

# Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

# Introduction: The History of What?

**Chapter:** MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

**Source:**

*The argument is no other than to inquire and collect out of the records of all time what particular kinds of learning and arts have flourished in what ages and regions of the world, their antiquities, their progresses, their migrations (for sciences migrate like nations) over the different parts of the globe; and again their decays, disappearances, and revivals; [and also] an account of the principal authors, books, schools, successions, academies, societies, colleges, orders—in a word, everything which relates to the state of learning. Above all things, I wish events to be coupled with their causes. All this I would have handled in a historical way, not wasting time, after the manner of critics, in praise and blame, but simply narrating the fact historically, with but slight intermixture of private judgment. For the manner of compiling such a history I particularly advise that the matter and provision of it be not drawn from histories and commentaries alone; but that the principal books written in each century, or perhaps in shorter periods, proceeding in regular order from the earliest ages, be themselves taken into consultation; that so (I do not say by a complete perusal, for that would be an endless labour, but) by tasting them here and there, and observing their argument, style, and method, the Literary Spirit of each age may be charmed as it were from the dead.*

—Francis Bacon, *de dignitate et augmentis scientiarum libri ix* (1623)<sup>1</sup>

*Mutatis mutandis*, Bacon's task was mine. He never lived to complete it; I have—but only by dint of a drastic narrowing of scope. My *mutanda* are stated in my title (one not chosen but granted; and for that honor I extend my thanks to the Delegates of the Oxford University Press). For “learning and the arts” substitute music. For “the different parts of the globe” substitute Europe, joined in Volume 3 by America. (That is what we still casually mean by “the West,” although the concept is undergoing sometimes curious change: a Soviet music magazine I once subscribed to gave news of the pianist Yevgeny Kissin's “Western debut”—in Tokyo.) And as for antiquities, they hardly exist for music. (Jacques Chailley's magnificently titled conspectus, *40,000 ans de musique*, got through the first 39,000 years—I exaggerate only slightly—on its first page.<sup>2</sup>)

Still, as the sheer bulk of this offering attests, a lot was left, because I took seriously Bacon's stipulations that causes be investigated, that original documents be not only cited but analyzed (for their “argument, style, and method”) and that the approach should be catholic and as near exhaustive as possible, based not on my preferences but on my estimation of what needed to be included in order to satisfy the dual requirement of causal explanation and technical explication. Most books that call themselves histories of Western music, or of any of its traditional “style periods,” are in fact surveys, which cover—and celebrate—the relevant repertoire, but make little effort truly to explain why and how things happened as they did. This set of books is an attempt at a true history.

Paradoxically, that means it does not take “coverage” as its primary task. A lot of famous music goes unmentioned in these pages, and even some famous composers. Inclusion and omission imply no judgment of value here. I never asked myself whether this or that composition or musician was “worth mentioning,” and I hope readers will agree that I have sought neither to advocate nor to denigrate what I did include.

But there is something more fundamental yet to explain, given my claim of catholicity. Coverage of all the musics that have been made in Europe and America is obviously neither the aim of this book nor its achievement. A glance at the table of contents will instantly confirm, to the inevitable disappointment and perhaps consternation of some, that “Western music” here means what it has always meant in general academic histories: it means what is usually called “art music” or “classical music,” and looks suspiciously

like the traditional canon that has come under so much justified fire for its long-unquestioned dominance of the academic curriculum (a dominance that is now in irreversible process of decline). A very challenging example of that fire is a fusillade by Robert Walser, a scholar of popular music, who characterizes the repertoire treated here in terms borrowed from the writings of the Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm. "Classical music," writes Walser,

is the sort of thing Eric Hobsbawm calls an "invented tradition," whereby present interests construct a cohesive past to establish or legitimize present-day institutions or social relations. The hodgepodge of the classical canon—aristocratic and bourgeois music; academic, sacred and secular; music for public concerts, private soirées and dancing—achieves its coherence through its function as the most prestigious musical culture of the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup>

Why in the world would one want to continue propagating such a hodgepodge in the twenty-first century?

The heterogeneity of the classical canon is undeniable. Indeed, that is one of its main attractions. And while I reject Walser's conspiracy-theorizing, I definitely sympathize with the social and political implications of his argument, as will be evident (for some—a different some—all too evident) in the many pages that follow. But that very sympathy is what impelled me to subject that impossibly heterogeneous body of music to one more (perhaps the last) comprehensive examination—under a revised definition that supplies the coherence that Walser impugns. All of the genres he mentions, and all of the genres that are treated in this book, are literate genres. That is, they are genres that have been disseminated primarily through the medium of writing. The sheer abundance and the generic heterogeneity of the music so disseminated in "the West" is a truly distinguishing feature—perhaps the West's signal musical distinction. It is deserving of critical study.

By critical study I mean a study that does not take literacy for granted, or simply tout it as a unique Western achievement, but rather "interrogates" it (as our hermeneutics of suspicion now demands) for its consequences. The first chapter of this book makes a fairly detailed attempt to assess the specific consequences for music of a literate culture, and that theme remains a constant factor—always implicit, often explicit—in every chapter that follows, right up to (and especially) the concluding ones. For it is the basic claim of this multivolumed narrative—its number-one postulate—that the literate tradition of Western music is coherent at least insofar as it has a completed shape. Its beginnings are known and explicable, and its end is now foreseeable (and also explicable). And just as the early chapters are dominated by the interplay of literate and preliterate modes of thinking and transmission (and the middle chapters try to cite enough examples to keep the interplay of literate and nonliterate alive in the reader's consciousness), so the concluding chapters are dominated by the interplay of literate and postliterate modes, which have been discernable at least since the middle of the twentieth century, and which sent the literate tradition (in the form of a backlash) into its culminating phase.

This is by no means to imply that everything within the covers of these volumes constitutes a single story. I am as suspicious as the next scholar of what we now call metanarratives (or worse, "master narratives"). Indeed, one of the main tasks of this telling will be to account for the rise of our reigning narratives, and show that they too have histories with beginnings and (implicitly) with ends. The main ones, for music, have been, first, an esthetic narrative—recounting the achievement of "art for art's sake," or (in the present instance) of "absolute music"—that asserts the autonomy of artworks (often tautologically insulated by adding "insofar as they are artworks") as an indispensable and retroactive criterion of value and, second, a historical narrative—call it "neo-Hegelian"—that celebrates progressive (or "revolutionary") emancipation and values artworks according to their contribution to that project. Both are shopworn heirlooms of German romanticism. These romantic tales are "historicized" in volume III, the key volume of the set, for it furnishes our intellectual present with a past. This is done in the fervent belief that no claim of universality can survive situation in intellectual history. Each of the genres that Walser names has its own history, moreover, as do the many that he does not name, and it will be evident to all readers that this narrative devotes as much attention to a congeries of "petits récits"—individual accounts of this and that—as it does to the epic sketched in the foregoing paragraphs. But the overarching trajectory of musical literacy is nevertheless a part of all the stories, and a particularly revealing one.

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The first thing that it reveals is that the history narrated within these covers is the history of elite genres. For until very recent times, and in some ways even up to the present, literacy and its fruits have been the possession—the closely guarded and privileging (even life-saving) possession—of social elites: ecclesiastical, political, military, hereditary, meritocratic, professional, economic, educational, academic, fashionable, even criminal. What else, after all, makes high art high? The casting of the story as the story of the literate culture of music turns it willy-nilly into a social history—a contradictory social history in which progressive broadening of access to literacy and its attendant cultural perquisites (the history, as it has sometimes been called, of the democratization of taste), is accompanied at every turn by a counterthrust that seeks to redefine elite status (and its attendant genres) ever upward. As most comprehensively documented by Pierre Bourdieu, consumption of cultural goods (and music, on Bourdieu's showing, above all) is one of the primary means of social classification (including self-classification)—hence, social division—and (familiar proverbs notwithstanding) one of the liveliest sites of dispute in Western culture.<sup>4</sup> Most broadly, contestations of taste occur across lines of class division, and are easiest to discern between proponents of literate genres and nonliterate ones; but within and among elites they are no less potent, no less heated, and no less decisively influential on the course of events. Taste is one of the sites of contention to which this book gives extensive, and, I would claim, unprecedented coverage, beginning with chapter 4 and lasting to the bitter end.

Indeed, if one had to be nominated, I would single out social contention as embodied in words and deeds—what cultural theorists call “discourse” (and others call “buzz” or “spin”)—as the paramount force driving this narrative. It has many arenas. Perhaps the most conspicuous is that of meaning, an area that was for a long time considered virtually off limits to professional scholarly investigation, since it was naively assumed to be a nonfactual domain inasmuch as music lacks the semantic (or “propositional”) specificity of literature or even painting. But musical meaning is no more confinable to matters of simple semantic paraphrase than any other sort of meaning. Utterances are deemed meaningful (or not) insofar as they trigger associations, and in the absence of association no utterance is intelligible. Meaning in this book is taken to represent the full range of associations encompassed by locutions such as “If that is true, it means that ...,” or “that's what M-O-T-H-E-R means to me,” or, simply, “know what I mean?” It covers implications, consequences, metaphors, emotional attachments, social attitudes, proprietary interests, suggested possibilities, motives, significance (as distinguished from signification)...and simple semantic paraphrase, too, when that is relevant.

And while it is perfectly true that semantic paraphrases of music are never “factual,” their assertion is indeed a social fact—one that belongs to a category of historical fact of the most vital importance, since such facts are among the clearest connectors of musical history to the history of everything else. Take for example the current impassioned debate over the meaning of Dmitry Shostakovich's music, with all of its insistent claims and counterclaims. The assertion that Shostakovich's music reveals him to be a political dissident is only an opinion, as is the opposite claim, that his music shows him to have been a “loyal musical son of the Soviet Union”—as, for that matter, is the alternative claim that his music has no light to shed on the question of his personal political allegiances. And yet the fact that such assertions are advanced with passion is a powerful testimony to the social and political role Shostakovich's music has played in the world, both during his lifetime and (especially) after his death, when the Cold War was playing itself out. Espousing a particular position in the debate is no business of the historian. (Some readers may know that I have espoused one as a critic; I would like to think that readers who do not know my position will not discover it here.) But to report the debate in its full range, and draw relevant implications from it, is the historian's ineluctable duty. That report includes the designation of what elements within the sounding composition have triggered the associations—a properly historical sort of analysis that is particularly abundant in the present narrative. Call it semiotics if you will.

But of course semiotics has been much abused. It is an old vice of criticism, and lately of scholarship, to assume that the meaning of artworks is fully vested in them by their creators, and is simply “there” to be decoded by a specially gifted interpreter. That assumption can lead to gross errors. It is what vitiated the preposterously overrated work of Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno, and what has caused the work of the “new musicologists” of the 1980s and 1990s. Adornians to a man and woman, to go with such stunning resolute-

It is, all pretenses aside, still an authoritarian discourse and an asocial one. It still grants oracular privilege to the creative genius and his prophets, the gifted interpreters. It is altogether unacceptable as a historical method, although it is part of history and, like everything else, deserving of report. The historian's trick is to shift the question from "What does it mean?" to "What has it meant?" That move is what transforms futile speculation and dogmatic polemic into historical illumination. What it illuminates, in a word, are the *stakes*, both "theirs" and "ours."

Not that all meaningful discourse about music is semiotic. Much of it is evaluative. And value judgments, too, have a place of honor in historical narratives, so long as they are not merely the historian's judgment (as Francis Bacon was already presciently aware). Beethoven's greatness is an excellent case in point because it will come in for so much discussion in the later volumes of this book. As such, the notion of Beethoven's greatness is "only" an opinion. To assert it as a fact would be the sort of historians' transgression on which master narratives are built. (And because historians' transgressions so often make history, they will be given a lot of attention in the pages that follow.) But to say this much is already to observe that such assertions, precisely insofar as they are not factual, often have enormous performative import. Statements and actions predicated on Beethoven's perceived greatness are what constitute Beethoven's authority, which certainly is a historical fact—one that practically determined the course of late-nineteenth-century music history. Without taking it into account one can explain little of what went on in the world of literate music-making during that time—and even up to the present. Whether the historian agrees with the perception on which Beethoven's authority has been based is of no consequence to the tale, and has no bearing on the historian's obligation to report it. That report constitutes "reception history"—a relatively new thing in musicology, but (many scholars now agree) of equal importance to the production history that used to count as the whole story. I have made a great effort to give the two equal time, since both are necessary ingredients of any account that claims fairly to represent history.

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*Statements and actions* in response to real or perceived conditions: these are the essential facts of human history. The discourse, so often slighted in the past, is in fact the story. It creates new social and intellectual conditions to which more statements and actions will respond, in an endless chain of agency. The historian needs to be on guard against the tendency, or the temptation, to simplify the story by neglecting this most basic fact of all. No historical event or change can be meaningfully asserted unless its agents can be specified; and *agents can only be people*. Attributions of agency unmediated by human action are, in effect, lies—or at the very least, evasions. They occur inadvertently in careless historiography (or historiography that has submitted unawares to a master narrative), and are invoked deliberately in propaganda (i.e., historiography that consciously colludes with a master narrative). I adduce what I consider to be an example of each (and leave it to the reader to decide which, if any, is the honorable blunder and which the propaganda). The first comes from Pieter C. Van den Toorn's *Music, Politics, and the Academy*, a rebuttal of the so-called New Musicology of the 1980s.

The question of an engaging context is an aesthetic as well as an historical and analytic-theoretical one. And once individual works begin to prevail for what they are in and of themselves and not for what they represent, then context itself, as a reflection of this transcendence, becomes less dependent on matters of historical placement. A great variety of contexts can suggest themselves as attention is focused on the works, on the nature of both their immediacy and the relationship that is struck with the contemporary listener.<sup>5</sup>

The second is from the most recent narrative history of music published in America as of this writing, Mark Evan Bonds's *A History of Music in Western Culture*.

By the early 16th century, the rondeau, the last of the surviving *formes fixes* from the medieval era, had largely disappeared, replaced by more freely structured chansons based on the principle of pervading imitation. What emerged during the 1520s and 1530s were new approaches to setting vernacular texts: the Parisian chanson in France and the madrigal in Italy.



During the 1520s, a new genre of song, now known as the Parisian chanson emerged in the French capital. Among its most notable composers were Claudin de Sermisy (ca. 1490–1562) and Clément Jannequin (ca. 1485–ca. 1560), whose works were widely disseminated by the Parisian music publisher Pierre Attaignant. Reflecting the influence of the Italian frottola, the Parisian chanson is lighter and more chordally oriented than earlier chansons.<sup>6</sup>

This sort of writing gives everybody an alibi. All the active verbs have ideas or inanimate objects as subjects, and all human acts are described in the passive voice. Nobody is seen as *doing* (or deciding) anything. Even the composers in the second extract are not described in the act, but only as an impersonal medium or passive vehicle of “emergence.” Because nobody is doing anything, the authors never have to deal with motives or values, with choices or responsibilities, and that is their alibi. The second extract is a kind of shorthand historiography that inevitably devolves into inert survey, since it does nothing more than describe objects, thinking, perhaps, that is how one safeguards “objectivity.” The first extract commits a far more serious transgression, for it is ideologically committed to its impersonality. Its elimination of human agency is calculated to protect the autonomy of the work-object and actually prevent historical thinking, which the author evidently regards as a threat to the universality (in his thinking, the validity) of the values he upholds. It is an attempt, caught as it were in the act, to enforce what I call the Great Either/Or, the great bane of contemporary musicology.

The Great Either/Or is the seemingly inescapable debate, familiar to all academically trained musicologists (who have had to endure it in their fledgling proseminars), epitomized in the question made famous by Carl Dahlhaus (1928–89), the most prestigious German music scholar of his generation: Is art history the *history* of art, or is it the history of *art*? What a senseless distinction! What seemed to make it necessary was the pseudo-dialectical “method” that cast all thought in rigidly—and artificially—binarized terms: “Does music mirror the reality surrounding a composer, *OR* does it propose an alternative reality? Does it have common roots with political events and philosophical ideas; *OR* is music written simply because music has always been written and not, or only incidentally, because a composer is seeking to respond with music to the world he lives in?” These questions all come from the second chapter of Dahlhaus’s *Foundations of Music History*, the title of which—“The significance of art: historical or aesthetic?”—is yet another forced dichotomy. The whole chapter, which has achieved in its way the status of a classic, consists, throughout, of a veritable salad of empty binarisms.<sup>7</sup>

This sort of thinking has long been seen through—except, it seems, by musicologists. A scurrilous little tract—David Hackett Fischer’s *Historians’ Fallacies*—that graduate students of my generation liked to read (often aloud, to one another) behind our professors’ backs includes it under the rubric “Fallacies of Question-Framing,” and gives an unforgettable example: “Basil of Byzantium: Rat or Fink?” (“Maybe,” the author comments, “Basil was the very model of a modern ratfink.”<sup>8</sup>) There is nothing *a priori* to rule out both/and rather than either/or. Indeed, if it is true that production and reception history are of equal and interdependent importance to an understanding of cultural products, then it must follow that types of analysis usually conceived in mutually exclusive “internal” and “external” categories can and must function symbiotically. That is the assumption on which this book has been written, reflecting its author’s refusal to choose between *this* and *that*, but rather to embrace this, that, and the other.

Reasons for the long if lately embattled dominance of internalist models for music history in the West (a dominance that in large part accounts for Dahlhaus’s otherwise inexplicable prestige) have more than two centuries of intellectual history behind them, and I shall try to illuminate them at appropriate points. But a comment is required up front about the special reasons for their dominance in the recent history of the discipline—reasons having to do with the Cold War, when the general intellectual atmosphere was excessively polarized (hence binarized) around a pair of seemingly exhaustive and totalized alternatives. The only alternative to strict internalist thinking, it then seemed, was a discourse that was utterly corrupted by totalitarian cooption. Admit a social purview, it then seemed, and you were part of the Communist threat to the integrity (and the freedom) of the creative individual. In Germany, Dahlhaus was cast as the dialectical antithesis to Georg Knepler, his equally magisterial East German counterpart.<sup>9</sup> Within his own geographical and political milieu, then, his ideological commitments were acknowledged.<sup>10</sup> In the English-speaking

countries, where Knepler was practically unknown, Dahlhaus's influence was more pernicious because he was assimilated, quite erroneously, to an indigenous scholarly pragmatism that thought itself ideologically uncommitted, free of theoretical preconceptions, and therefore capable of seeing things as they actually are. That, too, was of course a fallacy (Fischer calls it, perhaps unfairly, the "Baconian fallacy"). We all acknowledge now that our methods are grounded in and guided by theory, even if our theories are not consciously preformulated or explicitly enunciated.

And so this narrative has been guided. Its theoretical assumptions and consequent methodology—the cards I am in process of laying on the table—were, as it happens, not preformulated; but that did not make them any less real, or lessen their potency as enablers and constraints. By the end of writing I was sufficiently self-aware to recognize the kinship between the methods I had arrived at and those advocated in *Art Worlds*, a methodological conspectus by Howard Becker, a sociologist of art. Celebrated among sociologists, the book has not been widely read by musicologists, and I discovered it after my own work was finished in first draft.<sup>11</sup> But a short description of its tenets will round out the picture I am attempting to draw of the premises on which this book rests, and a reading of Becker's book will, I think, be of conceptual benefit not only to the readers of this book, but also to the writers of others.

An "art world," as Becker conceives it, is the ensemble of agents and social relations that it takes to produce works of art (or maintain artistic activity) in various media. To study art worlds is to study processes of collective action and mediation, the very things that are most often missing in conventional musical historiography. Such a study tries to answer in all their complexity questions like "What did it take to produce Beethoven's Fifth?" Anyone who thinks that the answer to that question can be given in one word—"Beethoven"—needs to read Becker (or, if one has the time, this book). But of course no one who has reflected on the matter at all would give the one-word answer. Bartók gave a valuable clue to the kind of account that truly explains when he commented dryly that Kodály's *Psalmus Hungaricus* "could not have been written without Hungarian peasant music. (Neither, of course, could it have been written without Kodály.)"<sup>12</sup> An explanatory account describes the dynamic (and, in the true sense, dialectical) relationship that obtains between powerful agents and mediating factors: institutions and their gatekeepers, ideologies, patterns of consumption and dissemination involving patrons, audiences, publishers and publicists, critics, chroniclers, commentators, and so on practically indefinitely until one chooses to draw the line.

Where shall it be drawn? Becker begins his book with a piquant epigraph that engages the question head-on, leading him directly to his first, most crucial theoretical point: namely, that "all artistic work, like all human activity, involves the joint activity of a number, often a large number, of people, through whose cooperation the art work we eventually see or hear comes to be and continues to be." The epigraph comes from the autobiography of Anthony Trollope:

It was my practice to be at my table every morning at 5:30 a.m.; and it was also my practice to allow myself no mercy. An old groom, whose business it was to call me, and to whom I paid £5 a year extra for the duty, allowed himself no mercy. During all those years at Waltham Cross he was never once late with the coffee which it was his duty to bring me. I do not know that I ought not to feel that I owe more to him than to any one else for the success I have had. By beginning at that hour I could complete my literary work before I dressed for breakfast.<sup>13</sup>

Quite a few coffee porters, so to speak, will figure in the pages that follow, as will agents who enforce conventions (and, occasionally, the law), mobilize resources, disseminate products (often altering them in the process), and create reputations. All of them are at once potential enablers and potential constrainters, and create the conditions within which creative agents act. Composers will inevitably loom largest in the discussion despite all caveats, because theirs are the names on the artifacts that will be most closely analyzed. But the act of naming is itself an instrument of power, and a propagator of master narratives (now in a second, more literal, meaning), and it too must receive its meed of interrogation. The very first chapter in Volume I can stand as a model, in a sense, for the more realistic assessment of the place composers and compositions occupy in the general historical scheme: first, because it names no composers at all; and second, because before any musical artifacts are discussed, the story of their enabling is told at considerable

length—a story whose cast of characters includes kings, popes, teachers, painters, scribes and chroniclers, the latter furnishing a *Rashomon* choir of contradiction, disagreement and contention.

Another advantage of focusing on discourse and contention is that such a view prevents the lazy depiction of monoliths. The familiar “Frankfurt School” paradigm that casts the history of twentieth-century music as a simple two-sided battle between an avant-garde of heroic resisters and the homogenizing commercial juggernaut known as the Culture Industry is one of the most conspicuous and deserving victims of the kind of close observation encouraged here of the actual statements and actions of human agents (“real people”). Historians of popular music have shown over and over again that the Culture Industry has never been a monolith, and all it takes is the reading of a couple of memoirs—as witnesses, never as oracles—to make it obvious that neither was the avant-garde. Both imagined entities were in themselves sites of sometimes furious social contention, their discord breeding diversity; and paying due attention to their intramural dissensions will vastly complicate the depiction of their mutual relations.

If nothing else, this brief account of premises and methods, with its insistence on an eclectic multiplicity of approaches to observed phenomena and on greatly expanding the purview of what is observed, should help account for the extravagant length of this submission. As justification, I can offer only my conviction that the same factors that have increased its length have also, and in equal measure, increased its interest and its usefulness.

R. T.

El Cerrito, California

16 July 2008

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## Notes:

(1) Francis Bacon, *Of the Dignity and Advancement of Learning*, trans. James Spedder, in *The Works of Francis Bacon* (15 vols., Boston, 1857–82), Vol. VIII, pp. 419–20.

(2) Paris, 1961, trans. Rollo Myers as *40,000 Years of Music* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1964).

(3) Robert Walser, “Eruptions: Heavy Metal Appropriations of Classical Virtuosity,” *Popular Music*, II (1992): 265. The authority to which Walser appeals is Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

(4) Most relevantly for our present purposes in his *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987).

(5) Pieter C. van den Toorn, *Music, Politics, and the Academy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), p. 196.

(6) Mark Evan Bonds, *A History of Music in Western Culture* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2003), pp. 142–43.

(7) Carl Dahlhaus, *Foundations of Music History*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 19.

(8) David Hackett Fischer, *Historians’ Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1970), p. 10.

(9) See Anne C. Shreffler, “Berlin Walls: Dahlhaus, Knepler, and Ideologies of Music History,” *Journal of Musicology* XX (2003): 498–525.

(10) See James M. Hepokoski, "The Dahlhaus Project and Its Extra-Musicological Sources," *Nineteenth-Century Music* XIV (1990–91): 221–46.

(11) It was a book review by the British sociologist Peter Martin that put me on to Becker's work: "Over the Rainbow? On the Quest for 'the Social' in Musical Analysis," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* CXXVII (2002): 130–46.

(12) Béla Bartók, "The Influence of Peasant Music on Modern Music," in Piero Weiss and Richard Taruskin, *Music in the Western World: A History in Documents* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1984), p. 448.

(13) Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), p. 1.

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

# CHAPTER 1 The Curtain Goes Up

## “Gregorian” Chant, The First Literate Repertory, And How It Got That Way

Chapter: CHAPTER 1 The Curtain Goes Up

Source: MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

## LITERACY

Our story begins, as it must, in the middle of things. The beginning of music writing in the West—which not only made history possible, but in large part determined its course—coincided with no musical event. Still less did it mark the origin of music, or of any musical repertory.

Something over a thousand years ago music in the West stopped being (with negligible exceptions) an exclusively oral tradition and became a partly literate one. This was, from our perspective, an enormously important change. The beginning of music writing gives us access through actual musical documents to the repertoires of the past and suddenly raises the curtain, so to speak, on developments that had been going on for centuries. All at once we are witnesses of a sort, able to trace the evolution of music with our own eyes and ears. The development of musical literacy also made possible all kinds of new ideas about music. Music became visual as well as aural. It could occupy space as well as time. All of this had a decisive impact on the styles and forms music would later assume. It would be hard for us to imagine a greater watershed in musical development.

At the time, however, it did not seem terribly important. There is not a single contemporary witness to the introduction of music writing in the West, and so we have only a rough idea of when it took place. Nobody thought of it then as an event worth recording, and that is because this innovation—momentous though it may appear in retrospect—was the entirely fortuitous by-product of political and military circumstances. These circumstances caused the music sung in the cathedral churches of Rome, the westernmost “see” or jurisdictional center of early Christendom, to migrate northward into areas that are now parts of France, Germany, Switzerland, and Austria. Musical notation arose in the wake of that migration.

The music thus imported during the eighth and ninth centuries—the first Western repertory to be notated as a coherent *corpus* or body of work—was not only sacred but liturgical. That is, it was set to the official Latin texts of Western Christian worship. It was not only vocal but monophonic, which is to say that it was sung by soloists or by chorus in unison, without accompaniment. From these facts it is easy to draw various false conclusions. It is easy to assume that in the West there was sacred music before there was secular, liturgical music before there was nonliturgical, vocal music before there was instrumental, and monophonic (single-voiced) music before there was polyphonic (multivoiced).

But Roman church chant was only one of many musical repertoires that coexisted in Europe a thousand years ago. It is the first repertory that, thanks to notation, we can study in detail, and so our story must inevitably begin with it. And yet we know from literary and pictorial sources that there was plenty of secular and instrumental music at the time, as well as non-Christian worship music, and that these repertoires had long histories going back long before the beginnings of Christian worship. We have every reason to assume, moreover, that much of the music sung and played in Europe had for centuries been polyphonic—that is, employing some sort of harmony or counterpoint or accompanied melody.

The fact that eighth-century Roman liturgical song—*cantus* in Latin, from which we get the word

“chant”—was singled out for preservation in written form had nothing to do with musical primacy, or even with musical quality. The privilege came about, as already implied, for reasons having nothing to do with music at all. It will not be the last time such “extramusical” factors will play a decisive role in our account of musical history. That history, like the history of any art, is the story of a complex and fascinating interaction of internal and external influences.

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Old Roman chant

# THE ROMANS AND THE FRANKS

**Chapter:** CHAPTER 1 The Curtain Goes Up

**Source:** MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

**Author(s):** Richard Taruskin

Late in the year 753, Pope Stephen II, accompanied by a large retinue of cardinals and bishops, did something no previous Roman pope had done. He crossed the Alps and paid a visit to Pepin III, known as Pepin the Short, the king of the Franks. They met on 6 January 754 at Pepin's royal estate, located at Ponthion, near the present-day city of Vitry-le-François on the river Marne, some 95 miles from Paris in what is now northeastern France. (France, then the western part of the Frankish kingdom, went in those days by the Roman name of Gaul; the country's modern name is derived from that of the people Pepin ruled.)

The pope was coming as a supplicant. The Lombards, a Germanic tribe whose territories reached from what is now Hungary into northern Italy, had conquered Ravenna, the capital of the Western Byzantine (Greek Christian) Empire, and were threatening Rome. Stephen asked Pepin, who three years earlier had concluded a mutual assistance pact with his predecessor Zacharias, to intercede on his behalf. When Pepin agreed to honor his earlier commitment, Stephen went with him to the cathedral city of Saint-Denis, just north of Paris, and cemented their covenant by officially declaring Pepin and his heirs to be honorary "Roman patricians" and recognizing them as the legitimate hereditary rulers of the united kingdom of the Franks, which encompassed (in addition to France) most of present-day Germany, Switzerland, and Austria, in addition to smaller territories now belonging to Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, and the Czech Republic. This ceremony inaugurated the Carolingian dynasty, which for the next two centuries would remain the most powerful ruling house in Europe.



fig. 1-1 Europe in the eighth century, shortly before the earliest notations of Christian chant.

Pepin duly invaded Italy. He not only successfully defended Rome but also wrested Ravenna and its surrounding territories back from Aistulf, the Lombard king. Ignoring the claims of the Byzantine emperor, Pepin made a gift of these territories to the pope; they became the so-called “Papal States,” which were administered by the Roman see as an independent country, with the pope as temporal ruler, until the unification of Italy in the nineteenth century. (The immediate territory around St. Peter’s Church in Rome—a few city blocks known as Vatican City—is still recognized internationally as a temporal state, the world’s smallest.) The Carolingian king and the Roman pope thus became political and military allies, pledged to mutual long-term support.

Thus, when in 773 Desiderius, a later Lombard king, made renewed forays against Adrian I, a later pope, it was a foregone conclusion that Pepin’s son and successor Charles I, known as Charlemagne (“Charles the Great”), would intervene. Charlemagne did even better than his father, defeating the Lombards in Italy on their own ground and incorporating their kingdom into his own. After yet another intervention, this time on behalf of Adrian’s successor, Pope (later Saint) Leo III, Charlemagne entered Rome in triumph and was crowned by Leo on Christmas Day, 800 CE, as temporal ruler (with Leo as spiritual ruler) of the reconstituted Western Roman Empire. This date is traditionally said to inaugurate the so-called “Holy Roman Empire,” which lasted—in name, anyway—until the early nineteenth century. (The actual title Holy Roman Emperor was first assumed by Otto I, crowned in 962.)



