

ADVENTUS DOMINI • Janka Szendrei, László Dobszay, cond; Schola Hungarica • BMCCD213 (70:45 📀)

Both of the founding directors of the Hungarian chant choir have passed away since this program was recorded in 2010, Dobszay in August 2011 during a session of the IMS study group Cantus Planus that he was instrumental in creating, and Szendrei in June 2019. The organization was disbanded after Dobszay's death. The CD was not issued until 2017 and has just now arrived. It has all the hallmarks of Dobszay's style of programming: a series of chants on a theme (Advent this time), a program drawn from a single medieval manuscript (Graz 807 here), and one supplemented by four related polyphonic works (Heinrich Isaac here). The chants belong to the four Sundays of Advent, the four Isaac communions from *Choralis Constantinus* to the same Sundays. Graz is not so far from the cathedral of Constance, which commissioned the set of polyphonic Propers, but this is only coincidental, for the early 12th-century chant manuscript was not a source that Isaac used. Szendrei, describing the manuscript, writes that the monks of Solesmes published a facsimile in 1981 (*recte*, 1974). This source clearly indicates the German dialect of chant, characterized notably by the rising la-do interval, wider than the la-ti in corresponding places of the more common form.

In addition to the Sunday Propers, chants for Ember Saturday are included, as well as the introit *Rorate caeli* for Ember Wednesday, a chant that was soon after was moved to the Fourth Sunday. The four offertories include verses that were still being sung when Graz 807 was copied. Discs that include the Propers of these four Sundays have been made upwards of a dozen times, for they fit neatly on a CD. But most of the other versions are sung by a choir (usually of monks) from the *Graduale Triplex*, while this offers the variety of men's, women's, and children's voices sung from a medieval manuscript of special distinction. The neumes are heightened using a red line for the fa clef and a yellow line for the do clef. (The facsimile reproduces the first page in color.) The schola employs Dobszay's familiar fast tempos with semiological interpretation. He and Szendrei alternate for the most part, but Szendrei directs the polyphony. Soloists are used regularly and some are identified, but oddly none of the excellent soloists in the offertory verses or the graduals.

The Ember Saturday chants have seldom been recorded, the gradual *A summo caelo* a few times, the rest hardly at all. If not for Richard Crocker's recordings of these chants for study purposes and Alberto Turco's recordings of his own edition in *Liber Gradualis*, these would be close to first recordings. The introit *Memento nostri*, long ago replaced for the Fourth Sunday as noted, was brought back into weekday use in the *Graduale Triplex* of 1974–79, but this is only its third recording. The four offertories have been recorded with one or two of their verses several times, most of all the popular *Ave Maria* for the Fourth

Sunday. Here both verses of the first three offertories are sung. The second verse of the alleluia *Laetatus sum* is also sung; there is a reference to this in the *Graduale Triplex* (p. 20). The introits are sung without the verse and repeat, although the source does include them. The graduals are sung without the repetition of the respond. The hymn *Benedictus es Domine Deus* is sung complete except for the verse repeated after the doxology, which is not found in the source. Less than half of the dozen recordings of this exceptional chant have been recorded complete, Schola Hungarica's 1990 version from a Prague source being one of them. Even Dom Gajard omitted a couple of verses. This recording marks 40 years since these choral forces were organized for a Christmas special (it took permanent shape a few years later). The subsequent series of recordings make up one of the largest collections of chant ever performed by a single group. If this is its final installment, it is a fitting climax. **J. F. Weber**

**This article originally appeared in Issue 44:5 (May/June 2021)
of *Fanfare Magazine*.**