

The Geese Book

German Medieval Chant

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Naxos 557412—70 minutes

The Geese Book is the name given to a large 15th Century chant manuscript commissioned for the parish church of St Lorenz in Nuremberg. The unusual title stems from a *bas-de-page* illumination where a choir of geese sings from a book of music while a wolf directs them—apparently an amusing reference to the choirboys at the church of St Lorenz. As Volker Schier points out in his notes, *The Geese Book* holds an important place in the history of liturgical music in Bavaria, because it is the only complete source of pre-Reformation liturgy from Nuremberg. The book is huge, so this program is only a small selection of its contents. It includes chants for the most solemn feasts at St Lorenz: Masses for Ascension and for Saint Lawrence himself; Masses for the Holy Lance and the Nails, Saint Deocarus, Saint Sebaldus, Saint Monica, and Saint Martha. Most are first recordings. The church of St Lorenz installed and later expanded the swallow's nest organ in 1444 and 1479. Since these events coincided with the copying of the manuscript, it was decided to insert works of 15th Century German polyphony between these liturgical chants. These are by the most famous composers of the empire: Othmayr, Senfl, Isaac, and Finck.

The singing of the Schola Hungarica is gorgeous, as usual. Their nimble interpretation of the chants makes them seem more expressive, more alive than one sometimes feels about chant when it is sung lugubriously. The intonation of the ensemble is impeccable, especially when the men and women sing together in octaves. The soprano voices are light and brilliant—a timbre that I notice has become more normative among ensembles that specialize in chant. Volker Schier's notes are excellent because they offer such rich detail about the liturgical history of the Nuremberg churches. The producers advertise that in an effort to save money, Naxos has made the sung texts for this release available only as PDF files online at www.naxos.com/libretti/geese-book.htm.

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