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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

# THE CAROLINGIAN RENAISSANCE

**Chapter:** CHAPTER 1 The Curtain Goes Up

**Source:** MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

**Author(s):** Richard Taruskin

The nexus of imperial and papal authority thus achieved ushered in a short period comparable to the *pax romana* ("Roman peace") of late antiquity, in which the existence of an invincible and unchallengeable state brought about an era of relative political stability in Europe. Until the partition of Charlemagne's Empire in 843, the only significant changes in the map of Europe were those that marked the Empire's expansion, which reached a peak around 830. The period from the 780s, when Charlemagne finally gained the upper hand in a protracted, savage war with the pagan Saxons to the east, into the reign of his son and successor Louis I (known as Louis the Pious, reigned 814–840), was devoted to the consolidation of centralized power within the Carolingian domains. In 812, two years before his death, Charlemagne had the satisfaction of being formally recognized as an equal by the Byzantine Emperor Michael I, whose imperial lineage, unlike Charlemagne's, reached back into antiquity.

This interval of stability enabled a spectacular rebirth of the arts of peace, particularly at Charlemagne's courts at Aachen (or Aix-la-Chapelle), now in westernmost Germany, and Metz (or Messins), in northeastern France. This happy period for learning and creativity, purchased by a period of endless battles, forced migrations and conversions, and genocidal massacres, is known as the Carolingian Renaissance.

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Plainchant

Alcuin

# THE CHANT COMES NORTH

**Chapter:** CHAPTER 1 The Curtain Goes Up

**Source:** MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

**Author(s):** Richard Taruskin

The importing of the Roman chant to the Frankish lands was one of the many facets of that Renaissance, during which all kinds of art products and techniques, from Ravenna-style architecture to manuscript illumination, were brought north from Italy to France and the British Isles, and all kinds of administrative, legal, and canonical practices were standardized. The central figure in this process was an English scholar, Alcuin or Albinus of York (ca. 735–804), whom Charlemagne invited to Aachen around 781 to set up a cathedral school.

A great proponent of literacy, Alcuin instituted one of the earliest systems of elementary education in Europe. He also devised a curriculum for higher education based on the seven “liberal arts” of the ancients, so named because they were the arts practiced by “free men” (men of leisure, which is to say the rich and the well-born). They consisted of two basic courses: the three arts of language (grammar, logic, and rhetoric), known as the *trivium*, which led to the Bachelor of Arts degree, and the four arts of measurement (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music), known as the *quadrivium*, which led to the Master of Arts. (Doctoral studies were devoted to canon law and theology.) Within the quadrivium, music was conceived in entirely theoretical terms as an art of measurement: measurement of harmonic ratios (tunings and intervals) and of rhythmic quantities (the classical poetic meters). This made possible its academic study in the absence of any form of practical musical notation. As a university subject music continued for centuries to be studied in that generalized and speculative way, quite unrelated to actual singing or playing. And yet Alcuin’s zealous emphasis on writing things down became a Carolingian obsession that was eventually extended to practical music as well.

The reason the Roman chant needed to be imported had to do with the stress the Carolingians laid on centralization of authority, both worldly and ecclesiastical. The Carolingian territories were vast, incorporating peoples speaking many languages and a large assortment of local legal systems and liturgies. With the establishing of the Roman pope as spiritual patron of the Carolingian Empire, the liturgical unification of the whole broad realm according to the practices of the Roman See became imperative. It would symbolize the eternal order that undergirded the temporal authority of the Carolingian rulers and established their divine mandate.

This meant suppressing the so-called Gallican rite, the indigenous liturgy of the northern churches, and replacing it with Roman liturgical texts and tunes. “As King Pepin, our parent of blessed memory, once decreed that the Gallican be abolished,” Charlemagne ordered the Frankish clergy on 23 March 789, in a document known as the *Admonitio generalis* (“General advisory”), “be sure to emend carefully in every monastery and bishop’s house the psalms, notes, chants, calendar material, grammars, and the Epistles and Gospels. For often enough there are those who want to call upon God well, but because of poor texts they do it poorly.” The texts in question, of course, were texts to be sung, as all liturgical texts are sung (for one does not “call upon God” in the kind of voice one uses to converse with one’s neighbor). The words of the Roman liturgy could be imported easily enough in books, but in the absence of a way of writing down the tunes, the only means of accomplishing the required “emendation” was to import cantors (ecclesiastical singers) from Rome who could teach their chant by laborious rote to their Frankish counterparts. Difficulty was

compounded by resistance. Each side blamed the other for failure. John the Deacon, an English monk writing on behalf of the Romans in 875, attributed it to northern baseness and barbarity. Notker Balbulus ("Notker the Stammerer"), the Frankish monk who wrote Charlemagne's first biography around the same time, attributed it to southern pride and chicanery.

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Old Roman chant

# THE LEGEND OF ST. GREGORY

**Chapter:** CHAPTER 1 The Curtain Goes Up

**Source:** MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

**Author(s):** Richard Taruskin

From these squabbles we can guess at the reason for a venerable legend that became attached to the Roman chant around the time of its advent into written history. It was then widely asserted that the entire musical legacy of the Roman church was the inspired creation of a single man, the sainted Pope Gregory I, who had reigned from 590 until his death in 604. John the Deacon's complaint about Frankish barbarism actually comes from his biography of the presumed author of the chant. "St. Gregory compiled a book of antiphons," John wrote, using the contemporary term for a kind of liturgical singing. "He founded a *schola*," the chronicler continued, using the contemporary term for a choir, "which to this day performs the chant in the Church of Rome according to his instructions; he also erected two dwellings for it, at St. Peter's and at the Lateran palace, where are venerated the couch from which he gave lessons in chant, the whip with which he threatened the boys, and the authentic antiphoner," the latter being the great book containing the music for the whole liturgical calendar.

That book could not have existed in St. Gregory's day, because there would have been no way of putting music into it. As Gregory's contemporary St. Isidore, Bishop of Seville (ca. 560–636), put it in his great encyclopedia called *Etymologiae* (or "Origins"), "Unless sounds are held in the memory by man they perish, because they cannot be written down." By the ninth century, however, the legend of Pope Gregory as composer of what has been known ever since as "Gregorian chant" was firmly in place. It was propagated not only in literary accounts like that of John the Deacon but also in an iconographic or pictorial tradition that adapted a motif already established in Roman illuminated manuscripts containing Gregory's famous Homilies, or sermons, on the biblical books of Job and Ezekiel. According to this tradition, the pope, while dictating his commentary, often paused for a long time. His silences puzzled the scribe, who was separated from Gregory by a screen. Peeping through, the scribe beheld the dove of the Holy Spirit hovering at the head of St. Gregory, who resumed his dictation only when the dove removed its beak from his mouth. (It is from such representations of divine inspiration that we get our expression, "A little bird told me.")

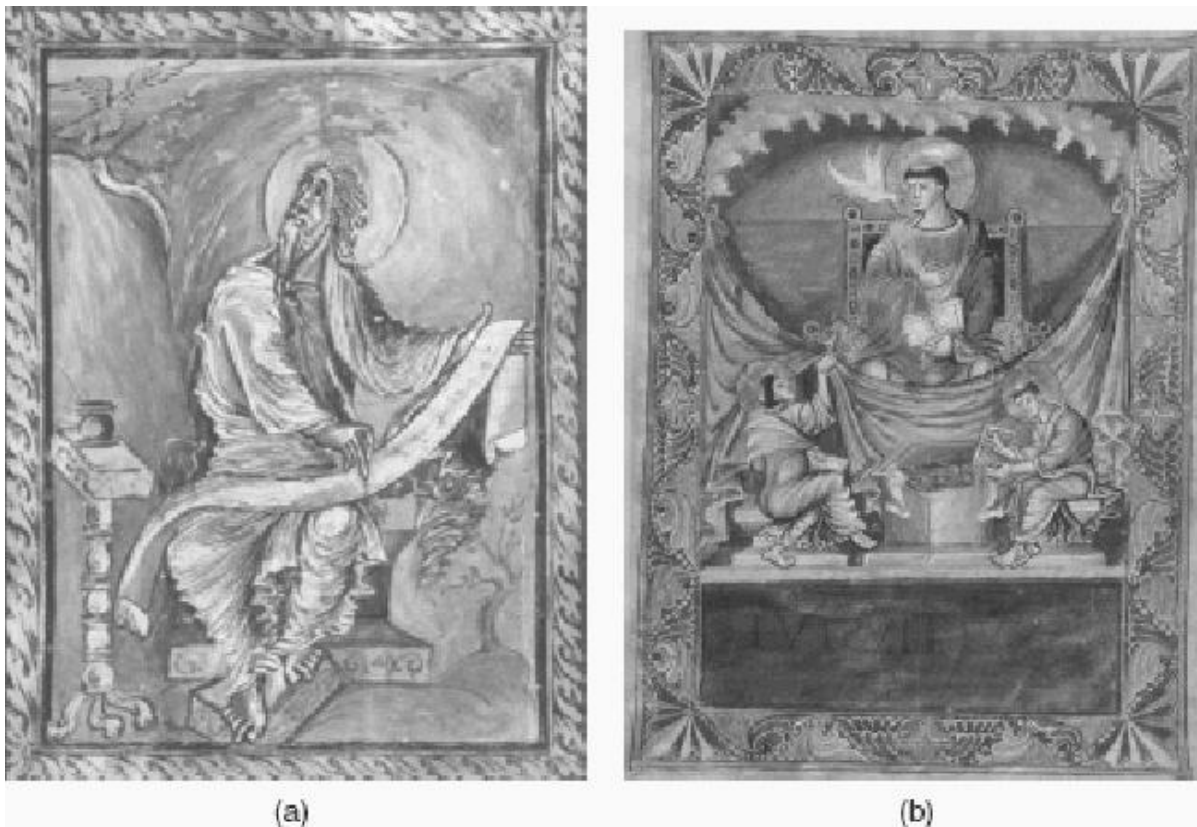


fig. 1-2 Two Carolingian manuscript illustrations showing divinely inspired authors at work. (a) In this illustration, from the so-called Gospel Book of Ebbo (first quarter of the ninth century), St. John is receiving the Gospel from the Holy Spirit in the guise of a dove. (b) This illustration, dating from about half a century later, is one of the earliest representations of Pope Gregory I (Saint Gregory the Great), who is receiving the chant from the same source. It comes from a sacramentary, a book containing the prayers recited by the celebrant at a solemn Mass. Charlemagne is known to have requested and received just such a book from Pope Hadrian I in 785.

These pictures are again found in early written antiphoners, or chant books, which began appearing in the Carolingian territories during the eighth century. Such books were generally headed by a prologue, which in the ninth century was occasionally even set to music to be sung as a “trope” or preface to the first chant in the book. *Gregorius Praesul*, it read in part, *composuit hunc libellum musicae artis scholae cantorum*: “Gregory, presiding [over the Church], composed [or, possibly, just ‘put together’] this little book of musical art of the singers’ choir.” Thus the legend of St. Gregory’s authorship was closely bound up with the earliest notation of the chant, suggesting that the two phenomena were related.

In fact both inventions, that of the legend and that of musical notation in the Christian west, were mothered by the process of musical migration decreed by the Carolingian kings. The legend was a propaganda ploy contrived to persuade the northern churches that the Roman chant was better than theirs. As a divine creation, mediated through an inspired, canonized human vessel, the Roman chant would have the prestige it needed to triumph eventually over all local opposition.

Gregory I was chosen as the mythical author of the chant, it is now thought, because many of the leading intellectual lights of the Carolingian court—like Alcuin and his predecessor St. Boniface (675–754), the reformer, under Pepin, of the Frankish church—were English monks who venerated St. Gregory as the greatest Christian missionary to England. (It was Alcuin’s teacher, Bishop Egbert of York, who first referred to the Roman liturgy as “Gregory’s antiphoner.”) To this great figure, already reputed to be a divinely inspired author, these English writers may have attributed the work of his successor Pope Gregory II (reigned 715–731), who, it seems, really did have something to do with drawing up the standard Roman

liturgical books some decades before their export north.

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online

Gregorian chant

Psalm

Music of the early Christian church

# THE ORIGINS OF GREGORIAN CHANT

**Chapter:** CHAPTER 1 The Curtain Goes Up

**Source:** MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

**Author(s):** Richard Taruskin

But of course neither did Gregory II actually compose the “Gregorian” chants. No one person did. It was a huge collective and anonymous enterprise that seems to have achieved standardization in Rome by the end of the eighth century. But what were its origins? Until very recently it was assumed as a matter of course that the origins of Christian liturgical music went back, like the rest of Christian practice and belief, to the “sacred bridge” connecting the Christian religion with Judaism, out of which it had originated as a heresy. The textual contents of the Gregorian antiphoner consisted overwhelmingly of psalm verses, and the recitation of psalms, along with other scriptural readings, is to this day a common element of Jewish and Christian worship.

It turns out, however, that neither the psalmody of the Christian liturgy nor that of today’s synagogue service can be traced back to pre-Christian Jewish worship, let alone to Old Testament times. Pre-Christian Jewish psalmody centered around temple rites that came to an end when the temple itself was destroyed by the Romans in 70 ce. One has only to read some famous passages from the psalms themselves, as well as other biblical texts, to become aware of this disjuncture. Psalm 150, the climax of the Psalter, or Book of Psalms, is in fact a description of ancient temple psalmody—singing God’s praises—in fullest swing. It reads, in part:

- Praise him with fanfares on the trumpet,
- praise him upon the lute and harp;
- praise him with tambourines and dancing,
- praise him with flute and strings;
- praise him with the clash of cymbals,
- praise him with triumphant cymbals;
- let everything that has breath praise the lord!

One will not find such goings-on in any contemporary Catholic church or synagogue; nor were they ever part of pre-Reformation Christian worship. (The Eastern Orthodox church, in fact, expressly bans the ritual use of instruments, and does so on the basis of the last line of this very psalm, for instruments do not have “breath,” that is, a soul.) Nor can one find today much reflection of the “antiphonal” manner of psalmody described in the Bible, despite the later Christian appropriation (in modified form and with modified meaning) of the word “antiphon.”

In its original meaning, antiphonal psalmody implied the use of two choirs answering each to each, as most famously described in the high priest Nehemiah’s account of the dedication of the Jerusalem walls in 445 bce, when vast choirs (and orchestras!) mounted the walls on opposite sides of the city gates and made a joyful noise unto the Lord. The verse structure of the psalms themselves, consisting of paired *hemistichs*, half-lines that state a single thought in different words (as in the extract above), suggests that antiphony was their original mode of performance.

And yet although it was (and remains) the central musical activity in Jewish worship services, psalmody



was—perhaps surprisingly—not immediately transferred from Jewish worship to Christian. It does not figure in the earliest accounts of Christian worship, such as Justin Martyr’s description of the Sunday Eucharist (ritual of blessings) or Lord’s Supper, later known as the communion service or Mass, at Rome sometime around the middle of the second century. Justin mentions readings from the prophets and apostles, sermons, prayers, and acclamations, but no psalms. In short, there is nothing in the earliest descriptions of Christian worship to correspond with the later repertory of Gregorian chant. That repertory was not a direct inheritance from Christianity’s parent religion. It originated elsewhere, and later.

Exactly when cannot be pinpointed, but psalmody had entered the Christian worship service by the beginning of the fifth century, when the Spanish nun Egeria sent a letter back home from Jerusalem describing the services she had witnessed in the oldest and holiest Christian see. “Before cockcrow,” she wrote, “all the doors of the church are opened and all the monks and nuns come down, and not only they, but also those lay people, men and women, who wish to keep vigil at so early an hour. From that time until it is light, hymns are sung and psalms responded to, and likewise antiphons; and with every hymn there is a prayer.”

The important points to note are two: it is a night service (or office) that is being described, and it is primarily a monastic gathering, even though the laity has been admitted. The origins of Christian psalmody, hence the earliest intimations of Gregorian chant, lie not in the very public worship of the Jewish temple, but in the secluded vigils of the early Christian ascetics.<sup>1</sup>

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## Notes:

(1) This account follows that of Richard Crocker in R. Crocker and D. Hiley, eds., *The New Oxford History of Music*, Vol. II (2nd ed., Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 121–23.

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online

Psalm: Biblical and early Christian period

# MONASTIC PSALMODY

Chapter: CHAPTER 1 The Curtain Goes Up

Source: MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Christian monasticism arose in the fourth century in reaction to the church's worldly success following its establishment as the official religion of the late Roman empire. Whereas earlier the Christians were persecuted in Rome for their pacificism and their contempt for temporal authority, now, as the custodian of an imperial state religion, the Christian church itself took on the attributes of an imperium. Its clergy was organized into a steep hierarchy. That clerical hierarchy, in turn, put forth an elaborate theology and an enforceable canon law, and modified the church's teachings so as to support the needs of the temporal state that supported it, needs that included the condoning of legal executions and military violence. The state Christian church could no longer afford the pure pacificism it had espoused when it was a persecuted minority. Indeed, it now became itself a persecutor of heretics.



fig. 1-3 Early Christian monastic centers.

In the face of this increasingly pompous and official ecclesiastical presence in the world, an increasing number of Christian enthusiasts advocated flight from the city, retreating into a solitary and simple life more consonant, in their view, with the original teachings of Christ. Some, like the Egyptian hermit St. Anthony the Abbot (ca. 250–350), established colonies of anchorites devoted to solitary prayer and mortification of the flesh. Others, like St. Basil (ca. 330–379), the Bishop of Caesarea, the Roman capital of Palestine (now

Kayseri in central Turkey), conceived of monastic life not in eremitic terms but in terms of *koinobios* —ascetic communal living devoted to pious, meditative fellowship and productive work.

It was in such a communal context that the psalmodic practices arose that would eventually produce the Gregorian chant. An important aspect of the monastic regimen was staying up at night, a discipline known as the vigil. To help them keep awake and to assist their meditations, monks would read and recite constantly, chiefly from the Bible, and particularly from the Psalter. The standard practice, eventually turned into a rule, was to recite the Psalter in an endless cycle, somewhat in the manner of a mantra, to distract the mind from physical appetites, to fill the back of the mind with spiritually edifying concepts so as to free the higher levels of consciousness (the *intellectus*, as it was called) for mystical enlightenment. In the words of St. Basil himself:

A psalm implies serenity of soul; it is the author of peace, which calms bewildering and seething thoughts. For it softens the wrath of the soul, and what is unbridled it chastens. A psalm forms friendships, unites those separated, conciliates those at enmity. Who, indeed, can still consider him an enemy with whom he has uttered the same prayer to God? So that psalmody, bringing about choral singing, a bond, as it were, toward unity, and joining the people into a harmonious union of one choir, produces also the greatest of blessings, charity.<sup>2</sup>

Half a century after St. Basil wrote these words, St. John Chrysostom, an eminent Greek church father, confirmed the triumph of psalmody, the musical legacy of David, the biblical Orpheus, who like his Greek mythological counterpart could miraculously affect the soul with his singing:

In church when vigils are observed David is first, middle and last. At the singing of the morning canticles David is first, middle, and last. At funerals and burials of the dead again David is first, middle, and last. O wondrous thing! Many who have no knowledge of letters at all nonetheless know all of David and can recite him from beginning to end.<sup>3</sup>

Christian psalmody emphasized not metaphors of wealth and exuberance (the orchestras, dancers, and multiple choirs of the Temple) but metaphors of community and discipline, both symbolized at once by unaccompanied singing in unison. That remained the Gregorian ideal, although the community of worshipers was replaced in the more public repertory of the Mass by the specially trained and eventually professional *schola*. Monophony was thus a choice, not a necessity. It reflects not the primitive origins of music (as the chant's status as oldest surviving repertory might all too easily suggest) but the actual rejection of earlier practices, both Judaic and pagan, that were far more elaborate and presumably polyphonic.

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## Notes:

(2) St. Basil, *Exegetic Homilies*, trans. S. Agnes Clare Way, *The Fathers of the Church*, Vol. XLVI (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1963), p. 152.

(3) Martin Gerbert, ed., *De cantu et musica sacra*, Vol. I, trans. R. Taruskin (St. Blasien, 1774), p. 64.

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

**See also from Grove Music Online**

Music of the early Christian church

Benedictine monks

Divine Office

Vespers

# THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LITURGY

**Chapter:** CHAPTER 1 The Curtain Goes Up

**Source:** MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

**Author(s):** Richard Taruskin

One of the first steps toward organizing the ceaseless cyclic psalm-chanting of early monastic vigils into a liturgy—that is, a prescribed order—was taken by St. Benedict of Nursia in his famous *Regula monachorum*, the book of rules that governed the lives of the monks in the monastery Benedict founded at Monte Cassino in 529. With apologies for the laxity of his ordinance, he required that the Psalter be recited not in a single marathon bout but in a weekly round or *cursus* of monastic Offices, eight each day. The greatest single portion went to the Night Office (now called *matins*, literally “wee hours”), in which twelve or more full psalms were performed, grouped by threes or fours (together with prayers and readings from scripture) in large subdivisions known as “nocturns.”

The Night Office, traditionally the primary site of psalmodic chanting, thus accounted for roughly half of the weekly round of psalms. It being the most spacious of the monastic services (since there was nothing else to do at night but sing or sleep), many psalms were sung, and the lessons were framed by lengthy *responsoria* (responsories)—chants sung in a more expansive style in which individual syllables could be sung to two, three, four, or more notes, even whole cascades called melismas.

Melismatic singing was held by Christian mystics to be the highest form of religious utterance: “It is a certain sound of joy without words,” St. Augustine wrote of melismatic chanting in the fourth century, “the expression of a mind poured forth in joy.”<sup>4</sup> It came to be called jubilated singing, after *jubilus*, Latin for a “call” upon God (as in Charlemagne’s *Admonitio*, quoted earlier; compare the root *ju-*, pronounced “yoo,” as in “yoo-hoo!”). This musical jubilation, in fact, was the means through which the Latin word took on its secondary (in English borrowings, primary) association with joy.

The jubilated singing at matins was a lusher version of the refrains that were added to psalms—together with a concluding *doxology* (from the Greek for “words of praise”) to the Holy Trinity—in their other Christian uses. These simpler refrains were called antiphons, possibly because they alternated with the psalm verses in a manner that recalled biblical multichoral antiphony.

The shorter services were the day offices. They began with the dawn office of praise (*Lauds*) and continued with four “minor hours” named after the clock hours in medieval parlance: *prime* (the first hour; in present-day terms, 6 a.m.), *terce* (the third hour, or 9 a.m.), *sext* (the sixth hour, or 12 noon), and *none* (the ninth hour, or 3 p.m.; the fact that our word noon derives from none is just one of those things). At these tiny services (often combined in pairs so that there would be more uninterrupted time for work), we can observe the liturgy in microcosm. At a minimum an office included a psalm, a scripture reading (“chapter” or *capitulum*), and a hymn, which was a metrical song of praise derived from Greek pagan practice, showing again how eclectic were the sources of the Christian liturgy that was once thought to descend in simple fashion from that of the temple and synagogue. St. Augustine’s definition of a hymn is neat:

A hymn is song with praise of God. If you praise God and do not sing, you do not utter a hymn. If you

sing and do not praise God, you do not utter a hymn. If you praise anything other than God, and if you sing these praises, still you do not utter a hymn. A hymn therefore has these three things: song, and praise, and God.<sup>5</sup>

The public liturgical day ended with evensong or Vespers, consisting of several full psalms with antiphons, along with the psalm-like “Canticle of Mary” (known as the *Magnificat* after its first word). There was a bedtime service for monks called *Compline* (completion), at which special elaborate antiphons (or “anthems,” to use the English cognate) came to be sung, in the later middle ages, to the Blessed Virgin as a plea for her intercession. (Compline and Lauds are the other services that contain canticles—texts from the New Testament that are sung in the same manner as psalms, with antiphons and doxology.)

Just as the liturgical day was a cycle of services, and the monastic week was a cycle of psalms, so the whole church calendar was organized in a yearly cycle of commemorations, known as feasts, that became ever more copious and diverse over time—wheels within wheels within wheels, within which Christian monastics lived out their lives, fulfilling the prophet’s mystical vision (see Ezekiel 1:15–21). The basic framework was provided by the Proper of the Time, or *temporale*, commemorating events in the life of Christ, organized in two great cycles surrounding the two biggest feasts, Christmas and Easter.

Their complicated relationship epitomizes the eclecticism of Christian worship. The Christmas cycle, beginning with four solemn weeks of preparation called Advent and ending with the feast of Epiphany, is reckoned by the Roman pagan (secular and solar) calendar. The Easter cycle, beginning with the forty-day fast called Lent and ending with the feast of Pentecost, is reckoned by the Jewish lunar calendar, as modified by councils of Christian bishops to insure that Easter fell on Sunday (*Dominica*—“the Lord’s Day”—in Latin). Since the date of Easter can vary by as much as a month relative to that of Christmas, the calendar allows for a variable number of Sundays after Epiphany (on one side of Easter) and Sundays after Pentecost (on the other) to take up the slack.

The church calendar also came to include a cycle of Saints’ commemorations (the *sanctorale*), a cycle of feasts of the Virgin Mary, and many other occasions as well, including special (so-called votive) occasions where prayers and offerings are made, such as weddings, funerals, or the dedication of a church. As official occasions were added to the calendar—and they continue, in a small way, to be added and deleted to this day—they had to be provided with appropriate texts and tunes. The actual book of psalms was fixed, of course, but the antiphons and responds drawn from it could vary; indeed they had to, for this was the primary means of differentiating the feasts. Antiphons and responds, then, became the primary site of new musical composition during the centuries in which the evolution of the chant was hidden behind the curtain of “oral tradition.” Antiphons remain, by and large, settings of psalm verses; but they are composites, made up of individual, freely selected verses that have some reference to the occasion. Selecting individual verses for setting as antiphons and responds is called the “stichic” principle (from the Greek for “verse”) as opposed to the “cursive” principle of complete cyclic readings. The stichic chants are not merely sung to a monotonous recitation “tone,” as in cursive psalmody, but are set as real melodies, the glory of the Gregorian repertory.

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## Notes:

(4) Jacques Paul Migne, ed., *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina*, Vol. XXXVII (Paris, 1853), p. 1953, trans. Gustave Reese in *Music of the Middle Ages* (New York: Norton, 1940), p. 64.

(5) Martin Gerbert, ed., *De cantu et musica sacra*, I, trans. R. Taruskin (St. Blasien, 1774), p. 74.

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Mass

# THE MASS AND ITS MUSIC

Chapter: CHAPTER 1 The Curtain Goes Up

Source: MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The greatest flowering of such liturgical “arias” came toward the end of the period of Gregorian oral composition, with the selection and completion of formularies—full sets of antiphons and responds—for the yearly round of Mass services.

The Mass is a public adaptation of the Christian counterpart, known as *agape* or “love feast,” of the Jewish Passover seder, the occasion of Christ’s last supper. It has two parts. The first, called the *synaxis* (“synagogue,” after the Greek for a meeting or assembly) or the Mass of the Catechumens, consists, like the synagogue service, of prayers and readings. It is an exoteric service, open to those who have not yet completed their religious instruction (known as *catechism*, whence *catechumen*, one undergoing indoctrination). The second, an esoteric service known as the Eucharist or the Mass of the Faithful, is closed to all who have not yet been baptized and consists of a reenactment of the last supper in which the congregation mystically ingests the blood and body of Christ in the form of miraculously transubstantiated wine and bread.

Mass was at first celebrated only on the Dominica and the Christian holidays, between the hours of terce and sext (i.e., around 10 a.m.). Later on, it came to be celebrated also on weekdays (*feriae* in Latin, whence “ferial” as opposed to “festal” Mass). Being a public service that incorporated a great deal of action, the Mass did not contain full cursive psalmody or hymns with their many *strophes* or stanzas. Instead, it featured short, stichic texts set to elaborate music; these short texts, assembled in large repertoires, articulated the “proper” identity of each occasion at which Mass was celebrated—feast, Sunday, or saint’s day.

An antiphon plus a verse or two accompanies the entrance of the celebrants, called the *Introit*. Between the two main *synaxis* readings or “lessons” (from Paul’s Epistles and from the Gospels, respectively) come the *Gradual*, named for the stairs by which the celebrants ascend to the pulpit from which the Gospel is read, and the *Alleluia*. These are the most ornate responds of all, with elaborately set verses for virtuoso soloists. Probably the oldest psalmodic chants specifically designed for the Mass, the lesson chants are said to have been introduced by Pope Celestine I, who reigned from 422 to 432. Antiphons then accompany the collection (Offertory) and the consummation of the Eucharist (Communion).

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# Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Gregorian chant

Neuma

Notation: History of Western notation

## NEUMES

**Chapter:** CHAPTER 1 The Curtain Goes Up

**Source:** MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

**Author(s):** Richard Taruskin

It is this special body of psalmodic chants for the Mass, consisting of about five hundred antiphons and responds, that is in strictest terms the repertory designated by the phrase “Gregorian chant.” It was this corpus that was imported by the Carolingian Franks under Pepin and Charlemagne and thus became the earliest music in the European tradition to be written down. The interesting thing, as we have already observed, is that this writing down, which seems to us such a momentous event, seems to have occasioned so little notice at the time.

There is not a single literary reference to document the invention of the so-called *neumes* that tracked the relative rise and fall of the tunes, and the placement within them of the text syllables, in the earliest musically notated (“neumated”) manuscripts. Etymologically, the word “neume,” which comes to us by way of medieval Latin from the Greek word *pneuma* (“breath,” whence vital spirit or soul), referred to a characteristic melodic turn such as may be sung on one breath. By now, however, the word more commonly denotes the written sign that represented such a turn. Since surviving antiphoners with neumes do not seem to date before the beginning of the tenth century, several generations after the Carolingian chant reform had been undertaken, scholarly speculation about the actual origins of the neumes and the date of their first employment has enjoyed a very wide latitude.

Traditionally, scholars assumed that the Carolingian neumes were an outgrowth of the “prosodic accents,” the signs—acute, grave, circumflex, etc.—that represented the inflection of poetry-recitation in late classical antiquity, and that still survive vestigially in the orthography of modern French. (As originally conceived, the acute accent meant a raising of the vocal pitch, the grave a lowering, the circumflex a raising-plus-lowering.) Others have proposed that the neumes were *cheironomic*: that is, graphic representations of the hand-signaling (*cheironomy*) by which choirmasters indicated to their singers the rise and fall of a melody. A more recent theory associates the neumes with a system of punctuation signs that the Franks seem to have developed by around 780—functional equivalents of commas, colons, question marks, and so on, which break up (parse) a written text into easily comprehended bits by governing the reader’s vocal inflections. All of these explanations assume that the neumes were parasitic on some earlier sign-system, and yet we have no actual basis in evidence to rule out the possibility that the neumes were independently invented in response to the immediate musical purpose at hand.

