

# LITURGY OF ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

in English

by **Benedict Sheehan**

World Première Recording  
by **The Saint Tikhon Choir**  
Conducted by the Composer

STREET DATE: OCTOBER 23, 2020  
CR421 (CD+BR DSM192K/24BIT)

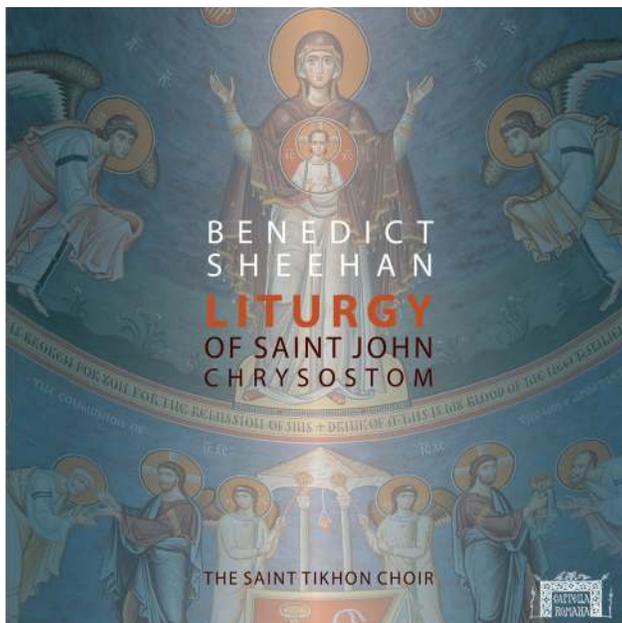
(Portland, Ore.)—Cappella Records is pleased to announce the October 23 release of **Benedict Sheehan's *Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom***, the world première recording of a major new choral work of elegance and beauty. The *Liturgy* is performed by the professional **Saint Tikhon Choir**, conducted by the composer.

Sheehan's *Liturgy* is the first of four planned releases on Cappella Records produced by multi-GRAMMY® Award winner **Blanton Alspaugh** and the engineering team at **Soundmirror**. Soundmirror's outstanding orchestral, solo, opera, and chamber recordings have received more than 100 GRAMMY® nominations and awards, with releases on every major classical label.

This is also the first release of The Saint Tikhon Choir on Cappella Records. The Choir recently recorded a collaboration on Naxos with three other choirs and the Orchestra of St. Luke's conducted by Leonard Slatkin, which debuted at #1 on Billboard. They also previously recorded the sacred works of Benedict Sheehan for Saint Tikhon's Monastery Press.

The 2-disc deluxe set features both CD and PureAudio Blu-ray™ media with high-resolution 2.0 Stereo and 5.0 Surround versions (DSM192K/24bit), recorded in DSD and downloadable to audio servers and devices. The Blu-ray™ also contains three video performances: two concert selections from the world première performance and the complete liturgical première sung at St. Nicholas Orthodox Cathedral in Washington, DC. The accompanying booklet provides an extensive essay by the composer, the full text of the Divine Liturgy, and beautiful photography. Cappella Records is distributed by Naxos USA.

PRESS RELEASE  
*For Immediate Release*



Cat # **CR421** 2 discs: CD + PureAudio Blu-ray™  
Producer: Blanton Alspaugh; Engineering: Soundmirror  
2.0 Stereo, 5.0 Surround. DSM192K/24bit. Recorded  
in DSD. CD: 75:33. Blu-ray™ 75:33 audio; 143:31  
video.

