

Hope and Participation: Sacred Music Colloquium 2006



Washington, D.C. – After decades of diversion, the time for beautiful music in Catholic liturgy has arrived, declared the organizers of the annual Sacred Music Colloquium meeting in Washington, D.C., June 20-25, 2006.

The source of this music is the Catholic musical heritage, Gregorian chant in particular, that has been neglected for decades but which is currently undergoing a spectacular revival.

As Pope Benedict XVI said on the last day the Colloquium meeting: "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."

Working toward this ideal, the Colloquium featured a world-class faculty, daily choir rehearsals, lectures on sacred music, and daily sung Masses with music from two millennia of Catholic faith. Its 85 participants included choral directors, parish priests, organists, and aspiring musicians of all ages who sing in Catholic choirs or hope to start new ones in the coming year.

Buoyed with a new sense of optimism, participants spent the week in rehearsals and teaching sessions singing the Gregorian chant attached to the Roman Rite, as well as exploring musical treasures from the polyphonic repertoire.

This was the 16th annual conference sponsored by the Center for Ward Method Studies of the Benjamin T. Rome School of Music of Catholic University and the Church Music Association of America, as affiliated with the *Consociato Internationalis Musicae Sacrae* in Rome. This conference is designed to provide full immersion into this music, so that participants can become fully engaged in its special sound and place in the life of the Catholic Church.

The Colloquium's record-high attendance reflected new interest in reviving the traditional liturgical culture of the Roman Rite. Each day of the colloquium sang at Masses said according to the new rite, at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, the chapel of Caldwell Hall, and the Franciscan Monastery of the Holy Land.

The final two liturgies were study in contrasting possibilities. One employed the fullness of the Gregorian repertoire, with the sung Ordinary and Propers from the *Graduale Romanum*. Another used a 19th-century Mass setting for choir and organ written by Josef Rheinberger, a harmonically rich piece that took on a special drama when presented alongside Gregorian chant. In this Mass, the Sanctus and Benedictus were sang as separate pieces before and after the consecration, a structure rarely employed today but one that has been suggested by Pope Benedict XVI.

Other music sung throughout the week included a Mass setting by Hans Hassler, motets by G.A. Palestrina, Martin de Rivaflecha, William Byrd, Orlando de Lassus, and a new piece by Calvert Shenk. A reading session of newly composed music was led by David Hughes of St. Catharine's in Pelham, New York.

The director of the polyphonic choir was Horst Buchholz, who is the principle organist and choirmaster at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Denver. The leader of the chant schola was Scott Turkington of St. John the Evangelist Roman Catholic Church in Stamford, Connecticut.

Amy Zuberbueler of the Ward Center in San Antonio, Texas, led a class in the fundamentals of Gregorian chant, and gave a demonstration of the Ward method of chant instruction.

A lecture was also given by William Mahrt, a professor of music at Stamford University, the president of the Church Music Association of America, and editor of its quarterly journal *Sacred Music*, which is the oldest journal of music in the United States. His presentation focused on the musical structure of the Ordinary parts of the Mass (Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, Agnus), and how the musical structure of each is intended to elicit a precise sense of spiritual participation from the people and draw hearts to a higher understanding of the meaning of the prayers.

Music professor at CUA and past CMAA president Fr. Robert Skeris presented two lectures on the theology of sacred music. He addressed the tension within the documents applicable to music: on the one hand placing chant at the center of liturgical life and, on the other hand, permitting a range of experimentation in music that opened the floodgates to music unsuitable to the Catholic liturgy. He encouraged musicians to take upon themselves to breath new life into the traditional music of the church.

Compared with previous years, this colloquium put a strong on the singing of the Propers, the parts of the Mass that change week to week, from the official books. At most Masses, the Introit, Gradual, Offertory, and Communion chant were sung in Latin from books of the Solesmes monastery. These chants are essential for conveying the universality of the beauty of the liturgy, which is why they are integral to the rite itself.

In a parish setting, these parts of the Mass can be a difficult undertaking for a beginning choir. Substitute psalm settings in English are viable (if imperfect) replacements. How these can be used was discussed in a session led by Kurt Poterack of Christendom College, who based his talk on the 1967 instruction "Musicam Sacram." He also covered the many ways in which participation of the people becomes part of liturgy.

The organizers of the colloquium observed that the numbers of attendees is growing substantially each year, and they are expecting much larger numbers next year. This year was especially notable for its firmness of purpose—to teach, challenge, and inspire a new generation of Catholic musicians—and its bright outlook on the future of sacred music.

The dates for next year's conference, Colloquium XVII, are June 19-24, 2007, also in Washington, D.C. For more information and registration, see Musicasacra.com.