

## VENI, SANCTE SPIRITUS

### *About the Sequences*

What we now call “Gregorian” chant represents an evolution and historical distillation of the elements of what once was a widely divergent practice in the ritual of Christian worship. Early practice divided singing into “lector chant” and “schola chant” at Mass, with a reader singing through a complete psalm, at times including a congregational response. As the ritual of the Mass became more systematic, selected verses of psalms were adapted and given a musical setting, with particular chants assigned to days throughout the liturgical year. Capable singers were identified and trained from an early age and taught to memorize chants for the entire cycle of the liturgical calendar.

Sequence, from the Latin sequere, means “to follow”, and indeed the original Sequence always followed the Alleluia until permanent reforms to the liturgy after Vatican II (1962 - 1965). Beginning as a genre of poetry, the Sequence (Sequentia) itself is actually a prosa, or the liturgical hymn of the Mass, placing proper importance on the text and its function in the context of the liturgy as an extension of and meditation on the Alleluia verse.

The Sequence served an important processional role in the Mass from as early as the 9th century and there were hundreds in use. The 1570 Missale Romanum limited the number of proscribed Sequences to four: Victimæ paschali laudes, (Easter), Veni Sancte Spiritus (Pentecost), Lauda Sion (Corpus Christi), and the Dies Iræ (All Souls/Requiem). A fifth sequence, the 13th century Stabat Mater, was restored to the liturgy in 1727 by Pope Benedict XIII for the feast of the Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

In *Western Plainchant: A Handbook*, David Hiley draws attention to the parallel-verse structure of the Sequence text and the typical one syllable per note in setting text to music. The relative uniformity of the Sequence form imparts what Hiley calls “an impression of insistent enthusiasm.”

Veni Sancte Spiritus is the Mass sequence for the Octave of Pentecost, and dates as early as the 13th century. The text was esteemed as the “Golden Sequence” and was recited by those seeking a highly-valued plenary indulgence (an indulgence that removes all temporal punishment). The text is a beautiful example of Latin poetry in trochaic dimeter, with lines one and two rhyming with one another and line three consistently ending on the same syllable.

Of particular note in this recording is the inclusion of the Stabat Mater dolorosa text in an otherwise unknown setting, premiered on Mignarda's 2020 album *Mater Dolorosa* in a 2-part chant setting with its historical contratenor part.

This selection of hymns and the complete surviving sequences offers an introspective glimpse of celebration of the Mass in the Extraordinary Form. Having sung the Latin Mass for many years, I have seen first-hand how Gregorian chant provides purpose and inspires contemplation. This recording is dedicated to those who find inspiration in the vibrant traditions that link us to our past – and provide hope for our future.

- Ron Andrico

## MUSIC IN SERVICE OF THE LITURGY

The music on this recording is the product of 20 years' immersion in singing chant in the context for which it was written: a weekly Latin Mass. As such, my approach is informed by historical musicology but guided more by an acute awareness of the purpose of the music, which is to work with the clergy to facilitate the ritual of the Mass and to deepen and enhance the devotional experience for the congregation.

Music for the Tridentine Mass is not decoration: it is integral to the liturgy. The text *is* the liturgy. Chant melodies, existing to serve and support the liturgy, are made up of elements at once functional and deeply spiritual. The almost hypnotic repetitions of the many verses of hymns like *Pange Lingua Gloriosa*, sung during the Holy Thursday procession after communion, or of the beautiful *Sacris solemniis*, sung during the Corpus Christi procession, act as more than traveling music; the music leads one to contemplate the meaning of Thomas Aquinas' words as the familiar melodies open the soul to the divine. The 13th century "Golden Sequence, *Veni, Sancte Spiritus*, uses the purity of a single line of plainchant to focus the listener on the significance of the text, one of the great masterpieces of sacred Latin poetry. And the *Stabat Mater* deepens awareness of Christ's sacrifice by revealing it to us through the anguished eyes of His mother, before finally allowing the comfort of the final verse: "Let me be shielded by the cross, safeguarded by Christ's death, cherished by grace".

During rehearsals of our tiny *schola* when enthusiastic discussion strays too far into musicological or theological corners, our brilliant and learned director has often been moved to remind us, "*This is not a graduate seminar.*" Quite right, in the context of preparing a practical offering of music to serve the liturgy - *this week*.

Happily, my purpose here need not be so narrow. I offer this music, together with my translations, as whatever you choose to make of it: as inspiration for meditation and prayer; as a tool to help you learn the chants yourself; as a source for reflection and deeper understanding of the texts; or simply for the pure enjoyment of the sound of these mesmerizing ancient words and melodies, whatever your background or faith.

- Donna Stewart

## ABOUT DONNA STEWART

Donna Stewart has been singing for as long as she can remember, discovering an affinity for hymn-singing at an early age. Noted internationally for her interpretations of music for voice and lute as half of *Duo Mignarda*, she has set a new standard in re-introducing the natural voice to Renaissance lute song. Her deeply-rooted concern for communicating ancient texts with clarity, warmth and understanding is often commented on by reviewers and audiences.

Her grounding in the practical application of chant and Renaissance polyphony stems from two decades with a small schola cantorum dedicated to providing music for the Tridentine Latin Mass throughout the liturgical year. This is her second album of solo Gregorian chant. As a vocal soloist, she has sixteen CDs to her credit, and she has also performed and recorded on the Koch and Onda labels with Baroque orchestra Apollo's Fire.

Current projects include immersion in sacred polyphony with Mignarda's *a cappella* vocal quartet, as well as applying her gift for storytelling to singing old-time harmony, hymnody, and heart-songs with the old-time duo *Eulalie*.

When not poring over sacred Latin texts, Donna can generally be found employing her knowledge of botanical Latin in her ever-expanding garden.