

Cantus sororum – Sisters’ chant

This songbook is for everyone who is interested in medieval chant and monastic prayers. Collection Cantus sororum, Sisters’ chant, is the Liturgy of the Hours of medieval Bridgettine convent.

Saint Bridget of Sweden (Den Heliga Birgitta) was a mystic and saint. She was born in Sweden in 1303 as Birgitta Birgersdotter, daughter of a wealthy landlord and knight Birger Persson. In her marriage to Ulf Gudmarsson she became a mother of eight children, six of whom survived. After her husband’s death Birgitta devoted herself to spiritual life. She established a religious community which was to become the Bridgettine order. She died in Rome in 1373. Saint Bridget is now one of the six patron saints of Europe.

Saint Bridget was a multi-talented woman with strong personality. She had a large impact on the religious and cultural life in medieval Europe. Her influence was considered even in Finland, a northern country under Swedish rule with Christian tradition from the 11th century. The Bridgettine Convent called Vallis Gratiae in Naantali, South-West of Finland, was the centre of religious and cultural life in Finland until the reformation.

Cantus sororum is a weekly cycle of songs, mainly antiphons with psalms, that was designated especially for sisters. The sisters sang the whole cycle from the beginning to the end through every single week. In this book, we try to bring all the old information as complete as possible – and we wholeheartedly encourage every singer to take the step to the world of medieval notation which, after some effort in getting used to it, is very enjoyable and fully understandable also for the singers of our times.

The songbook begins with the songs of Sunday morning matutinum. The first song of every day is called invitorium and is always followed by psalm 94 *Venite, exultemus Domino*. In the Liturgy of Hours there are eight Hours: *matutinum, laudes, prima, tertia, sexta, nona, vesper* and *completorium*. The cycle got its shape during the first 600 years of Christianity.

The cycle of the Liturgy of Hours was repeated from week to week, from Sunday matutinum to Saturday completorium. Every weekday has a theme of its own: On Sunday, the texts tell about Holy Trinity and Virgin Mary. On Monday the theme is Mary and the Angels. On Tuesday, the matriarchs and patriarchs are honoured. On Wednesday Mary is born and grows to be a young girl. On Thursday her Son is born. Friday is the day of passion and compassion. On Saturday the joy of resurrection is celebrated.

Cantus sororum was formulated by St. Bridget and her confessor Petrus af Skänninge. She was said to have received the texts from an angel; this is the origin for the name *Sermo Angelicus* given to the collection of 21 lessons and great responsories. Petrus af Skänninge then arranged the texts to the traditional liturgic melodies. It is very likely that he also composed some parts of Cantus sororum by himself, gently and with great respect for the tradition.

About the notation and sources

Cantus sororum was originally written with quadrat notes on the staff of four lines. This is the system we faithfully proceed also in this songbook.

The clefs (c $\overset{\text{f}}{\text{C}}$ and f $\overset{\text{f}}{\text{C}}$) show the place of corresponding note, c and f. In the transcriptions the clef can move from one line to other several times during the song. This is because no extra lines were used; the melody had to be kept in the frame of four lines. There were no sharps, and as to the flat symbols, only bb was in use. In some songs both b and bb can co-exist.

There is also a special symbol from earlier times: the so called liquescence guides the singer to sing the voiced consonants (l, m, n) separately, with a tone of their own. You can find this type of instruction in the antiphone *Converte Domina* (the "m" in word *circumda*) and *Quando nata es Virgo* (the "n" in word *sancta*).

Every chant is marked with the musical type it represents. There are

antiphones, invitatoriums, short responsories, great responsories and hymns. For each day there is also a *short blessing, Benedicamus.*

There are eight modes, from d to g. As to the formulas of the psalms there is freedom of choice; we have introduced our propositions based on the Manuscript of Hague. The formulas for Magnificats are from Manuscript A 84. As to the hymns our sources only include notations for the first verses; the arrangements for the latter verses are made by us.

The pitch of the notations is not absolute but flexible. The basic tone of each mode should be comfortable to the singer which is to say that the pitch can vary.

In the medieval notation there are no fixed durations as elements of rhythm. The melody adapts to the text; text always comes first and the music serves the needs of the text. When reading the complex notations please do it like this: higher-lower ♮ and lower-higher ♮.

For some words we have chosen the longer written form with 'ae' (aeternum instead of eternum) to help the singer constitute prolonged vowels.

Our main source is Codex Borghese (by name Manuscript A 84, 15th century) from the Royal Library of Sweden. Parallel sources are six manuscripts from the monastery of Altomünster, Germany (Alt1–5, the end of the 15 century, Alt6 1530's) and the Manuscript of The Royal Library of Hague (KB Den Haag 71 A 21, the Netherlands, 1480–1520). We have also researched fragments of Cantus sororum, 15th century Finland, breviariums F.m. III 127, F.m. III 128, F.m. III 165 and F.m. III 187 and one antiphonarium from the end of 14th century F.m. IV 69 and two antiphonariums from the 15th century F.m. IV 128 and F.m. IV 132. For all the Finnish sources please see the internet site fragmenta.kansalliskirjasto.fi. For Finnish sources we have used the manuscripts and for other sources the microfilms of manuscripts. Tuomo Pulkkinen has written the transcriptions mainly based on a source A 84, but in some parts he has chosen the versions from the other manuscripts. The reason for doing this has

been an easier notation for a singer, or the combination of notes has been different from A 84, but similar with each other in several other sources. All in all, the differences are very small, mainly a way of using notation.

About the authors

Tuomo Pulkkinen (Helsinki, Finland) is the producer of all the transcriptions of this songbook. He is a singer and enthusiast of gregorian chant. He has been working with the manuscripts under supervision of Hilikka-Liisa Vuori and in cooperation with her from the early 2000's. Hilikka-Liisa Vuori (Espoo, Finland) is a doctor of music, researcher and teacher of medieval chant. She has been editing and commenting all the material. She is a singer in the medieval duo Vox Silentii (www.voxsilentii.fi, established in 1992) together with Johanna Korhonen (Vantaa, Finland) who has also been contributing with this book.

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