

COMPACT
DIGITAL AUDIO
PACO 066
STEREO

Christmas at Beuron Abbey Gregorian Chant

PRISTINE
AUDIO
XR

The origins of the festival marking the Nativity of the Lord are not to be found in Old Testament tradition; their impulse springs rather from Hellenistic culture. Both the Greeks and the Romans celebrated the birthdays of monarchs and other important men. The day chosen was not always the actual anniversary of birth, even if that was known, but was often a day of some other significance in connection with the personage being remembered. It was therefore natural for the early Christians to celebrate the birthday of their master; and as the real date of the Lord's birth is unknown, a day of symbolic significance had to be chosen.

During the third century a late cult of sun-worship flourished, above all in Rome. It was declared by the Roman emperor to be the state religion, and at the same time was associated with the Roman cult of the emperor. The emperor Aurelian (270-75) introduced the festival "Sol Invictus" in Rome following his victory over Palmyra in the year 274, choosing 25 December as the dies natalis Solis Invicti. This was the last great cult of Roman paganism, and it brought about the last stage in the struggle between Christianity and Roman sun-worship. One consequence of it was the existence and the liturgical form of the Christian Feast of the Nativity on 25 December. It is clear from all extant fourth-century texts that the festival of Christ's birth, celebrated on that date, was a direct answer to the festival of the pagan cult of sun-worship.

The Christmas liturgy has been distinguished since the sixth century by three celebrations of the Mass. The third of these Masses is the oldest. The historical origin of the first Mass of Christmas may well be found in the Church of Jerusalem, where the festival of the Lord's Birth was celebrated at night in the Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem. This practice, reminiscent of the Natio ad Sanctum Mariam matrem ad Praesepe, was copied at Rome.

The liturgical celebration of Christmas contains both a First Vespers on Christmas Eve (*available as PACO 014, from a 1952 Beuron Abbey recording*), and a Second Vespers next day, bringing the Feast to a conclusion. The former refers to "him who is to come", the latter to the fulfilment of this hope in the Birth of the saviour. Vespers itself, the evening prayer of the Church, is of very ancient origin, with its beginnings in fact traceable to the Old Law (Ps. 140, 2).

Compline (Completa, Completorium) is the last of the Day Hours. It is of monastic origin, and was already known to Basil the Great around 360 A. D. In the West, the earliest evidence we have of it dates from the 5th century. Southern Gaul was acquainted with it in the 6th century, and the Rule of St. Benedict from the same period regards it as generally known. Since the time of Charlemagne it has been obligatory for the secular clergy as well. Monastic Compline is simpler than the Roman form, the latter being more closely related to the office of the day. Like the monastic it consists of two main parts: an Introduction, comparable to the "Chapter" section of Paterne, and the remainder which is properly a choral office.

Dr. Maurus Pfaff (*excerpts from LP discovers*)

Transfer notes

This release, bringing together for the first time the three major strands of Christmas liturgy recorded in the late 1950s by the monks of St. Martin's Abbey, Beuron, is marked only by the switch from mono to stereo between the first recording, of the Second Vespers and Compline, and the two later recordings of the First and Third Mass. In all cases the recordings themselves are exemplary, capturing clearly the declination throughout whilst retaining the fabulous acoustics of Beuron Abbey to create a real sense of atmosphere and space. I have used Ambient Stereo processing to help to recreate the space missing from the mono recordings, spreading the reverberation of Beuron Abbey across the stereo soundstage whilst retaining the mono image of the singers. I've also been able to "help" a few rough cuts in the original tapes, and noted that the half-track stereo tapes produced considerably higher bass than their earlier, full-track mono counterparts, something that has been largely remedied by digital noise reduction. Overall, however, I'm pleased to report that the high quality of the original source recording left me with little more to do. **AR**

FULL PROGRAMME NOTES CAN BE FOUND ONLINE AT WWW.PRISTINECLASSICAL.COM
SACD, Pristine Audio, Le Bourg, 24610 St. Meard de Gurçon, France - Tel. (00) 33 553 821857
www.pristineclassical.com

COMPACT
DIGITAL AUDIO
PACO 066
STEREO

Christmas

PRISTINE
AUDIO
XR

Gregorian chant at Beuron Abbey
Midnight Mass Second Vespers of Christmas
Compline of Christmas Third Christmas Mass



Choir of the Monks of the Benedictine Abbey of St. Martin, Beuron
Director Dr. Maurus Pfaff
Recorded 1957 and 1959

PRISTINE
AUDIO