

# ***Four Celtic Saints***

## ***Medieval music from Scotland and Ireland in praise of St Columba, St Kentigern, St Brigit and St Patrick***

Should Columba be Scotland's Patron Saint? There is no doubt that to many medieval minds he was, judging by the language in which he is described by the anonymous poet/monk in the Office for St Columba from the 13<sup>th</sup> century Scottish *Inchcolm Antiphoner* with which we begin our programme. Columba's reliquary (which can now be viewed in the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh) was carried from Dunkeld to bless the Scottish army before the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314, and we may infer from this famous Scottish victory that Columba's advocacy before the heavenly throne was effective! Whatever we think of the political expediency which resulted in the eventual adoption of the Apostle Andrew as Scotland's patron, and the cultural fall-out which resulted from the Romanisation of an hitherto largely Celtic church, Columba remains very dear to the hearts of Scots and his legacy continues to inspire and uplift new generations.

Scotland's other saints are less well-recorded in extant medieval music manuscripts, but we are fortunate to have another important survival from the 13<sup>th</sup> century: the *Sprouston Breviary*. Here we find, among others, a complete rhymed Office for St Kentigern, Patron Saint of the City of Glasgow. It is possible to reconstruct an entire Office of Matins for St Kentigern's Day which celebrates in the sequence of nine Lectons and Responsories the miracles which appear as symbols in Glasgow's coat of arms: the bird, bell, fish, tree and ring. We shall include some musical highlights from this Office, ending with Responsory IX which includes a Prosa set to a medieval 'pop' melody of the 13<sup>th</sup> century!

In the Library of Trinity College Dublin may be found three manuscripts (TCD 78, 80 and 88) from the 15<sup>th</sup> century which contain rhymed Offices for several Irish saints, including the nation's two Patrons: Brigit and Patrick. These two Offices include, besides other items, complete material for Matins, each comprising nine Lectons and Responsories. In the case of the Matins for St Patrick's Day, the final Responsory includes a Prosa which is set to the same popular melody as that in the St Kentigern Office.

St Brigit continues to fascinate with her dual history as pagan goddess and Christian saint. The adoption into her 'official' history of elements of pagan legend from the Dark Ages makes any celebration of her life and miracles considerably more colourful than many another saint. The Office of Matins from the TCD MSS describes only the legends of her childhood, although these have a wide range: from miracles that feature an increase of food and drink (clearly based on standard Christian ideals that have as their inspiration the feeding of the 5,000 by Jesus Christ) to distinctly pagan fire miracles. Incidentally, St Kentigern is also remembered by a similar fire miracle.

It is fitting that we begin with St Columba – an Irishman who fled to Scotland from his homeland and became the founding father of Scottish Christianity – and end

with St Patrick who may well have been born in Scotland, only to be kidnapped by Irish pirates and taken over the water to the nation he made his own, and the Offices for these four saints, each in their own way, shed a unique light on the spirituality not only of the middle ages, but also, more dimly, on that of the pre-Roman Celtic church.

Editions:-

*Inchcolm Antiphoner*: transcribed and edited by Isobel Woods-Preece

*Sprouston Breviary*: transcribed and edited by Greta-Mary Hair

Offices for St Brigit & St Patrick: transcribed and edited by Ann Buckley

Musical arrangements by Rebecca Tavener and William Taylor



## CANTY

**Micaela Haslam   Anne Lewis   Rebecca Tavener**

Canty was formed by Rebecca Tavener in 1998, the 900th anniversary of the birth of Hildegard of Bingen, and it comprises the regular female singers with Cappella Nova, Scotland's leading early music vocal ensemble. As individuals, the singers bring to the group a wealth of experience, both as soloists and as members of other distinguished ensembles. Together with regular collaborator, harpist William Taylor, they explore a unique repertoire combining Medieval music and contemporary works written specially for them.

Their first CD *Wings of Wisdom*, featuring chant by Hildegard von Bingen and from medieval Scotland, was released on the Dorian label. *Flame of Ireland* (Sanctuary *Gaudeamus*) was their second recording and it features world premiere recordings of 15thc Irish chant for St Brigit of Kildare. Their third disc, *Felix Femina* – medieval Scottish polyphony, has just been released (Sanctuary *Gaudeamus*) and was described by Andrew McGregor as having a '*transcendental quality that absolutely suits the music*' (CD Review, BBC Radio 3).

In 2007 they will record an Office for St Patrick from the same Irish manuscript. The group's diary is rapidly filling with concerts, residencies and workshops. Future projects include further research and experimentation to develop a truly indigenous style of performance for Medieval music from Celtic homelands.

[www.cappella-nova.com/canty](http://www.cappella-nova.com/canty)

*'The quality of the voices is outstanding'* Early Music  
*'Magical, mystical, even erotic'* The Scotsman  
*'Intoxicating and truly spiritual'* Jersey Evening Post  
*'The singing is gorgeous'* American Record Guide  
*'Voices that angels might envy'* Green Man Review  
*'The combination of voices and instruments is spellbinding'* Early Music Today  
*'Irresistibly attractive'* The Daily Telegraph  
*"Voices carrying clearly through the stonework like messengers from another age"*  
The Herald

---o0o---

### **WILLIAM TAYLOR**

Bill Taylor is a specialist in the performance of ancient harp music from Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and is one of very few players investigating these repertoires on medieval gut-strung harps, wire-strung clarsachs and Renaissance harps with buzzing bray pins. He is a contributor to the New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, and serves as convener of the Wire Branch of the Clarsach Society. He has been resident in Scotland for many years, where he teaches and works with Ardival Harps in Strathpeffer. Aside from accompanying Canty, he performs with the Highland early music group Coronach, the duo The Art of Musick and the Belgian Late-Medieval ensemble Quadrivium. Bill teaches community music classes through Fèis Rois and is a guest lecturer at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama in Glasgow. As a teacher of historical harps, he is frequently invited to lead workshops in the UK, Europe and the USA, including regular appearances at the Edinburgh International Harp Festival.

---o0o---