Tomás Luis de Victoria was born in Avila in Spain probably in 1548. He was the 7<sup>th</sup> of 11 children of Francisco Luis de Victoria and Francesca Suárez de la Concha. Tomás' father was a priest at the Avila Cathedral. After Francisco's death in 1557, Tomás' uncle, Juan Luis, who was also a priest, took in the family. Unlike many Renaissance composers, a fair amount is known about Victoria and his family, a family that clearly had close ties to the Catholic church, and also to the Spanish military. On both his mother's and father's side of the family, there were men of prominence, education and, likely, some wealth.

His own education started at St. Gil's boys school in Avila, a school with a fine reputation – a reputation supported by the notice of St. Theresa of Avila, who sent her nephews there. He remained at St. Gil's until his voice broke, around 1563, at age 15. While there, it is likely that in addition to singing and general studies, including Latin, he began his keyboard studies.

In 1563 (or as late as 1565) he was sent to the Jesuit Collegio, Germanico, in Rome, where he was enrolled as a singer. His studies would have included Latin as well as preparation for the priesthood. It is at this point that he may have met and even possibly studied with Palestrina. Though no actual record of such study remains, Palestrina was *maestro di cappella* at *Seminario Romano*, nearby. Palestrina's music was widely known in Rome, and any aspiring composer, which Victoria certainly was by then, would have made every effort to become acquainted not



just with the music, but with the composer himself. Victoria went on to hold a variety of posts as organist and singer in Rome. Although there is ample evidence that he was successful at such posts, he longed for his native Spain and the more relaxed life of the composer and priest. He finally achieved his desire for the quiet, contemplative life of a priest and composer in Spain when, in 1581, King Philip II named him chaplain to his sister, the Dowager Empress Maria at the *Monasterio de las Descalzas de St. Clara* in Madrid. He served as director of the convent choir until 1604. Thereafter, until his death in 1611, he served as just as organist.

### His Music

Victoria's first publication was a book of Latin motets for a variety of arrangement of parts, from 4 to 8 voices. His entire output is Latin service music comprising everything from motets to hymns to *Magnificat* settings, to Masses to Responsories and Lamentations for Holy Week. Though he expressed admiration for the expressive features of madrigals by other composers, he never ventured into that genre. But, he clearly absorbed the techniques used in such secular compositions. Unusually, practically his entire output was published by him during his lifetime. In a further departure from the norm, he frequently republished early works in later publications, showing revisions to those older works.

### His Place in Music

Victoria, whose music, along with much of the music of the Renaissance, fell out of favor in most places during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, has made quite a nice comeback in recent decades.

There are some fairly clear reasons why his music, rather than, say, the music of Morales or Guerrero – fellow Spaniards and wonderful composers, has become so popular. Victoria's music is easier for the modern ear to understand than that of many of his compatriots. His use of counterpoint is less complex, and the harmonies he favors sound to our ears rather like tonality rather than modality.

A few words of explanation may help here, first about counterpoint. In writing for multiple voices, you can have them all doing the same rhythmic thing at the same time, like a hymn, where all the voices move together supporting a melody. Or, you can have each voice be independent rhythmically and melodically. In that case, the melodic material in each part is usually similar, often fairly strictly imitative. In this style, each phrase of text has its own **small melodic phrase, used in each part.** In Victoria's music, there are more sections in which all the parts move at the same time in the same way than in many of his contemporaries, and certainly more than his immediate predecessors.

And now a word about modes. The music we know and love, music from the time of Bach until, in most cases, now, uses two scales or modes almost all the time – **major and minor.** In Renaissance music, it's really a lot more complex than that. Then, there were more scales used as the basis of a musical composition than just the two we are so fond of. Instead, there were four others used almost all the time – Dorian, Phrygian, Lydian, and Mixolydian. Each sounds different from the other, as major does from minor, and so each has connotations for the listener.

Before you nod off reading this, know Victoria made use of the modern, major and minor scales, then called Ionian and Aeolian, more frequently than, say, did Palestrina or any number of other contemporaneous composers. **All this means that Victoria's music is immediately more familiar to our ears.**

The other feature of his music that tends to capture our attention is its apparent emotional content. There is a spirituality, an intensity to many of his compositions that we find particularly appealing, as did his contemporaries. His use of a kind of easy chromaticism and very fluid melodic lines is part of this appeal. It is equally possible that his incorporation of the techniques of madrigal composition, as perfected in Italy at this time, in sacred music gives his compositions a more direct emotional tie to the listener than the somewhat drier strict counterpoint of other composers of the era. However he achieved his effects, we tend to feel strongly about his music.

## In Summary

Victoria was an expert singer, a noted keyboard player, a priest, and a gentleman. For the most part, he led a quiet life of service and contemplation. His music reflects both aspects of his life. The beauty and profundity of his music provokes in many listeners **deep contemplation of the text set and, I'm sure, of the service in which it is found.**

For his music is first and foremost service music. That it is often performed in concert is simply a tribute to its profound beauty. For us at St. John Cantius, his music is an integral part of the majesty of the sacrament of the mass. It supports and sustains the worship of the parish, as does all the other beautiful music performed by the array of choirs we are fortunate enough to have.

