



# New release by Cappella Records **WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING**

## BENEDICT SHEEHAN: VESPERS

Cappella Records is pleased to announce the November 19, 2021, release of **Benedict Sheehan's Vespers**, an Eastern Orthodox Vespers performed in English by the **GRAMMY®-nominated Saint Tikhon Choir**, conducted by the composer.

Inspired by the great *All-Night Vigil* setting by Rachmaninoff, Sheehan's composition expands the genre with full settings of Psalms, each of which expresses a full range of human emotion.

*Vespers* also features virtuosic vocal concertos, including the first for basso profundo in English, sung by the renowned basso profundo Glenn Miller. This engaging music projects a vision of hope and light for all.

The Saint Tikhon Choir also recently recorded a collaboration on Naxos with three other choirs and the Orchestra of St. Luke's conducted by Leonard Slatkin, for which they received a GRAMMY® nomination.

### SALES POINTS

- Critical acclaim for *Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom* "Simply beyond praise for excellence ... beautiful ... luminous, blended tone" (Fanfare), which debuted at #2 on Billboard and #1 on Amazon. Saint Tikhon Choir's second release on Cappella Records.
- Available in 192kHz/24-bit high-resolution, DSD audio, multi-channel surround sound, and SACD, produced by **multi-GRAMMY® Award winner Blanton Alspaugh** and the team at Soundmirror (100+ GRAMMY® nominations and awards).
- Cappella Records and the Saint Tikhon Choir have an active presence on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook with over 10,000 followers combined, and their YouTube Channels have over 5,000 subscribers totaling over 1 million views.
- Rehearsal and performance videos available in 4k HD for two of the works, including the Instant Grat/Focus track.
- Recording photos available for press and reviews.
- Physical product includes a 32-page booklet with extensive essay by the composer, photography, and all texts.

Feat. Track: "The Song of Symeon" <https://youtu.be/hB3UsLMzjbQ>

Cat # **CR423 Benedict Sheehan: Vespers SACD Hybrid Multichannel**

Artists: Saint Tikhon Choir, Benedict Sheehan, conductor

Producer: Blanton Alspaugh; Engineering: Soundmirror

2.0 Stereo, 5.0 SURROUND. **DSM192K/24bit.**

Recorded in DSD. Total time: 59:29.