There were other early schemes for graphically representing music, some of them much older than the Carolingian neumes. Some did not even reflect melodic contour but were entirely arbitrary written signs that represented melodic formulas by convention, the way alphabet letters represent speech sounds. The ancient Greeks used actual alphabetic signs as musical notation. Alphabetic notation survived to a small extent in medieval music treatises, like that of the sixth-century encyclopedist Boethius, which formed the basis for music study within the *quadrivium* curriculum.

More familiar examples of special formula-signs for music, called *ecphonetic* neumes, include the so-called Masoretic accents (*ta’amim*) of Jewish biblical cantillation, which Jewish children are taught to this day in

preparation for their rite of passage to adulthood (*bar or bat mitzvah*), when they are called to the pulpit to read from scripture. To learn to read *ta'amim* one must have a teacher to instruct one orally in the matching of sign and sound. Such matching, being arbitrary, can vary widely from place to place, and also varies according to the occasion, or according to what kind of text is being read. The same signs, for example, will be musically realized one way in readings from the prophets and another, usually more ornate, in readings from the Pentateuch; the very same portion of Scripture, moreover, will be variously realized on weekdays, Sabbaths, or holidays.

The contour-based Carolingian neumes follow an entirely different principle of representation. It is the only system that has direct relevance to the history of Western music, because out of it developed the notation that is familiar to every reader of this book, the one that has served as graphic medium for practically all music composed in what we consider to be our own continuous (or at least traceable) musical tradition.

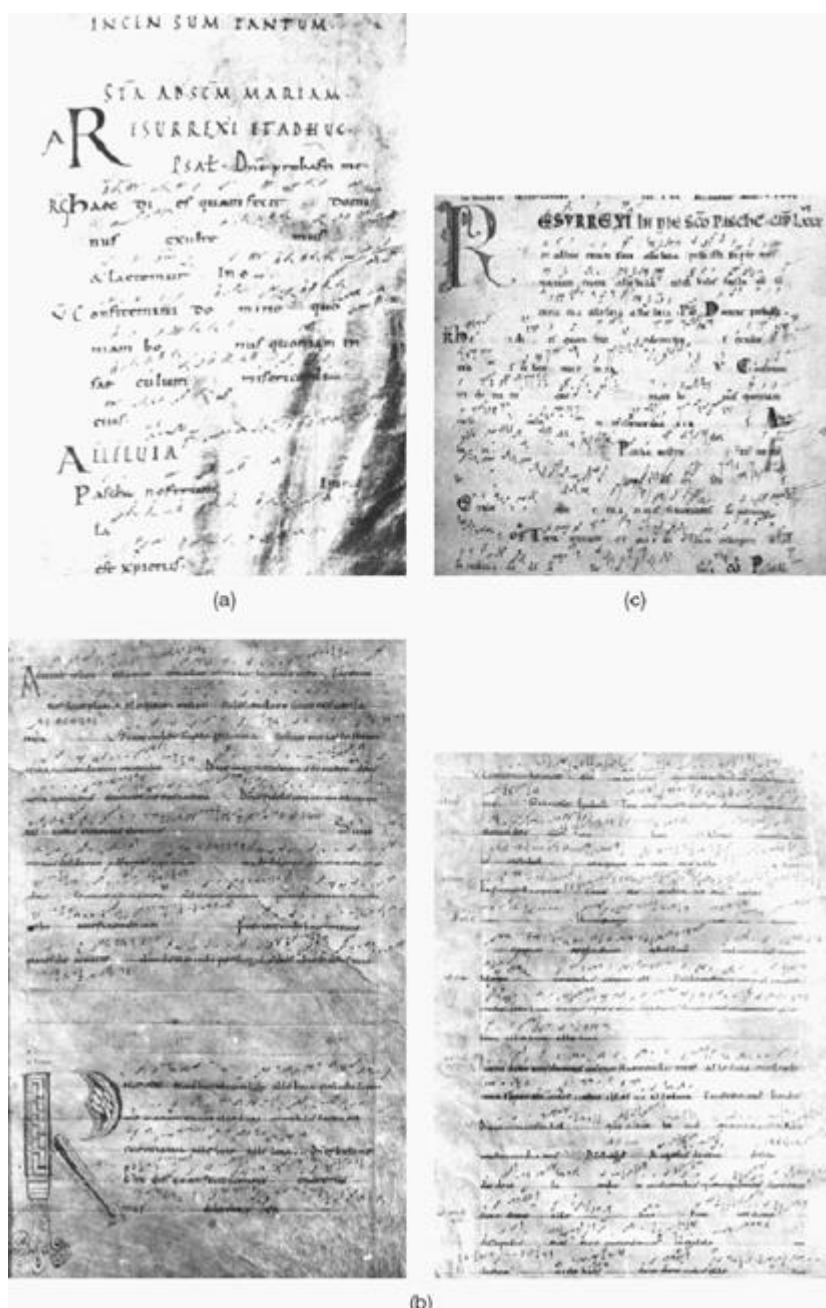


fig. 1-4 Easter Introit, *Resurrexi*, as it appears in three neumated manuscripts from the Frankish territories. (a) From a cantatorium, or soloist's chant book, prepared at the Swiss

monastery of St. Gallen early in the tenth century (before 920). (b) This may be the oldest version of the chant to have survived into modern times; it comes from a *graduale*, or book of chants for the Mass, prepared in Brittany in the late ninth or early tenth century and kept at the municipal library of Chartres, near Paris. It was destroyed toward the end of World War II. (c) From a *graduale* prepared perhaps 250 years later (early twelfth century) in the cathedral town of Noyon in northern France and kept today at the British Library in London. By this time the neumes might have been written on a staff to fix their pitches precisely, but the scribe did not avail himself of this notational innovation—indicating that the notation still served as a reminder to the singer of a melody learned orally and memorized.

עָשׂוֹ: <sup>23</sup>וְלֹא הִבִּירוּ כִּי־הָיוּ יָדָיו כְּדֵי עֲשׂוֹ אָחִיו שְׁעָרַת וַיְבָרְכֶהּ:  
<sup>24</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר אֵתָּה זֶה בְּנִי עֲשׂוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר אָנֹכִי: <sup>25</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר הַגֵּשָׁה לִּי וְאֶכְלָה  
מִצֵּיד בְּנִי לְמַעַן תְּבָרְכֶנָּה נַפְשִׁי וַיִּגְשָׁהּ לֹו וַיֹּאכַל וַיָּבֵא לוֹ יֶזֶן וַיִּשְׂתֶּ:  
<sup>26</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו יִצְחָק אָבִיו גְּשָׁה־נָּא וְשָׁקֶה־לִּי בְּנִי: <sup>27</sup>וַיִּגַּשׁ וַיִּשְׁקֶה־לוֹ  
וַיִּרַח אֶת־רִיחַ בְּנֵיָו וַיְבָרְכֶהּ וַיֹּאמֶר  
רֵאשִׁית רֵיחַ בְּנִי כְרִית שְׂדֵה אֲשֶׁר בָּרַכְו יְהוָה:

fig. 1-5 Passage from the Book of Genesis showing *ta'amim*, ecphonic neumes entered above or below each word in the Torah along with the vowels. Starting at the number 23 (remember that Hebrew is written from right to left), in the first word the neume is the right-angled corner below the middle letter; in the second word it is the dot above the last letter. In the hyphenated word that follows there are two neumes: the vertical dash below the first letter and the right angle under the penultimate letter. Unlike Gregorian neumes, *ta'amim* do not show melodic contour and must be learned orally by rote according to an arbitrary system that can vary from place to place, book to book, or occasion to occasion.

Some scholars think that the Carolingian neumes, in their very earliest application, were used not to notate the imported, sacrosanct Gregorian repertory, which was learned entirely by heart, but to notate lesser, newer, or local musical accessories to the canonical chant such as recitation formulas (known as “lection tones”) for scriptural readings, as well as the explanatory appendages and interpolations to the chant, including polyphonic ones, about which there will be more to say in the next chapter. (It is true that the earliest neumated sources for such “extra” items do predate the earliest surviving neumated antiphoners.) Other scholars assume that prototypes for the surviving Carolingian antiphoners once existed, perhaps dating from as early as the time of Charlemagne’s coronation as Emperor at the end of the eighth century, more than a century before the earliest surviving manuscripts were produced.<sup>6</sup>

Whenever the Carolingian neumes first appeared, whether before 800 or after 900, the fact remains that they shared the limitation of all the early neumatic systems: one cannot actually read a melody from them unless one knows it already. To read a previously unknown melody at sight, one needs at a minimum a means of precise intervallic (or relative-pitch) measurement. It was not until the early eleventh century that neumes were “heighted,” or arranged *diastematically*, on the lines and spaces of a cleffed staff (invented, according to tradition, by the monk Guido of Arezzo, whose treatise *Micrologus*, completed around 1028, included the earliest guide to staff notation). Only thereafter was it possible to record melodies in a way that could actually transmit them soundlessly.

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## Notes:

(6) For a summary of this controversy and a bibliography, see Kenneth Levy, "On Gregorian Orality," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* XLIII (1990): 185–227. The article, but not the bibliography, is reprinted in K. Levy, *Gregorian Chant and the Carolingians* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 141–77. See also James McKinnon, *The Advent Project: The Later-Seventh-Century Creation of the Roman Mass Proper* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000).

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online

Improvisation: Western art music

Notation

# PERSISTENCE OF ORAL TRADITION

Chapter: CHAPTER 1 The Curtain Goes Up

Source: MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

As scholars are beginning to recognize, the fact that the earliest notations of the canonized liturgy did not communicate actual pitch content shows that no one expected or needed them to do so. In some theoretical treatises of the ninth century, when pitch content needed to be shown, alphabetic notation adapted from the quadrivium treatises was employed. On the other hand, manuscripts with unheighted neumes went on being produced in Frankish monastic centers—even St. Gallen (now in eastern Switzerland), where the earliest surviving neumated antiphoners were inscribed—until the fifteenth century. This shows that the communication of the actual pitch and interval content of liturgical melodies went right on being accomplished by age-old oral/aural methods, that is, by listening, repeating, and memorizing. Most monks (and regular churchgoers, too, until the chant was largely abandoned by the church in the 1960s) still learn their chants that way. Notation did not supersede memory, and never has.

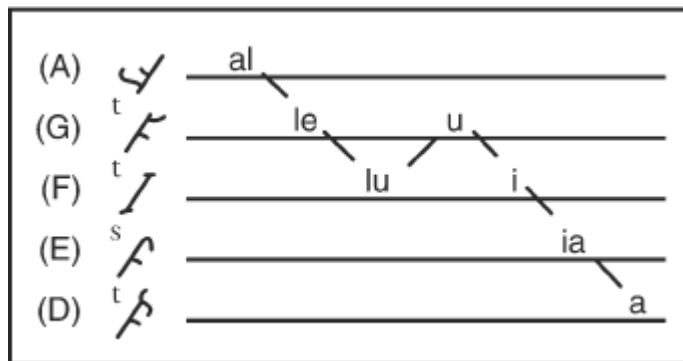


fig. 1-6 Greek-derived alphabetic notation from *Musica enchiradiadis* (ca. 850). Such notation (used by Boethius in the sixth century) did fix pitch precisely; this suggests that Gregorian chant might have been notated that way from the beginning, had anyone seen the need for it.

After a thousand years of diastematic notation, five hundred years of printing, and a generation of cheap photocopying, Western “art-musicians” and music students (especially those with academic educations) have become so dependent on texts that they (or rather, we) can hardly imagine minds that could really use their memories—not just to store melodies by the thousand, but to create them as well. By now, we have all to some degree fallen prey to the danger about which Plato was already warning his contemporaries some two and a half millennia ago: “If men learn writing, it will implant forgetfulness in their souls” (*Phaedrus*, 275a). So it is no wonder that “classical” musicians habitually—and very wrongly—tend to equate musical composition in an oral context with improvisation.

Improvisation—making things up as you go along in “real time”—is a performance art. It implies an

ephemeral, impermanent product. But while some forms of orally transmitted music (jazz, for example) do enlist the spontaneous creative faculty in real time, there have always been musicians (today's rock bands, for example) who work out compositions without notation yet meticulously, in detail, and in advance. They fix their work in memory in the very act of creating it, so that it will be permanent. Every performance is expected to resemble every other one (which of course need not preclude retouching or improvement over time, or even spontaneously). Their work, while "oral," is not improvisatory. The creative and re-creative acts have been differentiated.

And that is how Gregorian chant seems to have been created over a period spanning half a millennium at least. It was the exigencies of migration northward that made notation desirable as a fixative, but the nature of the early written sources (tiny books, for the most part) suggests that notation was at first not the primary means of transmission but only a mnemonic device (that is, a reference tool to refresh memory), or an arbiter of disputes, or even a status symbol. (If the Mass celebrants—the priests and deacons—had their little books, why not the cantors?) So it is important to remember that literacy did not suddenly replace "orality" as a means of musical transmission but gradually joined it. Since the time of the earliest Carolingian neumatized antiphoners, the two means of transmission have coexisted in the West in a complex, ever-evolving symbiosis. There are plenty of familiar tunes that are still transmitted within our culture almost exclusively by oral means: national anthems, patriotic and holiday songs ("America," "Jingle Bells"), songs for occasional use ("Take Me Out to the Ballgame," "Happy Birthday to You"), folk songs ("Home on the Range," "Swanee River"), as well as a vast repertory of children's songs—or songs that have become children's songs—in transmitting which adults rarely play a part ("It's raining, it's pouring," "Oh they don't wear pants in the sunny south of France").

Almost all of these songs, many of them composed by literate musicians (like Stephen Foster, author of "Swanee River" and many other songs that now live mainly in oral tradition), have been published and even copyrighted in written form. Yet while almost every reader of this book will be able to sing them by heart, very few will have ever seen their "sheet music." They are generally encountered "in situ"—in the places and on the appropriate occasions of their use. Some of them, especially patriotic and religious songs, are formally taught by rote in schools or churches or synagogues; many others, perhaps most, are simply "picked up" the way a language is by its native speakers.

At the same time, the Western music most likely to be thought of as belonging exclusively to the literate tradition—sonatas, symphonies, "classical music" generally—actually relies for its transmission on a great deal of oral mediation. Teachers demonstrate to their pupils by aural example many crucial aspects of performance—nuances of dynamics, articulation, phrasing, even rhythmic execution—that are not conveyed, or are inadequately conveyed, by even the most detailed notation; and the pupils learn directly to imitate what they have been shown (or better, to emulate it, which implies an effort to surpass). Conductors communicate their "interpretations" to orchestras and choruses by singing, shouting, grunting, gesticulating. Earlier, the composer may have sung, shouted, grunted, and gesticulated at the conductor. Not only jazz performers, but classical ones, too, copy the performances of famous artists from recordings as part of their learning process (or as part of a less openly admitted process of appropriation). All of this is just as "oral" a means of transmission as anything that may have happened in Rome to produce the Gregorian chant before its migration northward.

Dedicated to J. A. STERNAD

## Take Me Out To The Ball Game. <sup>3</sup>

Words by JACK NORWORTH. Music by ALBERT VON TILZER.

Tempo di Valze.

The image displays the original sheet music for the song "Take Me Out to the Ball Game." It is a waltz in 3/4 time, composed by Albert von Tilzer to lyrics by Jack Norworth. The music is presented in two systems. The first system shows the lead-in verse, which begins with the lyrics: "Katie Casey was baseball mad, / Had the fever and had it bad, / Just to root for the home town crew, / Ev'ry sou Katie blew." The second system shows the beginning of the chorus, starting with "On a Saturday, her young beau / Called to see if she'd like to go, / To see a show, but Miss Kate said, 'No, / I'll tell you what you can do.'" The sheet music includes both vocal lines and piano accompaniment.

Copyright © 1908 by The Tobin Music Co.  
 Albert Von Tilzer, 815  
 44 West 108th St., New York.

fig. 1-7 Original sheet music for the chorus of “Take Me Out to the Ball Game,” a waltz song composed in 1908 by Albert Von Tilzer to words by Jack Norworth. Very few people remember these facts about the song’s provenance, and virtually nobody learns it from the printed page. Its utterly forgotten lead-in verse puts the famous chorus in the mouth of a young girl: “Katie Casey was baseball mad,/Had the fever and had it bad;/Just to root for the hometown crew,/Ev’ry sou Katie blew./On a Saturday, her young beau/Called to see if she’d like to go/To see a show, but Miss Kate said, ‘No,/I’ll tell you what you can do.’” The chorus has flourished by itself in oral tradition for almost a century. As always, the oral tradition has modified what it transmits, here only in small ways, but irrevocably. The tune has survived the mouth-to-mouth process unchanged, but many people now sing “Take me out to the crowd,” and everyone sings “For it’s root, root, root.”

The great difference, of course, is that when a work within a partly literate tradition is completed, it need not



be committed to memory in order to go on in some sense existing. It is the sense that an art work may exist independently of those who make it up and remember it that is distinctive of literate cultures. (As we shall see, it is that sense that allows us even to have the notion of a “work of art.”) And another difference is that having works of music, however large their scale, in written form encourages us to imagine or conceptualize them as objects, which is to say as “wholes,” with an overall shape that is more than the sum of its parts. Concepts of artistic unity in works of performing art, and, conversely, an awareness of the function of the parts within the whole in such works (what we call an *analytical* awareness), is thus distinctive of literate cultures. Since the performance of such works must unfold in time, but the written artifacts that represent them are objects that occupy space, one can think of literate cultures as cultures that tend conceptually to substitute space for time—that is, to spatialize the temporal. This is an important idea, one that we shall have many occasions to refer to in the course of our survey of Western music in history.

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Psalm

Divine Office

Antiphon

# PSALMODY IN PRACTICE: THE OFFICE

**Chapter:** CHAPTER 1 The Curtain Goes Up

**Source:** MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

**Author(s):** Richard Taruskin

It is time now for some music. Many of the points in the foregoing account of the history and prehistory of Gregorian psalmody, and also something of its many genres and styles, may be illustrated by tracing settings of a single psalm verse through its various liturgical habitats. The twelfth verse of Psalm 91 (according to the numbering in the standard Latin Bible, known as the Vulgate, translated by St. Jerome in the late fourth century) was especially favored in the liturgy, perhaps owing to its vivid similes. It crops up time and again in many contexts, running the full stylistic gamut of Gregorian chant from the barest “liturgical recitative” to the most flamboyant jubilation.

In the “original” Latin the verse reads, *Justus ut palma florebit, et sicut cedrus Libani multiplicabitur*. In the Authorized (King James) Version of 1611, long the standard English translation (in which the parent psalm carries the number 92), it reads, “The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon.” In its simplest musical form, the verse takes its place in the cursive recitation of the psalm from which it comes, within the weekly monastic office round. In such contexts it is sung to an elementary reciting formula or “tone,” each verse alternating in historical practice with an antiphon. In modern, somewhat streamlined practice the refrain sandwiches the entire psalm rather than alternating with every verse. In Ex. 1-1, the psalm is paired with an antiphon consisting of its own twelfth verse, the *Justus ut palma* verse, extracted according to the stichic principle for use in a service commemorating a martyr saint, to whom the sentiments expressed in the text are especially pertinent.

A psalm tone like the one given here is music stripped to its minimum functional requirements as a medium for the exaltation of a sacred utterance. In the example, the tone formula is analyzed into its constituent parts, which function very much like punctuation marks. First there is the intonation (in Latin, *initium* or *beginning*), given the first time by a soloist (called the *precentor*) to establish the pitch. As in a declarative sentence, the intonation formula always ascends to a repeated pitch, called the *reciting tone* or *tenor* (because it is held, for which the Latin is *tenere*; other names for it include *repercussa*, because it is repeated, and *tuba*, because it is “trumpeted”). The tenor is repeated as often as necessary to accommodate the syllables of the text: since psalms are prose texts, the number of syllables varies considerably from verse to verse. In a long verse there will be many repetitions of the tenor, lending the whole the “monotone” quality often associated with the idea of “chanting.” The longest verses (in the abbreviated version shown in Ex. 1-1, only verse 2) have a “bend” (*flexus*) as additional punctuation.

Antiphon  
Solo                      Choir

Ju-stus ut pal-ma flo-re-bit, sic-ut ced-rus Li-ba-ni mul-ti-pli-ca-bi-tur.

Pa. 91 (abbreviated)  
— initium — tenor                      flexus                      (tenor resumed)                      — mediant —

1. Bo-num est confi-teri Do-mi-no:  
2. Ad-an-nun-tiandum ma-ne miseri-cordiam tu-am:  
3. In-de-ca-chordo psal-te-ri-o:  
12. Jus-tus ut palma flo-re-bit:  
13. Plan-ta-ti in domo Do-mi-ni,  
(Doxology) Glo-ri-a Patri et Fi-li-o,  
Si-cut e-rat in principio, et nunc, et sem-per,

tenor                      — terminatio —

1. et psallere nomine tu-o, Al-tis-si-me.  
2. et veritatem tu-am per-noc-tem.  
3. cum canti-co et ci-tha-ra.  
12. sicut cedrus Libani mul-ti-pli-ca-bi-tur.  
13. in atrius domus Dei no-stri flo-re-bunt.  
(Doxology) et spiri-tu i-san-cto.  
et in secula seculorum. A-men.  
( E u o u a e )  
(Antiphon da capo)

Antiphon as printed in the *Liber responsorialis* (Solesmes, 1895)

Ju-stus ut pal-ma flo-re-bit, sic-ut ce-drus Li-ba-ni mul-ti-pli-ca-bi-tur. E u o u a e.

ex. 1-1 *Justus ut palma* as antiphon to Psalm 91

The end of the first hemistich is sung to a formula known as the mediant (in Latin, *mediatio*), which functions as a divider, like the comma or colon in the text. The second hemistich again begins on the tenor, and the whole verse ends with the termination (in Latin, *terminatio*), often called the cadence because, again as in a declarative sentence, it entails a lowering (or “falling,” for which the Latin is *cadere*) of pitch. Note that at the end of the psalm, the doxology—the Christianizing tag invoking the Holy Trinity (a notion assuredly unfamiliar to the Old Testament authors of the Psalter)—has been appended. It is treated simply as an extra pair of psalm verses.

Psalm and lection tones like these are very ancient. They carry a whiff of the origins of music, at least in its cultish uses. Singing, however minimal, is numinous; it elevates words out of the context of the everyday. Like the biblical readings themselves, the use of lection tones is a definite point of kinship between Christian and Jewish worship. The Roman psalm tones are mentioned and described in Carolingian service books as early as the eighth century. They were not actually notated until the early tenth century, however, and are not found in the early antiphoners, for which reason they are not part of the “Gregorian” repertory in what we have identified as the strictest, most authentic sense of the term. But the term “Gregorian” is used by now to cover the whole medieval repertory of the Roman church.

Eight psalm tones (of which the one given in the example is listed last in the standard books) are used in the Latin liturgy, plus one called the *tonus peregrinus* (“migrating tone”) because the tenor of the second hemistich is different from that of the first. The eight-tone system seems to have been borrowed in concept (though not in actual musical content) from that of the Greek (Byzantine) church. Because the music of a psalm tone is so obviously related in its function to that of punctuation, the Gregorian tones (incorporating those used for prayers, as well as psalms and scriptural readings) are often collectively characterized by the word *accentus*, or “accent,” already associated with chant notation in one hypothesis of its origin.

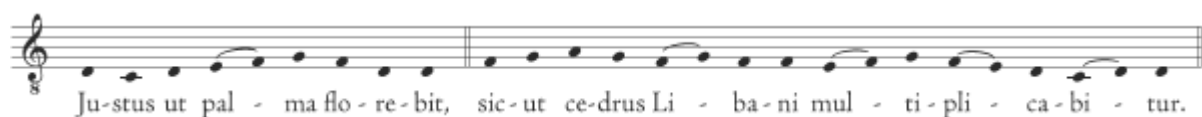
Although the designation *accentus* seems to have been used in this sense no earlier than the sixteenth century, it is nevertheless very apt, because a psalm sung to a tone is in fact an accentuated or heightened recitation. Sixteenth-century and later writers who use the word *accentus* in this way contrast it with the word *concentus*, a Latin word associated with the pleasures of music (it may be translated as “harmony,” or “concert,” or “choir,” or “concord,” depending on the context), which denotes the more distinctive and decorative melodies found in antiphons, responds, or hymns.

The antiphon in Ex. 1-1 is a modest example of *concentus* melody. Where the relationship between the text and music in the psalm tone is straightforwardly syllabic (one note to each syllable, the reciting tone accommodating most of them), the antiphon is a moderately neumatic chant, in which nine of the twenty-one syllables in the text carry what were known as “simple” (two- or three-note) neumes. In the figure accompanying Ex. 1-1, the antiphon is printed exactly as it is found in the *Liber responsorialis*, a book of Office chants published in 1895 by the monks of the Benedictine Abbey of Solesmes, who carried out a vast restorative project during the late nineteenth century in which the corpus of Gregorian chant was reedited from its original manuscript sources. The notation they used, called “square” or “quadratic” after the shape of the note-heads, was adapted from a calligraphic style that became prevalent in twelfth-century manuscripts, especially those containing polyphonic music, in which (as will be seen in due course) the various neume shapes often assumed specific—eventually measured—rhythmic values.

As early as the tenth century, neumes were learned from tables in which each shape was given a distinctive name. The two-note ascent over *pal-*, for example, was called the *pes* (or *podatus*), meaning “foot.” Its descending counterpart, over *-ma*, was called the *clivis* (meaning “sloped”; compare “declivity”). The three-note neumes (grouped, appropriately enough, over a word meaning “flourish”) were known respectively as the *scandicus* (from *scandere*, “to climb”), the *torculus* (“a little turn”), and the *trigon* (“a toss”). The motion opposite to the *torculus* (i.e., down-and-up) is shown by the *porrectus* (“stretched”), with its striking oblique stroke: . The *pes*, *clivis*, *torculus*, and *porrectus* were the basic shapes, corresponding to the acute, grave, circumflex, and anticircumflex accents. They were retained in later notational schemes, where we will encounter them again.

The group of six notes following the antiphon verse, set over the letters *E u o u a e* (sometimes informally combined into a mnemonic, pronounced “e-VO-vay”) shows the ending of the psalm—or rather the doxology, for the letters are the vowels in “...seculorum. Amen.” The six-note formula is called the *differentia*, because it tells you which of the different available endings of the psalm tone to employ in order to achieve a smooth transition into the repetition of the antiphon. The *differentiae* are now given in books, but even today’s practicing monks have them down cold and need only glance at the required “evovay” formula in order to sing the psalm from memory (or at most from the written text).

*Justus ut palma* appears twice more in the Office of Martyrs. At Vespers it also functions as a psalm antiphon, but is sung to a different melody requiring a different psalm tone (Ex. 1-2). And a really minimal setting of the verse functions as a concluding versicle (from the Latin *versiculum*, “little verse”), sung by the officiant and answered by a congregational response at the end of one of the “lesser hours.” The one on *Justus ut palma* comes at the end of none (Ex. 1-3). The extreme simplicity of the versicle illustrates the direct connection between the importance of an occasion and the elaborateness of the music that enhances it.



ex. 1-2 *Justus ut palma* as a Vespers antiphon



**ex. 1-3 *Justus ut palma* as a versicle**

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Psalm

Mass

# PSALMODY IN PRACTICE: THE MASS

**Chapter:** CHAPTER 1 The Curtain Goes Up

**Source:** MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

**Author(s):** Richard Taruskin

No fewer than four stichic settings of the *Justus ut palma* verse are found in the original Gregorian corpus of “Mass propers,” the psalmodic chants for the yearly round of feasts, recorded formulary by formulary in the early Carolingian antiphoners. Like the Office chants, they are more or less elaborate depending on the occasion and the liturgical function they accompany. All of the examples from the Mass are given in square notation, as they are found in the *Liber usualis*, an anthology of the basic chants for Mass and Office, issued by the Benedictine monks of Solesmes for the use of Catholic congregations following the official adoption of their restored version by Papal decree in 1903.

The *Justus ut palma* verse, being an encomium (that is, an expression of praise), is particularly suitable for Mass formularies honoring saints. As an Introit antiphon (Ex. 1-4) it is sung in tandem with the next verse in its parent psalm at Masses commemorating saints who were priests but not bishops (or confessors but not martyrs). Then comes “Bonum est,” the opening verse of Psalm 91 (plus the obligatory doxology, given in a space-saving abbreviation), sung to an accentus tone—the vestigial remains of full cursive psalmody such as now survives only in the Office. Being Mass chants, though, both the antiphon and the vestigial verse are considerably more elaborate, indeed rhetorical, than their Office counterparts.

The antiphon has a few compound neumes verging on the melismatic style. The very first syllable is set to a seven-note complex that ends with a long drawn-out, throbbing triple note (*tristropa*). Over *palma* there is a three-note ascent (*salicus*), immediately followed by a *climacus* (cf. “climax”), a three-note descent from a high note (*virga*, meaning “staff” or “walking stick” after its shape), the latter being sung twice for additional emphasis (*bivirga*). The highest note, a full octave above the lowest note (on *ut*), is reached in the middle of a torculus on *-ca-*, which is then coupled with a clivis to produce a five-note complex. The final phrase of the antiphon, *Dei nostri*, returns three times to the lowest note before cadencing on D. Overall, the antiphon thus describes the same graceful, characteristic arclike shape we have already observed in microcosm in the Office psalm tones. Meanwhile, the psalm tone used here, in a festal Mass, is almost as pneumatically ornate as the Office antiphons already examined.

The pair of “alleluia” exclamations that comes between the antiphon and the verse is sung when the saint’s commemoration happens to fall during the fifty-day period after Easter known as Paschal Time, the gladdest season of the church year.

Ju - stus \* ut palma flo - re - bit: sic - ut ce - drus Libani mul - ti - pli - ca -  
 - bi - tur: planta - tus in domo Domi - ni, in a - tri - is domus De - i  
 no - stri. P. T. Alle - lu - ia, alle - lu - ia. Ps. Bo - num est con - fi - te - ri Do - mi - no:  
 \* et psal - le - re no - mi - ni tu - o, Al - tis - si - me. Glo - ri - a Pa - tri. E u o u a e.

ex. 1-4 *Justus ut palma* as Introit

The Offertory and the Communion, the psalmodic chants of the Eucharist, have by now been entirely shorn of their psalm verses, which in the case of the Offertory were once very elaborate indeed. They are sung as free-standing antiphons amounting to autonomous stichic “arias” for the choir. The Offertory on *Justus ut palma* is sung at a Mass commemorating a saint who was a “Doctor of the Church,” especially distinguished for wisdom and learning. (Many of the early Church Fathers whose pronouncements have been quoted in this chapter belong to this category.)

