

# What's Ignatian about The Ignatian Schola?

*The Ignatian Schola is a Manhattan-based vocal ensemble composed of Jesuits and lay colleagues.*

By Christopher Derby, S.J., Wendell J. Laurent and Boreta A. Singleton



*Members of The Ignatian Schola in song at First Vows Mass, Le Moyne College Chapel, August 2007.*

The formation of The Ignatian Schola was a gradual process, very Ignatian in character. We did not one day get together and say, “Hey! Let’s start a vocal group called The Ignatian Schola!” As with all things Ignatian, it started with an experience and from reflection on that experience we formed the group.

The original members of the Schola have been singing together for quite some time, some of us more than 15 years, in different settings, such as: the choir at the Church of St. Francis Xavier; the St. Vincent’s Players at St. Vincent’s Hospital; the Jesuit ordinations at Fordham; and special Masses and services at St. John the Baptist Church on 31st Street.

For a while, we were simply an amor-

phous group of singers who enjoyed singing together. We were all people of prayer, who enjoyed singing as prayer and who believed in the importance of music ministry and the power of music to be a channel of God’s grace. That was our experience, and from that experience we decided to become more intentional about singing together. Dr. Jacqueline Perez, who is currently on sabbatical from St. Vincent’s Hospital, working with the Jesuit Refugee Service in Malaysia, suggested that we get together twice a month “just to sing.”

These “just to sing” gatherings turned out to be very prayerful experiences; without realizing it at the time, we had really formed a small church community. In good Ignatian fashion, we came to realize that the music we shared was a gift, and we desired

to share that gift with others. We began to think of ourselves as a *schola*, an intentional group of singers banded together for the purpose of singing sacred music, not “an amorphous group of singers.” We wanted to find a name for ourselves, but had difficulty finding something we truly liked. One day we were asked to sing at a special Mass at St. John the Baptist Church by the music director, Laurence Rosania (former director of music at Xavier). He wanted to list us in the program, and as we had not given him a name, he put us in as “The Ignatian Schola.” We really liked the name, and it sort of stuck. It is interesting that it took someone outside of the group to see the dynamic that was going on and to name us so aptly!

Once we had a name, we became a little more intentional about the focus of our

ministry, which is to inspire prayer through music with a decidedly Ignatian focus. It might seem obvious that a singing group called The Ignatian Schola—made up of Jesuits and folks who are associated with the Society of Jesus, which performs at events like the Jesuit Jubilarian celebration or an Ignatian Spirituality Conference, and which performs music written by Jesuits and their colleagues, sometimes with texts associated with St. Ignatius—is somehow Ignatian!

Of course, The Ignatian Schola does have ties to the Society of Jesus and to the Ignatian tradition. What is more pertinent is the *how* question. *How we do what we do* is what really makes us an Ignatian Schola.

While we take our music seriously and work hard at growing as musicians, the Ignatian Schola is not a professional choir, nor is it a musicological group dedicated to a particular branch of the choral repertoire. Rather, we are a group of singers whose collective identity is rooted and grounded in relationships: in our individual relationships with Jesus Christ and our relationships with one another. As opportunities for ministry have grown, so too we have deliberately grown the group. Not every Schola member can make every event we are invited to participate in, so in order to guarantee that we have 2 to 3 people on each vocal part, we have carefully invited like-minded singers to join the group.

In this respect we emulate the original *Compañía de Jesús*, those “friends in the Lord” who gathered around Ignatius because they believed they could do more for Christ together than individually, if they placed their talents at the disposal of the Church. Like those early Jesuits, we share a love for Jesus and a desire to be closer to Him; we share a common ministry and a joy in that ministry; and we “break bread” together—we eat and socialize together, often in conjunction with our rehearsals and performances.

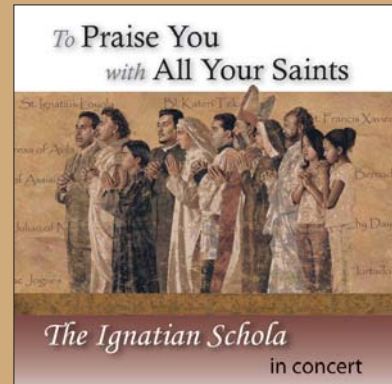
The Ignatian Schola explores an eclectic repertoire of sacred music for the sake of both its musical diversity and the relation-

ship of the texts to our own prayer. We sing medieval chant, Renaissance motets, early American songs and contemporary liturgical music. The diversity of music reflects, we hope, the diversity of the group in many respects. We are Jesuits and lay people, women and men, of different ages and ethnic backgrounds. Our diversity is part of the gift we offer to the Church.

For us the saying of St. Augustine, “the one who sings prays twice,” is not just something we read once or saw on a banner at Mass! This is our experience: that we feel closer to God in singing than in just saying words; that the music itself carries the emotion; that in singing we are attentive and focused on God in a special way; that in singing we pray with our entire being—mind, body, spirit, all at once. We find and praise God in the music and in one another.

In accordance with the Spiritual Exercises, we believe that the way to respond graciously to God’s generous gifts is to use and develop those gifts and talents and put them at the disposal of God’s Kingdom. We recognize the talents of the other Schola members—musical gifts, organizational and creative gifts, gifts of time and energy—and by sharing them, we respect God who gave them to us. We try to discern how we ought to proceed—when and where to sing, what music to learn, how to determine the composition of the group. We try, for example, to sing where we know there is a need or where our music will contribute to a Mass or an event in a distinctive way. Similarly, we try to sing music, often by composers we know, which relates explicitly to Ignatian themes and helps widen the audience for the wisdom of Ignatius.

Ignatian spirituality speaks clearly to us about being open to God’s Spirit. Our hopes are intimately connected to the Jesuit understanding of mission. One responds to the prompting of the Spirit within, then one shares the fruit of the Spirit with others. Our music is a direct response to the Spirit. The musical gifts that we possess are to be shared with all those who hear us; indeed, this is our ministry!



**The *Suscipe* of St. Ignatius**

Take, Lord, receive my liberty,  
my mind, my will, my memory;  
Your love and grace are enough for me.  
Your love and grace are enough for me.

All that I own, all I possess,  
Are gifts from You that I return.  
Your love and grace are enough for me.  
Your love and grace are enough for me.

Take, Lord, receive all that is Yours,  
of it, dispose as You will.  
Your love and grace are enough for me.  
Your love and grace are enough for me.

*Arr. by Michael Burgo, music director of St. Ignatius Church in Chestnut Hill, MA, to the tune “O Waly Waly,” familiar to many of us as “The Water is Wide.”*

*For information on how to order the CD, visit [www.IgnatianSchola.org](http://www.IgnatianSchola.org).*

Our most recent concert, held at St. Francis Xavier Church in November, “To Praise You With All Your Saints,” will be released on a CD in March to help those who hear it to pray and to sing. Included on the CD is a new version of “Take, Lord, Receive,” the prayer of St. Ignatius that is often known by its first word in Latin, *Suscipe*. The *Suscipe* is our prayer for ourselves, as well as our prayer for you, that all may know that God’s love and grace are enough for us!