Historia Sancti Olavi
Consortium Vocale Oslo/ Alexander M
Schweitzer; Graces & Voices/ Adrija Cepaite,
Antanina Kalechyts
LAWO 1106 [2CD] 95 mins

This release presents a nearly complete
recording of the cycle of chants for First Vespers,
Matins, and Lauds on the feast of St Olaf,
the patron saint of Norway. Although there
was an archaic cycle of Olaf chants based on
the common chants for a martyr, a new cycle
emerged around 1152, possibly the work of
Oystein Erlendsson (1161-88), archbishop of
Nidaros. St Olaf's Historia eschews his Viking
roots, preferring rather to advance themes of
his conversion to Christianity and missionary
work. The melodies are largely borrowed from
11th- and 12th-Century chants venerating Sts.
Augustine, Denis, Victor, and Vincentius,
thereby adding prestige to the cult St Olaf.
These office chants were propagated widely in
numerous manuscript copies, but of these
only two sources remain, both from the archbishopric
of Uppsala. The performing text for
this recording—some 30 chants—is in Stockholm's
Royal Library (A96), compiled some
time between 1520 and 1530. Readings are
taken from the Uppsala Breviary.

It is wonderful to hear the simple liturgical
recitative of the readings juxtaposed in proper
liturgical order with the musically appealing
antiphons and responsories. The male voices
of Consortium Vocale Oslo alternate chants
with the female choir of Graces & Voices. The
chants for First Vespers and the First and Second
Nocturne of Matins appear on the first
disc. Disc 2 continues with the Third Nocturne,
Lauds, and Antiphon and Magnificat of
Second Vespers.

The performance practice follows the common
tradition of singing with a pure voice,
without the inflections suggested by earlier
chant notation. The results are rather beautiful,
even quite ethereal. The singing is well paced,
speeding and slowing to follow the natural
cadence of the text and music. The singers are
so together that it is impossible to discern individual
voices. Texts and notes are in English.
LOEWEN

American Record Guide