The setting (Ex. 1-5) is even more ornate than the foregoing example: each of the words set to compound neumes in the Introit (*justus, palma, multiplicabitur*, plus the Paschal alleluia) now carry full-fledged melismas. In addition, the use of what are called ornamental or liquescent neumes implies a particularly expressive manner of singing, though its exact nature is uncertain. The third note over *justus*, for example, as well as the second note over *cedrus*, has a “trembling” shape called *quilisma* (from the Greek *kylio*, “to roll”), which may denote a trilling effect or a vibrato. The word *in* is set to a *clivis liquescens* or *cephalicus*, which involved an exaggerated pronunciation of the “liquid” consonant *n*.

Ju - stus \* ut palma flo - re - bit:  
 sicut ce - drus, quae in Li - ba - no est,  
 mul - ti - pli - ca - bi - tur.

ex. 1-5 *Justus ut palma* as Offertory

Finally, settings of the *Justus ut palma* verse function as “lesson chants,” sung between the scripture readings that cap the Synaxis portion of the Mass, at a time when there is little or no liturgical action going on. Of all the chants in the Mass, these are the most florid, because more than any other they are meant as listener’s music, filling the mind with the inexpressible joy of which St. Augustine wrote so eloquently. *Justus ut palma* is found both as a Gradual, following the Epistle, and as an Alleluia verse (Ex. 1-6), preceding the Gospel. The rhapsodic, essentially textless, fifty-one-note *jubilus* that follows the word “alleluia” in the latter setting (sung at a Mass commemorating a saint who was an abbot, or head of a monastery) is repeated note for note at the end of the verse, showing an apparent concern for ideal musical

shaping that is mirrored on a smaller scale by the internal repetitions (representable as aabb) that make up the internal melisma on the word *cedrus*. The lesson chants are responsorial chants, in which a soloist (*precentor*) alternates with the choir (*schola*). At the beginning, the precentor sings the word "alleluia" up to the asterisk, following which the choir begins again and continues into the jubilus. The same precentor/schola alternation is indicated in the verse (given mainly to the soloist) by the asterisk before *multiplicabitur*. The choral alleluia is repeated like an antiphon after the verse, giving the whole a rounded (ABA) form.

The image displays five staves of musical notation in square neumes on a four-line red staff. The first staff begins with the lyrics "Al-le - lu - ia. \*". The second staff starts with a double bar line and a fermata, followed by the lyrics "Justus ut palma flo - re - bit, et sicut ce -". The third staff continues the melody. The fourth staff includes the lyrics "drus \* multi - plica - bi-tur." and ends with a double bar line. The fifth staff is a short concluding phrase, also ending with a double bar line.

ex. 1-6 *Justus ut palma* as Alleluia

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online

Gradual

Gregorian chant

# EVIDENCE OF “ORAL COMPOSITION”

**Chapter:** CHAPTER 1 The Curtain Goes Up

**Source:** MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

**Author(s):** Richard Taruskin

The repetitions that give the Alleluia setting its striking shape are memorable not just for the listener, but also for the performer. Such things were, in fact, a vital memory aid in an age of oral composition and show the relationship between this extraordinarily ornate, mystically evocative composition and the simple psalm tone with which our survey of chant genres began. However protracted and however beautiful, the jubilation-melismas served a practical, syntactical purpose as well as a spiritual or esthetic one. Like the mediant and termination formulas in the tones, albeit at a much higher level of expressive artistry, they mark endings and give the precentor and the schola their cues.

Repetitions of this type not only link the parts of individual chants, they link whole chant families as well. Ex. 1-7 contains two Graduals, each consisting of a melismatic respond and an even more melismatic verse for a virtuoso cantor. The respond in the first of these Graduals, from a formulary assigned in Carolingian times to the commemorative feast of St. John the Baptist, is a setting of the *Justus ut palma* verse. The second (Ex. 1-7b) is the very famous Easter Gradual, in which the text consists of two verses from Psalm 117, one functioning as respond, the other as soloist's verse:

- *R: Haec dies, quam fecit Dominus: exultemus, et laetemur in ea.*
- *V: Confitemini Domino, quoniam bonus: quoniam in saeculum misericordia ejus.*
- [Ps. 117, 24: This is the day which the Lord hath made: we will rejoice and be glad in it.
- Ps. 117, 1: O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good: because his mercy endureth for ever.]

Grad. 2

Justus \* ut palma flo - re - bit: sic - ut ce - drus Liba - ni  
mul - tipli - ca bi - tur  
in do - mo Domi - ni. *V.* Ad annunti - andum  
ma - ne mi - se - ri cordi -  
am tu am, et ve - ri - ta - tem tu  
am per no - ctem.

ex. 1-7a *Justus ut palma* as Gradual

Grad. 2

Haec di - es, \* quam fe - cit Do - mi nus:  
exsulte - mus, et lae - te mur in e - a.  
*V.* Confi - temi - ni Do - mi - no,  
quo - ni - am bo - nus quo - ni - am in sae -  
culum mi - se - ri - cor di - a \* e - jus.

ex. 1-7b *Haec dies* (Easter Gradual)

It is easy to show (here, by bracketing them) that these two chants draw heavily upon a shared fund of melodic turns. In fact a whole family of Graduals, numbering more than twenty in all, have these formulas in common: besides the two given here, they include the Graduals for the Christmas Midnight Mass (to the

words *Tecum principium*, “With Thee in the day of Thy power”) and the funeral Mass, called the Requiem after the opening word of its Introit, which happens to recur in the Gradual (*Requiem aeternam*, “Eternal rest”). Again, what is striking is that the shared formulas are found most frequently at initial and (especially) cadential points, and that internal repetitions regularly occur to accommodate lengthier texts. In other words, these extremely elaborate chants still behave, under their flowing melismatic raiment, very much like the psalm tones they may once have been.

How did the one evolve into the other? While we will never find a contemporary witness to musical developments that took place before there were any means of documenting them, an answer to this question is nevertheless suggested by recent research into the practices of more recent, in some cases still active, oral traditions of church music. Nicholas Temperley, investigating the history of what has sometimes been called “the Old Way of Singing” in English parish churches of the seventeenth century and New England Congregational churches of the eighteenth, and the “surge songs” of black churches in the American south, noted a pattern.<sup>7</sup> Musically unlettered or semiletted congregations that sing without professional direction over long periods of time tend to develop a characteristic style: “the tempo becomes extremely slow, the sense of rhythm is weakened; extraneous pitches appear, sometimes coinciding with those of the hymn tune, sometimes inserted between them.” Wesley Berg, a Canadian scholar working with Mennonite communities in Western Canada, has corroborated the process by direct observation.<sup>8</sup>

What both scholars describe is the transformation, over time, of simple syllabic melodies into ornate, melismatic ones. (And the point about rhythmic weakening jibes tellingly with the notorious nonmetrical rhythm of the chant, about which little is known and about which, therefore, many strong opinions are maintained.) In New England, the process was thought to be one of corruption. Professional singing masters, armed with notated hymnbooks, sought to counteract the tendency by training their congregations to be not only literate but literal-minded in their attitude toward written texts. In a wholly oral age, when alternative methods of transmission were not available, the process of transformation was more likely seen as desirable, since it produced an ever more artistic, “skilled” product. In the context of the evolving Christian liturgy, degrees of melismatic elaboration served as a means of differentiating types of chants as well as liturgical occasions on the basis of their relative “solemnity.” As we will see in the next chapter, moreover, there is evidence that the Gregorian chant itself continued to develop melismatic embellishments in parts of Europe where a relatively fluid oral culture seems to have continued, perhaps for centuries, after the Franks had begun relying on notation as a fixative.

It used to be thought that the large amount of shared material within chant families reflected a “patchwork” process of composition, called *centonization* (after the Latin *cento*, “quilt”). Peter Wagner, one of the pioneering historians of early Christian music, compared centonized chants to articles of jewelry in which prized gems have been selected to receive “a splendid mounting, an ingenious combination, and a tasteful arrangement.”<sup>9</sup> Today, scholars prefer a different analogy or model: instead of a fund of individual memorized formulas from which chants are assembled on the basis of artistic ingenuity and taste, one imagines a process of elaboration from a repertory of simple prototypes for various liturgical genres and classes.

The shared formulas found in the Graduals we have been comparing, for example, are found only in Graduals. Another type of chant that is comparably formulaic in its melodic content is the *Tract*, a long, sometimes highly melismatic psalm setting that is sung in place of the Alleluia during penitential seasons such as Advent and Lent, when the joyous ejaculation *alleluia*—Hebrew for “Praise God!”—is suppressed. Tracts come in two mutually exclusive formula-families, and their characteristic turns are not found in any other chant genre.<sup>10</sup>

A fund of shared melodic turns characterizing the chants of a given functional type, or those proper to a certain category of ritual observance, is exactly how the term *mode* is defined in its earliest usages. The concept of mode as formula-family is still prevalent in the Greek Orthodox (Byzantine) church, where the liturgical singing follows what is known as the *oktoechos*, an eight-week cycle of formulaic “modes” (*echoi* in Greek).

Our more recent concept of mode, based on that of a scale, and defined mainly in terms of its final note, fits the Gregorian repertory poorly. (We have already seen, in fact, that Gregorian psalm tones often have a variety of potential final notes, the *differentiae*—see Ex. 1-8.) The concept of mode as a function of scale and final was originally the product of Frankish and Italian music theory of the tenth and eleventh centuries, in which an attempt was made to organize the chants of the Roman church according to the categories of ancient Greek music theory, which was well known from treatises, even if practical examples of ancient Greek music are virtually nonexistent. (As we shall see, the chants composed by later Frankish musicians who had been trained according to this theory conform much more closely to our accustomed idea of what a mode is.)

The image shows the musical notation for the first psalm tone (Initium) and its four differentiae. The main notation is labeled with rhythmic patterns: Initium (rec. tone flex), rec. tone (rec. tone), and terminatio to D. Below this are four staves, each labeled with a final note: to F, to G, and to A. Each staff contains the same melodic line with the lyrics 'E u o u a e' underneath. The notation uses a single-line staff with a clef and a 6/8 time signature.

ex. 1-8 *Differentiae* of the first psalm tone

## Notes:

(7) N. Temperley, "The Old Way of Singing: Its Origins and Developments," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* XXXIV (1981) 511–44.

(8) W. Berg, "Hymns of the Old Colony Mennonites and the Old Way of Singing," *Musical Quarterly* LXXX (1996): 77–117.

(9) Peter Wagner, *Einführung in die gregorianischen Melodien*, Vol. III (Leipzig, 1921), p. 395.

(10) They are described and illustrated in Leo Treitler, "Homer and Gregory: The Transmission of Epic Poetry and Plainchant," *Musical Quarterly* LX (1974): 347–53.

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Mode: Medieval modal theory

# WHY WE WILL NEVER KNOW HOW IT ALL BEGAN

Chapter: CHAPTER 1 The Curtain Goes Up

Source: MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Yet even if the ancient Greek catalogue of lyre tunings was conceptually foreign, hence irrelevant, to the modal structure of Gregorian chant, the attempt to codify medieval modal theory according to Greek ideas of order was not wholly misplaced. The Greek system and the Gregorian corpus did have one thing self-evidently in common. They both employed what some scholars now call the “diatonic pitch set,” the field of pitches and pitch relationships reducible to a specific arrangement of tones and semitones (“whole steps” and “half steps”), of which the familiar major and minor scales are among the possible representations.

When staff notation was introduced in the eleventh century, it made tacit yet explicit provision for that arrangement. There is no way of telling the diatonic half steps (between B and C and between E and F) from the whole steps on the basis of their appearance on the staff; from its very beginning, in other words, the staff was “prejudiced” to accommodate the two different sizes of step-interval as musicians had from time immemorial habitually “heard” and deployed them.

Thus there is no point in inquiring about the historical origins of the diatonic pitch set, our most fundamental musical possession. We will never know them. We can do no better than the legends by which the Greeks sought to explain the origins of their musical practice. In one of these, related by Nicomachus in the second century ce, Pythagoras, the reputed inventor of music, heard beautiful sounds coming unexpectedly out of a blacksmith’s shop. Weighing the anvils the smiths were striking, he discovered the harmonic ratios governing the perfect (“Pythagorean”) consonances, as well as the whole step. Laying these intervals out on a staff, and adding the two extra tones that are obtained when the Pythagorean complex is transposed to begin on each of its own constituent pitches, we may arrive at a primitive five-note (“pentatonic”) scale. Plugging the “gaps,” we find that we have “discovered” the half steps (see Ex. 1-9a).

Another way of deducing the diatonic pitch set from properties of acoustic resonance is to generate it by fifths radiating outward from a central tone. (If D is chosen for this demonstration the whole complex may be represented on the staff without the use of accidentals.) A trace of this deduction survives in the names of our scale degrees, “dominant” being the name of the tone produced by the first fifth “up,” and *subdominant* (“under-dominant”) being the name of the tone produced by the first fifth “down” (see Ex. 1-9b).

But these deductions are all long after the fact and have nothing to do with history. They are rationalizations, designed to show that our familiar musical system is “natural.” (Efforts to deduce the diatonic pitch set from the so-called natural harmonics, or “overtones,” are especially ahistorical, because the overtone series was not discovered and described until the eighteenth century.) Yet if the immemorial diatonic pitch set is to be understood as “natural,” it must be understood in terms not only of physical but of human nature. The historical evidence suggests that our diatonically apportioned musical “space,” while grounded in acoustic resonance, may also be the product (or one of the possible products) of a physiological predisposition governing “musical hearing,” that is, our discrimination of meaningful pitch differences and pitch relationships.

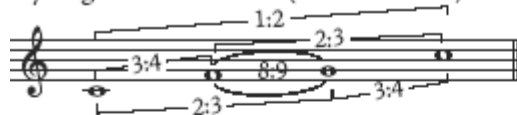


fig. 1-8 Illustration from a thirteenth-century manuscript of a famous music treatise by John of Cotton, now housed at the Bavarian State Library in Munich, which shows Pythagoras in the blacksmith shop, measuring the harmonic consonances. The inscriptions read , *Per fabricam ferri mirum deus imprimit* (“By means of a smithy God has imparted a wonder”) and *Is Pythagoras ut diversorum/per pondera malleorum/perpendebat secum quae sit concordia vocum* (“It was this Pythagoras who, by the weights of the various hammers, worked out the consonances for himself “). The lower panel shows a mono-chord, a more “modern” device for tone measurement, and a harp, laterally strung like a lyre, which represents music’s power of *ethos* or moral influence.

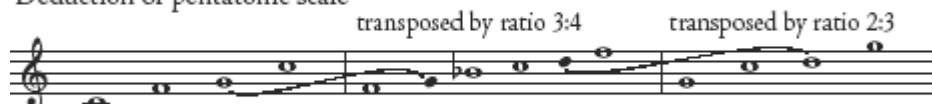
Where actual musical practice is concerned, the relevant historical fact is that people have evidently internalized the diatonic pitch set—carried it around in their heads as a means of organizing, receiving, and

reproducing meaningful sound patterns—as far back as what is as of now the very beginning of recorded musical history, some three and a half millennia ago.

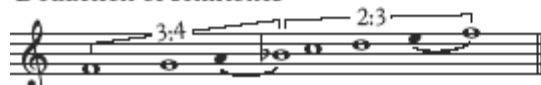
Pythagorean harmonies (the four anvils)



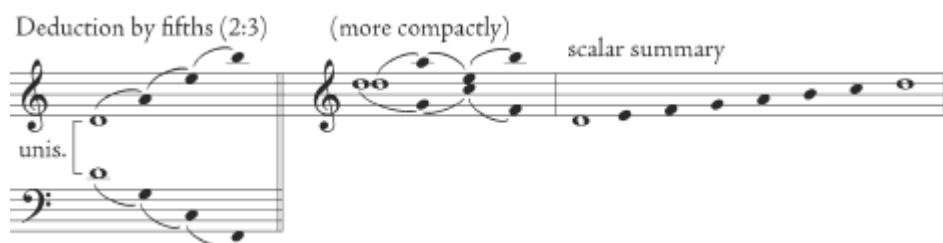
Deduction of pentatonic scale



Deduction of semitones



ex. 1-9a Deduction of the diatonic pitch set from the Pythagorean consonances



ex. 1-9b Deduction of the diatonic pitch set by fifths

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Notation: History of Western notation

Byzantine chant

# BEGINNINGS, AS FAR AS WE KNOW THEM

Chapter: CHAPTER 1 The Curtain Goes Up

Source: MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin



**fig. 1-9 Harpist in the garden of Sennacherib, shown in a neo-Assyrian bas-relief from the palace at Nineveh, seventh century b.c.e., 500 years later than the earliest musical notation.**

of similar geographical provenance, to have been successfully transcribed in modern times. That piece, described in the text, could have been performed by one or both of the figures represented here.

This new “beginning” was established in 1974 when a team of Assyriologists and music ologists at the University of California at Berkeley managed to decode and transcribe the musical notation on a cuneiform tablet dating from around 1200 bce that had been unearthed on the site of the ancient Babylonian city of Ugarit, near Ras-Shamra in modern Syria.<sup>11</sup> The tablet contained a hymn, composed in Hurrian, a dialect of the Sumerian language, to the goddess Nikkal, the wife of the moon god. The music can be read as being set for a solo voice accompanied homorhythmically by a harp or lyre, thus testifying to a practice of polyphonic composition many centuries before the rise of Christian chant. Most remarkable is how unremarkable this earliest preserved piece of music now seems: it consists of harmonic intervals recognized as consonant in most Western practice, and is easily notated on the normal Western staff because it conforms to the same disposition of diatonic whole and half steps used in Western music since the start of its continuous written tradition (Ex. 1-10). Like the Gregorian chant, the Babylonian melody conforms to the basic contents of the familiar diatonic pitch set, though not to any of our modern ways of patterning it.

(Fragmentary and untranslatable text omitted.)



ex. 1-10 First phrase of Hurrian cult song from ancient Ugarit, transcribed by Anne Draffkorn Kilmer



**fig. 1-10 Attic Greek amphora (jar), ca. 490 b.c.e., showing someone singing to a lyre. Greek music theory was mainly confined to prescribing tunings for the lyre, in three *genera*, or types: diatonic, chromatic, and enharmonic. These words have survived in modern musical terminology, although not with precisely the same meanings.**

Pretty much the same may be said about the handful of ancient (if relatively “late”) Greek melodies that happen to survive in decipherable practical sources, as well as the earliest Greek Christian music that grew more or less directly out of prior pagan practice.<sup>12</sup> The earliest such Greek remnant, the first of two surviving Delphic Hymns, or paeans to Apollo sung by a priestess at the Delphic oracle’s abode, was set down around 130 bce on a now only partly legible stone tablet that is kept at the National Archaeological Museum in Delphi. It employs a learned and artificial style, called the “chromatic [i.e., colorful] genus” by the Greeks, in which some of the strings of the lyre were tuned low in order to provide two semitones in direct succession. (Hence the adaptation of the word “chromatic” to denote the much later Western practice of inflecting scale degrees by semitones; Greek theorists also describe an “enharmonic” genus in which the semitones could be

replaced by quarter tones.) Ex. 1-11a shows the second half of the melody, in which the embellishing “chromatic semitones” are most prevalent, adapted from a somewhat speculative transcription made about eighty years ago by the French archaeologist Théodore Reinach: it reproduces the melodic pitches exactly as “alphabetically” notated in the source but infers the meter and rhythm from that of the text.

Ex. 1-11b contains the earliest surviving artifact of actual Christian service music, a fragment from the close of a Greek hymn to the Holy Trinity, notated on a papyrus strip during the fourth century ce and discovered in 1918. The hymn is probably a translated extract from the liturgy of the Syriac Christian church. Although we cannot be certain (since it is our only example), it seems to be built up out of a diatonic formula-family. It is the earliest surviving representative, by six or seven centuries, of the Greek-texted music of the Orthodox (that is, official) church of the Eastern Roman Empire, known as the Byzantine Empire after Byzantium (or Constantinople), its capital until 1453.

[En - kly -] ta me - ga - lo - po - lis At - this eu - khai - si peh - ro - ploi - o - nai -  
 5  
 ou - sa Tri - to - ni - dos da - pe - don a - thrau - ston! Ha - gi - os de bo - moi - sin Ha -  
 11  
 phai - stos ai - ei - the - ne - on me - ra ta - ou - ron ho - mou de nin A - raps at - mos es O -  
 17  
 lym - pon a - na - kid - ne - tai Li - gu - de lo - tos bre - mon ai - ei - ol - oi - ois me - le - sin oi -  
 23  
 da - an kre - kei Khry - se - a d'ha - dri - throis ki - tha - ris hym - noi - sin a - na - mel - pe - tri.

ex. 1-11a Second stanza of the First Delphic Hymn, transcribed by Egert Pöhlmann and Martin L. West

Hym - noun - ton d'hy - mon pa - te - ra hui - on ha - gi - on pneu - ma Pa - sai dy - na - meis  
 6  
 e - pi - pho - noun - ton a - min a - min. Kra - tos ai - nos a ei hai do - xa The - o  
 10  
 do - ti - ri mo - noi pan - ton a - ga - thon A - min a - min.

ex. 1-11b Fourth verse of a proto-Byzantine Hymn to the Trinity, transcribed by E. Pöhlmann and M. West

Unlike the Western Roman church, which came to cultivate the traditional prose-poetry of the Psalter as its main sphere of musical creativity, the Eastern Orthodox church emphasized hymnody, newly composed “songs with praise of God” in metrical verse. This repertory, known as Byzantine chant, consists of hymns in many liturgical genres or categories ranging from the single-stanza *troparion* (for the Vigil, or Night Office) and *sticheron* (for the day services), which attach themselves to psalms in a manner matching that of the Gregorian antiphon—through the *kontakion* (from the Greek for “scroll”), an elaborate metrical sermon in as many as 30 stanzas—to the *kanon* (from the Greek for “rule”), a magnificent cycle of nine *odes*, each based on a different metrical prototype or model stanza called a *hiermos*.

One of the oldest melodies still in active liturgical use is the one called “Credo I” in modern chant books (Ex. 1-12). It is a setting of the Nicene Creed: a recitation of articles of Christian faith that was adopted in the fourth century, originally for use in the baptism ceremony. The Creed eventually joined the Eucharistic liturgy, sung first in the Eastern churches, later (sixth century ce) in Spain and in Ireland. It was adopted by the Franks in 798 and was formally incorporated into the “universal” (or “Catholic”) Latin Mass by Pope Benedict VIII in 1014, positioned between the Gospel reading and the Offertory as the divider between the synaxis and Eucharist services.

Credo in unum De - um, Patrem omnipot - entem, fa - ctorum caeli et  
terrae, vi - si - bi - li - um omni - um, et in - vi - si - bi - li - um. Et in unum  
Dominum Jesum Christum, Fi - li - um De - i unigeni - tum. Et ex  
Patre natum ante omni - a saecu - la.

ex. 1-12 Beginning of “Credo I”

Despite its late adoption, the formulas to which this venerable text is most often sung are demonstrably archaic and demonstrably Greek. Its formula-family, with its regular use of B-flat and E to surround the reciting tone on G, and its final cadence on E, is a rather exotic specimen within the Gregorian corpus. (But compare the Offertory on *Justus ut palma* in Ex. 1-5.) Yet although it seems to emphasize the odd interval of a diminished fifth, the melody nevertheless fully conforms to the intervallic structure of the diatonic pitch set. Transposed up a fifth or down a fourth it could be accommodated on the staff without accidentals. (The reason why it is not notated at that pitch level in the Gregorian sources will become clear in the next chapter.)

As these very old melodies suggest, there are many ways of patterning and embellishing the diatonic pitch set, giving rise to any number of historical, culture-bound musical styles. Tracing their development will be one of this book’s primary tasks. Yet history also suggests that the pitch set as such—the raw material, so to speak, that precedes patterning—may be a natural “datum,” given to a degree in external nature (the physics of sound) but, more relevantly, in human nature (call it the physiology of sound cognition). Within the tradition of Western music, there may be cognitive universals that, as in language, underlie and undergird all cultural practices, and (the downside, some may feel) set limits to them.

## Notes:

(11) Anne Draffkorn Kilmer, Richard L. Crocker, and Robert R. Brown, *Sounds from Silence: Recent Discoveries in Ancient Near Eastern Music* (Berkeley: Bit Enki Publications, 1976).

(12) All the extant fragments of ancient Greek music have been collected and given new and authoritative transcriptions in Egert Pöhlmann and Martin L. West, *Documents of Ancient Greek Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001).

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

# CHAPTER 2 New Styles and Forms

## Frankish Additions to the Original Chant Repertory

Chapter: CHAPTER 2 New Styles and Forms

Source: MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

## LONGISSIMAE MELODIAE

Amalar (or Amalarius) of Metz, an urban cleric and a disciple of Alcuin, served Charlemagne and his successor Louis as both churchman and statesman. He was one of the supervisors of the Carolingian chant and liturgy reform, and virtually our sole witness to it. After a diplomatic sojourn in Rome in 831, Amalar spent the remaining decades of his life compiling liturgical books, to which he added commentaries replete with information about the church singing he had heard, which he wished to see transplanted to Frankish soil. Although Amalar did not use neumes (possibly because he lived just too early to have had the option of using them), his descriptions of the ways in which the Roman chant was adapted to the use of the Franks are uniquely detailed and vivid.

One thing we learn from Amalar is that the Roman cantors he observed had taken one of their real showpieces—a *neuma triplex*, a huge threefold melisma from a matins responsory commemorating St. John the Baptist's day (December 27)—and transferred it back to Christmas, where its festive jubilation seemed even more appropriate. This practice was part of a general trend, which Amalar wanted to abet, toward adorning the liturgy with special music. Christmas, liturgically the most elaborate of days (on which, for example, not one but three Masses were sung: at midnight and at dawn as well as at the usual hour between terce and sext), was of course especially favored. The *neuma triplex* was available for insertion, however, wherever it was wanted. In different sources it is found associated with the feast of the Holy Innocents and with the feasts of various saints as celebrated, with special pomp, in their home diocese.

The third and most sumptuous of the *neuma triplex* melismas, with its seventy-eight notes, may be the longest *melodia*, or stretch of textless vocalizing, in the entire repertory of medieval chant. In Example 2-1, the concluding words (*fabricae mundi*, "of the structure of the world") from *Descendit de caelis* ("He descended from Heaven"), the crowning responsory from Christmas matins, are given first in their "normal" form, then with the *neuma triplex* melisma as eventually written down in staff notation about three centuries after Amalar described it. (We can assume that it still pretty much resembles the eighth-century melody Amalar described because it concords well with unheighted neumes in much older manuscripts.)

Amalar enthusiastically endorses the practice of interpolating such *neumae* or melismas into festive chants, in keeping with the old idea of "jubilated" singing. Noting that in its original context (the feast of St. John the Baptist) the triple melisma fell on the word *intellectus*, which he interprets to mean an ecstatic or mystical kind of "understanding" beyond the power of words to convey, Amalar exhorts monastic musicians that "if you ever come to the 'understanding' in which divinity and eternity are beheld, you must tarry in that 'understanding,' rejoicing in song without words which pass away."<sup>1</sup>

End of original respond

Et ex - i - vit per au - re - am por - tam lux de - cus

u - ni - ver - sae fa - bri - cae mun - di

And the light, the glory of the universal structure of the world, will go out through the golden gate.

The three melismas (inserted into the respond on its three repetitions)

a. (on the first repetition)

fa

bri - cae mun - di

b. (on the second repetition)

fa

bri - cae mun - di

c. (on the concluding repetition)

fa

bri - cae mun - di

bri - cae mun - di

### ex. 2-1 *Neuma triplex*

This passage from Amalar recalls the famous words in which St. Augustine, five hundred years earlier, had extolled the “jubilated” singing of his day, associated by the time of Amalar chiefly with the Mass Alleluia. And sure enough, Amalar writes enthusiastically of another Roman practice, that of replacing the traditional *jubilus*, the melisma on the “-ia” of “Alleluia,” with an even longer melody, which he describes as “a jubilation that the singers call a *sequentia*,” presumably because of the way it followed after the Alleluia chant.<sup>2</sup>

That the Franks enthusiastically adopted the practice of adorning their service music with ever lengthier *melodiae* we learn from Agobard of Lyons, another ninth-century ecclesiastical observer, who condemned what Amalar endorsed. From childhood to old age, Agobard complained, the singers in the schola spent all their time improving their voices instead of their souls, boasted of their virtuosity and their memories, and vied with one another in melismatic contest. The *sequentia* repertoire was the tamed and scripted issue of these frantic oral engagements.



Interrogatio




Quem quae - ri - tis in se - pul - chro, o Chri - sti - co - lae?

Responsorium



Je - sum Na - za - re - num cru - ci - fi - xum, o cae - li - co - lae.



Non est hic, sur - re - xit si - cut prae - di - xe - rat; i - te, nun - ti - a - te

Introit



qui - a sur - re - xit de se - pul - chro. Re - sur - re - xi ... etc.

ex. 2-9 Easter dialogue trope (*Quem quaeritis in sepulchro*)

TABLE 2-1 Ordo of the Western Mass

SUNG(concentus)		SPOKEN OR RECITED TO A TONE(accentus)	
-----------------	--	---------------------------------------	--

Proper	Ordinary	Proper	Ordinary
--------	----------	--------	----------

SYNTAXIS

1. Introit

2. Kyrie

3. Gloria (omitted during Lent and Advent)

4. Collect (call to prayer)

5. Epistle reading

6. Gradual (replaced between Easter and Pentecost by an Alleluia)

7. Alleluia (replaced during Lent and Advent by the Tract)

8. Sequence (ubiquitous and fully canonical from the tenth to the sixteenth centuries; only four survived the Counter Reformation\*)

---

**SUNG(concentus)**

**SPOKEN OR RECITED TO A  
TONE(accentus)**

9. Gospel reading

(Sermon)

**EUCCHARIST**

10. Credo

11. Offertory

12. Offertory prayers

13. Secret  
(Celebrant's silent  
prayer)

14. Preface to the  
Sanctus

15. Sanctus

16. Canon  
(Celebrant's Prayer  
consecrating wine  
and bread)

17. Lord's Prayer  
(congregation)

18. Agnus Dei

19. Communion

20.  
Postcommunion  
prayer

21. Dismissal (*Ite, missa est*,  
replaced during Lent and  
Advent by *Benedicamus  
Domino*, "Let us bless the  
Lord")

---

(\*) The fortunate four were the sequences for Easter (*Victimae paschali laudes*), Pentecost (*Veni sancte spiritus*), Corpus Christi (*Lauda Sion*, by St. Thomas Aquinas), and the funeral or Requiem Mass (*Dies Irae*). During the eighteenth century a new one (*Stabat mater dolorosa*) was added upon the creation of a new feast, the "Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary." Its text is by the fourteenth-century Italian poet Jacopone de Todi; the music in modern chant books was composed in the nineteenth century by a

choirmaster from the Benedictine abbey of Solesmes.

