

# Gregorian Feast

Chants for  
Festive Days

Pro Cantione  
Antiqua

Director

Mark Brown



alto

Ich er gyt von Hemenrich vnd ert  
ruche vnd alle allen crefftten swelet  
dine cracht Vnd dar vnter lo lobet  
dich billichen alles das da ist vnd  
ein erheler aller wißheit Darvnt  
lo saget man die billichen lop vnd  
dang Vnd mit der gottes wißheit  
ist die grolle ere gesaget got herre  
vnter den ewigen vnter ist om m



# Gregorian Feast

## Chants for Festive Days

### *In Festo Sanctissimi*

[1] Introitus	2:34	[3] Offertorium	1:19
[2] Graduale	3:04	[4] Communio	1:34

### *In Nativitate*

[5] Puer nates	2:28	[7] Offertorium	1:13
[6] Graduale	3:30	[8] Communio	0:35

### *In Epiphania Domini*

[9] Introitus	2:42	[11] Offertorium	1:22
[10] Graduale	3:00	[12] Communio	0:56

[13] <i>Dies Irae</i>			6:23
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### *In Assumptione*

[14] Introitus	4:03	[16] Offertorium	1:13
[15] Graduale	3:12	[17] Communio	0:57

### *Andreae Apostoli*

[18] Introitus	2:33	[20] Offertorium	1:49
[19] Graduale	5:53	[21] Communio	1:04

### *Cummunione Unius Martyr*

[22] Introitus	3:18	[24] Offertorium	1:37
[23] Graduale	5:27	[25] Communio	0:50

[26] <i>Aeterna Christi Munera</i>			2:35
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## Pro Cantione Antiqua

Mark Brown, *director*

### NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

Plainsong, or chant, is at least as old as Christianity itself. Indeed, the Jewish custom of singing Biblical texts to enhance the meaning of the words became a natural practice for the first Christians. It's not hard to see why. Chant is liturgical music, performed as part of a communal act of worship, and while the spoken text is no less intelligible, sung texts, however simple, are more audible, more dignified, and more expressive, altogether a worthier way of praising God. The evolution and development of plainchant, with its fusion of Jewish, Byzantine, Roman, Gallic, and Frankish elements, is one of the chief glories of western Christianity. Most of the finest chants were written before the 9th century, the so-called "golden age" itself being between the 5th - 6th and the 8th centuries.

How much this creative activity, if any, can be attributed to the man whose name is inseparably associated with it, St. Gregory the Great, (Pope from 590-604), is anybody's guess. Contemporary, or near-contemporary accounts of the Saint either make no mention of chant or the *Schola Romanum*, or, if they do, do not relate them to Gregory's pontificate, and it was not until nearly 300 years after his death that he was said to have founded the *Schola* and codified its music. Though he was a prolific writer and energetic liturgical organiser, his only known reference to music concerns the singing of chant by deacons, and the occasions on which the *Alleluia* and *Kyrie* might be sung. Nevertheless, Gregorian Chant it is, and the fact the known references seem to be liturgical rather than musical prescriptions, serve to emphasise that the music can rarely be discussed other than in relation to the text.

Naturally, it was the liturgy, the organised worship of God and the re-enactments of significant events in Christ's life on earth, that not only determined the choice of text, but also the appropriate music for each. Verses from the Psalms, for instance, were sung over and over again in different ways, according to the part of the liturgy where they occurred. And for the central ritual act, the Mass, the symbolic recreation of Christ's last supper, the variety was enormous. The main Mass of the day was, even in non-monastic or secular communities, supplemented by other Masses of different kinds, and Masses for the dead and cycles of votive Masses were not infrequent. The *Lincoln Statutes* of 1531 refer to an astonishing daily round of 44 Masses though, of course, most of these would have been said rather than sung. The texts for the Ordinary of the *Mass*, *Kyrie*, *Gloria*, *Sanctus*,

*Benedictus*, and *Agnus Dei*, remained the same, but the Proper changed regularly, that is to say the text appropriate for each day or feast and consisting of *Introit*, *Gradual* and *Alleluia*, *Offertory*, and *Communion*.

