

Gregorian chants featured on new CD

Mark Pattison/CNS

WASHINGTON — The music world has had to deal with its share of pop stars who would just as soon make their music and then be left alone.

But nobody takes it to the level of the Benedictine Monks of Santo Domingo de Silos in Spain, who recorded their Gregorian chants between 1973 and 1979 while maintaining their cloistered lifestyle.

It took more than a decade, but the monks' chants caught on. The first wave of success came from their native Spain. That was followed in 1994 by top-10 status for "Chant" on Billboard's pop charts for eight weeks; it spent 25 weeks atop Billboard's classical music chart.

Before the phenomenon subsided, "Chant" had sold 3 million copies over two years. And it's still selling at a clip of about 300 copies a week, according to Mark Forlow, vice president of classics for EMI Classics and Virgin Classics, which distrib-



ute the monks' recordings on the Angel label.

In a telephone interview from New York, Forlow told Catholic News Service that at the peak of the "Chant" craze "I remember there were reporters who were showing up at the door of the monastery, and the monks just wishing they'd go away."

Also, Forlow recalled, "there were certain monks who were no longer with the order who came out of the woodwork and said, 'We want to be

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paid!"

Forlow said the craze was fueled by an Associated Press story about the Spanish success of the monks' music "that seemed to run simultaneously in every newspaper available."

The "Chant" success story resulted in three additional CDs of chant music that also was recorded during the 1970s by the Santo Domingo de Silas monks. A feminine counterpart to the monks' music was released, also by Angel, called "Vision: The Music of Hildegard von Bingen" by Emily Van Evera and Benedictine Sister Germaine Fritz.

And before it was all over, popular greeting card artist Sandra Boynton, who had studied Latin at a Quaker day school, put together the Ad Hog Camerata for a gentle porcine spoof called "Grunt: Pigorian Chant from Snouto Domoinco de Silo."

Now, the monks' original music is returning. EMI-Virgin's Spanish subsidiary, which started the "Chant" madness, developed a "greatest hits" compilation of sorts

for European audiences — selling 300,000 copies — and offered it to EMI-Virgin in the States.

Forlow said EMI-Virgin tweaked it somewhat, using new liner notes and cover art, and has named it "Chant: The Anniversary Edition," a two-CD set. It was to retail in record stores this spring for the cost of a single CD.

"We've got almost everything from the original 'Chant' as well as material from the last three albums," Forlow told CNS. He added that only the original "Chant" and its immediate successor, "Christmas Chants," are still available, but the other two albums are not.

Forlow said the first "Chant" benefited from the "stress-busting" trends at the time. He added the 10th anniversary edition will be marketed to religious bookstores as well as publications that focus on meditation and healing.

"We're certainly going to look to the Christian community to get the word out again," he said.

But any sales that come will have to be generated by the quality of the music. The Benedictine Monks of Santo Domingo de Silos continue to be unavailable for interviews.

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