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## Notes:

(1) J. M. Hanssens, *Amalarii episcopi opera liturgica omnia*, Vol. III (Studi e testi, 140; Vatican City, 1950), p. 54. Translation adapted from that of Daniel J. Sheerin given in Ruth Steiner, "The Gregorian Chant Melismas of Christmas Matins," in J. C. Graue, ed., *Essays on Music in Honor of Charles Warren Fox* (Rochester: Eastman School of Music Press, 1979), p. 250.

(2) Hanssens, *Amalarii*, Vol. XVIII, p. 6.

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# Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online

Prosa

Prosula

## PROSA

**Chapter:** CHAPTER 2 New Styles and Forms

**Source:** MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

**Author(s):** Richard Taruskin

Like the jubilus itself, the early *sequentia* vocalises—sung on the word “Alleluia” but so melismatic as to be virtually textless—had many internal phrase repetitions designed to make them easier to memorize. Another memory aid employed by Frankish singers was of far-reaching artistic significance: they added words to melismatic chants that turned them, perhaps paradoxically, into syllabic hymns. This led to a fantastic flowering of new devotional song that developed over three centuries and reached its peak in twelfth-century France.

Its beginnings are what concern us now. Amalar’s *neuma triplex* can serve as our starting point. As its surviving sources attest, it begat several little prose poems, or *prosulae*; compare the pair in Example 2-2 with the climactic third melisma in Ex. 2-1.

The texts are in prose (or “art-prose” as it has been called, since its diction is very high-flown) because the original melody, like most melismatic chants, is rhythmically rhapsodic and irregular. (The use of prose was nothing new, of course; the psalms themselves are examples of art-prose.) But the melody’s one regularizing feature—the use of a repeated phrase at the outset (disguised by the interpolation of a pair of low notes)—lends the texted version a slight suggestion of strophic or “couplet” form. (In strophic form every line of text is set to the same melody; in couplet form the melody changes after every pair of lines.) Also note parenthetically the interpolated “key signature” of one flat in Ex. 2-2a. This was not part of the original notation, but reflects the way we assume any medieval singer would have sung a melody in which B immediately preceded or followed an F, or in which F and B described the outer limits of a melodic “turn.” (The augmented fourth, not recognized by the Frankish music theory we will shortly be investigating, was adjusted to the perfect fourth in practice long before it was “prohibited” in theory.)

[1] Fac - tu - re tu - e rex ful - get sa - cra - ta di - es is - ta

[2] Cum vir - gi - ne fe - cun - da - ta si - de - re - um hon - nus in - nu - ba

[3] Re - rum cre - a - tor o - pus im - ple - vit

[4] pro - mis - sum in - te - me - ra - te con - ser - va

[5] si - de - ra lux no - va mun - do to - to po - lo gra - ci - a

[8] fa - bri - ce mun - di

**ex. 2-2a Prosulae to the neuma triplex, Facture tue**

Rex re - gum ab al - ta, Chri - stus pe - tens a ter - res - tri - a,

Re - ges - que po - tes - ta - tes, et tir - ran - o - rum fre - git tar - ta - ra;

Clau - stra in - fer - ni vir - tus im - pe - rat, cho - rus - que an - ge - lo - rum pro - cla - mat;

San - ctus De - us! San - ctus for - tis! San - ctus et im - mor - ta - lis!

**ex. 2-2b Prosulae to the neuma triplex, Rex regum**

A similar underlaying of a prose text or *prosula* to a preexisting melisma adorns a famous chant we met in the previous chapter. The eleventh-century Gradual of St. Yrieux, which contains elaborated versions of the Mass propers, has what looks like a syllabic version of the Alleluia *Justus ut palma*: an entire poem is interpolated into the text of its verse to correspond with the notes of the long melisma on “cedrus.” As we may recall from Ex. 1.6, that melisma is distinguished by regularizing internal repetitions that can be

represented as aabb. When the prose text is underlaid to the melisma, the resulting prosula has the appearance of a poem in couplets (pairs of lines set to the same tune). As we shall see, paired verses are characteristic of many medieval chants. We may be witnessing the procedure in its embryo (compare Ex. 2-3 with Ex. 1-6).

a<sub>1</sub>  
Si - cut li - li - o - rum can - dor in glo - ri - a ma - ne - bis co - ram Chri - sto be - a - te

a<sub>2</sub>  
et si - cut pul - chri - tu - do ro - sa - rum ru - ti - la - bis ma - gno de - co - re.

b<sub>1</sub>  
Qua - si ar - bor in tel - lu - re

b<sub>2</sub>  
Quae vo - ci - ta - tur no - mi - ne

c  
(melisma as in Ex. 1-6)  
ce - drus mul - ti flo - re - bunt san - cti cum De - o.

ex. 2-3 Prosulated version of Alleluia, *Justus ut palma*

An early witness to the practice of “prosulation”—as good a term as any for the interpolation of syllabic texts into melismatic tunes—is Notker Balbulus (Notker the Stammerer, d. 912), a monk at the East Frankish monastery of St. Gallen, already known to us as Charlemagne’s first biographer. In the introduction to his *Book of Hymns* (*Liber hymnorum*), which dates from about 880, Notker recalls that in his youth he learned the practice from a monk who had escaped from the West Frankish abbey of Jumièges (near Rouen in northwestern France), after it had been laid waste by marauding “Normans” (that is, Vikings).<sup>3</sup> This would have been in 852, about twenty years after Amalar had first described the *sequentia* and promoted it among the Franks. This monk, Notker tells us, had with him an antiphoner in which some *sequentia* melismas had been “prosulated.” Notker, so he tells us, leapt at this device for making extra-long vocalises (*longissimae melodiae*, he calls them) memorable, and went on, so he boasts, to invent what we now call the *sequence*.

## Notes:

(3) The best translation of the preface to Notker’s *Liber hymnorum* is Richard Crocker’s, in *The Early Medieval Sequence* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), pp. 1–2. An adaptation of it can be found in Piero Weiss and Richard Taruskin, *Music in the Western World: A History in Documents* (2nd ed., Belmont CA: Thomson/Schirmer, 2008), p. 39.

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Sequence

Mass

# SEQUENCES

**Chapter:** CHAPTER 2 New Styles and Forms

**Source:** MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

**Author(s):** Richard Taruskin

We now use the English word “sequence,” derived from the Latin *sequentia* (or, sometimes, “prose,” derived from the Latin *prosa*) to denote not the jubilus-replacing melisma itself but the syllabic hymn that (as Notker tells us) was originally derived from it by matching prose syllables to its constituent notes. The sequence eventually became a canonical part of the Mass, on a par with the Alleluia that it followed and the Gospel reading that it preceded. It is one of the indigenous Frankish contributions to the evolving “Roman” liturgy, and Notker (despite the studied modesty of his diction) may have exaggerated his role in its creation.

Also evidently exaggerated in his telling is the dependency of the sequence, as Notker and others actually practiced it in the late ninth century, on the earlier *sequentia* described by Amalar. Only a handful of surviving sequences (out of the thirty-three in Notker’s book, only eight) can be linked up with a known *sequentia* melisma. By the time Notker completed his book, the sequence had already matured into a substantial composition, fresh in both words and music and novel in style, that was sometimes (but far from always) modeled on a liturgical Alleluia melody. It is of course possible that a lost or unrecorded *sequentia* lurks behind each of Notker’s “hymns.” But to assume that this is the case would be to confuse the origin of the genre with the origin of each individual specimen (as if every symphony were assumed to be an operatic overture because, as historians have learned, the earliest ones were). That kind of false assumption about origins is known as the “genetic fallacy.” To illustrate the early sequence we can examine two specimens from Notker’s own *Liber hymnorum*, reminding ourselves that Notker himself was able to notate only the texts of his sequences; the melodies come from later manuscripts that may or may not transmit them exactly as Notker composed or adapted them in the ninth century. *Angelorum ordo* (Ex. 2-4a) represents the earliest stage, a simple prosulated *sequentia* melisma that belongs to the Alleluia *Excita Domine* (third Sunday in Advent). It conforms to Notker’s description of how the sequence was born. The little melodic repetitions are of the kind we have already encountered in many melismatic chants.





fig. 2-1 Notker Balbulus, a ninth-century monk from the Swiss monastery of St. Gallen, shown in an illumination from a manuscript probably prepared there some 200 years later. He looks as though he is cudgeling his brain to recall a *longissima melodia*, as he tells us he did in the preface to his *Liber hymnorum* (Book of hymns), which contains some early examples of prosulated melismas known as sequences.

Altogether different is *Rex regum* (Ex. 2-4b), a mature sequence that happens to share its text incipit with one of the items in Ex. 2-2. Its opening melodic phrase is artfully derived from the Alleluia *Justus ut palma* (Ex. 1-6); there are other similarities between the two melodies as well. The sequence may thus have been meant to link up with that particular Alleluia (sung at St. Gallen, Notker's monastery, at the Mass commemorating St. John the Baptist), but there is no reason to suppose it would have been limited to that use. The melodic resemblance being approximate rather than exact, it has effect of an allusion: an honorific, like those in the text, that might compliment any distinguished churchman. In any case, the reference to *Justus ut palma* is not in this case the automatic result of an adaptive process but a deliberate artistic touch, replete with a couple of neumes that in this context suggest flourishes.

Thereafter, the sequence proceeds in strictly syllabic couplets, successive pairs of lines sung to repeated portions of the melody. (In sequences of a later date, when texts in rhymed verse replaced the earlier “prosa” type, the couplets are often called “paired versicles.”) There is no preexisting *sequentia* melisma with such a regular structure, but it would remain standard for sequences for the next three hundred years. That structure, which begins to suggest strophic repetitions, may be the reason why Notker called his compositions “hymns.”

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Sequence

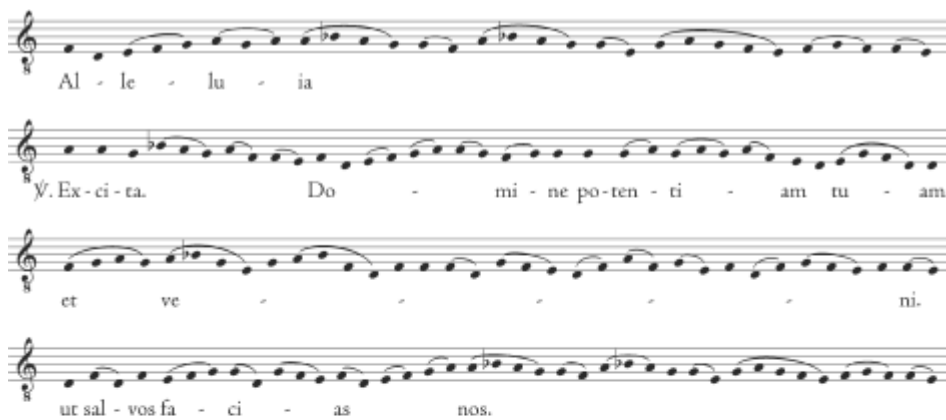
Plainchant

# HOW THEY WERE PERFORMED

Chapter: CHAPTER 2 New Styles and Forms

Source: MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin



Al - le - lu - ia

Ex - ci - ta. Do - mi - ne po - ten - ti - am tu - am.

et ve - ni.

ut sal - vos fa - ci - as nos.

Notker's text:



An - ge - lo - rum or - do sa - cer, De - i se - re - no sem - per vu - tu jo - cun - da - te, Qui

Al - le - lu - ia. Qui re - gis scep - tra for - ti dex - tra so - lus cunc - ta.

lau - de ip - si - us su - per fa - vum dul - ci pa - sce - ris in ae - vum, Cur - sum

Tu ple - bi tu - am o - sten - de ma - gnam ex - ci - tan - do po - ten - ti - am: Pre -

vi - tae no - strae nun - quam sta - bi - lem Tu - is sup - pli - ca - ti - o - ni - bus com - men - da De - o, Qui

sta do - na il - li sa - lu - ta - ri - a, quem pre - dix - e - runt pro - phe - ti - ca va - ti - ci - ni - a:

li - cet ex - cel - sus re - gnet in cae - lis, In - fi - ma ter - rae pi - us in - ten - dit.

A cla - ra po - li re - gi - a in no - stra Ihe - su mit - te Do - mi - ne ar - va.

ex. 2-4a Sequence by Notker Balbulus, *Angelorum ordo*

1  
Rex re - gum, De - us no - ster co - len - del

2  
Tu mo - de - ra - ris mi - li - ti - am chri - sti - a - nam  
Bel - lan - di gna - ros hor - ri - bi - li proe - li - o de - sti - nan - do,

3  
Con - su - les sci - os re - i pub - li - cae  
Dan - do ma - gi - stros tu - is po - pu - lis.

4  
Nec e - nim fal - le - ris. e - li - gen - di sa - pi - ens.  
Quem cu - i sub - ro - ges mi - ni - ste - ri - o De - us  
etc.

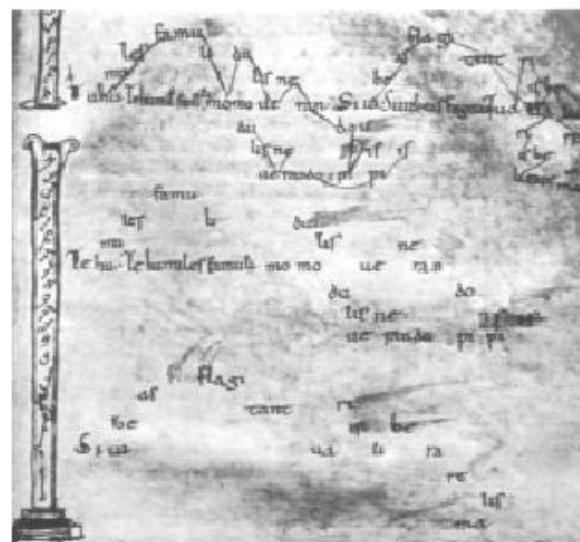
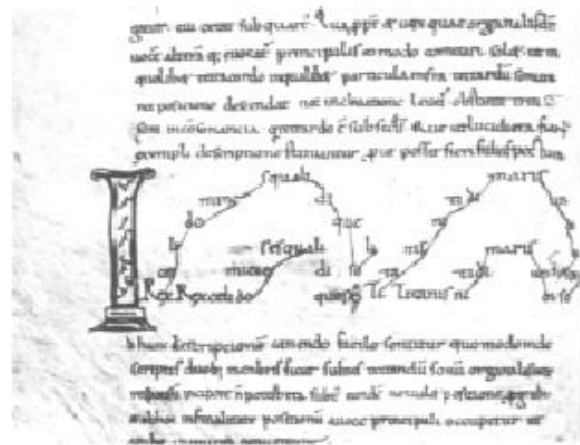
ex. 2-4b Sequence by Notker Balbulus, *Rex regum*

Even greater regularity, and even greater independence from preexistent models, can be seen in *Rex caeli* (Fig. 2-2; its first five lines are transcribed in Ex. 2-5), a composition of such sophisticated, artful shape that its status as a sequence has been questioned. (So let's call it a sequence-type hymn.) Unlike most early sequences, it is structurally "rounded" on several levels. Its lines are arranged not only in couplets but occasionally in quatrains—groups of four successive lines sung to the same melody. The melody of the first couplet recurs in the fourth, and the whole series of seven melodic strains then repeats (in a so-called double cursus or "double run-through") to provide the next seven. The last pair of melodic units recapitulates the opening and closing strains of the cursus. Line lengths are almost uniformly in multiples of four syllables (eight, twelve, sixteen), giving an impression of regular meter. Not only that, but the words of many of the couplets are linked by such a strong use of assonance—similarity of vowel placement—as to approach rhyme.

This was not only a remarkable composition but a famous one. It is found complete on a French manuscript leaf dating from the tenth century, but we know that it was a ninth-century composition—and already famous in the ninth century—because its first two couplets were chosen as a didactic illustration in *Musica enchiridis* ("Handbook of music"), the earliest surviving Frankish treatise about practical music-making, which is thought to date from some time between 860 and 900. The illustration is reproduced in Fig. 2-2. It is one of several examples in the treatise of polyphonic singing, and can serve us as a forceful reminder that polyphony was routinely practiced among the Franks as early as we have any evidence of their musical practice at all.



(a)



(b)

fig. 2-2 *Rex caeli Domine*, a sequence-like hymn probably dating from the ninth century. (a) Its most complete source, a French manuscript from the tenth century written in an alphabetic notation that specifies pitch precisely. (b) Its earliest source, the ninth-century treatise *Musica enchiriadis*, which shows a fragment of it, in a similar notational style, adapted to illustrate a common practice whereby monophonic chants were amplified polyphonically in performance. This provides evidence of polyphony as early as evidence of the chant itself.



1. Rex cae - li, Do - mi - ne ma - ris un - di - so - ni, Ti - ta - nis ni - ti - di squa - li - di - que so - li,  
King of heaven, Lord of the sounding sea, of the shining Titan sun and the gloomy earth,  
8. Mor - ta - lis o - cu - lus vi - det in fa - ci - e, Tu au - tem la - te - bras a - ni - mi per a - gras.  
The mortal eye sees the external form; Thou, however, dost search through the hiding places of the soul.



2. Te hu - mi - les fa - mu - li mo - du - lis ve - ne - ran - do pi - is,  
Thy humble servants, worshiping Thee with devout song as Thou has bidden,  
9. So - no - ris fi - di - bus fa - mu - li ti - bi - met de - vo - ti  
With sounding strings, we servants devoted to Thee



- Se, ju - be - as, fla - gi - tant va - ri - is li - be - ra - re ma - lis  
earnestly entreat Thee to order them freed from their various ills.  
Da - vi - dis se - qui - mur hu - mi - lem re - gis pre - cum ho - sti - am.  
attend the humble offering of the prayers of King David.



3. Ci - tha - ra sa - pi - en - tis me - lo - di - a est Ti - bi - met, ge - ni - tor, for - te pla - ci - ta;  
The cithara is the song of the wise; to Thee, Creator, may it be pleasing.  
10. Hoc Sa - ul lu - di - cro mi - ti - ga - ve - rat, Spi - ri - tu cum si - bi for - te de - bi - lem  
With this entertainment he had soothed Saul when from his soul, made feeble by chance,



- Cun - cta ca - ptus de - vo - to - rum lau - dum mu - ni - a No - stri quo - que su - me vo - ti har - mo - ni - am.  
Having obtained the whole service of praise of the devoted, receive also the harmony of our prayer.  
Spi - ri - ta - lem a - bo - le - bat ju - sti - ti - am Ip - so jo - co tu - a can - tans prae - co - ni - a.  
he was blotting out righteous justice; in this pastime singing your praises.



4. Pla - ca - re, Do - mi - ne, no - stris ob - se - qui - is, Quae noc - te fer - i - mus, quo - que me - ri - di - e,  
May Thou be appeased by our services, which we offer by night and also by day . . .  
11. Haec si - bi cae - li - tus mu - ne - ra ve - ne - rant, Ut i - ram dul - ci - bus pre - me - ret mo - du - lis.  
These gifts had come to him from heaven, that he might check anger with pleasant melodies.

Trans. Richard H. Hoppin

**ex. 2-5 *Rex caeli Domine* (Fig. 2-2a) transcribed**

1  
a. Rex cae - li, do - mi - ne ma - ris un - di - so - ni,  
b. Ti - ta - nis ni - ti - di squa - li - di - que so - li,

2  
a. Te hu - mi - les fa - mu - li mo - du - lis ve - ne - ran - do pi - is.  
b. Se, iu - be - as, fla - gi - tant va - ri - is li - be - ra - re ma - lis.

ex. 2-6 Polyphonic example from *Musica enchiriadis* (Fig. 2-2b) transcribed

In this arrangement (transcribed in Ex. 2-6), the upper voice sings the original *Rex caeli* melody, for which reason it is called the “principal voice” (*vox principalis*). The lower voice, called the *vox organalis* because it produces the harmony or counterpoint (called *organum* at the time), begins at the unison and holds on to its initial pitch as a drone until the principal voice has reached the interval of a fourth above it, the smallest interval considered consonant according to the theory of the time. At this point, the two voices move in parallel until the cadence (or *occursus*, as it was called, meaning the coming-together), which restores the unison. In the second phrase, the augmented fourth against B is avoided first by sustaining the “organal” G, and then by leaping to E. Once again unison is restored at the end.

This is *not* a polyphonic “composition.” Rather, it is an example of how Frankish cantors harmonized the chants they sang “by ear.” How did that style of harmony get into their ears? The answer to that question is lost among the unnotated musical repertoires that existed alongside the privileged repertory of notated Roman and Frankish chant. Literate musicians have always been much affected by the music in their aural environment, and the performance of all music, whether written down or not, is governed in part by unwritten conventions. (Otherwise, one could learn to compose or to play the piano simply by reading books.) We can assume that the monks who recorded our first examples of polyphony were not inventing it but adapting it from oral (probably secular) practice, and that the early examples were meant as models for application to other melodies.

Which melodies? More likely the new Frankish repertory of proses, hymns, and suchlike than the canonical Roman chant. That chant, being largely psalmodic, had (as we have seen) an exceptional “ethical” tradition demanding unison performance. The other, simpler examples given in *Musica enchiriadis* of polyphonic “performance practice” (strictly parallel doubling at the fourth, the fifth, and the octave) are based, like the one shown in Fig. 2-2, on syllabic Frankish compositions in the new style. But we do not really know what restrictions or preferences there may have been at this time; and it is tantalizingly possible that polyphonic singing was not the exception but the rule, at least in certain monastic communities.

The other remarkable feature of the *Rex caeli* hymn, both in its complete source and as quoted in *Musica enchiriadis*, is its notation. It is called Daseian notation after the Greek *prosodia daseia*, the “sign of rough breathing” used in various modified forms by Greek music theorists to indicate pitches, and it is found mainly in didactic treatises. In Fig. 2-2b, Daseian signs showing the pitches from *c* to *a* are written in ascending order inside the column preceding the first phrase of *Rex caeli*, and those from *c* to *c'* precede the wider-ranging second phrase. Here is proof that the Franks had at their disposal a notation that showed exact pitches. They could have used it in their chant manuscripts, too, if they had wanted to do so. Again we must confront the fact that music was still primarily an art of memory, and that in practical sources all that was required was enough notation to bring a melody forward, so to speak, from the back of the mind. “Sight-reading,” as we know it today, was not yet thought a useful skill.

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# Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Hymn

Psalm

## HYMNS

**Chapter:** CHAPTER 2 New Styles and Forms

**Source:** MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

**Author(s):** Richard Taruskin

The sequence, although it was the most elaborate, was only one of many new musical forms with which the Franks adorned and amplified the imported Roman chant, and made it their own. The strophic office hymn was another genre that they cultivated avidly. The Latin liturgy had known hymnody since at least the fourth century, but for doctrinal reasons it was rejected in Rome (and so it was not part of the repertory brought north under the Carolingians). St. Augustine recounts that his teacher St. Ambrose, the fourth-century bishop of Milan, had adapted hymns from Greek practice for full congregational singing during vigils. The greatest Latin hymnographer after Ambrose was a contemporary of Pope Gregory named Venantius Fortunatus (d. ca. 600), an Italian who served as bishop of Poitiers in west-central France. His most famous composition, *Pange lingua gloriosi* ("Sing, O my tongue"), used a metrical scheme (trochaic tetrameter) that would be widely imitated by later hymn composers.

Both Ambrose's fourth-century Milanese texts and Venantius's sixth-century "Gallican" ones remained current into the twentieth century, but no melodies can be documented before the year 1000, and once they begin appearing in monastic manuscripts, they appear in such profusion that most of the oldest texts are provided with as many as a dozen or more tunes. There is no telling which or how many of them date from before the ninth century, but the overwhelming majority conform so much better with the tonal criteria established by the ninth-century Frankish music theorists (whose work we will shortly be investigating) than they do with the tonal types of the Roman chant, that their Frankish origin seems virtually certain.

Hymnody is the apparsent antithesis (or rather, the calculated complement) of psalmody. Where psalms and their stichic appendages are lofty and numinous, conducive to spiritual repose and contemplation, hymns are the liturgy's popular songs: markedly rhythmical (whether their rhythms are organized by syllable count or by actual meter), strongly profiled in melody, conducive to enthusiasm. The first verses of three of the most famous ones are given in Ex. 2-7. At this point they may be regarded primarily as illustrations of the genre, but later they will serve as examples of contrasting tonalities within the Frankish "mode" system (and later still, we will see them embodied in polyphonic settings by famous composers).



fig. 2-3 St. Ambrose, the fourth-century governor and bishop of Milan who introduced Byzantine-style hymn-singing to the Western church. He is shown writing, in an illumination—initial F (Frater Ambrosius)—from the Bible of Pedro de Pamplona, Seville, MS 56-5-1, fol. 2.

*Ave maris stella* (“Hail, Star of the sea”) is an acclamation to the Blessed Virgin Mary intended for one of the many offices devoted to her that burgeoned in the Franco-Roman liturgy around the time of the early neumatized manuscripts. The text is securely dated to the ninth century. The rather decoratively neumatic tune, the most famous of several associated with the poem, makes its appearance in the extant manuscripts somewhat later. In a still primarily oral age, however, the date of a melody’s earliest written source bears no reliable witness to the date of its creation.

The version of *Pange lingua* that follows is not Venantius’s original but a reworking—called “parody,” but without any connotation of satire—by St. Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), composed for the office of Corpus

Christi (veneration of the body of Christ). Like our contemporary satirical parodies, medieval sacred parodies (also called *contrafacta*) were meant to be sung to traditional tunes, so that in this case the melody is far older than the words. Both this example and the preceding one testify in their opposite ways to the fluidity of the text-music relationship in this and many other medieval sung repertoires.

*Veni creator spiritus*, the great Pentecost hymn and something of a Carolingian anthem, has been attributed honorifically to many famous Franks, including Hrabanus Maurus (d. 856), the archbishop of Mainz, and even Charlemagne himself. The poem employs the so-called Ambrosian stanza (four lines of eight syllables each), established by the original Latin hymnodist five centuries before; but the dynamically arching melody, its successive phrases marking cadences on what we still identify as “primary” scale degrees, is of exemplary Frankish design.

a. *Ave maris stella*

Ave maris stella, Dei, Mater alma, Atque semper Virgo, Felix caeli porta.

ex. 2-7a Three Frankish hymns

Pange lingua glo - ri - o - si Corpo - ris myste - ri - um, Sanguisque  
pre - ti - o - si, Quem in mundi pre - ti - um Fru - ctus ventris gene - ro - si  
Rex effudit genti - um.

ex. 2-7b *Pange lingua gloriosi*

Veni Cre - a - tor Spi - ri - tus, Mentis tu - orum vi - si - ta: Imple su - perna  
gra - ti - a Quae tu cre - asti pecto - ra.

ex. 2-7c *Veni creator spiritus*

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# Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online

Trope

Introit

## TROPEs

**Chapter:** CHAPTER 2 New Styles and Forms

**Source:** MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

**Author(s):** Richard Taruskin

Sequences and hymns were complete compositions in their own right—freestanding songs, so to speak, on a par (but contrasting in style) with the psalmodic chants of the inherited Roman chant. Another large category of Frankish compositions consisted of chants that did not stand alone but were attached in various ways and for various reasons to other—usually older, canonical—chants. One of the commonest ways of attaching new musical settings to older ones was by casting the new one as a preface, to amplify and interpret the old one for the benefit of contemporary worshipers. Although the practice, like most Frankish musical innovations, can be dated to the ninth century, it was cultivated most intensely beginning in the tenth, reflecting (if only indirectly) the spiritual and creative ideals of the so-called Cluniac reform of monastic life.

The Benedictine monastery of Cluny, in east-central France, was founded by the Abbot Berno in 910 under the patronage of Guillaume (William) the Pious, the first duke of Aquitaine. It was established on land recently won by William from the duke of Burgundy and deeded to the monastery outright so as to free it from lay interference. There, Berno sought to reestablish the original Benedictine discipline that had seriously eroded during two centuries of Norse invasion. The chief means of purifying monastic life was vastly to increase the amount of time and energy devoted to liturgical observances. That meant not only expanding the duration and gravity of services but also educating the monks in devotion. This was a possible purpose of the newly composed prefaces, called tropes (from the Latin *tropus*, possibly related to the Byzantine-Greek *troparion*, or nonscriptural hymn stanza in art-prose).

The primary sites of troping were the antiphons of the Mass proper. Attached most characteristically to the Introit, the trope became a comment on the Mass as a whole, as if to say, “We are celebrating Mass today, and this is the reason.” Tropes were also attached to the other Gregorian antiphons that accompanied ritual action, especially the Offertory (“we are offering gifts, and this is the reason”) and the Communion (“we are tasting the wine and the wafer, and this is the reason”). While troping became a very widespread practice as the Cluniac reform spread over large areas of France, Germany, and northern Italy, the individual tropes were a more local and discretionary genre than the canonical chant. A given antiphon can be found with many different prefaces in various sources, reflecting local liturgical customs.

At their most elaborate, tropes could function not only as preface to a complete Introit, say, but also as prefaces to each stichic psalm-verse in the antiphon, or to the cursive verse or verses that followed, or even to the doxology formula. Thus, in practice, tropes could take the form of interpolations as well as prefaces. Unlike the syllabic sequence, which contrasted starkly with the melismatic alleluia that it followed, tropes imitated the neumatic style of the antiphons to which they were appended, to all intents and purposes becoming part of them. Because the first words of chants are always sung by the precentor to set the pitch, it is thought that the tropes may have been differentiated from the choral antiphons by being assigned to soloists.

Manuscripts containing tropes, called “trovers,” are preeminently associated with two monasteries. One is the East Frankish monastery of St. Gallen, where Notker played his part in the development of the sequence,

and where the monk Tuotilo (d. 915) may have had a similar hand in the development of the trope. The other is the West Frankish monastery of St. Martial at Limoges in southwestern France, which in the tenth century belonged, like Cluny, to the Duchy of Aquitaine. The three tropes or sets of tropes in Ex. 2-8 and Ex. 2-9 are all found in tenth-century St. Martial tropers (but with later concordances in staff notation), and all meant to enlarge upon the same canonical item—the Introit of the Easter Sunday Mass, the most copiously troped item in the entire liturgy.