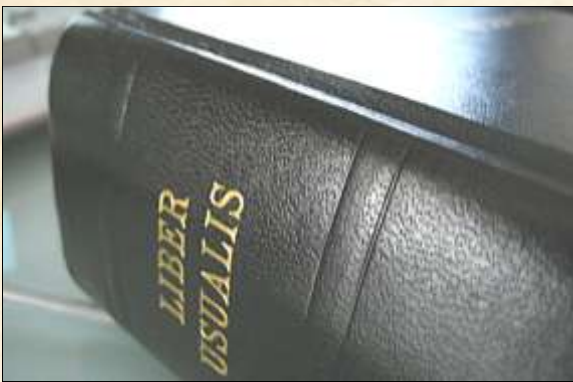
Daniel V. Robinson



### *Liber primus qui Missas*

*Victoria's first book of masses dates from the time when he was Master of Music at the German College in Rome, which had taken him in as a boarder in 1565. Founded by Pope Julius III in 1552, the German College lodged boarding students from other countries who were completing their religious training.*

## REVISITING 'DE MUSICA SACRA'



In September 1958, at the close of his pontificate and with the history book of the Church about to turn to the new chapter entitled “Vatican II,” Pope Pius XII issued *De Musica Sacra et Sacra Liturgia*. [1] Pius XII’s instruction on sacred music and liturgy would consolidate the pastoral vision and liturgical teaching of Pius X’s *Inter sollicitudines* (1903), Pius XI’s *Divini cultus* (1928) and his own *Musicae sacrae disciplina* (1955). *De Musica Sacra* would canonize many important principles of the liturgical movement, and lay the groundwork for Vatican II’s *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. Today, it is useful to revisit *De Musica Sacra*, due to the recent reintegration of the Classical form of the Roman Rite in the Church today achieved through Benedict XVI’s *Summorum Pontificum*, which took effect September 14, 2007.

Catholics have a special opportunity today to celebrate the Roman tradition of Liturgy in two forms. Both forms share elements that come from a common patrimony, yet each liturgical form expresses sacredness and beauty in different modalities. *Summorum Pontificum* desires that both the Ordinary and Extraordinary Forms of the Liturgy be celebrated with equal reverence, devotion and honor, so that the faithful will come to understand the inherent sacredness of Catholic Liturgy, in all her splendid variety. As regards sacred music, *De Musica Sacra* establishes principles that are upheld in Vatican II’s Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, and so Pius XII’s document is a viable reference point for sacred music in the post-Vatican II liturgy. But with the reintroduction of the Classical Roman Rite, *De Musica Sacra* provides an invaluable synthesis of musical and liturgical customs, as well as rubrics, and shines forth as brilliant foundational liturgical document, relevant for our day.

Today Benedict XVI, like Pius XII, teaches us “...an authentic updating of sacred music can take place only in the lineage of the great tradition of the past, of Gregorian chant and sacred polyphony.”[2]

*Instrumentum Laboris* states, “the faithful need to know the standard Gregorian chants, which have been composed to meet the needs of people of all times and places, in virtue of their simplicity, refinement and agility in form and rhythm.” [3]

In the celebration of the Roman Rite, the treasury of chant and sacred polyphony, thus, becomes a factor of unification in the Roman Rite. Church Musicians, formed by the pastoral vision of “*De Musica Sacra*,” must labor in seminaries, parishes, dioceses, and religious communities, to ensure that Catholics are not deprived of those parts of our musical and liturgical heritage that the Church treasures as a rightful inheritance. In seeking to reintroduce sacred Catholic music into the Roman Liturgy, one must face the stark reality that the Roman heritage of Latin liturgical music has been jettisoned. Generations of Catholics have been robbed of any contact with the Roman musical tradition.

How many Easters have passed in this parish or that without the chanting of the *Exsultet* or the *Victimae Paschale Laudes*? If Catholics know any chant, it is only the simple *Salve Regina* or the *Sanctus* of the *Requiem Mass*. What was once common ground has now become foreign territory to most Roman Catholics.

In stark contrast, Catholics who primarily attend the Ordinary Form of the Mass have been schooled in popular contemporary religious songs. Pius XII recognizes the value of such religious music, which is usually set in the vernacular and composed according to a popular, contemporary style. But he insists that such religious music not be admitted to liturgical services, such as Mass or Vespers, but that it be fostered in devotional services, youth rallies, concerts, etc.





John Paul II, echoing Pius X, stated: “A composition for the Church is all the more sacred and liturgical the more its development, inspiration, and flavor approaches the Gregorian melody, and the less worthy it is the more it distinguishes itself from that supreme model”. And thus, popular religious music, a supplement to liturgical music, will bear greater success when it flows from Gregorian Chant.

Today in our diverse culture, it is important to embrace the liturgical and musical principles that Pius XII presents, so that a universal expression of the Liturgy can be realized by embracing the sacred music tradition of the Latin Rite, which places Gregorian Chant and Polyphony at the center.

