

Introit chant recordings offered free by diocese

By JOSEPH O'BRIEN
Catholic Times Correspondent

LA CROSSE – Even as the older form of the Mass is making a comeback after Benedict XVI's 2007 motu proprio "Summorum Pontificum," restored it as the extraordinary form of the Roman Rite, so too, the Diocese of La Crosse is dusting off revered liturgical norms that have fallen out of use in the ordinary form of the Mass.

The diocesan Office of Sacred Worship is making available through its page on the diocesan Web site (<http://worship.dioceseoflacrosse.com>) the complete introits for Sundays, solemnities and feast days of the liturgical year. The introits are the entrance antiphons that are often replaced with so-called "entrance hymns."

Funded by an anonymous donation, the recordings have been made from the Roman Gradual, the Vatican-approved book of Gregorian chant for all parts of the Mass.

Learning aid

Sacred Worship director Christopher Carstens is providing these recordings for free to anyone with access to the Internet. There are 75 complete recordings downloadable as MP3 files, Carstens said, and the corresponding sheet music from the Roman Gradual is also available as downloadable PDF files.

"In this way, one can print off the piece of music and then listen to the recording of the chant to assist in learning it," he said. "A director of a choir, for example, may want to use one of the chants or even send the link to choir or schola members for them to review before gathering for



CT/Joseph O'Brien

A Gregorian chant was recorded for the Introit Project at the Cathedral of St. Joseph the Workman April 30, 2008. From left are Brian Luckner, the Cathedral's sacred music director, Matthew Curtis, Danielle Luckner and Amy Johnson-Pierce.

rehearsal."

Both the scarcity of such musical resources and the efficiency of the Internet inspired Carstens to undertake the project. There was also a personal reason, he noted. "I have tried to incorporate the introit chants in celebrations at which I am the cantor or choir director," he explained, adding that, like many involved in music, his ability to sight read is limited.

"So, in the process of learning a piece of music that I have not seen or heard before, such as an introit chant, I have sometimes found a recording of the chant on the Internet" he explained. "Although these files are rarely available, when I find them, they are the most convenient way for me to learn a chant."

Easy access

The availability of this music, Carstens noted, helps small parishes without a large budget by offering the recordings for free. It also helps parish choirs that might otherwise be hesitant to use Gregorian chant because they don't know Latin or are unfamiliar with the principles of chant.

"The Introit Project, while not eliminating every challenge, seeks to be a useful way to help introduce

chant into the liturgy, as the Magisterium of the Church desires," Carstens said.

Carstens added that the Second Vatican Council's document on the liturgy "Sacrosanctum Concilium" calls for the continued use of Gregorian chants. It is also mentioned in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM), the official Vatican-approved user's guide for

the Mass, as the first of four options which priests have for liturgical music at the beginning of Mass.

Given its position both in the GIRM and in the Church's heritage, Carstens said that chant really should have pride of place in contemporary liturgical music. "While in practice most parishes and communities choose the last option, a 'suitable liturgical song,'" he explained, "the first option, the introit, should be given greater consideration."

Quartet of voices

The foursome who recorded the introits at the Cathedral of St. Joseph the Workman were Cathedral Parish's sacred music director Brian Luckner, his wife Danielle Luckner, and fellow parishioners and choir members Matthew Curtis and Amy Johnson-Pierce.

The sessions were recorded between April 9 and May 21, 2008, Luckner said, with the help of producer Jeff Cozy of Bright Ideas Multimedia, La Crosse. The recording went smoothly, he added, especially because of the caliber of the talent. "They're all highly skilled musicians," Luckner said of his fellow singers. "They had a lot of material

and had to process that material relatively quickly. But they all had the skills for it.”

According to Luckner, the music being performed is at least half as old as the Church herself.

“Most of the pieces would date from the sixth to the tenth century,” he said, pointing out that most of them were written by anonymous monks. “For a long time, the pieces weren’t notated, but only handed on in oral tradition.”

As music’s own traditions began to develop, Luckner explained, the pieces were eventually written down – and continued to be handed down as part of the Church’s rich musical patrimony. Gregorian chant was named after Pope St. Gregory the Great (540-604), who had collected the chants of his time in manuscript form as a sort of forerunner to the Roman Gradual.

Given the music’s long unbroken tradition in the Church, Luckner hopes that people will see how appropriate its place is in the holy sacrifice of the Mass. “There’s a certain profound spirituality that is evoked by the very nature of these ancient chants,” he said.

Variation on a theme: Introit project inspires local singer

By JOSEPH O’BRIEN
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LA CROSSE – Matthew Curtis’ Gregorian chant Web site is another sign that early Church music is beginning to gain in popularity. Curtis, one of the members of the schola choir that recorded the Introit Project and a member of the Cathedral of St. Joseph the Workman, developed a Web site to sell his own solo version of the introits and other parts of the Mass. His work is available at both his own Web site, <http://www.chanttracks.com>, and at <http://www.ucombo.com>, a music-sharing Web site.

An award-winning tenor – his forte ranging from lyric to opera – Curtis graduated from Viterbo University, La Crosse, with a bachelor’s degree in vocal performance and is continuing his studies at the University of Minnesota’s Master of Music Program.

Curtis has been a member of the Cathedral choir since 2000 and over the years grew familiar with the Gregorian chants he recorded for the diocese. Inspired by this work, Curtis has decided to branch out on his own and has made a separate recording of the complete proper Mass parts from the Gregorian Missal, including the introits, graduals, alleluias, and offertory and communion parts.

Since as a singer he has to support himself, he’s asking for a minimal fee for each piece of music downloaded. “In all there are 475 chants that I recorded,” he said. “If you choose to download the entire collection, it only costs \$49.99 – that’s about 10 cents per chant, which is pretty reasonable,” he said.

He decided to sell his music, Curtis said, because there is such a premium on study and rehearsal time for student musicians. He’s hoping his talents help support him financially. “In fact, this project was an excuse,” he said with a laugh, “not to go looking for a summer job.”

He added that his own Web site also serves as a resource for other singers – and listeners – interested in the Church’s rich liturgical tradition.