The canonical text of the Introit consists of excerpts from three verses—18, 5, and 6 respectively—of Psalm 138, words that by the ninth century already had a long tradition of Christian *exegesis*, or doctrinal interpretation. Within the original Psalm, the verse excerpt that opens the Introit—*Resurrexi, et adhuc tecum sum* (“I arose, and am still with thee”)—refers to an awakening from sleep. Amalar of Metz was one of the many Christian commentators who construed these words as having been addressed by the eternal Christ to his Father through the unwitting agency of the psalmist David, and thus to refer prophetically to the event the Easter Mass commemorates: Christ’s resurrection from the dead on the third day after his crucifixion. It was one of the functions of the tropes to confirm this interpretation and render it explicit.

The first and simplest trope in the sample (Ex. 2-8a) consists of a single exhortation or invitation to the choir to sing, strengthening the assumption that the trope would have been performed by a precentor or cantor. Despite its brevity, it manages most economically to accomplish the task of an exegetical trope, identifying the psalmist’s words with the victory of Christ. Ex. 2-8b contains what might be called a full set of tropes to the Introit, introducing not only the first stich but each of the other two as well. An even more elaborate set has a fourth line to set off the concluding “alleluia.” Like the one in Ex. 2-8b, it amplifies the psalm verses with a patchwork of texts freely mined and adapted from the Bible and meant in this context, like the Introit verses themselves, to represent the words of Christ. Yet another set of Introit tropes from St. Martial embeds the Introit text within a narrative that imitates the style of the Gospels, and attaches *neumae* or interpolated melismas to each stich in the antiphon as a further embellishment.

Trope

Psal-li - te re - gi ma - gno de - vi - cto mor - tis im - pe - ri - o.

Introit antiphon

E - ia: Re - sur - re - xi et ad - huc te - cum sum, etc.

ex. 2-8a Prefatory trope to the Easter Introit, *Resurrexi*

a. Trope

Ec - ce pa - ter cun - ctis, ut jus - se - rat or - do per - a - ctis

Introit antiphon

Re-sur - re-xi et ad - huc te-cum sum al - le - lu - ia:

Trope

Vi - ctor ut ad ce - los cal - ca - ta mor - te red - i - rem.

Antiphon resumed

Po - su - i - sti su - per me ma - num tu - am, al - le - lu - ia:

ex. 2-8b The Easter Introit, larded with two sets of tropes from the monastery of St. Martial

By all odds the most famous of the *Resurrexi* tropes, probably the most famous of all tropes, are the ones that recount the *visitatio sepulchri*—the visit of the three Marys to Christ’s tomb on the morning after his burial—in the form of a dialogue between them and the angel who announces the Resurrection, thus furnishing a very neat transition into the Introit text. In Ex. 2-9, which gives an early version of this trope from a St. Gallen manuscript dating around 950, the text carries special directions (known in liturgical books as *rubrics*, since they were often entered in red ink made from *rubrica*, Latin for “red earth”) somewhat needlessly specifying what is a “question” (*interrogatio*) and what an “answer” (*responsorium*). These rubrics seem to be an indication that two (or several) singers were to act out the dialogue in parts. Tropes like this one were the earliest and simplest of what became a large repertory of Latin church plays (sometimes called “liturgical dramas”) with music. More elaborate ones will be described in the next chapter.

Like many favorite chants, the Easter dialogue trope gave rise to parodies. An eleventh-century manuscript at St. Martial contains a dialogue trope for Christmas that mimics the Easter prototype in entertaining detail, beginning with the famous incipit *Quem quaeritis* (“Whom do you seek?”), then substituting the manger for the tomb and the shepherds for the Marys. Once again, the object is to justify an Old Testament reading as a prophecy of Christ’s coming, in this case the famous lines from the book of Isaiah (“Unto us a child is born”) on which the Christmas Introit is based. Christmas, too, became a fertile site of church dramas (“manger plays”) in centuries to come. Scholars used to think that the eventual medieval church plays, enacted not at Mass but after matins, were amplifications of actual Introit tropes (tropes on tropes, so to speak). The relationship has turned out to be far less direct than that, but the general practice of acting out the liturgy did nevertheless originate in the dialogue tropes for Easter and Christmas.

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online

Mass

Ordinary chants

# THE MASS ORDINARY

**Chapter:** CHAPTER 2 New Styles and Forms

**Source:** MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

**Author(s):** Richard Taruskin

Finally, Frankish composers were responsible for creating fancy melodies for the invariant texts of the Mass liturgy, the ones recited at every Mass regardless of the occasion. There had not been any need for such settings in pre-Carolingian times, because these texts—acclamations all—had not yet been assigned stable liturgical positions. Their adoption by the Franks reflects a love of pomp, most likely transferred from civic ceremonial (like the *laudes regiae*, the “royal acclamations,” with which Charlemagne was greeted after his Roman coronation). Once these texts became fixed, they could be written down as part of the Mass *ordo* (Latin for “order of events”), which listed things to do at a given service.



**fig. 2-4 Ivory book cover, probably of a sacramentary or a graduale, from the court of Charles the Bald, Charlemagne's grandson, who ruled the kingdom of the West Franks from 843 to 877. It shows the Eucharist service—the second part of the solemn Mass, in which the wine and host are miraculously transformed.**

The texts (and chants) proper to the unique occasion were collected in their own books (antiphoners, graduals, and the like). Those that were sung at every Mass were included in the ordo itself. Hence to musicians the term “Mass Ordinary” (from *ordinarium missae*) has come to mean, precisely, the five invariant texts sung by the choir: Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei. These began to receive significant musical attention in the Carolingian period; much later they began to get set as a unified polyphonic cycle, spawning a tradition of Mass composition that lasted into the twentieth century, to which many famous composers of the standard concert repertory (Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, to name a few) made contributions. Another text that was often included in the early ordinary formularies was the dismissal versicle (*Ite, missa est*—from which the term *Missa*, for Mass, was adopted) and its response, *Deo gratias* (“Thanks be to God”).

The Gloria, also known as the “Gloria in excelsis” or Greater Doxology (to distinguish it from the “Gloria patri” formula or Lesser Doxology, inserted at the end of psalms and canticles), was the first to be cultivated. Its text begins with two verses or stichs from the Gospel of St. Luke, quoting the angels’ greeting to the shepherds on the night of the Nativity. For this reason, before it was assigned to its fixed position in the Mass, the *Gloria in excelsis* was often used as a Christmas processional hymn, forming the culmination of the celebrants’ entrance. (It was also used this way at Easter; and after it joined the Mass, it was not sung during the penitential weeks preceding those two feasts so that its reappearance would express seasonal gladness.) Following the angelic hymn are a series of *laudes* that may actually have originated in the context of ruler worship. Next come a series of litanies, or petitions, and finally a concluding praise-song. While its earliest use seems to have been congregational, implying a simple, formulaic style, the Glorias preserved in Frankish manuscripts are neumatic chants with occasional melismas, and (once past the celebrant’s intonation) are clearly intended for the clerical or monastic *schola*. Ex. 2-10 is a ninth-century Gloria melody, one of the earliest of the forty or so surviving Frankish settings. (Its number, IV, is the one assigned to it in modern chant books.)

The Sanctus is a biblical acclamation (from the book of Isaiah). Under its Hebrew name, *Kedusha*, it has been part of the Jewish worship service since ancient times, whence it was taken over by the earliest Christians as the congregation’s part of the “eucharistic” (thanksgiving) prayer. Even in its Latin form, the text retains a pair of Hebrew words: *Sabaoth* (“hosts”) and *Hosanna* (“save us”). The earliest Frankish settings, like Ex. 2-11, date from the tenth century. By then, like the Gloria, it was sung not by the entire congregation but by the trained *schola*.

The Agnus Dei has a much shorter history in the liturgy than the Sanctus, having been introduced to the Mass only in the seventh century, to accompany the breaking of bread before communion. At first it was cast as litanies, with an unspecified number of repetitions of the acclamation to the Lamb of God, answered by the congregational prayer, “have mercy on us.” Later the chant was standardized and abbreviated, limited to three acclamations, and with the third response changed to “grant us peace.” This happened right around the time the Franks were busy composing their “ordinary” chants, and so the early melodies were in this case coeval with the text. Of the two following examples, the first (Ex. 2-12a) probably represents a survival from the older litany practice, while the second (Ex. 2-12b), a Frankish arrangement and abridgment of the earliest (Greek) surviving melody for the Agnus Dei, is cast in a rounded “ternary form” (ABA) to match the adapted text. Its neumatic antiphon-like style makes it suitable for performance by the *schola*.

Glo - ri - a in excelsis De - o. Et in terra pax ho - mi - ni - bus bonae vo - lun - ta - tis. Laudamus te.  
 Bene - di - cimus te. A - do - ra - mus te. Glo - ri - fica - mus te. Gra - ti - as agimus  
 ti - bi propter magnam glo - ri - am tu - am. Do - mi - ne De - us, Rex caelestis, De - us Pa - ter  
 omni - pot - ens. Do - mi - ne Fi - li - uni - ge - ni - te Je - su Chri - ste. Do - mi - ne De - us,  
 Agnus De - i, Fi - li - us Pa - tris. Qui tollis pec - ca - ta mundi, mi - se - re - re no - bis.  
 Qui tollis pec - ca - ta mundi, suscipe de - pre - ca - ti - onem nostram. Qui se - des ad dexteram Pa - tris,  
 mi - se - re - re no - bis. Quo - ni - am tu so - lus sanctus. Tu so - lus Do - mi - nus. Tu so - lus Altissimus,  
 Je - su Chri - ste. Cum Sancto Spi - ri - tu, in glo - ri - a De - i Pa - tris.  
 A - men.

ex. 2-10 Gloria IV

Since the ordinary chants were composed precisely when the practice of antiphon-troping was at its height, they too played host to sometimes very extended tropes. Particularly rich is the repertory of Gloria tropes, many of which were proper to specific feasts or classes of feast (such as those in honor of the Blessed Virgin). These tropes often took the form of additional *laudes* or acclamations, inserted in between the standard ones. One such verse that seemed to live a life of its own in the manuscripts went *Regnum tuum solidum permanebit in aeternum* (“Your abiding reign will endure forever”). It is found following “Tu solus altissimus, Jesu Christe” in many sources, associated with many different Gloria melodies.

Sanctus, \* Sanctus, Sanctus Dominus De - us Saba - oth. Ple - ni sunt cae - li et terra  
 glo - ri - a tu - a. Hosanna in excel - sis. Bene - dictus qui ve - nit in no - mine  
 Domini. Ho - sanna in excel - sis.

ex. 2-11 Sanctus I

Agnus De - i, \* qui tollis pecca - ta mundi: mi - se - re - re no - bis. Agnus De - i, \*

qui tollis pecca - ta mundi: mi - se - re - re no - bis. Agnus De - i, \* qui tollis

pecca - ta mundi: dona nobis pa - cem.

ex. 2-12a Agnus XVIII

What is especially fascinating is the way in which *Regnum tuum solidum* itself became a site for embellishment. In some sources, an impressive *neuma* (as Amalar would have called it) has been grafted in to coincide with the first syllable of the word *permanebit* (“will endure”). This seems to be an example of what would later be called “tone painting,” since the melisma, by stretching the word out, in effect illustrates its meaning. And then, in other sources, the melisma is subjected in turn to syllabic texting in the form of a *prosula*. Thus two types of liturgical embroidery—melodic (*neuma*) and textual (*prosula*)—have been combined with a melodic/textual interpolation (*trope*) in one magnificent clump (Ex. 2-13).

Agnus De - i, \* qui tol - lis pecca-ta mun - di: mi-se-re - re no - bis.

Agnus De - i, \* qui tol - lis pecca-ta mun - di: mi - se - re - re no - bis.

Agnus De - i, \* qui tol - lis pecca-ta mun - di: do-na no - bis pa - cem.

ex. 2-12b Agnus II

The image displays four staves of musical notation in a single system, illustrating the relationship between different levels of musical structure in a Gloria. The first staff, labeled 'Laus (Gloria trope)', shows a melodic line with the lyrics: '...Tu so-lus al-tis-si-mus Je-su Chri-ste Re-gnum tu-um so-li-dum'. The second staff, labeled 'Neuma (interpolated melisma)', shows a more complex melodic line with the lyrics: 'O rex glo-ri-ae qui es splen-dor ac spon-sus ec-cle-si-ae quam de-co-ra-sti tu-o quo-que'. The third staff, labeled 'Prosula', shows a melodic line with the lyrics: 'Per pre-ci-o-so san-gui-ne, hanc re-ge sem-per pi-is-si-me qui es fons mi] se-ri-cor-di-ae per-'. The fourth staff, labeled 'Gloria IV resumed', shows a melodic line with the lyrics: 'ma-ne-bit in ae-ter-num Cum san-cto spi-ri-tu...'. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and bar lines, and the lyrics are written below the notes.

**ex. 2-13 Aprosula within a neuma within a laus within a Gloria**

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online

Mass

Kyrie eleison

### KYRIES

Chapter: CHAPTER 2 New Styles and Forms

Source: MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The remaining “ordinary” chant, the *Kyrie eleison*, has a more complex—indeed, a somewhat puzzling—history. Its special status is evident first of all from its language: the one Greek survival in the Latin Mass. *Kyrie eleison* means the same thing as *Domine, miserere nobis*: namely, “Lord, have mercy on us” (compare the middle part of the Gloria in Excelsis and the Agnus Dei refrain). It used to be a common liturgical response, especially appropriate for use in the long series of petitions known as litanies, which often accompanied processions. Pope Gregory the Great, in one of the few musically or liturgically significant acts that may be firmly associated with his name, decreed in a letter that the formula *Kyrie eleison* should alternate with *Christe eleison* (“Christ [that is, Savior], have mercy on us”). By the ninth century, when the Frankish musicians went to work on the chant, the Kyrie had been established as a ninefold acclamation: thrice *Kyrie eleison*, thrice *Christe eleison*, thrice *Kyrie eleison*.

As in the case of the other “ordinary” chants, there are simple Kyries that probably reflect early congregational singing, and more decorative melodies that were probably produced at the Frankish monasteries, beginning in the tenth century, for performance by the *schola*. These more artful Kyrie tunes often reflect the shape of the litany they adorn, matching its ninefold elaboration of a three-part idea with patterns of repetition like AAA BBB AAA’ or AAA BBB CCC’. (In both cases the last invocation—the A’ or C’—is usually rendered more emphatic than the rest, most typically by inserting or repeating a melisma.) Ex. 2-14a is one of these tenth-century tunes; note that while the words *Kyrie–Christe–Kyrie* are set to a non-repeating (ABC) pattern, the word *eleison* has an AA’B pattern. The retention of the same formula for *eleison* while *Kyrie* changes to *Christe* and back seems to be a vestige of an old congregational litany refrain.

The image displays three staves of Gregorian chant notation for Kyrie IV. Each staff begins with a C-clef and a common time signature. The first staff contains the melody for 'Kyri - e \* e - le - i - son. Chri - ste e - le - i - son.' The second staff contains the melody for 'Ky - ri - e e - le - i - son. Ky - ri - e \* \*\*'. The third staff contains the melody for 'e - le - i - son.' The asterisks and double asterisks indicate melismatic passages.

ex. 2-14a Kyrie IV

The earliest sources for ordinary chants were little books called *Kyriales*, by analogy with *Graduale*, the much bigger book that contained the Mass propers. Most Kyriales date from the tenth and eleventh centuries. One of their curious features is the way Kyrie melodies are recorded in them. They are entered twice, first in melismatic form as shown in Ex. 2-14a, and then in syllabically texted form as shown in Ex. 2-14b.

1. Cun-cti-po-tens ge-ni-tor, De-us o-mni-cre-a-tor, e - le - i - son.  
 2. Fons et - o - ri - go bo - ni, pi - e, lux-que per-en - nis e - le - i - son.  
 3. Sal - vi - fi - cet pi - e - tas tu - a nos, bo - ne rec - tor e - le - i - son.

4. Chri - ste, De - i splen - dor, vir - tus pa - tris - que so - phi - a e - le - i - son.  
 5. Plas - ma - tis hu - ma - ni fa - ctor, la - psi re - pe - ra - tur, e - le - i - son.  
 6. Ne tu - a dam - ne - tur, Je - su, fa - ctu - ra be - ni - gne, e - le - i - son.

7. Am - bo - rum sa - crum spi - ra - men, ne - xus a - mor - que e - le - i - son.  
 8. Pro - ce - tens fo - mes, vi - tae fons, pu - ci - fi - cans vis, e - le - i - son.

9. Pur - ga - tor cul - pae, ve - ni - ae lar - gi - tor o - pi - mae, of - fen - sas de - le, san - cto nos mu - ne - re re - ple,  
 spi - ri - tus al - me, e - le - i - son.

ex. 2-14b Kyrie, *Cunctipotens Genitor Deus*

The easy explanation would be that the melismatic Kyrie is the canonical version, and the syllabically texted one has been enhanced (or corrupted) by a prosula. That, at any rate, was the assumption made by the sixteenth-century editors of the chant who, in the purifying spirit of the Counter Reformation, purged all Kyries of their syllabic texts. (Even so, their old incipits are still used to identify the Kyrie melodies in modern liturgical books: Ex. 2-14a is now called “Kyrie IV, *Cunctipotens Genitor Deus*.”) There are several reasons to question that assumption. For one thing there is no evidence that the melismatic Kyries are any older than the texted ones. They appear side by side in the sources from the beginning. Indeed, the earliest text we have for a Mass Kyrie, from Amalar of Metz himself, writing around 830, is “texted,” as follows: *Kyrie eleison, Domine pater, miserere; Christe eleison, miserere, qui nos redemisti sanguine tuo; et iterum Kyrie eleison, Domine Spiritus Sancte, miserere.* [Lord have mercy on us; O Lord our father, have mercy on us; Christ, have mercy on us, O Thou who hast redeemed us with Thy blood; and again, Lord, have mercy on us; O Lord, Holy Spirit, have mercy on us.]

This, then, was a Kyrie that to a ninth-century writer looked normal, consisting as it did of a traditional Greek acclamation amplified with newer and more specific Latin ones.

Evidence concerning chronology—the age of sources, the testimony of early witnesses—counts as “external” evidence. There is “internal” evidence, too, on behalf of the primacy of texted Kyries—that is, evidence based on observation of the musical artifacts themselves (or rather, their appearance in the manuscripts we have). If the texts in the texted Kyries are indeed prosulas—that is, words added to a preexisting melismatic chant—then why is the short neuma on *eleison* left “unprosulated” every time? Would it not be more plausible to assume that the regular alternation of syllabic and neumatic prosody was part of the original conception? In the case of *Cunctipotens genitor*, the texted form must have come first for the additional reason that the text is in verse, not prose. What is not prose is no prosula. Less tautologically, there is little likelihood that the notes of a preexisting melisma will by chance accommodate the strict requirements of poetic scansion.



It has been suggested that the reason for the appearance of texted and melismatic Kyrie melodies side by side has to do with the state of notation in the tenth century, when the neumes had been well established, but the staff had yet to be invented. The syllabic notation was necessary in order to show which syllables were sung to which notes; but the melismatic notation, in which the various neume shapes indicated rise and fall much better than single notes could do, was necessary in order to record the melodies' contour accurately enough to serve even a rudimentary mnemonic purpose. The same double-entry procedure is found in early sequence manuscripts. Both the syllabic sequence melody and a melismatic counterpart, conventionally texted *Alleluia*, are frequently found side by side, or else in consecutive sections of the book. The assumption that these melismatic tunes were in every case preexisting *sequentia* melismas, to which the words of the sequence were later added, has been questioned on the same grounds of chronology as in the case of the Kyries, and this has led to a thorough revision of the history of the sequence.<sup>4</sup> It was probably cases like these, where double notation was necessary in order to convey all the needed information, that made it urgent to find a way of conveying all the information at once. This, in short, may have been the necessity that mothered the invention of the staff.

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## Notes:

(4) The chief questioner is Richard Crocker, in *The Early Medieval Sequence*.

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Mass

# THE FULL FRANKO-ROMAN MASS

**Chapter:** CHAPTER 2 New Styles and Forms

**Source:** MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

**Author(s):** Richard Taruskin

With the standardization of the "ordinary" chants, the Franks completed a musical enhancement of the sixth-century *ordo* (or agenda) of the western Mass that established its form for the next millennium. Their version, which was reimported back to Rome in the eleventh century and became standard almost everywhere in Europe and the British Isles, is given in Table 2-1.

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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[Old Roman chant](#)

[Gregorian chant](#)

# “OLD ROMAN” AND OTHER CHANT DIALECTS

**Chapter:** CHAPTER 2 New Styles and Forms

**Source:** MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

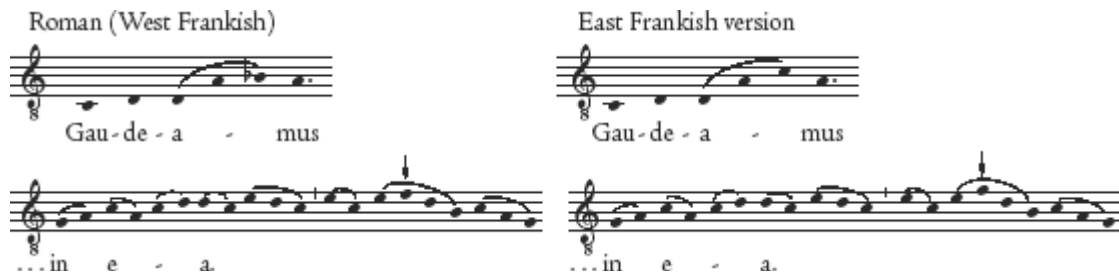
**Author(s):** Richard Taruskin

The reintroduction of the Frankish redaction, or adaptation, of the Roman chant back to Rome was to have marked the final stage in the musical unification of Western Christendom. It also entailed the importation of the Frankish neumes, which were soon adapted to the staff and became a universal European system of notation. Once neumatic chant manuscripts began to be produced in Rome, however, some surprising anomalies appeared. The most surprising consists of a small group of *graduales* and *antiphoners*, produced in Rome between the eleventh and the thirteenth centuries, containing a repertory of chants for the Mass and Office that, while clearly related to it, differs significantly from the standard Franco-Roman “Gregorian” chant. It is, generally speaking, both more formulaic and more ornamental than the standard redaction.

Most scholars agree that this variant repertory, which has been nicknamed the “Old Roman” chant, shares with Gregorian chant a common origin in the Roman church singing of the eighth century. The basic, as yet unanswered, question is whether the Old Roman chant, despite the late date of its sources, represents this original tradition, which later Roman singers (perhaps under Pope Vitalian, who reigned from 657 to 672) or even the Franks themselves radically edited and streamlined; or whether the Old Roman chant is the evolutionary result of three hundred years of oral tradition in Rome itself that took place after the original eighth-century version had gone north.

To put these matters in terms of a bald “either/or” is very much to oversimplify a complicated situation. Yet of the two alternatives just described, the second seems to accord better with what is known of the nature of oral transmission. Repertories, even those available in written form, are never wholly stable but are in a constant, indeed daily state of gradual incremental flux that comes about inescapably with use. Any living tradition, whatever its ostensible aims, is an engine of change.

Thus, although it is much more common, and certainly appropriate, to pay tribute to the Carolingians’ centralizing achievement by remarking on the high degree of uniformity among the earliest Frankish manuscripts containing the Gregorian chant, the fact remains that there are also many small discrepancies among them—indeed, between any two of them. There are also distinct, recognized local or geographical “dialects” within the tradition of Gregorian chant. East Frankish (that is, German) sources often turn the semitones in West Frankish (that is, French) sources into minor thirds, possibly reflecting the habits of ears and throats accustomed to a pentatonic (or, more precisely, an *anhemitonic*—that is, semitoneless) folk idiom (see Ex. 2-15).



ex. 2-15 Incipit of the *Gaudeamus* Introit and the climactic phrase of the *Haec dies* gradual in West Frankish and East Frankish versions

To ignore these differences in favor of the uniformity (or, contrariwise, to de-emphasize the uniformity in favor of the differences) is a decision one makes depending on the kind of story one wants to tell. Stories that emphasize sameness are, in the first place, shorter and more manageable than stories that emphasize difference. The tendency in a book like this is to minimize exceptions and get on with things. But one pays a price for the space or the time one saves. One can form the mental habit of looking for sameness instead of difference, which can lead to an actual (perhaps unconscious) preference for simplifying sameness, and a concomitant (equally unconscious) antagonism toward complicating difference.

In the case of the history of Gregorian chant, such an antagonism toward difference recapitulates on the apparently innocuous plane of historiography the ruthless political program of the Carolingians and the papacy. (This seems to be one reason why the Old Roman chant, whose existence—or persistence—makes for a pesky complication of an otherwise simple and triumphant narrative, has received from many scholars a very negative “aesthetic” assessment.<sup>5</sup>) To generalize even further, antagonism toward difference implies sympathy with the interests of elites. This tendency is particularly characteristic of histories of the fine arts, for the fine arts have always depended upon political, social, and religious elites for support.

That is why it seems appropriate, as a way of ending a chapter about the propitious musical achievements of the ninth- and tenth-century Franks who succeeded in establishing and canonizing one particular repertory of plainchant, briefly to cast an eye at some pockets of resistance—chant repertoires that, like the Old Roman, managed to hold out (at least for a while) against the Gregorian tide.

The most successful of these was (or is) the liturgical chant of the archdiocese of Milan, which has lasted to this day, although, like the Gregorian chant, it is falling out of use (or where still used, sung in Italian translation) in the wake of the liturgical reforms instigated by the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s. Milan, as we know, was the fourth-century seat of St. Ambrose, a figure with a legend and an authority equal to St. Gregory’s; and so the myth of Ambrose has legitimized the survival of the Milanese (or “Ambrosian”) rite and sustained it even as the myth of Gregory legitimized the ascendancy almost everywhere else of the Franco-Roman.

Like the Old Roman chant, the Ambrosian entered the written tradition later than the Gregorian; most manuscripts containing it were notated in the twelfth century or later. Whether because of its actual age or because of its longer preliterate tradition, the Ambrosian chant tends to be more melismatic than the Gregorian and, in the Mass propers, more given to responsorial psalmody, in which a soloist sings verses in alternation with melismatic choral refrains, a practice largely confined to the Office in Gregorian psalmody. Since they were never mediated by Frankish editors, the Ambrosian melodies conform only vaguely with the familiar system of medieval “church modes” (the subject of our next chapter).

Also notated in the tenth and eleventh centuries was the chant sung on the Iberian peninsula, sung at least since the seventh century, but called Mozarabic (a term referring to Christians living under Islamic domination) because it continued to be sung after the Moorish invasion of 711, which ushered in a period of Muslim political rule that lasted almost until the end of the fifteenth century. The Mozarabic chant was officially suppressed in favor of the Gregorian in 1085 following the Christian reconquest of Toledo, the seat

of the Spanish church. Hence almost all of the Mozarabic sources are notated in nondiastematic neumes that cannot now be read for their precise pitch content. But even so, the makeup of the liturgy, the style of its constituent melodies (whether syllabic or melismatic, etc.), and hence its relationship to other rites can be assessed; and because they are the largest body of liturgical manuscripts to preserve an authenticated pre-Carolingian Latin rite, the Mozarabic sources have attracted a good deal of scholarly attention, if not as much as they deserve. The rite underwent a spurious nationalistic revival in the late fifteenth century, when the Moors were expelled from Spain. Printed books of “Mozarabic chant” were then prepared, but the melodies they contain (some of them still sung at the Cathedral of Toledo) bear no discernible relation to the neumes in the authentic Mozarabic sources.

The so-called Beneventan chant, a repertory sung at various locales in southern Italy (Benevento, Monte Cassino, etc.) was another rite that lasted just long enough alongside the Gregorian to make it into neumatic notation. Beneventan manuscripts dating from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries survive, but only the oldest layer (mainly consisting of chants for Easter and Holy Week) is free of Gregorian infiltration. Judging from what little remains of it, it is possible that the Beneventan repertory was largely a Latinized import from the Byzantine church. The same may be said for the rite of Ravenna, the ex-Byzantine city that Pepin conquered and bestowed on Pope Stephen II. It survived into the manuscript age in shreds and was mostly extinct by the end of the eleventh century.

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## Notes:

(5) It is given a stern “interrogation” in Leo Treitler, “The Politics of Reception: Tailoring the Present as Fulfilment of a Desired Past,” *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* CXVI (1991): 280–98.

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Service

### WHAT IS ART?

**Chapter:** CHAPTER 2 New Styles and Forms

**Source:** MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

**Author(s):** Richard Taruskin

As has been observed frequently and well, the forms of Frankish musical composition, the earliest composition in the literate tradition we habitually call our own, often contradict the assumptions that we habitually make about musical compositions—assumptions we do not usually even know we are making, precisely because they are habitual. We normally neither reflect upon them nor consider alternatives. Very old music often asks us to consider alternatives, and to reflect.

Regarding tropes to the Introit, for example, one might well ask in what sense a series of interpolations into a preexisting piece can itself be considered “a piece.” It is neither continuous nor coherent nor unitary nor independent, all of these adjectives naming qualities that we tacitly expect pieces of music to exemplify. Indeed, the Introit itself, once it plays host to the trope, loses its continuity, its coherence, its unity, and its independence. Does it lose its piecehood when invaded by the other? And if its piecehood is so easily lost, how genuine was it to begin with?

Rather than judge the trope or its host on the basis of their conformity with our casual expectations (for such a judgment can only be invidious), we might take the opportunity the trope affords us to critique those expectations. For it would indeed be surprising if musical expectations had not changed over a period of a thousand years.

The first criterion that might be questioned is the notion from which all the others stem—namely, that a piece of music worthy of consideration as such ought to be able to stand timelessly on its own two feet. What is demanded is that it have an existence independent of its context, its observers, and particularly its users. This is called the principle of autonomy, and it is pretty universally regarded today as a requirement for aesthetic appreciation—that is, for evaluation as a work of art. A trope certainly fails this test, but then so do all the other musical artifacts of its time.

For music only became autonomous when it stopped being useful; and this did not happen until conditions allowed such a thing to happen. Some of those conditions were beginning to exist a thousand years ago. The potential for autonomy existed as soon as the means of recording music in writing existed. Until then, music was only an activity—something you did (or that others did while you did something else). All of the music we have been considering thus far falls into that category. It is both literally and figuratively service music: music for the divine service and music that serves a divine purpose. And yet the divine service was after all a human activity, and the music that both accompanied this activity and gave it shape was a music that functioned in symbiosis with a social framework as yet undivorced from daily life. A lot of music is still like that; we call it “folk.” But some music has since been objectified as “art.” It happened in stages, of which the first, as we know, was writing. In written form music at last possessed (or could possess) some sort of physical reality independent of the people who made it up and repeated it. It could outlive those who remembered it. (And it could reach us, who no longer have a use for it.) It could be silently reproduced and transmitted from composer to performer, thus for the first time completely distinguishing their roles. With the advent of printing, almost exactly five hundred years ago (and also almost exactly five hundred years

after the introduction of music writing), reproduction became easy and cheap. Music could be disseminated much more widely than before, and much more impersonally. In the form of a printed book, music could be all the more readily thought of not as an act but as a thing. Philosophers have a word for this conceptual transformation: they call it *reification* (from *res*, Latin for “thing”). The durable music-thing could begin to seem more important than ephemeral music-makers. The idea of a classic—a timeless aesthetic object—was waiting to be born.