UPC: 753459959183

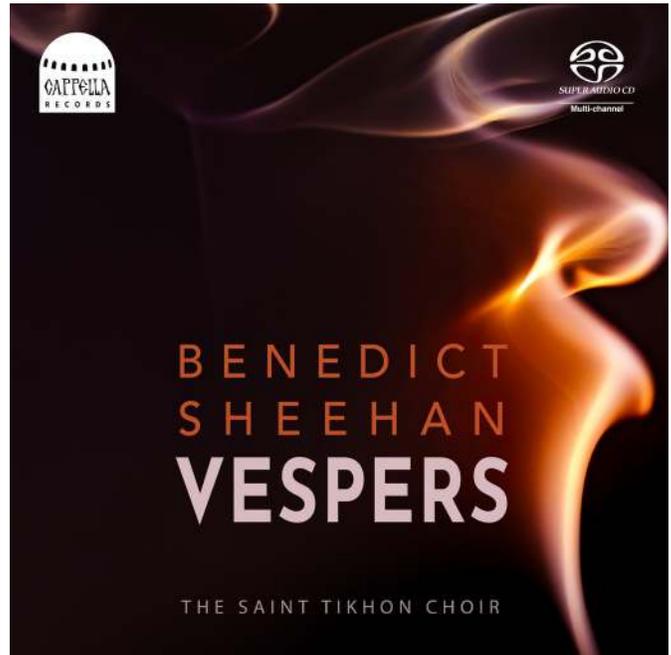
SRP: \$19.99 USD

Label: Cappella Records

Genre: Classical,

Classical|Choral,

Sacred|Chant



**RELEASE DATE: 11/19/2021**

<p>BENEDICT SHEEHAN: VESPERS (2021) THE SAINT TIKHON CHOIR Benedict Sheehan, CONDUCTOR</p>		<p>GRAMMY®-nominated conductor and composer Benedict Sheehan leads The Saint Tikhon Choir in his new setting of Eastern Orthodox Vespers in English. Inspired by the great All-Night Vigil setting by Rachmaninoff, Sheehan's composition expands the genre with full settings of Psalms. Each verse is treated with deep musical pathos to express a full range of human emotion. <i>Vespers</i> also features virtuosic vocal concertos, including the first for basso profundo in English. Encounter this music that projects a vision of hope and light for all.</p> <p>The Saint Tikhon Choir was founded in 2015 by Benedict Sheehan, the group's artistic director, 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.</p> <p>©1942-© &amp; ©2021 Cappella Records. All rights reserved. Blanton Alspaugh, producer; Brandon Johnson and John Newton, engineers; Mark Donahue, mastering engineer. Super Audio CD (SACD) Hybrid Multichannel, 2.0 stereo; 5.0 surround sound. The SACD can also be played on a regular CD player through only in stereo. Made in Germany. SACD and DSD are registered trademarks.</p> <p>all-page booklet inside with extensive essay by the composer, complete biographies of soloists, and all texts.</p>	
1	The Opening Psalm   Ps. 103		9:08
2	Great Litany		5:10
3	Blessed is the Man		3:00
4	Small Litany		1:36
5	The Lamp-Lighting Psalms   Pss. 140 & 141		3:25
6	Sukhira of the Resurrection		10:00
7	O Gladsome Light Fotina Naumenko, SOLOIST		4:04
8	The Lord is King   Ps. 92 Vocal concerto for countertenor Timothy Parsons, SOLOIST		2:42
9	Evening Prayer   "Vouchsafe, O Lord"		3:30
10	The Song of Symeon Vocal concerto for basso profundo Glenn Miller, SOLOIST		5:00
11	Interlude: The Trisagion Prayers		1:54
12	Rejoice, O Virgin		3:34
13	The Closing Psalm   Ps. 33		6:17
TOTAL:		59:29	

"Simply beyond praise for excellence ... beautiful ... luminous, blended tone"  
(Fanfare)

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PRESS RELEASE  
New from Cappella Records  
**Benedict Sheehan: *Vespers***

(Portland, Ore.)—Cappella Records is pleased to announce the November 19, 2021, release of **Benedict Sheehan's *Vespers***, an Orthodox Vespers performed in English by the GRAMMY®-nominated **Saint Tikhon Choir**, conducted by the composer.

Inspired by Rachmaninoff's *All-Night Vigil*, Sheehan's unique musical and linguistic expression expands the genre. He adorns full-length Psalms and hymns with a deep understanding of beauty, faith, and humanity. *Vespers* also features virtuosic vocal concertos, including the first for basso profundo in English. Engage with this music that projects a vision of hope and light for all.

Sheehan's *Vespers* is the third 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 earned more than 100 GRAMMY® nominations and awards, with releases on every major classical label.

This is the second release of The Saint Tikhon Choir on Cappella Records. The Choir recently recorded Benedict Sheehan's critically acclaimed *Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*, which debuted at #2 on Billboard and #1 on Amazon. They also recently recorded a collaboration on Naxos with three other choirs and the Orchestra of St. Luke's conducted by Leonard Slatkin, for which they received a GRAMMY® nomination.

The *Vespers* recording features a Hybrid SACD in 2.0 stereo and 5.0 surround sound (DSM192K/24bit), recorded in DSD and downloadable to audio servers and devices. The accompanying booklet provides an extensive essay by the composer, the full texts used in the composition, composer notes, and beautiful photography. Cappella Records is distributed by Naxos USA.