Barcode: 746839858978

Artists: The Saint Tikhon Choir, Benedict Sheehan  
US SRP: \$29.99

Label: Cappella Records

Genre: Classical,  
Classical|Choral,  
Sacred|Choral



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## BENEDICT SHEEHAN

Composer and conductor **Benedict Sheehan** is described as “an up-and-coming conductor” (*The Oregonian*), “a rising star in the choral world” (*Catholic Sentinel*), and as having “set the bar for Orthodox liturgical music in the English-speaking world” (*Orthodox Arts Journal*). He is Director of Music at St. Tikhon’s Seminary and Monastery in Pennsylvania, Artistic Director of professional vocal ensemble The Saint Tikhon Choir, and CEO and co-founder of the Artefact Institute, a collective of “culture creators.” Sheehan has become one of the most sought-after clinicians for Orthodox sacred music in America. He has also appeared regularly as a guest conductor with Cappella Romana, leading works from the Slavic tradition, and is in high demand as a composer. His works have been performed by the GRAMMY®-nominated Skylark Vocal Ensemble, the GRAMMY®-nominated PaTRAM Institute Singers, Cappella Romana, the William Jewell Choral Scholars, Te Deum, the Pacific Youth Choir, and many others. His “story score” to two classic fairy tales, *Once Upon a Time*, was released in 2020 by Skylark, and has been called “evocative” (Gramophone), “quite extraordinary” (*Limelight*), “brilliant” (*Metro West Daily News*), and “otherworldly” (*Boston Musical Intelligencer*). His new carol, *Gabriel’s Message*, was released in 2020 by The Oxford Choir, conducted by Bob Chilcott. Sheehan’s music is published by Oxford University Press, Artefact Publications, and Musica Russica.

## THE SAINT TIKHON CHOIR

The **Saint Tikhon Choir** was founded in 2015 by its artistic director Benedict Sheehan and Abbot Sergius of St. Tikhon’s Monastery. It is the first professional vocal ensemble connected with an Orthodox monastery in America, founded with a mission to foster and build up the American Orthodox choral tradition at the highest artistic level. Its debut recording, *Till Morn Eternal Breaks: Sacred Choral Music of Benedict Sheehan* (2015), was heralded as “delicate and subtle ... at other times powerful and opulent ... [a] cause for joy and hope” (*Orthodox Arts Journal*). In 2018, The Saint Tikhon Choir took part in the world premiere of Alexander Kastalsky’s monumental *Requiem for Fallen Brothers*, written in 1917 to commemorate the dead of World War I across national borders. This concert took place at Washington’s National Cathedral, performing in collaboration with the Clarion Choir, the Kansas City Chorale, the Cathedral Choral Society, and the Orchestra of St. Luke’s under the baton of

BENEDICT SHEEHAN: LITURGY OF ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM (2018)		ALSO ON THE BLU-RAY™ DISC		
THE SAINT TIKHON CHOIR Benedict Sheehan, CONDUCTOR Timothy Parsons, COUNTERTENOR Michael Hawes, BARTONE Jason Thoms, BASS		1	Cherubic Hymn (World premiere performance, 26 May 2019)	8:05
		2	Communion Hymn – Psalm 148 (as above)	7:14
		3	Complete Liturgy (Liturgical premiere, 20 October 2019)	2:08:12
		TOTAL		2:23:31

1	Great Litany	5:16
2	First Antiphon – Psalm 102	6:06
3	Second Antiphon – Psalm 145	3:48
4	Only-Begotten Son – The Hymn of Justinian	2:54
5	Third Antiphon – The Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3-12)	3:31
6	O Come, Let Us Worship	1:14
7	Holy God	4:27
8	Alleluia (Based on Znamenny Chant)	1:32
9	Cherubic Hymn	8:05
10	Litany of Supplication	5:01
11	Anaphora	10:11
12	It Is Truly Meet	4:56
13	Our Father	2:52
14	One is Holy	1:36
15	Communion Hymn Psalm 148 (Based on Valaam Chant)	6:38
16	Liturgy Ending	5:20
17	Blessed be the Name of the Lord	2:00
TOTAL		75:33

“The bar for Orthodox liturgical music in the English-speaking world has now been set, definitively” (*Orthodox Arts Journal*)

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1.1 DTS-HD MA 24BIT/96KHz  
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Leonard Slatkin. The project was heralded as one of the “Top Ten Performances of 2018” (*Washington Classical Review*) and “an unforgettable performance” (*Washington Post*). The world premiere recording of this historic project was released in August of 2020 on the Naxos label, debuting at #1 on Billboard, and hailed in early reviews as “tremendously dignified” (*MusicWeb International*) and “powerful” (*Kansas City Star*). Benedict Sheehan’s *Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom* is The Saint Tikhon Choir’s third recording. On the web at [sainttikhonchoir.org](http://sainttikhonchoir.org)