For reasons that we will later need to consider in detail, its birth had to await the birth of “aesthetics,” which was a by-product of romanticism, an intellectual and artistic movement of the late eighteenth century. Only then do we encounter notions of transcendent and autonomous art—art that was primarily for contemplation, not for use, and for the ages, not for you or me. Since then the reification of music has reached new heights (and depths) with the advent of actual sound recording, leading to new sorts of music-things like compact discs and digital audiotapes. Thanks to these, music was commercialized in the twentieth century to an extent previously unimaginable, yet it has also been more completely classicalized than ever before. A recording of a piece of music is more of a thing than ever before, and our notion of what “a piece” is has been correspondingly (and literally) solidified.

So if a set of interpolated tropes—or a vagrant melisma, or a now-you-see-it-now-you-don’t prosula—challenges or “problematizes” the notion of a piece of music as an autonomous work of art, we should realize that the problem thus created is entirely our problem, and that it arises out of an anachronism. Our casual assumptions about music and art are no longer congruent with those that motivated the Frankish musicians of a thousand years ago. Realizing this can help us approach more realistically not only the art products of the distant past but also the ones with which we are most familiar—precisely because, in a context of alternative views, the familiar is no longer quite so familiar. When things are no longer taken for granted they can be more clearly and meaningfully observed; when we allow our values to be challenged by different ones, they can be more fully and discerningly understood. They are in fact more our own once we have reflected on them.

None of this should imply that the musicians of a thousand years ago, and the people who heard them, could not enjoy their work sensuously. Indeed, Saint Augustine admits to just such an enjoyment of liturgical singing in his *Confessions*. And yet although he admits *to* it, he does not admit it. Recognizing that “there are particular modes in song and in the voice, corresponding to my various emotions and able to stimulate them because of some mysterious relationship between the two,” he maintains a special guard “not to allow my mind to be paralyzed by the gratification of my senses, which often leads it astray.”<sup>6</sup> That ambivalence, expressed by Saint Augustine in the fourth century, has remained a characteristic of Western religious thinking about music.

But if the early medieval Christians did not recognize our category of the “aesthetic,” which anachronistically implies a “pure” (that is, disinterested) contemplation of beauty, that does not mean that we cannot now apprehend a musical product of the ancient church—say, a troped Introit—with aesthetic appreciation. (Indeed, if we did not know how the process of troping worked, we would never have had an aesthetic problem with a troped Introit; it would just be a longer Introit.) As Saint Augustine implies, and as a hackneyed proverb confirms, the religious or sensuous or aesthetic “content” of works of art (or, to be careful, works capable of being regarded as art) is not an inherent property of such works but the result of a decision taken by the beholder, and defines a relationship between the observer and the observed. When such decisions are not consciously taken but are the result of cultural predisposition, they can easily seem to be attributes of works, not of observers.

By now, the aesthetic reception of ancient service music is well established. Gregorian and medieval chants can be for us (and, indeed, have definitely become) a form of concert music, which we now experience in new surroundings (concert halls, our homes, our cars) and for new purposes. In 1994, the year this chapter was first drafted, a compact disc of Gregorian chants sung by a *schola* of Spanish monks unexpectedly rose to the top of the popular music sales charts, betokening a wholly new way of apprehending (and using) them. Or maybe not so new: the pop reception of chant may not be so much an aesthetic phenomenon as a renewed form mediated and modified by the pacifying objectives of “New Age” meditation of the *intellectus* Amalar

celebrated at the very beginning of our story.

Be that as it may, putting ourselves imaginatively in the position of the chant's contemporaries gives us access to meanings we might otherwise never experience. And perhaps even more important, it gives us a distanced perspective on our own contemporary world, a form of critical awareness we would otherwise never gain. These are among the most potent reasons for studying history.

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## Notes:

(6) St. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1961), p. 238.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

## CHAPTER 3 Rethorizing Music

### New Frankish Concepts of Musical Organization and their Effect on Composition

Chapter: CHAPTER 3 Rethorizing Music

Source: MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

## MUSICA

When musicians thought “theoretically” about music—that is, made systematic generalizations about it—before the tenth century, they usually did so in terms of the *quadrivium*, the late-classical postgraduate curriculum, in which music counted as one of the arts of measurement. What was measurable was what was studied: abstract pitch ratios (we call them intervals) and abstract durational ratios (we call them rhythms, organized into meters). Reducing music to abstract number was a way of emphasizing what was truly “real” about it, for late-classical philosophy was strongly influenced by Plato’s doctrine of forms. A Neoplatonist believed, first, that the world perceived by our sense organs was only a grosser reflection of a realer world, God’s world, that we perceive with our God-given capacity for reasoning; and, second, that the purest form of reasoning was numerical reasoning, because it was least limited to what our senses tell us. Education meant the development of one’s capacity to transcend the limitations of sense and achieve comprehension of “essences,” purely rational, quantitative concepts untouched by any “stain of the corporeal.”<sup>1</sup> A medieval treatise on music theory, then, emphasized *musica speculativa* (we may call it Musica for short), “music as reflection of the real” (from *speculum*, Latin for looking glass or mirror).<sup>2</sup> Such a treatise had as little to do as possible with actual “pieces of music,” or ways of making them, for such music was merely music for the senses—unreal and (since real meant divine) unholy. The two most-studied late-classical texts on Musica were *De musica* (“About Musica”) by none other than St. Augustine (Aurelius Augustinus, 354–430), the greatest of the Fathers of the Christian Church, and *De institutione musica* (“On the organization of Musica”) by Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius (ca. 480–ca. 524), the Roman statesman and educational reformer who first proposed the division of the liberal arts curriculum into the trivium and the quadrivium. Both of these books, but especially the one by Boethius (which was virtually rediscovered by the Franks), were mainstays of the Carolingian academic curriculum instituted by Alcuin.



**fig. 3-1 St. Augustine, depicted in an eleventh-century French manuscript of his treatise “On Baptism,” disputing in 411 with Felicianus of Musti, a Donatist bishop, who represented a schismatic sect that practiced rebaptism of the righteous (comparable to the “rebirth” of Protestant fundamentalists in later periods).**

St. Augustine’s treatise, completed in 391, is the sole survivor from an enormous projected set of treatises that would have encompassed the whole liberal arts curriculum. It covers nothing but rhythmic proportions (quantitative metrics) and contains a famous definition of music—as *bene modulandi scientia*, “the art of measuring well”—that was quoted as official doctrine by practically every later medieval writer. The treatise ends with a meditation, reminiscent of Plato’s dialogue *Timaeus*, on the theological significance of the harmonious proportions with which it deals, and the way in which they reflect the essential nature of the universe. (The *Timaeus*, translated by Cicero, was the only Platonic text known to late-classical Latin writers.) Boethius’s treatise covers much more ground than Augustine’s. It consists largely of translations from the Hellenistic writers Nicomachus and Ptolemy. (The term “Hellenistic” refers to the Greek-influenced

culture that flourished in the non-Greek territories conquered by Alexander the Great.) It thus became the sole source of medieval knowledge of Greek music theory, which included the Greater Perfect System, a scale constructed out of four-note segments called tetrachords; and also the Pythagorean classification of consonances (simultaneous intervals). The treatise also contained directions for representing pitch intervals in terms of spatial ratios, which made possible the construction of “laboratory instruments” called monochords (later to be described in more detail) for demonstrating number audibly, as sound.

While Greek music theory still involved practical music for Nicomachus and Ptolemy (who lived in the second century ce in Arabia and Egypt, respectively), by the time of Boethius the actual music practiced by the ancient Greeks had fallen into oblivion, along with its notation. Accordingly, Boethius’s treatise concerns not practical music but abstract *Musica*, as the author declares quite explicitly.

Boethius inherited two transcendent ideas from the Neoplatonists: first, that *Musica* mirrored the essential harmony of the cosmos (an idea we have already encountered in Augustine); and, second, that owing to this divine reflection it had a decisive influence on human health and behavior. This was known as the doctrine of *ethos*, from which the word “ethics” is derived. Audible music (*musica instrumentalis*, “music such as instruments produce”) is thus only a gross metaphor for the two higher and “realer” levels of *Musica*, perhaps best translated in this context as “harmony.” At the top there was the harmony of the cosmos (*musica mundana*), and in the intermediate position there was the harmony of the human constitution (*musica humana*), which *musica instrumentalis*—depending on its relationship to *musica mundana*—could either uplift or put awry. All of this is most effectively expressed not in words but in a famous manuscript illumination of the thirteenth century, fully seven hundred years after Boethius (Fig. 3-2). In each of the three panels of this illumination, “*Musica*” points to a different level of her manifestation. In the top panel *Musica* points to a representation of the universe with its four elements: earth, air, fire (the sun), and water. The sun and moon further represent the periodic movements of the heavens, an aspect of measurable “harmony.” In the middle panel *Musica* points to four men representing the four “humors,” temperaments, or basic personality types—that is, the four types of “human harmony.” The proportions of these humors were thought to determine a person’s physical and spiritual constitution: the “choleric” temperament was ruled by bile, the “sanguine” by blood, the “phlegmatic” by phlegm, and the “melancholic” by black bile. The four humors mirror the four elements; thus, human harmony is a function of the celestial. In the bottom panel we find *musica instrumentalis*, the music that we actually hear. *Musica* is reluctant to point; instead, she raises an admonishing finger at the fiddle player, obviously no disciple of hers but a mere sensory titillator. Whatever its relation to actual sounding music, the idea of *Musica* had remarkable staying power.

One who has mastered *Musica*, Boethius concluded, and only such a one, can truly judge the work of a musician, whether composer or performer. The composer and performer are after all concerned only with music, a subrational art, while the philosopher alone knows *Musica*, a rational science. The stringent differentiation between music and *Musica*, and their relative evaluation, were easily translatable from Platonist into Christian terms and remained standard in music treatises until the fourteenth century and even beyond. The idea that music was ideally a representation of *Musica* remained current in certain circles of musicians, and in certain genres of music, even longer than that.



**fig. 3-2** Frontispiece of a mid-thirteenth-century manuscript  
—Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS Pluteo  
29.I—representing the musical cosmology described by Boethius  
in *De institutione musica*.

At the height of the Carolingian renaissance, the liberal arts were studied at the great Benedictine abbeys, such as St. Gallen (where the Irish monk Moengal instructed the likes of Notker and Tuotilo), St. Martin at Tours (where Alcuin himself taught beginning in 796), St. Amand at Tournai (now in the southern, French-speaking part of Belgium), and Reichenau (on an island in Lake Constance, Switzerland). The libraries of all of these monasteries contained copies of Boethius's treatise on music, and Neoplatonist ideas about Musica were incorporated as theological underpinning into liturgical music study. At the same time, however, the pressures of liturgical reorganization and chant reform created the need for a new kind of theoretical study, one that served the purposes not of theological or ethical indoctrination but of practical music making and memorization. Beginning very modestly, this new theoretical enterprise, and the documents it generated, led to a complete rethinking of the principles not of Musica but of actual music, as we understand the term

today. Its repercussions were nothing short of foundational to the tradition of "Western music," however we choose to define that slippery term.

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## Notes:

(1) *Scolica enchiriadis*, in Martin Gerbert, ed., *De cantu et musica sacra*, Vol. I (St. Blasien, 1774), p. 196.

(2) The informal distinction proposed here between music and Musica follows Hendrik van der Werf's longstanding and useful habit. See, for example, "The Raison d'être of Medieval Music Manuscripts," Appendix to his *The Oldest Extant Part Music and the Origin of Western Polyphony* (Rochester: H. van der Werf, 1993), pp. 181–209.

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Gregorian chant

Tonary

Mode

# TONARIES

**Chapter:** CHAPTER 3 Rethorizing Music

**Source:** MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

**Author(s):** Richard Taruskin

Among the earliest documents we have for the Carolingian reorganization of the liturgy and the institutionalization of Gregorian chant are the manuscripts, which begin to appear soon after Pepin's time, that group antiphons (represented by their incipits or opening words) according to the psalm tones with which they best accord melodically. These lists, which began to appear long before the Franks had invented any sort of neumatic notation, at first took the form of prefaces and appendices to the early Frankish graduals and antiphoners that contained the texts to be sung at Mass and Office. (The earliest appendix of this kind is found in a gradual dated 795.) By the middle of the tenth century, these lists had grown large enough to fill separate books for which the term *tonarius* or "tonary" was coined.

These books served an eminently practical purpose, since in every service newly learned antiphons had to be attached appropriately to their full cursive psalms (in the Office) or at least to selected stichs (in the Mass) as a matter of basic operating procedure. In the Vespers service, for example, there were for any given day of the week five unchanging "ordinary" psalms and literally hundreds of ever-changing "proper" antiphons that had to be matched up with them in daily worship. To achieve this practical goal, large stylistic generalizations had to be made about the antiphons on the basis of observation. Classifying the Gregorian antiphons was thus the earliest European exercise in "musical analysis," analysis being (literally and etymologically) the breaking down of an observed whole (here, a chant) into its functionally significant parts. The generalizations thus produced constituted a new branch of "music theory."

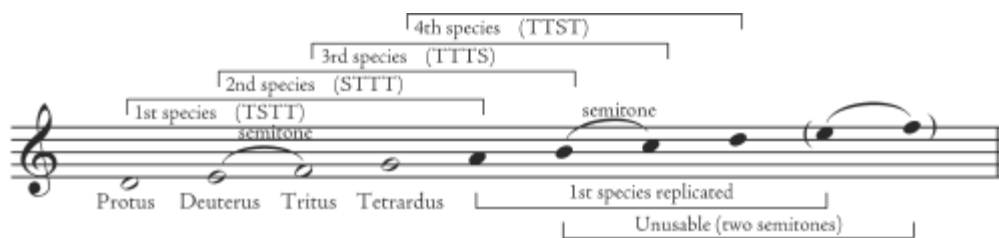
The earliest analysts and theorists, like the earliest composers of medieval chant, were Frankish monks. The most extensive early tonary was the one compiled around 901 by Regino of Prüm, the abbot of the Benedictine monastery of St. Martin near the German town of Trier. It contains the incipits of some thirteen hundred antiphons as well as five hundred introits and offertories (performed in those days with psalm verses), all keyed to the ending formulas (*differentiae*) of the eight psalm tones. To achieve this abstract classification of melody types, the compiler had to compare the beginnings and endings of the antiphons with those of the psalm tones.

In effect, a corpus of actual melodies inherited from one tradition (presumed to be that of Rome, the seat of Western Christianity) was being compared with, and assimilated to, an abstract classification of melodic turns and functions imported from another tradition (the *oktoechos*, or eight-mode system, of the Byzantine church). The result was something neither Roman nor Greek but specifically Frankish—and tremendously fertile, a triumph of imaginative synthesis. What was actually abstracted through this process of analysis by observation and assimilation was the intervallic and scalar structure of the chant.

Specifically, antiphons were compared with psalm tones to see how the interval was filled in between their ending note (*finalis*) and the pitch corresponding to the psalm tone's reciting tone (*tuba*), normally a fifth above. (Since most often the last note of a Gregorian chant is the same as the first, Regino actually classified antiphons—or so he said—by their first notes; the concept was refined slightly later.) There are four ways a fifth can be filled in within the aurally internalized diatonic pitch set, with its preset arrangement of tones

(T) and semitones (S). In the order of the tonaries these were (1) TSTT, (2) STTT, (3) TTTS, and (4) TTST. What is identified in this way are scale degrees. The notion of scale degrees, and their identification, thus constitutes from the very beginning—and, one is tempted to add, to the very end—the crucial “theoretical” generalization on which the concept of tonality in Western music rests.

These intervallic “species,” as they came to be called, could be demonstrated in various ways. One method was by the use of the monochord, the medieval theorist’s laboratory instrument, which consisted of a sound-box surmounted by a single string, under which there was a movable bridge. The surface of the box was calibrated, showing bridge placements vis-à-vis one end of the string or the other, by means of which one could exactly measure off (or “deduce”) the various intervals. Another, more abstract, way of demonstrating the species was notation—at first by means of Daseian signs as illustrated in the previous chapter (see Fig. 2-2), later (from the eleventh century) by means of the staff. When one writes things down, one can demonstrate or discover that the diatonic scale segment descending from A to D (or ascending from A to E) corresponds with the first species of fifth listed above; that the segment descending from B to E corresponds to the second species; that the segment descending from C to F corresponds to the third species; and that the segment descending from D to G corresponds with the fourth (Ex. 3-1).



### ex. 3-1 The four species of fifth and the “four finals”

The ending notes of these four species-defining segments—D, E, F, and G—were dubbed “the four finals” in Frankish tonal theory and named (in keeping with the Byzantine derivation of the mode system) according to their Greek ordinal numbers: *protus* (first), *deuterus* (second), *tritus* (third), and *tetrardus* (fourth) respectively. (The fifth A–E was considered a doubling, or transposition, of the first segment; hence A was functionally equivalent to D as a final.) Full correspondence between the chant-classification and the preexisting eightfold system of psalm tones was achieved by invoking the category of *ambitus*, or range. Chants ending on each of the four finals were further broken down into two classes. Those with the final at the bottom of their range were said to be in “authentic” tonalities or modes, while those that extended lower than their finals, so that the final occurred in the middle of their range, were called “plagal,” from the Greek *plagios*, a word derived directly from the vocabulary of the *oktoechos*, where it referred to the four lower-lying scales.

Thus the four finals each governed two modes (*protus authenticus*, *protus plagalis*, *deuterus authenticus*, and so on), for a total of eight, in exact accordance with the configuration (but only in vague accordance with the content) of the eightfold system of psalm tones. In elaborating this system, the basic fifth (or modal *pentachord*, from the Greek) whose diatonic species defined the final’s domain was complemented with a fourth (or *tetrachord*) to complete the octave. (According to the terminology of the day, the tetrachord was said to be *conjunct*—rather than *disjunct*—with the pentachord because its first pitch coincided with the last one in the pentachord rather than occupying the next scale degree.) The authentic scales were those in which the pentachord was placed below its conjunct tetrachord, so that the final was the lowest note. In the plagal scales the tetrachord was placed below the pentachord, so that the final came in mid-range. The result was a series of seven distinct *octave species* or scales with particular orderings of the diatonic tones and semitones. There are only seven possible octave species but eight modes; hence the last scale in Tabl. 3-1 (tetrardus, plagal) has the same order of intervals as the first (protus, authentic), but they are split differently into their component pentachord and tetrachord. Although their octave species coincide, the modes do not, for they have different finals: D and G, respectively.

TABLE 3-1 *Modes and Octave Species*

		TETRACHORD	—	PENTACHORD	—	TETRACHORD
Protus (D)	Authentic			T-S-T-T		— T-S-T
	Plagal	T-S-T		— T-S-T-T		
Deuterus (E)	Authentic			S-T-T-T		— S-T-T
	Plagal	S-T-T		— S-T-T-T		—
Tritus (F)	Authentic			T-T-T-S		— T-T-S
	Plagal	T-T-S		— T-T-T-S		
Tetrardus (G)	Authentic			T-T-S-T		— T-S-T
	Plagal	T-S-T		— T-T-S-T		

In Ex. 3-2 this table is translated into modern staff notation, giving the full array of so-called “medieval church modes.” They will henceforth be numbered from one to eight, as they are in the later Frankish treatises, and they will be given the Greek geographical names that the Frankish theorists borrowed from Boethius, the authority of authorities. Boethius had adopted these names from late Greek (Hellenistic) sources, where they had referred not to what we would call modes but to what the Greeks called *tonoi*, transpositions of a single scale rather than different diatonic scales. Thus the familiar Greek nomenclature of the medieval modes was actually a misnomer, first perpetrated by an anonymous ninth-century treatise called *Alia musica* (literally, “More about Music”); but there is not much point in trying to rectify that now. (Note that the Greek prefix *hypo-*, attached to the names of the plagal scales, is roughly synonymous with the word plagal itself: both mean “lower.”) Ex. 3-2 also includes the *tubae* of the corresponding psalm tones, for these were sometimes claimed by contemporary theorists to pertain to the church modes as well. The tuba of an authentic mode lies a fifth above the final, as already observed in chapter 1. The tuba of a plagal mode lies a third below that of its authentic counterpart. Note that wherever, according to these rules, the tuba would fall on B, it is changed to C. This was evidently because of an aversion to reciting on the lower note of a semitone pair. Note, too, that the tuba of the fourth tone is A rather than G by the regular application of the rules: it is a third lower than its adjusted counterpart (C in place of B transposes to A in place of G).



The image displays the eight medieval modes on a single staff, grouped into four pairs. Each pair consists of an authentic mode and its corresponding plagal mode. The modes are labeled with Roman numerals and Greek names. The authentic modes are labeled 'I Authentic', 'III Authentic', 'V Authentic', and 'VII Authentic'. The plagal modes are labeled 'II Plagal', 'IV Plagal', 'VI Plagal', and 'VIII Plagal'. The modes are also labeled with Greek names: Dorian, Hypodorian, Phrygian, Hypophrygian, Lydian, Hypolydian, Mixolydian, and Hypomixolydian. Modes IX + X ((Hypo)Ionian) and XI + XII ((Hypo)Aeolian) are shown at the bottom, with a note that they are 'Recognized in theory only in 1547'. The modes are also labeled with Greek names: (Hypo)Ionian and (Hypo)Aeolian. The modes are also labeled with Greek names: Protus, Deuterus, Tritus, and Tetrardus. The modes are also labeled with Greek names: (glareanus, Dodecachordon).

### ex.. 3-2 The eight medieval modes

Perhaps the most important thing to bear in mind regarding this array of medieval modal scales is that the staff positions and their corresponding “letter names” *do not* specify actual pitch frequencies, the way they do in our modern practice. Thus one must try to avoid the common assumption that the Dorian scale represents the piano’s white keys from D to D, the Phrygian from E to E, and so on. Rather, the “four finals” and their concomitant scales represent nothing more than the most convenient way of notating intervallic patterns, relationships between pitches that can be realized at any actual pitch level, the way singers (unless cursed with “perfect pitch”) can at sight—or rather, by ear—transpose the music they are reading, wherever it happens to be notated, to a comfortable *tessitura* or “placement” within their individual vocal ranges. What we are now conditioned to regard as fixed pitch associations (e.g., “A-440”) were at first no more than notational conventions.

If this is a hard idea to get used to, imagine a situation in which all pieces in the major were written “in C” and all pieces in the minor “in A,” regardless of the key in which they would actually be performed. Only instrumentalists, whose physical movements are coordinated with specific pitches, or singers with perfect pitch, who have memorized and internalized the relationship between specific frequencies and the appearance of notated music, would be seriously discommoded by such an arrangement. Such musicians can only transpose by mentally changing clefs and signatures. And as we shall see, it was the rise of an extensive independent repertory of instrumental music in the seventeenth century that brought about our modern

“key system,” in which actual pitches were specified by notation and in which key signatures mandated specific transpositions of the standard scales.

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

**See also from Grove Music Online**

Mode: Medieval modal theory

Aurelian of Réôme

Hucbald of St Amand

# A NEW CONCEPT OF MODE

**Chapter:** CHAPTER 3 Retheorizing Music

**Source:** MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

**Author(s):** Richard Taruskin

Thanks to the work of the “tonarists” who coordinated the Roman antiphons with the psalm tones, and the theorists who drew general conclusions from the tonarists’ practical observations, a new concept of mode arose. Instead of being a formula-family, a set of concrete, characteristic turns and cadences arising out of long oral tradition, a mode was now conceived abstractly in terms of a scale, and analytically in terms of functional relationships (chiefly range and finishing note or final). We owe this change, on which all our own theoretical notions of musical “structure” ultimately depend, and the classifications and terminology outlined above, primarily to the work of two Frankish theorists of the ninth century.

Aurelian of Réôme, the earlier of them, was a member of the Benedictine abbey of St. Jean de Réôme in what is now the Burgundy region of France, southeast of Paris. His treatise, *Musica disciplina* (“The discipline of music”), was completed sometime around 843. Beginning with its eighth chapter, subtitled “De octo tonis,” it consists of the earliest description (or at least the earliest naming, for it is impressionistic and nontechnical) of the eight church modes with their pseudo-Greeky tribal names. Aurelian changed the order of the tones from what it was in Byzantine theory. Instead of grouping the four authentic modes together and following them with the four plagal modes, Aurelian paired authentic modes with plagal ones that shared the same finals, thus enhancing the role of what we now call the “tonic” in establishing a tonality. Aurelian’s chapter on psalm recitation contains the oldest extant notations in early Frankish neumes.

Hucbald (d. 930), a monk from the abbey of St. Amand, was the real genius of medieval modal theory. His treatise, *De harmonica institutione* (“On the principles of music”), thought to have been completed around 880, is a far more original work than Aurelian’s and far less dependent on the received academic tradition. It was the earliest treatise to number the modes, following the order established by Aurelian, straight through from one to eight. It is also the earliest treatise we have that replaces the relative-pitch or interval/degree nomenclature of ancient Greek music—the so-called Greater Perfect System, transmitted by Boethius—with the alphabet letter names still in use. The name of the lowest note of the Greek system, *proslambanomenos*, was mercifully shortened to “A,” and the rest of the letters were assigned from there. Hucbald did not, however, recognize what we now call “octave equivalency,” but continued the series of letters through the full two-octave compass of the Greeks, all the way to P. Modern usage, in which A recurs after G and so on, was established by an anonymous Milanese treatise of ca. 1000 called *Dialogus de musica*, once attributed erroneously to Abbot Odo of Cluny.



fig. 3-3 The Abbey of St. Amand, where Hucbald lived and worked, as it looked in the eighteenth century. This painting was made by J. F. Neyts shortly before the abbey was destroyed, an early casualty of the French Revolution.

Hucbald sought to ground his theory as far as possible in the chant itself. He grasped that the “four finals” used in actual singing formed a tetrachord in their own right (T–S–T), and he showed how the scale of the first mode could be built up from it by means of disjunct replication: TST–(T)–TST. He defined the four finals in a manner that resonates fully with our modern notion of a tonic: “Every song” he wrote, “whatever it may be, however it may be twisted this way and that, necessarily may be led back to one of these four; and thence they are termed ‘final,’ because all things which are sung may take an ending in them.” By relocating the tetrachord of the four finals (D – E – F – G) on its fourth note rather than its first (or, to speak technically, by conjunctly replicating it: T – S – T/T – S – T), he deduced the tetrachord G – A – B $\flat$  – C. Thus he was able to rationalize within the new modal system the old singer’s practice of adjusting the note B to avoid the tritone with F. In effect he admitted two versions of B (the hard and the soft, as they came to be known) into the system (Ex. 3-3) to account for the pitches actually called for by the Gregorian melodies.

ex. 3-3 Disjunct and conjunct replication of the T-S-T tetrachord (the tetrachord of the four finals) as described by Hucbald

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Mode: Medieval modal theory

Final

# MODE CLASSIFICATION IN PRACTICE

Chapter: CHAPTER 3 Rethorizing Music

Source: MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

As continually emphasized in this discussion, modal theory arose out of an attempt at classifying the existing Gregorian chant, particularly the antiphons, as an aid to mastering an enormous body of material that had somehow to be committed to melodic memory. Modal theory was thus one of the very many aspects of medieval music-making that originated, very humbly, as *mnemotechnics* (memory aids). Every chant was eventually assigned a modal classification in the tonaries, and eventually in the graduals and antiphoners themselves, including the modern chant books from which some of the examples in the previous chapters were taken. Let us now cast an eye back over some of those examples and see how modal classification worked in practice.

In Ex. 1-1 an actual pairing of antiphon and psalm tone was given. Even though the psalm tone covers no more than the modal pentachord (D descending to G, as it was first theoretically abstracted), the use of C as the tuba identifies the tone as plagal, not authentic (Ex. 3-2). The antiphon is even easier to identify as being in the eighth mode, the Hypomixolydian: its final is G, but the range extends down as far as the D below (and exactly as far up as the D above), establishing the octave species as D to D with cadence in the middle, on G.

Approaching the antiphon in Ex. 1-2 with a tonarist's eye, we notice that it basically outlines the pentachord A-down-to-D, and dips down one note below the final into the lower tetrachord. We have no hesitation, therefore, in assigning it to the second mode, the Hypodorian. And yet the Introit antiphon in Ex. 1-4 is unequivocally assignable to mode 1, the authentic Dorian, even though it, too, frequently makes use of the lower neighbor to the same final. That is because the melody extends above the limits of the modal pentachord as well, reaching the C above. The final is thus clearly located near the bottom of the total range. The psalm verse, chosen expressly to conform to the antiphon, confirms the modal classification. Besides the tuba on A, note the similar approaches to the high C. Here we have a case of modal affinity of the older kind (involving turns of actual phrase) working in harness with the newer classification: the very thing the tonarists and theorists sought to ensure.

As a matter of fact the compilers of the tonaries, and the theorists who followed them, made special allowance for the lower neighbor to the final (called *subtonium modi*), especially in the *protus* or Dorian tonality. As the anonymous author of *Alia musica* put it, "and if a note is added on to some song, above or below the species of the octave, it will not be out of place to include this as being in the tune, not out of it." Thus we are to regard the low C in Ex. 1-4 to be a "note added on below" rather than a full-fledged member of the modal tetrachord. This seeming exception to the rule about mode classification was based on the observed behavior of mode 1 antiphons, as they existed in Pope Gregory's inspired (and therefore not-to-be-tampered-with) chant. Again we see the influence, even within the characteristically rationalistic Frankish mode theory, of the older concept of mode as formula-family.

The Offertory antiphon in Ex. 1-5, although it ends on E, is only arbitrarily assigned to mode 4 (rather than 3) by the tonarists. Clearly, it was (orally) composed with no awareness of the eventual criteria of modal propriety, for its range partakes of tetrachords both below and above the tetrachord that descends to the final, and it "repercusses" more on F than on either of the "Phrygian" reciting tones. Many of its phrases,

moreover, seem to belong to a different octave species altogether. Consider the second (“ut palma florebit”), for example: it begins and ends on D, and it introduces B-flat as upper neighbor to A, emphasizing the A as an apparent upper limit to a pentachord. This phrase by itself would unequivocally be assigned to the first mode. Thus, where the Introit in Ex. 1-4 was a case of close correspondence between the old Roman melody and the new Frankish theory, Ex. 1-5 shows a poor fit between the two. Both hits and misses are equally fortuitous, for the chant evolved long in advance of the theory and quite without premonition of it.