### **BENEDICT SHEEHAN**

Conductor and composer **Benedict Sheehan** has been called “a remarkable musician” and “one of the most important voices in American Orthodox choral music” (*Choral Journal*). He is Artistic Director of the Saint Tikhon Choir and the newly-founded Artefact Ensemble, as well as Director of Music at St. Tikhon's Monastery and Seminary in Pennsylvania. His work as a Chorus Master on the 2020 Naxos release of Kastalsky's *Requiem for Fallen Brothers* earned him and his collaborators a 2021 GRAMMY® nomination, and he was recently awarded 2nd Place in the 2021 American Prize for Choral Conducting. His *Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom* (2020), on which he conducts the Saint Tikhon Choir, has garnered critical acclaim as “simply beyond praise for



excellence” (*Fanfare*), “radiant...superb...a masterstroke” (*MusicWeb International*), “fresh and vibrant...spot on...a superb effort” (*Audiophile Audition*), “inventive, moving, and extravagantly beautiful” (*The American Organist*), and “a new standard for excellence in the American choral landscape” (*The Living Church Magazine*). His innovative choral “story score” was featured on Skylark Vocal Ensemble’s 2021 GRAMMY®-nominated album *Once Upon A Time*, and has been hailed as “evocative” (*Gramophone*), “quite extraordinary” (*Limelight*), “brilliant” (*MetroWest Daily News*), and “otherworldly” (*Boston Musical Intelligencer*). His newest story score, based on the Dickens classic *A Christmas Carol*, was recently recorded by Skylark and will be released in November of 2021. Sheehan’s monumental new *Vespers* was recorded in 2021 by the Saint Tikhon Choir under the composer’s direction, and will also be released in November of 2021. Sheehan’s music is published by Oxford University Press, Artefact Publications, Musica Russica, and others. Upcoming performances of his music in the 2021-22 season will include new commissions from Conspirare and Cappella Romana, and performances by Skylark and the Houston Chamber Choir. This fall he will conduct Artefact Ensemble in the world premiere of Arvo Pärt’s *O Holy Father Nicholas* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. To learn more visit [www.benedictsheehanmusic.com](http://www.benedictsheehanmusic.com)

## THE SAINT TIKHON CHOIR

Founded with a mission to foster and build up the American Orthodox choral tradition at the highest artistic level, the GRAMMY®-Nominated **Saint Tikhon Choir** has been steadily breaking new ground since its inception in 2015. It is the first professional ensemble associated with an Orthodox monastery in America. 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 a monumental world premiere of Alexander Kastalsky’s *Requiem for Fallen Brothers* (1917) at the Washington 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 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 recording of this historic project, released in 2020 on the Naxos label, debuted at #1 on the Billboard Traditional Classical charts and received a 2021 GRAMMY® nomination for “Best Choral Performance.” The Saint Tikhon Choir’s recent recording of Benedict Sheehan’s *Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*, which debuted at #2 on Billboard, has been garnering critical acclaim as “simply beyond praise for excellence... beautiful...luminous, blended tone” (*Fanfare*), “radiant...superb...a masterstroke” (*MusicWeb International*), “fresh and vibrant...spot on...a superb effort” (*Audiophile Audition*), “extravagantly beautiful” (*The American Organist*), and “a new standard for excellence in the American choral landscape” (*The Living Church Magazine*). Benedict Sheehan’s *Vespers* is the Saint Tikhon Choir’s fourth 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)

### **LISTENING NOTES FOLLOW.**

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## LISTENING NOTES

by Mark Powell, Executive Director, Cappella Records; Lydia Given, General Manager, The Saint Tikhon Choir; and Richard Barrett, The Saint John of Damascus Society.

**Vespers is Benedict Sheehan's next major work following his critically acclaimed *Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*.** Sheehan continues to make inspired contributions to the body of American choral repertoire. Drawing deeply from Greek and Russian Orthodox chant traditions, he creates a cohesive individual voice for *Vespers* that is both traditional and modern.

Here Sheehan employs Slavic, Byzantine, and newly composed chant melodies in orchestrated choral textures. As in his earlier *Liturgy*, listeners can hear in Sheehan's *Vespers* "vocal orchestration" similar to that of Rachmaninoff and other Russian masters: the doubling of high and low voices; soloists and semi-choruses accompanied by full chorus, like solo instruments in a concerto; colorful Romantic harmonies; and nods to Baroque counterpoint.

