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Gregorian Champ

BY ROSEANNE THERESE SULLIVAN

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The St. Ann Choir of Palo Alto, Calif., was new when William Mahrt joined in 1963. At the time he was a graduate student at nearby Stanford University.

Today Mahrt is a Stanford music professor, director of the St. Ann Choir — and president of the Church Music Association of America (online at musicasacra.com).

The expert on Gregorian chant and polyphony spoke with Register correspondent Roseanne Therese Sullivan.

Not many people are familiar with the Church Music Association of America. Would you tell us a little about it?

The CMAA was formed by an amalgamation of the Society of St. Caecilia (founded in 1874) and the Catholic Choir Masters Guide (founded in 1913) shortly after the Second Vatican Council. So we are quite a longstanding organization. The association's purpose has always been the cultivation and improvement of music for the liturgy. Its focus is Gregorian chant and the classical polyphony of tradition in the context of the liturgy.

The Council's first document was Sacrosanctum Concilium, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, which specified that Gregorian chant should be given pride of place in the Roman rite.

One doesn't see a lot of evidence of Gregorian chant having pride of place in this country. So one of our campaigns is to increase the use of Gregorian chant for regular services.

Another point that comes from the Council is that polyphonic music has a special role, a privileged place in the use of the Church.

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy and the 1967 document Musicam Sacram (Instruction on Music in the Liturgy) also had this to say: "The use of the Latin language is to be preserved in the Latin rites. The treasure of sacred music is to be preserved and fostered. The pipe organ is the canonical church instrument. It is to be held in high esteem because it lifts up man's mind to God and to higher things."

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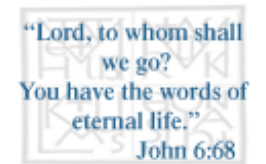
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Does the CMAA want to make chant and polyphony exclusively used?

We want chant and polyphony to have the priority that was mandated by the Council, not necessarily to be exclusively used.

What is the association accomplishing toward this end?

We publish the journal Sacred Music, which has been under my editorship for about a year and a half. Sacred Music is a continuation of the journal Caecilia, which was started by the Society of St. Caecilia in 1874. We rather proudly claim that Sacred Music is the oldest continuously published journal of music in North America.

The journal addresses issues of both the tradition and the gradual incorporation of better music into contemporary liturgical practice.

We have a sacred-music colloquium every summer and that colloquium is growing by leaps and bounds. In 2006 we had something like 80 people. This past June we had 140 — and we turned away a hundred. We anticipate larger numbers next year.

We are moving the colloquium next year from The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., to Loyola University in Chicago, where the facilities will accommodate the larger number of people we expect.

Priests, choir singers, congregation members, choir directors and organists are coming to this colloquium seeking ways in which they can improve the quality and the sacred character of the music they are doing in their churches today.

We also present workshops. For example, last month we held a seminar for clergy at St. John Cantius Church in Chicago on how to sing their parts of the Mass. The seminar included training in singing both the new and old forms of the Roman Rite.

You seem sanguine about the future of traditional music even though there's a lot of work to do to "bring it back."

With Pope Benedict's liturgical initiatives, there is an increased awareness of the importance and the beauty of the Latin Church music and of the need for the music to enhance the sacred character of the liturgy.

We hope that the increased interest in the traditional Church music, and in the sacredness of music in the liturgy, will grow. And we hope that we can assist everyone who needs it to find the appropriate ways of improving their liturgies.

Roseanne Therese Sullivan

writes from San Jose, California.

She also maintains a weblog at catholicpunditwannabe.blogspot.com.



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#1 - WY 36 at 38 Parishes

| | | | |
|----|----|----|----|
| AK | 0 | MS | 1 |
| AL | 1 | MT | 1 |
| AR | 1 | NC | 0 |
| AZ | 5 | ND | 3 |
| CA | 19 | NE | 35 |
| CO | 25 | NH | 1 |
| CT | 2 | NJ | 1 |
| DE | 1 | NM | 1 |
| DC | 0 | NV | 1 |
| FL | 4 | NY | 3 |
| GA | 1 | OH | 12 |
| HI | 0 | OK | 0 |
| IA | 7 | OR | 1 |
| ID | 0 | PA | 5 |
| IL | 3 | RI | 2 |
| IN | 2 | SC | 0 |
| KS | 15 | SD | 7 |
| KY | 2 | TN | 1 |
| LA | 25 | TX | 29 |
| MA | 3 | UT | 0 |
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