When popular religious songs dominate the Sacred Liturgy, the universality of liturgical music that is offered by Gregorian Chant, designed for people of all cultures and times, is sacrificed. Popular religious songs, by their very nature, tending towards the vernacular and composed with contemporary styles, cannot serve the needs of a universal liturgy.

In the recent past, a certain mindset prevailed that insisted the People of God could not appreciate Gregorian chant and sacred polyphony. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, building on *De Musica Sacra*, in contrast, insists otherwise and, moreover, asserts that Catholics enjoy a right to sing the traditional liturgical chant in Latin for their spiritual and intellectual benefit. [4]

In the pastoral implementation of these norms, seeking to form Catholics in the true spirit of worship, the clergy can help restore Catholic culture in liturgical practice, but will, in reality, face political opposition in the parish, religious house, diocese and seminary. Thus, formation is necessary on every level so Catholics can come to joyfully embrace the liturgical and musical treasury of the Roman Rite.

If the restoration of liturgical music is to be taken seriously, we must begin with formation of our future clergy in the seminary. *De Musica Sacra* insists that competent liturgical musicians are needed to instruct priesthood candidates in a program of courses that will invigorate them with a love for Catholic liturgical music. This education must employ these future Church leaders with the means to pastorally implement a real Catholic restoration of liturgical music, an investment of inestimable worth.

Rev. Scott Haynes, S.J.C.

[1] *De Musica Sacra et Sacra Liturgia* was issued on September 3, 1958, the Feast of St. Pius X.

[2] Benedict XVI's comments in the Sistine Chapel, on Saturday, June 24, 2006.

[3] *Instrumentum Laboris*, 61.

[4] “Gregorian chant, which the Roman Church considers her own as handed down from antiquity...is proposed to the faithful as belonging to them also [assisting] ... the faith and devotion of the congregation.” --Pope Pius XII (1939-1958), Encyclical Letter *Mediator Dei*, Sec. 191, November 20, 1947.

## THE 'MOZARTEAN' BEAUTY OF MUSIC

The philosopher, Dietrich Von Hildebrand, whom Pope Pius XII called “the 20th Century Doctor of the Church,” was, according to Josef Seifert, “truly in love with the beauty of music, yet by no means just any music. Rather, von Hildebrand



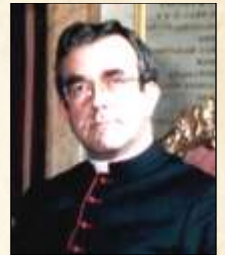
loved most of all that ‘true’ music which speaks of some higher world of values. But he also loved a broad spectrum of lesser but still aesthetically good music. Von Hildebrand always felt that Mozart’s music was unique, so to speak the music, falling like a heavenly dew from above, a ‘musical grace’ opening to humanity the ‘world above’ and, as Gabriel Marcel put it in his inaugural speech for the Salzburg Festival (*La musique – patrie de l’âme*), bringing us into contact with ‘the true home of our soul.’”

Seifert’s article entitled, ‘On von Hildebrand’s Love of Music and Mozart’ states: “The words of many great minds about Mozart quoted by von Hildebrand in his essay on Mozart express not only his own belief that Mozart is one of the three greatest composers of all time, along with Bach and Beethoven, but that his music is somehow distinguished from all others by being like a “heavenly grace in the world of music.”

In response to this uniquely “Mozartean” beauty—whether in Mozart’s concertos, his chamber music, his operas, or his sacred music—von Hildebrand encountered some truly incomparable and unique peak of beauty in music, some form of “heavenly charm,” which is only to be found in Mozart.

## NEWS FROM ROME ON SACRED MUSIC

Monsignor Valentin Miserachs Grau, the director of the Pontifical Institute of Sacred Music, which trains church musicians, said that there had been serious “deviations” in the performance of sacred music.



“How far we are from the true spirit of sacred music. How can we stand it that such a wave of inconsistent, arrogant and ridiculous profanities have so easily gained a stamp of approval in our celebrations?” he said. He added that a pontifical office could correct the abuses, and would be “opportune.” He said: “Due to general ignorance, especially in sectors of the clergy, there exists music which is devoid of sanctity, true art and universality.”

Msgr. Grau said that Gregorian chant was the “cardinal point” of liturgical music and that traditional music “should become again the living soul of the assembly.” The Pope favored the idea of a watchdog for church music when he was the cardinal in charge of safeguarding Catholic doctrine.

The Holy Father is known to be a strong supporter of Msgr. Grau, who is also in charge of the *Cappella Liberiana* of the *Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore*.



## A FINAL NOTE FROM THE HOLY FATHER

Pope Benedict XVI, in upholding our Catholic liturgical traditions, has said, “An authentic updating of sacred music cannot take place except in the wake of the great tradition of the past, of Gregorian chant and sacred polyphony.” He has said that in music, as in art and architecture, the church continually promotes “new expressive means without denying the past — the history of the human spirit — which is also the story of its dialogue with God.”