

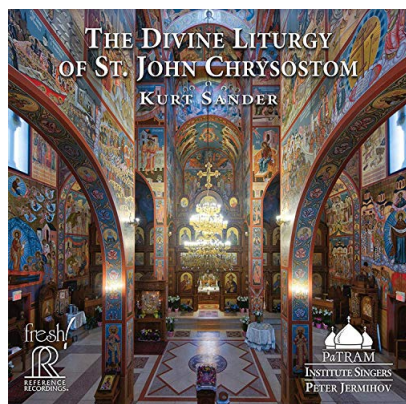


## FEATURE REVIEW by [Daniel Morrison](#)

 SANDER Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom • Peter Jermihov, cond; PaTRAM Institute Singers • REFERENCE 731 (2 CDs: 90:06 )



### [Divine Liturgy St Chrysostom](#)

#### [Audio CD](#)

#### [Reference Recordings](#)



Kurt Sander is a contemporary American composer who converted to the Orthodox Church and immersed himself in the spirit of that faith's liturgical music. He offers here the first ever English-language setting of the complete Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, one of the principal Orthodox liturgies. The recording is a project of the Patriarch Tikhon Russian-American Music Institute (PaTRAM). The names of PaTRAM and of conductor Peter Jermihov should be familiar to readers interested in this kind of repertoire. PaTRAM was also responsible for the recording of Orthodox liturgical music by Pavel Chesnokov that was reviewed by myself and others in 42:3 and appears on my Want List in the present issue. Those reviews and the accompanying interviews provide information about PaTRAM and about Patriarch Tikhon that need not be repeated here. Both the Chesnokov recording and the present release feature choruses affiliated with PaTRAM, but they are not the same choruses. The Sander work is performed by the PaTRAM Institute Singers, a mixed chamber chorus. The Chesnokov performance is by an all-male chorus consisting of the PaTRAM Institute Male Choir augmented by two Russian choruses. Only two singers participate in both performances: Alexis Lukianov, the PaTRAM chairman and co-founder, and Kurt Sander himself. With an ensemble including some PaTRAM singers, Peter Jermihov is the conductor of a recording of Rachmaninoff's All-Night Vigil that was reviewed by myself and others in 40:6 and appeared on my 2017 Want List.

I must confess that I had no particular interest in hearing an Orthodox liturgy in English, for aesthetic, not religious reasons, but the sublime beauty and exalted spirituality of Sander's music is irresistible, even to a non-religious person like myself. One element that especially resonates with me is the piteous cries for mercy that permeate the text of this and other liturgies, which seem to communicate something about the human condition in past ages as well as the present. Sander's writing seems thoroughly idiomatic and steeped in Russian Orthodox tradition. As

Jermihov comments in his contribution to the notes for this release, Sander's setting is rooted in "the 19th Century Russian models of Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff, Grachaninoff [sic], and others." Jermihov also points out that the structure of Sander's score fosters a degree of musical unity that is unusual among Orthodox liturgical settings. In this performance the sections of the liturgy follow one another without a break, resulting in a continuous musical fabric. All of the clerical "exclamations" and litanies are included, allowing the listener to relish the sepulchral basso profundo tones of Glenn Miller (no, not that Glenn Miller) as the Deacon in the Great Litany and the slightly less subterranean incantations of Vadim Gan, who sings as the Deacon elsewhere in the liturgy. (Gan was also a participant in the Rachmaninoff All-Night Vigil recording mentioned above.) In Sander's mellifluous writing, replete with polyphony and subtle harmonic color, serene contemplation and hushed supplication alternate with joyous passion.

**The performance by the PaTRAM Institute Singers [Peter Jermihov, Conductor] is notable for its beautiful, blended tone, excellent intonation, perfect coordination, finely tuned balances, and profound depth of feeling.** The soloists, who in addition to Miller and Gan include tenor Daniel Shirley as the Reader in the "Alleluia" and as the soloist in the First Antiphon, baritone Keven Keys as the Priest, and baritone Evan Bravos in the Trisagion, perform their parts capably.

Although Reference Recordings issued the Chesnokov program as a hybrid SACD, the Sander recording is a conventional CD. The sound quality is nonetheless very good. The acoustic is reverberant, as would be expected from a recording made in a church, but not excessively so. The sound is blended but not murky, doing full justice to the beauty of the music and the singing. The sumptuously illustrated booklet includes the full text of the liturgy as well as informative essays by Sander, Jermihov, and others.

**This release should appeal strongly to anyone with an interest in a cappella choral music and would be likely to convert anyone who has not yet developed such an interest. Daniel Morrison**

**This article originally appeared in Issue 43:2 (Nov/Dec 2019) of *Fanfare* Magazine.**