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.

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