Careful listening will reveal Sheehan's use of the palindromic device called chiasmus as a structural element throughout. Chiastic structure (e.g. A-B-C-D-C'-B'-A') marks a center point, in this case the movement "Gladsome Light," with others organized symmetrically around it. Bach's motet "Komm, Jesu, Komm" may be the best known choral work to use this form, while later composers, including Brahms and Stravinsky, likewise employ this kind of formal organization. Sheehan uses chiasmus within individual movements as well, both in terms of text and music. One can hear this particularly in the Psalms.

Sheehan utilizes asymmetrical meters; think of "Take 5" by Dave Brubeck, or "Aliens" by Coldplay, or the second movement of Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony, all in 5/4 with shifting strong and weak beats within the pattern. However, *Vespers* takes this a step further by not settling into one asymmetrical meter for too long. Instead, the music throughout follows the jagged prosody of medieval Slavic and Byzantine chant melodies that, in turn, are driven by the asymmetrical patterns of strong and weak syllables in the poetry.

**The Opening Psalm.** While Slavs tend to sing an abbreviated Psalm 103 LXX (104), Greeks simply read the whole text. Here Sheehan sets the whole to music in an expansive form unknown to common Slavic use. Its exposition on the creation narrative is also chiastic in

structure. Baritone and countertenor soloists alternate with the chorus as a conversation between God and the created order. The intentionally hushed Alleluias, which could have been more ebullient, prefigure the gentle glow of the central movement, "Gladsome Light."

**Blessed is the Man.** Here a male-voice trio sings the verses with full-choir refrain "Alleluia." Then a countertenor in a higher register enters at "Arise O Lord," a subtle word-painting device, continuing at the final, most important verse of the psalm "Salvation is from the Lord..." The whole choir sings the Small Doxology ("Glory to the Father...") with its final antiphonal refrains.

**The Lamp-Lighting Psalms.** Building on Byzantine motifs rather than complete chants, the Lamp-Lighting Psalms follow the Slavic practice of syllabic settings (roughly one note per syllable) for all the verses. This is in contrast to the received Byzantine tradition, in which the first two verses are set to melismatic melodies (many notes per syllable), with the remainder syllabic. Sheehan marries modern Slavic practice (using the ancient refrain "Hear me, O Lord") with the Byzantine practice of all verses through-composed. In common Orthodox practice (both Greek and Slavic), the interior verses are omitted, while Sheehan's setting may be the first to set these complete for polyphonic choir.

Those familiar with the Byzantine melodic formulas will hear patterns from the First Mode (specific melodic patterns and cadential figures in approximately D minor, with modulations to G minor and back). The utilization of pedal tones (isons, or drones), characteristic of modern Byzantine chant practice, can also be heard throughout. This movement builds on the practice of harmonies in thirds that became popular for a while in liturgical music championed by the composer/cantor John Sakellarides in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Greece. The composer takes this a step further with fists of parallel closely-voiced chords in the style of Sir John Tavener. Some soloists employ ornamentation in their lines, appropriate to received Byzantine chant, comparable to the essential ornamentation applied to Baroque music.

**Stikhira of the Resurrection.** Between the final verses of the Lamp-Lighting Psalms, a series of tropes (troparia, or proper hymns) make explicit the connection between the light of the Psalms and the light of the risen Christ. For a Saturday Vespers in anticipation of Sunday, always a day of Resurrection or a feast of Jesus Christ, these tropes point to what follows, Gladsome Light, the center of *Vespers*.

This collection is reminiscent of Einojuhani Rautavaara's through-composed troparia in memory of St. John

the Baptist in his Finnish *Vigilia (All-Night Vigil)*, with basso profundo and high tenor soloists accompanied by atmospheric choral textures. One can also compare them to Sir John Tavener's through-composed troparia in his rarely-performed *Orthodox Vigil Service* in English. As in the Rautavaara, there is no strict role for soloists and choir; traditional Byzantine practice assigns psalm verses to a soloist and the tropes to the choir. Like the Rautavaara setting, Sheehan's musical ambiguity between the psalm verses and their tropes creates a cohesive stream of expression. The psalm verses and their tropes are sometimes sung by choir, by soloists, or in combination to accentuate the poetic imagery.