## CAPPELLA RECORDS

**Cappella Records** is the label operated by the vocal ensemble **Cappella Romana**. Founded in Portland, Oregon, in 1991, the company combines passion with scholarship in its exploration of early and contemporary music of the Christian East and West, both on its own and in collaboration with peer artists and ensembles all over the world. Its name refers to the medieval Greek concept of the Roman *oikoumene* (inhabited world), which embraced Rome and Western Europe as well as the Byzantine Empire of Constantinople (“New Rome”) and its Slavic commonwealth. **Cappella Records** has released over 25 titles, including the recent Billboard chart-topping *Lost Voices of Hagia Sophia*. [cappellarecords.com](http://cappellarecords.com)

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## LISTENING NOTES

by Mark Powell

*Mark Powell is executive director of Cappella Romana and Cappella Records. He has been a professional ensemble singer and arts administrator for over 30 years, having worked both in the US and in Europe, and holds a Master's Degree in Musicology from the University of Washington, Seattle.*

While building on the traditions of sacred Russian choral music, Sheehan's new *Liturgy* in English is harmonically and structurally more adventurous than those by predecessors such as Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff. The professional singers of The Saint Tikhon Choir masterfully handle this virtuoso score with clarity of tone, purity of expression, and power in reserve.

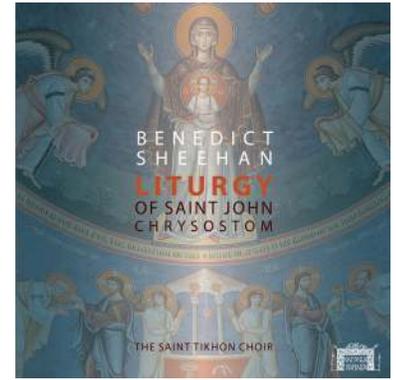
The composition reveals its roots in the Russian tradition with the deliberate "orchestration" of the voices, especially in the doubling of high and low voices singing in octaves, common to the Moscow Synodal School. The work's power is likewise reinforced by the presence throughout of a clearly perceptible melodic theme that unites the work organically. Sheehan also employs techniques reminiscent of Arvo Pärt's music: profoundly affecting textures built on disciplined triadic and step-wise melody.

The opening Psalms of the *Liturgy's* Antiphons are set for double choir, one of high voices, and the other low, recalling the polychoral music from San Marco in Venice by Monteverdi, the Gabriellis, and Schütz. The Psalms were translated compassionately by the composer's late father, a poet and professor of literature, to whom the work is dedicated. Unlike the Slavic style of Psalm singing at breakneck speed, Sheehan takes his time with certain verses to highlight their deeply personal implications.

Sheehan composed all of the chants in full for priest and deacon, ensuring perfect symphony with the choral responses that accompany them. Baritone Michael Hawes intones the priest's chants with loving conviction, matched with bass Jason Thoms singing the deacon's petitions with dignity and authority. The stellar countertenor Timothy Parsons figures prominently as soloist in the last large movement.

Like the Eucharistic services of the West, the Byzantine Divine Liturgy is divided into two sections: the first made up of Psalms and readings, and the second,

the service of Holy Communion, or Eucharist. In today's Byzantine rite, the pivot point between these sections is the Cherubic Hymn, typically a long, meditative work designed to evoke the heavenly realm into which the assembly is about to enter.



There may be no other setting of the Cherubic Hymn quite like that in Sheehan's *Liturgy*. Had it been set for string orchestra, Sheehan's could have been a symphonic Adagio by Gustav Mahler, with its slow unfolding of musical themes, cascading suspensions, imperfect cadences, and the complete avoidance of final tonal resolution or release until its close—and even then the music suggests that there is more to come.

Sheehan's communion verse "Praise the Lord from the Heavens, Alleluia" 1) sets Psalm 148 in its entirety and 2) is effectively a vocal concerto for countertenor and double chorus, both aspects unprecedented in the Orthodox choral repertoire. Written for the virtuoso countertenor Timothy Parsons, recently a layclerk at Christ Church, Oxford (UK), it exploits the fullest range of Parsons' powerful and authoritative voice that reaches an impressive high E at the consummation of this beautiful movement.

The ending movements following Holy Communion, expressing thanks and joy, are in the bright key of E major. Sheehan's exuberant setting of "Blessed be the name of the Lord, henceforth and for evermore" leaves no doubt in this writer that the whole work has been a journey, a pilgrimage into a transcendent realm.

Sheehan's music seems to transfigure the words of the *Liturgy* into doors to eternity for those willing to open them, setting the listener—regardless of background—on a musical and spiritual pilgrimage of discovery.