

few
ARE CHOSEN

Monks are going gold

By Mark Pattison
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — The Gregorian chant sung by an abbey of Spanish Benedictine monks could give a whole new meaning to the phrase "oldies but goodies."

The centuries-old chant, also known as plainsong, has already topped the pop charts in Spain, and if the monks' U.S. record label has any say in the matter, their debut on these shores will go gold, meaning sales of at least 500,000 copies.

"I suspect that it will become gold quickly," said Angel Records publicist Aimee Gautreau. If it goes gold, the album, simply titled "Chant," will have outsold every album in Angel's history, including discs by Itzhak Perlman, Maria Callas and the cast of the Broadway musical "Crazy for You."

The monks, who live in Santo Domingo de Silos, Spain, are cloistered and were barely aware as it was happening that they were topping Gloria Estefan on Spain's pop charts for six weeks running.

The monks' chants were recorded from 1973 to 1979 by Hispavox, a Spanish record label. When the Spanish arm of EMI, Angel's parent company, bought Hispavox, the chants were issued as singles.

Label executives saw growing interest, decided to try a wide marketing push, "and sure enough, it took off," said Gautreau in a telephone interview from New York.

The monks' Spanish release, a two-CD set spanning their four 1970s albums, has sold 300,000 copies since November, earning two platinum and one gold certification on the pop charts — and on the classical charts, platinum 12 times over.

Ismael Fernandez de la Cuesta, a Gre-



AP/Wide World Photos

Abbott Clemente Serna of the monks of Santo Domingo de Silos discusses the Benedictine monks' music at a press conference in Madrid, Spain.

gorian chant conductor, told the British news agency Reuters the monks were particularly adept at interpreting the chants to evoke an internal response. Some in the music industry believe people are now drawn to chant as an antidote to the sound-drenched rhythms of rock, pop and rap.

Sales of the monks' plainsong in Spain went mainly against the grain; 60 percent of the buyers were ages 16-25.

Gregorian chant was most commonly heard at Masses before the Second Vatican Council. While music in the vernacular has been overwhelmingly used in the last 30 years, chant has not faded away entirely.

The monks have received more than \$10,000 in royalties from their Spanish sales. That's not counting U.S. royalties sure to come.

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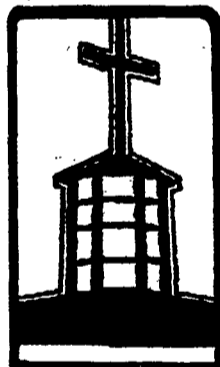


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