The final doxastikon or dogmatikon (the trope that follows "Glory to the Father..."), is a short poem to the Virgin Mary. While common Slavic practice usually makes little stylistic distinction between the former tropes and the final one, this is set in a more expansive style with a grand ending, not unlike traditional Byzantine settings, which emphasize musically the Orthodox devotion to the Mother of God.

**Gladsome Light.** This is the central movement of Vespers, with the outer movements in symmetry with it. While incorporating fragments of Byzantine melodies, this movement is a full polyphonic setting, more thickly scored than a melody against drones or held chords. Its restraint ties in with the Moscow School of Russian choral writing (e.g. Rachmaninoff, Kastalsky, Gretchaninoff), in that even in its most powerful moments there is energy in reserve, perhaps inclining the listener to perceive the sublime. In this way the theme of light is made gentle, not severe. In fact, the Slavonic term for "gladsome" could be rendered "gentle," whereas in Greek it is closer to "joyful," and Sheehan's setting undulates musically between the two. The eternal light of Christ is musically communicated as comfort and warmth.

**Prokeimenon (The Lord is King).** Comparable to a Latin Gradual, a prokeimenon is sung before a reading, set here in quasi-Baroque style. This is reminiscent of earlier experiments in Russian Orthodox choral music by Baroque composers Diletsky (c.1630 – c.1680) or Titov (c.1650 – c.1715). Employing a countertenor soloist also tips a hat towards Western European Baroque idioms. Brahms also comes to mind as an inspiration, who infused Baroque counterpoint with romantic harmonies.

**Vouchsafe, O Lord.** This movement invites comparisons with common Obikhod chant (affectionately called "typewriter chant" by insiders), here with more adventurous harmonies. The Obikhod's unmetered musical notation

leaves the exact rhythm of the words up to unwritten convention. This is the case both in the pointed Psalms of Anglican chant and in the pointed hymnography in the Slavic style. In contrast, Sheehan has prescribed the precise speech rhythms in order to allow non-Slavic choirs to sing in a style normally learned by ear and experience.

**Song of Simeon.** This movement calls for a virtuoso male chorus (including countertenors) and the rarest of basso profundo soloists. The wholly remarkable basso profundo soloist Glenn Miller, to whom the work is dedicated, is required to sing a sustained F<sub>1</sub>, an octave below low bass F. As this movement is virtually unperformable except by the rarest basso profundo, the published score also provides a transposed version for mixed chorus and "ordinary" bass soloist. The movement also ties with the particularly Slavic tradition of the choral concerto. These are intended to show off the technical prowess of a soloist and a choir at high moments in the services. This is the only such concerto in the repertoire for basso profundo in English.

**Rejoice, O Virgin.** Known as the Ave Maria in the West, its text draws from the Gospel of Luke when the Angel Gabriel announces to Mary that she will bear the Son of God. Its Orthodox version features a number of standard textual changes: the title Virgin Theotokos (God-bearer) at the beginning "Rejoice [Hail], *O Virgin Theotokos*, Mary full of grace..." and a concluding phrase. Sheehan orchestrates solo melodies between voice parts accompanied by rich choral refrains that undulate in ambiguous keys. He delays harmonic resolution, finding a "home" at C major, only appearing in a strong cadence at the close. There a baritone solo, doubled by the altos singing high in their range, emerges in the concluding phrase "for thou hast borne the Savior of our souls": the voice of the gender-neutral Angel Gabriel proclaiming the consequence of the Incarnation.

**The Closing Psalm.** Adhering to the work's chiasmic form, the Closing Psalm recalls the Opening Psalm. Sheehan revisits and reinvents the very first motif of the work, transporting the listener back to the creation narrative, now transfigured by the service's Christian narrative. This final movement is a vocal concerto for mezzo-soprano and tenor duet, which in this performance is sung by the married couple Helen Karloski and Paul D'Arcy. Like a double concerto for instruments, the solos are passed back and forth between the vocal soloists interspersed with ripieno sections by the chorus. The final passage builds upon the themes and energy of previous movements as the choir exultantly sings "Glory to thee, O God!"

###