

## MUSIC for the ENGLISH GRADUAL

The Benedictine Monks of Belmont Abbey

Hoxa HS 1212 – 15

This set of 2 CDs comprises 52 tracks, with examples of Chants for each Liturgical Season, the Commons and the Ordinary of the Year. It will be welcomed by those who, for many years, have sung settings by the late D. Alan Rees of texts suitable for use at Mass. His instinctive musicality enabled him to compose with simple artistry, always shaping the melodies to rise to a gentle climax, and fall back to the cadence appropriate for the mode in which the piece was written.

The monks sing the chants with unity, usually with the intonation sung by a solo Cantor and then taken up by the full choir. Well-chosen psalm verses could accompany the processions at the Introit, Offertory and Communion. Occasionally the psalm verse is spoken over a gentle organ obligato. Throughout, the organ enhances the chants, whether in the accompaniment, or the short and evocative Improvisations or in the Interludes by D. Paul Benoit. How fitting this feature is, recalling as it does, D. Alan's own gift as an organist. The variety of tone colour of the Abbey organ is demonstrated most ably on these discs by Stasio Sliwka.

The Director, Christopher Walker, has achieved a breadth of tone and excellent diction from the monastic choir. They are to be congratulated on their range where some of the melodies take them to their upper register, without any sense of strain, but with warmth and prayerfulness.

Every listener will find treasures which appeal to them in a particular way. At Stanbrook, this past Lent, we found the setting of "When I am lifted up from the earth . . ." very poignant due to the genius of the setting with the rising and repeated phrase 'painting' the words so powerfully. We look forward to exploring this valuable resource of Liturgical music further during the coming months.