Thus the chant also changed. Furthermore, because it was an evolving, living and oral tradition, variations occurred within the same chant. Some early manuscripts show how only the rise and fall and grouping of notes, some provide rhythmic indications, all are really not much more than *aides memoires* to the singers. Until the letter notation devised by Hucbald in the 9th century and the development 100 years later of the four-line stave, generally ascribed to Guido D'Arezzo, chants were passed on in much the same way as folk-songs, though more seriously and precisely. By the 10th century, chant performance would have been fairly fast and flexible, with the rhythmic variety of the spoken word, for oral melodic tradition implies an oral rhythmic one. With codification, however, singers came to rely rather less on learning by listening, and since the four-line stave had no provision for rhythmic indications, chant began to be performed in notes of more or less equal length.

Nevertheless, even in the 16th century, contemporary Graduals appear to imply some rhythmic distinction by their notation. Renaissance singers and composers were brought up on Gregorian chant. They read it, heard it, and sang it every day. Some indeed, like Dufay, continued to compose it, and it has been persuasively argued that Renaissance composers respected the rhythms of the chant as they heard it (as distinct from how they read it), when they used it as *cantus firmus* in their polyphonic works. Some of these compositions certainly suggest that the chant was not as uniform and neutral at this time as was believed, and the performance of the six Propers and the hymns *Aeterna Christi Munera* on this recording offer an interpretation of this relative flexibility. They are taken from *Gradual Romanum* (Giunta, Venice 1611) and are appropriate to be sung within the Masses of say, Palestrina, (as they have been). Annibale Zoilo and Palestrina himself were, in 1577, charged by Pope Gregory XIII with the revision of the plainsongs of the Roman Gradual and Antiphoner to rid themselves "superfluties, barbarisms, and obscuraties" in accordance with post-Tridentine doctrine. Although Palestrina never completed this task, the eventual revision and *Editio Mediacaea* of 1614 clearly reflected his views as expressed in surviving correspondence with Duke Gonzago over many years.

The Propers heard here are for some of the great occasions of the Christian year. The Feast of Corpus Christi, officially instituted by Pope Urban IV in 1264, was celebrated from the 14th century on the Thursday after Trinity, that moveable part of the Church year dependant on Easter. Those for the birth of Christ (25th December) and Epiphany (6th January) were parts of the fixed calendar, as were important Saint's Days, such as the Feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary (15th August) and St. Andrew the Apostle (30th November). *Commune unius Martyris non Pontificis* is, as the title indicates, the Proper for a non-episcopal martyr, and is thus not special to a particular day. Medieval hymns were songs of praise with strophic rhyming texts, and their chant melodies date from the 11th century. *Aeterna Christi Munera* was one of the most famous, the matins hymn for the Common of the Apostles, and the three themes of its ABCA form were later developed by Palestrina in his Mass of the same name.

**Notes by Peter Bamber**

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## NOTES ON THE ARTISTS

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The English vocal group **Pro Cantione Antiqua** was formed in 1968 by Mark Brown, Paul Esswood and James Griffett originally to perform music of the medieval, Renaissance and Baroque eras but have since recorded music of later periods too. These performers were joined by Michael George, Ian Partridge, James Bowman, Stephen Roberts, Kevin Smith, Brian Etheridge, David Thomas and Paul Elliot, all since distinguished soloists in their own right. Most had begun their singing careers in the Choir of Westminster Cathedral, then under the direction of Colin Mawby, and so became expert quickly in Plainchant in the surroundings of the leading Roman Catholic Cathedral in the UK. Various combinations of these singers and later members under the name of Pro Cantione Antiqua have sold out many tours around the world, and sold hundreds of thousands of records for labels such as Archiv (Deutsche Grammophon), Argo, Teldec, Warner, IMP, Carlton, Ars Musici, and now alto.

**Alto ALC1117**

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Producer: **Jack Leppington** ([1]-[8]), **Mark Brown** ([9]-[12] and [14]-[16]), and **Ellen Malone** ([17]-[26])

Engineer: **Antony Howell** ([1]-[8] and [17]-[26]) and **Tony Faulkner** ([9]-[12] and [14]-[16])

Mastered for alto by **Paul Arden-Taylor**

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**alto**