

Sing to Mary / Learn about Chant: Salve Regina

By Cecilia Curran

Chant was born out of a transcultural need to find a music appropriate for a liturgical rite that crossed the various cultures of Europe, or at least of the Holy Roman Empire but, with the re-emergence in our time of national or cultural translations and adaptations of that unified liturgy, chant has become, in many quarters, an oddity of musical history often relegated to a dusty niche in the history of Western music or ceded to New Age devotees who listen to chant without understanding its text. Chant certainly should be taught as part of our musical history, but it has other roles to play as well as a living part of the heritage of Catholic\ liturgical music which still has a place in current forms of worship, and as a musical introduction to the nature of ritual music, especially to forms of ritual music in which the text shapes the musical form. One piece of music which may serve in all three ways, as a voice out of the past, as an example of ritual music, and as a form of contemporary prayer, is a composition that looks like a hymn but which is, technically, a "Marian antiphon": "Salve, Regina."

Text and Tune

No one knows who composed the text or the tune of this song to Mary, though it seems probable that the same person who wrote the text also composed the music. The most likely candidates for author/composer are the monk Herman the Cripple (Hermanus Contractus, 1013-1054) and the bishop Adhemar of Puy (or of Puy, d. 1098). Herman got his nickname from a disease which struck when he was a young child; it left him limited in movement and with speech problems for the rest of his life (he could barely speak above a whisper). He became a Benedictine monk at the Abbey of Reichenau, which stood on an island in Lake Constance, when he was about thirty, though he had probably lived at this monastery or at the Monastery of St. Gall from the time he was seven years old. Besides writing about the related scientific subjects of astronomy, arithmetic, and music, Herman was also a composer, a maker of musical instruments, and a clock maker. Adhemar, a member of the royal house of the Counts of Valentinois, became bishop of the town of Le Puy in the year 1080. He seems to have spent most of his ministry not so much as a bishop but on horseback, as a fighter. First he fought to regain for his diocese some church lands that had been confiscated by nobles in the surrounding countryside, then, in 1095, he joined the first crusade to recover the Holy Land from its Muslim conquerors. He was appointed the papal legate to the crusade by Pope Urban II, and the crusade's leader, Raymond IV, Count of Toulouse, made Adhemar his deputy. The warrior-bishop stayed with the crusade for three years, acting as a military adviser for some battles, a political reconciler among the squabbling Western leaders, and a religious peacemaker between the Eastern and Western clergy. Bishop Adhemar died while on the crusade, at Antioch, Syria, in 1098, without reaching Jerusalem, which was seized by the crusaders in the following year.

The text and music for "Salve Regina" were probably composed about the year 1080, and one of its earliest reported liturgical uses was as a "processional antiphon" in 1135, at the Abbey of Cluny, a center of Benedictine reform and renewal. Processional antiphons were generally used on days when the entrance procession had an elaborate ritual attached to it, such as the solemn entrance with palms on Passion (Palm) Sunday, or the Major Litanies chanted on April 25 at Rome each year, replacing a pagan procession on that same date. Monasteries occasionally had long processions from the monastery itself into the church, during which they chanted a hymn or an antiphon. Sometime after the year 1218, the

"Salve Regina" became a daily processional chant for the monks at Cluny, sung as they entered the abbey church. In the year 1230 the members of the various Dominican orders began to use the antiphon each day after *compline* (night prayer). Under the influence of the Dominicans, the antiphon became a seasonal part of *compline* for the rest of the Roman Rite; it was used from Trinity Sunday to the beginning of Advent. As part of this night prayer, it came to be identified as a "Marian antiphon." This particular Marian antiphon was very popular during the Renaissance, so popular, in fact, that it influenced the development of religious societies of lay people devoted to giving honor to Mary and invoking her help through prayer. These societies were called "Salve confraternities." One of the largest was the Marian Brotherhood of Antwerp, organized in 1482. Each day, according to their charter, the members of the Marian Brotherhood were to celebrate a devotional service between five and six o'clock in the evening, for which they employed four adult singers, twelve choir boys, a choirmaster, an organist, and a priest. Because of its popularity as the key element of these "Salve services," a great number of polyphonic settings of the antiphon were commissioned and composed in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

[You may want to find one or more recordings of these settings to play after you've studied and used the antiphon. Composers include Dufay, Agricola, Gombert, La Rue, Josquin des Près, Obrecht, and Ockeghem.] Antiphons, Marian and Other Chant antiphons are normally settings of prose texts sung in association with a psalm. (The "response" currently used with the "responsorial psalm" at Mass is such an antiphon.) But "Marian antiphons" are different. These antiphons are usually settings of somewhat longer texts, some prose, some poetry, and they have been in regular use since the thirteenth century, sung at the close of *compline* (night prayer), the last "hour" of the liturgical day. Some of the texts for these antiphons are very ancient: The *Sub tuum praesidium*, for example, is a Latin translation of a Greek original that dates at least to the third century. Other texts date from the eighth through the thirteenth centuries. English translations of many of these antiphons are still used at night prayer, among them a translation of "Salve Regina" (Hail, Holy Queen), "Alma Redemptoris mater" (Loving Mother of the Redeemer), "Ave Maria" (Hail Mary, Full of Grace), and "Regina coeli" (Queen of Heaven, Rejoice). Here is the Latin text of the "Salve Regina" and a contemporary English translation:

Salve Regina, mater misericordiae: Vita, dulcedo, et spes nostra, salve. Ad te clamamus, exules filii Hevae. Ad te suspiramus, gementes et flentes in hac lacrimarum valle. Eia ergo, advocata nostra, illos tuos misericordes oculos ad nos converte. Et Jesum, benedictum fructum ventris tui, nobis post hoc exsilium ostende. O clemens, O pia, O dulcis Virgo Maria.

Hail queen, mother of mercy. Hail, our life, our comfort, and our hope. Exiled children of Eve, we cry out to you: To you we breathe a prayer, as we journey in sorrow and lament through this "valley of tears." Come then, our advocate, turn your eyes filled with pity our way. And when this time of exile is past, show us Jesus, the blessed fruit of your womb, gentle, loving, and kind virgin Mary.

You can find the chant for this text, using modern notation, in these hymnals: Catholic Book of Worship III (Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops), #469 (Latin text) Journeysongs (OCP), #508 (Latin text) The Collegeville Hymnal (The Liturgical Press), #331 (Latin text) We Celebrate Worship Resource, Deluxe Hymnal (World Library Publications), #266 (Latin and English) Worship (GIA), # 703 (Latin and English)

How Chant Works

Using this antiphon, you can learn several things about chant and how it works. (You may want to use one of the hymnals that has both the Latin and the English text I recommend the setting in *Worship*, since it uses unstemmed notes, which will help you not to treat the music as if it were metered.) Here we'll highlight three things about chant: meter, mode, and melisma. Meter First, you can point out that chant, unlike the hymns and many of the songs that we use in church, is considered unmetered. Unlike some of the other compositions in the hymnal, the notes for the "Salve Regina" either have no stems or no time signatures or both compare with hymns on nearby pages. This is because the rhythm of the chant is determined by the rhythm of the text: The text doesn't conform to the music; the music conforms to the text. *Chant is, in other words, "sung speech."*

(MS CECILIA CURRAN has served as a music educator in several schools in the Washington, DC, area.)