Proof of that fortuity comes in Ex. 1-6, the Alleluia. Phrases that closely resemble that second phrase of Ex. 1-5 abound here (for example, the famous melisma on *cedrus*). Since there is no contradiction between the internal phrases and the final cadence, it is easy to assign the melody to mode 1. (Here is the reasoning: the lower neighbor to the final counts less as a representative of a complementary tetrachord than does the upper neighbor to the fifth above; hence we may conceptualize the octave species with the pentachord below the tetrachord; and in additional confirmation, the vast preponderance of melody notes lie above the final, establishing the mode as authentic.) With the two Graduals in Ex. 1-7, we are back in ambiguous territory. The final, A, is accommodated to the theory of the four finals by the back door, as we have seen, on the basis of the congruence between its modal pentachord (TSTT) and that of the protus final, D. Its complementary tetrachord (STT) differs from that of the protus modes, however, resembling the deuterus instead. So the assignment of these melodies to the second mode is more or less arbitrary, especially in view of that pesky B-flat—over *cedrus* in Ex. 1-7a, and over the very opening word, *Haec*, in Ex. 1-7b—preceding a cadence on A that would seem to invoke (if anything) a transposed deuterus or Phrygian scale. There is a considerable gap here between the reality of the chant and the theoretical abstraction of a modal system.

It was noted in chapter 1 that these Graduals come from an old, distinguished formula-family that is suspected of being among the most ancient on record. Thus it is really no surprise that its melody conforms so little with a body of generalizations (that is, a theory) that arose many centuries later—the more so as Graduals, not being antiphons, were not much taken into account by the tonarists. The Frankish mode theory did have a way of accounting for melodies that were wayward by its standards: they were classified as being of “mixed mode” (*modus mixtus*), meaning that some of their constituent phrases departed from the basic octave species of the melody as a whole. But that is just another effort to dispel an anomaly by giving it a name—something on the order of an exorcism.

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Mode

Hucbald of St Amand

# MODE AS A GUIDE TO COMPOSITION

Chapter: CHAPTER 3 Rethorizing Music

Source: MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

What a difference we will observe when we look at melodies written after the Frankish chant theory had been formulated! For that theory, modest in its intention, was huge in its effect. While it may have begun as a way of improving the efficiency with which a body of ancient music was mastered and memorized, it quickly metamorphosed into a guide to new composition, achieving a significance its early exponents may never have envisioned for it. >From a description of existing music it became a prescription for the music of the future.

The first composer whom the chant theory “influenced” may have been Hucbald himself, its chief early exponent. His surviving compositions include a set of antiphons for the Office of St. Peter, as well as the famous set of *laudes* or Gloria tropes. They are all modally systematic in a way that earlier chant had never been. The Office antiphons, for example, are arranged in a cycle progressing through the whole array of church modes in numerical order—Hucbald’s own numerical order! The trope, *Quem vere pia laus*, does not employ the common melodic formulae of the existing Gloria chants—in other words, it eschews the old concept of mode as a formula-family—but instead exemplifies the more abstract features of scalar construction.

In Ex. 3-4, Hucbald’s set of *laudes* is embedded in a Gloria that shares its mode (the sixth, or Hypolydian) and seems, on the basis of its sources as well as its style, to date from within, or shortly after, Hucbald’s lifetime. In both, the tonal focus is sharp, with the final, F, located in the middle of the melody’s range, providing a clear line of demarcation between the modal pentachord and the plagal tetrachord below. Hucbald uses three pitches to end the constituent (and, remember, nonconsecutive) phrases of his *laudes*. Only the last ends, as might be expected, on the final. A plurality, five, end on the reciting tone, namely A. The other four, which end on G, seem to have picked up the influence of some secular genres, especially dance songs, which, as we will see in the next chapter, frequently use the “supertonic” degree to create half (or “open”) cadences, to be fully closed by the final at the end of the next phrase of the original chant. That is what happens in Hucbald’s second, third, and fourth phrases, all of which end on G. The second phrase is answered and “closed” by the full cadence on “Benedicimus te”; the fourth by the close on “Glorificamus te.” The one in between (*Qui dominator...*) is answered strategically by “Adoramus te” with a cadence on D, so that a tonally closed ABA pattern sets off the three parallel acclamations from the rest of the Gloria. This kind of tonally articulated formal structure was the great Frankish innovation.



(B-flat has been added to the key signature to save the trouble of individually signing every B, as would be necessary)

Glo-ri - a in ex - cel - sis De - o. Et in ter - ra pax ho - mi - ni - bus bo - nae vo - lun - ta - tis.

Quem ve - re pi - a laus quem so - lum con - de - cet hym - nus. Lau - da - mus te.

Cun - cta su - per qui - a tu De - us es be - ne - di - ctus in ae - vum. Be - ne - di - ci - mus te.

Qui do - mi - na - tor ad - es coe - li ter - ra - que ma - ris - que A - do - ra - mus te.

Glo - ri - a quem per - pes ma - net im - pe - ri - um - que per - ben - ne

Glo - ri - fi - ca - mus te. De qua ple - na vi - gent abs te - que con - di - ta con - stant

gra - ti - as a - gi - mus ti - bi pro - pter ma - gnam glo - ri - am tu - am. Do - mi - ne De - us, Rex coe - le - stis,

De - us Pa - ter o - mni - po - tens. Do - mi - ne Fi - li u - ni - ge - ni - te Je - su Chri - ste.

Do - mi - ne De - us, A - gnus De - i, Fi - li - us Pa - tris.

Qui tol - lis pec - ca - ta mun - di, mi - se - re - re no - bis

Qui tol-lis pec-ca-ta mun-di, su-sci-pe de-pre-ca-ti-o-nem no-stram.  
 Es qui-a tu cle-mens mi-tis pi-us at-que be-ni-gnus.  
 Qui se-des ad dex-te-ram Pa-tris, mi-se-re-re no-bis.  
 Stat-ti-bi nam pro-pri-um mi-se-re-ri vel-le mi-sel-lis. Quo-ni-am tu so-lus san-ctus.  
 San-cti-fi-cans o-mnes tu-a quos ti-bi gra-ci-a ne-ctit. Tu so-lus Do-mi-nus,  
 Tri-na ge-nu-fle-ctit cu-i sub-di-ta ma-chi-na re-rum.  
 Tu so-lus al-tis-si-mus Je-su Chri-ste Cun-cta vi-dens et cun-cta re-plens  
 per se-cu-la re-gnans.  
 Cum san-cto spi-ri-tu in glo-ri-a De-i Pa-tris. A-men.

ex. 3-4 Gloria in mode 6, with laudes by Hucbald of St. Amand (texted in italics)

The same regular features can be discerned in many of the trope melodies discussed in chapter 2. That is because the authors of tropes had to be music analysts as well as poets and composers. They had to determine and reproduce the mode of the chant to which they were setting their prefaces and interpolations, whether or not they actually intended to imitate the style of the earlier chant. (In practice, it seems, some did so intend and some evidently preferred their new melodies to stand out from the old; all, however, understood the requirement of modal conformity.) Consider the preface to the Easter Introit in Ex. 2-8a. The mode of the Introit antiphon itself is given as the fourth (*Deuterus plagalis* or Hypophrygian), and one can immediately see why: it begins with D, a note in the lower tetrachord (and the first phrase, “Resurrexi,” actually cadences there); the range will later touch bottom on the C below that. The highest note in the melody is A, which means that the full modal pentachord above E is never expressed at all. Only the final cadence on E (something that could hardly be predicted at the outset) justifies the assignment of the melody to the Phrygian tribe. The gap between the reality of the chant and the utopia of mode theory yawns.

“Psallite regi,” the little prefatory trope shown in Ex. 2-8a, resolutely closes the gap. It begins on E, precisely so that the beginning of the newly augmented antiphon will conform to the end (and so that the end, so to speak, can now fulfill the implications of the beginning). It sounds the B above the final so that the full

modal pentachord of mode 4 is represented. It expressly avoids a modal cadence at the end, of course, so that it will flow imperceptibly into the antiphon it is introducing. But it has very perceptibly enhanced the conformity of the actual Gregorian antiphon with the Frankish definition of its mode.

Although it is the shorter and the simpler of the introit tropes for Easter shown in chapter 2, “Psallite regi” is by far the most radical in its transformation of the melody to which it is appended. Ex. 2-8b is more obviously an imitation of the Gregorian antiphon. Its prefacing phrase begins, like the antiphon, with a feint toward D, and ends, again like the antiphon, with a cadence on the final. It even mimics the Introit’s ambitus (C up to A) instead of, like Ex. 2-8a, completing the modal pentachord with a B.

The *Quem quaeritis* trope (Ex. 2-9) is modally whimsical. It actually takes the initial feint to D at its word, so to speak, and prepares it with an actual melody in mode 2 (Hypodorian). It is the descent to the bottom of the lower tetrachord at the very beginning of the “Interrogatio” that establishes the melody as plagal, even though the “Responsorium,” as befits the heavenly voice that sings it, ascends into the upper tetrachord (though not all the way to the top of it). Melodies that encompass more than two primary scale segments (or that have ranges of more than an octave) exemplify what medieval theorists called *commixtio*, or *modus commixtus*. The term is often “translated” into a nonexistent English cognate: “commixture” or “commixed mode.” In any case, it needs to be distinguished from the *modus mixtus* defined above. “Mixed mode” denotes a mixture of different octave species. “Commixture” refers to the extension of a melody so as to encompass both authentic and plagal scales.

The hymn melodies in Ex. 2-7 were chosen, among other reasons, to exemplify “modern” Frankish melodies in various modes. *Ave maris stella* (Ex. 2-7a) is a wonderfully clear example of post-Gregorian Dorian melody. Its composer most assuredly knew all about abstract modal syntax, and about the relationship between antiphon modes and psalm tones as laid out in the tonaries. Note how the first phrase leaps up from the final to the upper tetrachord, which it fully describes, meanwhile emphasizing the note dividing the pentachord and tetrachord (the tuba, so to speak) with a turn figure. The second phrase completely describes the pentachord. The third phrase cadences on the “note added on below,” introducing it with a veritable flourish. And the fourth phrase returns to the uncluttered pentachord for the final cadence. This kind of clearly delineated structure can hardly be found in the original corpus of Gregorian chant. It is the product of “theory,” and of a single composer’s shaping hand. For the first time, it seems, we are looking at a piece not merely maintained but composed within the literate tradition—composed, that is, in the sense we usually have in mind when we use the word.

*Pange lingua* (Ex. 2-7b), in the third mode (authentic Phrygian), also gives its “modernity” away, this time by giving cadential emphasis to the note C, high above the final. (Third mode melodies in the original Gregorian corpus often emphasize this C, but not as a cadence.) By the time *Pange lingua* was composed, theoretical rationalization had made such emphasis common. The same point may be made, even more emphatically, about *Veni creator spiritus* (Ex. 2-7c). It is assigned to the eighth mode (rather than the seventh), but not for any reason having to do with its ambitus or final. The final, G, is common to all *tetrardus* melodies. The range could be described as the modal pentachord with a “note added on” either above or below, again suggesting that the authentic and the plagal scales have an equal claim on the tune’s allegiance. What clinches things for the plagal is the cadential emphasis on C, the tuba of the corresponding psalm tone. (The authentic tuba, D, also gets a cadence, but C gets two.)

Thus these hymn melodies graphically illustrate the synthesis of Roman and Byzantine elements that made up Frankish mode theory and its perhaps unforeseen compositional influence. (The regularity of structure in the hymns may of course also reflect the influence of popular genres that have left no written trace and are consequently beyond our historical ken.) The style and the effect of these tunes is altogether different from those of the true Gregorian corpus. Where the older melodies were discursive, elusive, and ecstatic, these are dynamic, strongly etched, and therefore highly memorable (as congregational songs need to be). The influence of “theory” on them was in no way an inhibition. Quite the contrary; it seems to have been an enormous spur to the Frankish musical imagination, leading to a great burst of indigenous musical composition in the north of Europe, contributing a new (and lasting) kind of musical beauty.

To savor this new Frankish style at its best and most characteristic, let us have a look at a melody composed around 1100, after mode theory had a century or more in which to establish itself in singers' consciousness: Kyrie IX, which bears the subtitle *Cum júbilo* ("with a shout") after its perhaps original texted form (Ex. 3-5). Never yet have we seen a melody that, by so clearly parsing itself into the "principal parts" of its mode, advertises the fact that the mode, as a concept, preceded and conditioned the composition of the melody.

ex. 3-5 Kyrie IX, *Cum júbilo*

Consider first the opening threefold acclamation. The first eight notes of the opening "Kyrie" exactly stake out the modal pentachord. The rest of the phrase decorates the final with the characteristic "Dorian" lower neighbor. The second acclamation begins by staking out the lower tetrachord just as the first had staked out the pentachord. It then proceeds like the first. The third is a full repetition of the first. Summing up the pattern of repetitions, we find that the opening threefold litany mirrors in melodic microcosm the shape of the entire ninefold text: a melodic ABA or "sandwich" form nested within a textual ABA (threefold Kyrie/threefold Christe/threefold Kyrie). At the same time, the melisma on "-e," plus the "eleison" (into which the melisma flows smoothly by vowel elision), are the same every time, reflecting the old practice of choral refrains. Hence, the overall shape of the opening threefold acclamation could be represented as A(x) B(x) A(x). So far the melody conforms closely to the principal parts of mode 2, the Hypodorian (with the refrain dwelling significantly on F, the tuba).

The first "Christe," consisting for the most part of turn figures around A, substitutes the tuba of the authentic Dorian for that of the plagal and similarly emphasizes it; this gives us an inkling that the chant is going to encompass a commixed mode. As to overall shape, the threefold Christe is also cast, like the previous threefold acclamation, in an ABA design that mirrors in melodic microcosm the overall form of the text. But note one playful detail: what fills the Christe sandwich is a variant of what was the "bread" in the Kyrie sandwich.

The concluding threefold acclamation begins by confirming the impression that this will be a *modus commixtus* chant. Compare the new intonation on "Kyrie" with the "filling" of the first Kyrie sandwich. It is the same motive an octave higher, now staking out the upper tetrachord and completing the authentic Dorian scale. (Because of the many repetitions this motive will receive in the higher octave, the complete melody is classified as a mode 1 chant.) And now notice that the continuation on "eleison" is a variant of the continuations of the first and last "Christe" phrases. This brings about another playful switch of functions between "filling" and "bread," and it also means that the "eleison" phrases following the first and last "Christe" phrases were another detachable refrain, alternating with the first. Wheels within wheels!

The last threefold acclamation, like the others, is a sandwich; its filling is the same as that of the second

sandwich (namely a variant of the bread in the first). The final acclamation is augmented by an internal melisma that repeats the melody of the entire first Kyrie; but then, in order to end on the final rather than the tuba, the second Kyrie is recapitulated, too, so that the last word is sung to the original “eleison” refrain. The entire subtly interwoven and integrated formal scheme looks like Table 3-2.

Thus a sort of “rondo” scheme (*AbAcAcDAdA*) crosscuts the trio of sandwiches, and a single dynamic pitch trajectory, from the bottom of the Hypodorian tetrachord

TABLE 3-2 *Structure of Kyrie IX*

A.	Kyrie eleison	A(x)	
	Kyrie eleison	B(x)	
	Kyrie eleison	A(x)	
B.	Christe eleison	C(y)	= A
	Christe eleison	A'(x)	B
	Christe eleison	C(y)	A
A.	Kyrie eleison	D(y')	= A
	Kyrie eleison	A'(x)	B
	Kyrie eleison	D(y') - D(y') - A'(x)	A

to the top of the authentic Dorian tetrachord, seems to describe a progression from darkness to light (or, in terms of mood, from abjection to rejoicing) that accords with the implied (or hoped-for) answer to the prayer, the more so as the peak of the melodic range coincides with the peak of melismatic “jubilation.” Finally, the melody’s tonal regularity, with its alternation of cadences on final and tuba a fifth apart, was a permanent “Western” acquisition. It would outlast the modal system that gave rise to it.

For a final indication of the Frankish passion for formal rounding and regularity, compare the concluding item in the Ordinary formulary initiated by Kyrie IX, the dismissal formula (Ex. 3-6). It is set to the same melody as the opening “Kyrie eleison” in Ex. 3-5, the phrase designated “A(x)” in Table 3-2, which recurred throughout the litany and came back out of retirement to conclude it. The whole Mass service is thus effectively rounded off the same way the Kyrie was, with a significant melodic refrain. The Frankish ambition to use music as a shaping and a unifying force is exercised here at the highest possible level.



ex. 3-6 *Ite/deo gratias* from Mass IX

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online

Sequence

Versus

Dies irae

Hildegard of Bingen

# VERSUS

**Chapter:** CHAPTER 3 Rethorizing Music

**Source:** MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

**Author(s):** Richard Taruskin

The same urge to regularize tonally and formally, and to use the two stabilizing dimensions to reinforce one another, can be seen in late Frankish sequences as well, together with the additional regularizing element of metrical verse, eventually replete with rhyme. Settings of such texts, especially rhymed metrical sequences, are often called *versus* to distinguish them from the older *prosa*. Ex. 3-7 contains two of the sequences that have survived into the modern liturgy. The Easter sequence, *Victimae paschali laudes* (“Praises to the Paschal victim”), is attributed in both words and music to the German monk Wipo, chaplain to the Holy Roman Emperor Conrad II (reigned 1024–39). It has the paired versicle structure common to the form: A, BB, CC, DD. The constituent phrases describe the principal parts of the modal scale with great regularity. The two phrases of verse A describe the modal pentachord, with the first phrase darkened by the Dorian lower neighbor, and the second compensating by adding the previously withheld top note. Verse B makes a steady descent from the authentic tetrachord (cadencing on the tuba) through the pentachord, through the darkened pentachord with lower neighbor and no tuba. Verse C extends downward, like the second Kyrie in Ex. 3-5, to describe the plagal tetrachord, proceeding through the “darkened” pentachord to the full pentachord. Phrase D, which resembles phrase B, begins like it with the authentic tetrachord at the top of the modal ambitus, and again gradually descends to the final, with the final phrase (and also the paschal alleluia) colored dark by the use of the *subtonium* (the lower neighbor).

a. *Victimae paschali laudes* (Easter)

Victimae pascha - li laudes \* immolent Christi - ani. Agnus redemit oves:

Christus innocens Patri reconci - li - avit peccatores. Mors et vi - ta

du - ello confluxere mirando: dux vitae mortu - us, regnat vivus.

Dic nobis Mari - a, quid vidisti in vi - a? Sepulcrum Christi viventis,

et glo - ri - am vidi resurgentis: Ange - licos testes, suda - ri - um, et vestes.

Surrexit Christus spes me - a: praecedet su - os in Ga - lilae - am. Scimus

Christum surrexisse a mortu - is vere: tu nobis, victor Rex, mi se re - re.

Amen. Alle - lu - ia.

## ex. 3-7 Two sequences in modern use



Di - es irae, di - es illa, Solvet saeculum in favilla: Teste David cum Sibylla.

Quantus tremor est futurus, Quando ju - dex est venturus, Cuncta stricte discussurus!

Tuba mi - rum spar - gens sonum Per sepulcra regi - onum, Coget omnes ante thronum.

Mors stupe - bit et natu - ra, Cum resurget cre - a - tura, Judi - can - ti responsura.

Liber scriptus pro - fe - re - tur, In quo to - tum contine - tur, Unde mundus judi - ce - tur.

Judex ergo cum sedebit, Quidquid la - tet apparebit: Nil inultum remanebit.

ex. 3-7b *Dies irae* (Requiem)

Ex. 3-7 gives the musical text of *Victimae paschali laudes* exactly as it is found in the *Liber usualis*, a practical edition of Gregorian chant first published in 1934 for the use of modern Catholic congregations. It lacks a repetition of the D phrase because the text has been officially expurgated. The omitted verse, the first of the pair sung to phrase D, had read: *Credendum est magis soli Mariae veraci/quam Judeorum turbe fallaci* (“More trust is to be put in honest Mary [Magdalen] alone than in the lying crowd of Jews”). Sensible to its nastiness, and aware of its bearing on a history of persecutions, the Council of Trent, the mid-sixteenth century congress of church reform that evicted almost all the other sequences from the liturgy, pruned the offending verse from *Victimae paschali* as a gesture of reconciliation with the Jews.

*Dies irae* (“Day of wrath”), from the Requiem Mass (Ex. 3-7b), is probably the most famous of all medieval liturgical songs, and a very late one. It may even be a thirteenth-century composition, for the text is attributed to Thomas of Celano (d. ca. 1255), a disciple and biographer of St. Francis of Assisi. Thomas’s poem is a kind of meditation or gloss in rhymed three-line stanzas (tercets) on the second verse—“Dies illa, dies irae”—of the responsory *Libera me, Domine, de morte aeterna* (“Deliver me, O Lord, from eternal death”), which is sung at the graveside service that follows the Requiem Mass. Even the melody begins as a parody (or gloss, or takeoff—but not a trope, except in the loosest possible use of the term) on that of the responsory verse (Ex. 3-8).

Di - es il - la, di - es i - rae, ca - la - mi - ta - tis et mi - se - ri - - ae, di - es ma - gna

et a - ma - ra val - de.

**ex. 3-8 *Libera me* (responsory verse)**

Like *Rex caeli* (Ex. 2-1), in its full form the *Dies irae* has a melodic repetition scheme that exceeds the normal allotment of a sequence. (There can be no doubt about its status, though, because within the actual liturgy it occupies the place and accomplishes the business of a sequence.) Its three paired versicles go through a triple cursus—a threefold repetition like that of a litany: AABBC/AABBC/AABBC, with the last C replaced by a final couplet, to which an additional unrhymed couplet and an Amen were added by an anonymous reviser. (Ex. 3-7b contains only the first cursus.) The various constituent phrases have many internal repetitions as well: the second phrase of B, for example, is an embellished variant of the responsory-derived opening phrase of A, which (like the opening acclamation in Kyrie “Cum júbilo”) thus assumes the role of a refrain.

Once again, as by now we may expect to find in a late medieval Dorian chant, the melody delineates the principal parts of the mode with great clarity. The A phrase occupies the Hypodorian ambitus, minus the highest note; the B phrase stakes out the upper tetrachord (but again minus the highest note); and the C phrase sinks back into Hypodorian space (this is, after all, a funereal chant). Only the final couplet (on “judicandus...”) manages to reach the top of the authentic octave, vouchsafing a mode 1 classification for the melody. Until the “coda,” moreover, with a pair of half cadences on A (the mode 1 tuba), every one of the melody’s frequent cadences has been to the final, imparting an additional, very heavy-treaded, dimension of repetition.

Despite its formal peculiarities, the *Dies irae* is a very typical late sequence in its verse structure. By the middle of the twelfth century, rhymed tercets composed of eight-syllable lines with regularly alternated accent patterns were very much the norm, not only for sequences but for new Office formularies as well. This verse pattern (especially in a modified tercet with syllable count 8+8+7) is often associated with Adam Precentor, alias Adam of St. Victor (d. 1146) a much-venerated Parisian churchman and an “outstanding versifier” (*egregius versificator*) who is credited with churning out between forty and seventy sequences of this type, most of them set to a small repertory of stereotyped and interchangeable tunes. These sequences were composed not only for the Augustinian abbey of St. Victor, where Adam was resident, but also for the newly consecrated Cathedral of Notre Dame, where he served as cantor. The most famous melody associated with Adam is the Mixolydian tune to which St. Thomas Aquinas’s sequence *Lauda Sion Salvatorem* (“Praise the Savior, O Zion”) is still sung at traditional Catholic churches on the feast of Corpus Christi. In Ex. 3-9 the first two melodic phrases are given both with St. Thomas Aquinas’s words and with Adam’s original poem, *Laudes crucis attollamus* (“Praises to the cross we bear”), composed about a hundred years earlier. Mixing and matching texts and tunes (especially new texts and familiar tunes) was a common practice, called *contrafactum*, that thrived especially in genres that exhibited the kind of rigorous regularity of form and meter that we find in the late Parisian (or “Victorine”) sequence.

Sequence 7.



Lau - da Si - on Sal - va - to - rem, Lau - da du - cem et pas - to - rum, In hym - nis et can - ti - cis.  
(Lau - des cru - cis at - tol - la - mus nos, qui cru - cis ex - sul - ta - mus spe - ci - a - li glo - ri - a.

2. Quan - tum po - tes, tan - tum au - de: Qui - a ma - jor om - ni lau - de, Nec lau - da - re suf - fi - cis.  
Dul - ce me - los tan - gat cae - los, dul - ci li - gnum dul - ci di - gnum cre - di - mus me - lo - dia.

3. Lau - dis the - ma spe - ci - a - lis, Pa - nis vi - vus et vi - ta - lis Ho - di - e pro - po - ni - tur.  
Vo - ci vi - ta non dis - cor - det; dum vox vi - tam non re - mor - det, dul - cis est sym - pho - ni - a.

4. Quem in sac - rae men - sa coe - nae, Tur - bae frat - rum du - ode - nae Da - tum non am - bi - gi - tur.  
Ser - vi cru - cis cru - cem lau - dent, qui per cru - cem si - bi gau - dent vi - tae da - ri mu - ne - ra.)

ex. 3-9 *Lauda Sion Salvatorem/Laudes crucis attolamus*

Altogether different were the contemporaneous sequences of Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), Abbess of the Benedictine convent of Rupertsberg in the Rhine valley near the German city of Trier. In its formal, modal, and metrical clarity, the Parisian sequence accorded with the scholastic tradition of Augustine and Boethius; scholastic thinkers sought, through orderly and cogent argument, to make faith intelligible to reason. Hildegard, by contrast, used poetry and music to express a visionary “symphony of the harmony of heavenly revelations” (*symphonia armonie celestium revelationum*), as she called her collected poetical works, assembled by the late 1150s. Besides her famous sequences, the book contains antiphons, responsories, hymns, and Kyries.

Hildegard’s melodies often have an extraordinary ambitus (up to two and a half octaves!), and they are not easily parsed into abstract modal functions. Rather, they exhibit the older formula-family notion of modal identity, just as their verbal patterns, avoiding both rhyme and regular accentuation, revert to the older, Notker-style notion of *prosa*. Her fantastic diction and imagery are all her own.

In the sequence *Columba aspexit* (“The dove looked in”) for the commemoration feast of St. Maximinus, a local saint of Trier, the versicles are paired in the traditional way, but loosely. (Ex. 3-10 shows the first two pairs.) The members of a pair do not always correspond exactly in syllable count. Compared with the literal strophic repetition we have become used to in the late medieval sequence, Hildegard’s melodic parallelism seems more to resemble a process of variation. (Some of her sequences avoid parallelism altogether, something unheard of since the ninth century and probably unknown to Hildegard as a precedent.) The result of all these irregularities is a relatively difficult melody to comprehend rationally or memorize. That lack of easy grasp, which induces a passivity of mind, combined with a flamboyant imagery, much of it derived from the Song of Songs, that evokes strong sensory impressions (specially implicating the sense of smell), conspire to produce an immensity of feeling one associates with revelation rather than reflection. Unlike the elegant, urbane creations of the Victorines, Hildegard’s is a lyricism of mystical immediacy. (Nor is this the last time French and German “schools” will be so differentiated.)



**fig. 3-4 Hildegard of Bingen, the twelfth-century abbess of Rupertsberg, writing down her visions (or, possibly, her chants). The illustration comes from a manuscript of her treatise *Scivias* ("Know the ways of the Lord") called the Codex Rupertsberg. It disappeared during World War II.**

Co - lum - ba as - pex - it  
per can - sel - los fe - nes - tre  
u - bi an - te fa - ci - em e - ius  
su - dan - do su - dan bal - sa - mum  
de lu - ci - do Ma - xi - mi - no.

The image shows a musical score for a Latin versus. It consists of five staves of music, each with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The lyrics are written below the notes. The first staff contains the lyrics 'Co - lum - ba as - pex - it'. The second staff contains 'per can - sel - los fe - nes - tre'. The third staff contains 'u - bi an - te fa - ci - em e - ius'. The fourth staff contains 'su - dan - do su - dan bal - sa - mum'. The fifth staff contains 'de lu - ci - do Ma - xi - mi - no.' The music is written in a simple, early style with notes and rests connected by horizontal lines and slurs.

Ca - lor so - lis ex - ar - sit  
 et in te - ne - bras res - plen - du - it  
 un - de gem - ma sur - re - xit  
 in e - di - fi - ca - ti - o - ne tem - pli  
 pu - ris - si - mi cor - dis be - ni - vo - li.  
 I - ste tur - ris ex - cel - sa  
 de - lig - no li - ba - ni et cy - pres - so fac - ta,  
 ia - cin - cto et sar - di - o or - na - ta est.  
 urbs pre - cel - lens ar - tes  
 a - li - o - rum ar - ti - fi - cum.  
 Ip - se ve - lox cer - vus  
 cu - cur - rit ad fon - tem pu - ris - si - me a - que  
 flu - en - tis de for - tis - si - mo la - pi - de  
 qui dul - ci - a a - ro - ma - ta ir - ri - ga - vit.

ex. 3-10 Hildegard of Bingen, *Columba aspexit*

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Medieval drama

Hildegard of Bingen

# LITURGICAL DRAMA

Chapter: CHAPTER 3 Rethorizing Music

Source: MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Hildegard's largest work is a play with music called *Ordo virtutum* ("The enactment of the virtues"). In it, the Devil and the sixteen virtues do battle for the possession of a Christian soul. It is by far the oldest extant example of what is now called the "morality play," a form of allegorical drama (chiefly popular between the fourteenth and the sixteenth centuries) in which the actors personify virtues and vices. In terms of content, then, Hildegard's play was unusual and, it could be said, prophetic. In terms of its genre, however, it was not unusual at all.

By Hildegard's twelfth century, the sung verse play in Latin was a veritable craze in northern Europe and England, and church space was increasingly given over on major festivals to dramatic representations of various kinds. Such plays begin to appear in written sources in the tenth century, and it is probably no accident that the earliest ones all enact the same episode—the visit of the women (or the Magi) to Christ's tomb (or the manger) and their meeting with an angel—that we encountered in the previous chapter in the form of tropes to the Easter and Christmas Intros. While it would be misleading to allege (as scholars once believed) that the so-called liturgical drama (performed at matins) grew directly or "organically" out of the earlier tropes (performed at Mass), it is clear that the church plays were a part—the crowning part, it is fair to say—of the same impulse to adorn and amplify the liturgy that produced the trope, the sequence, and all the other specifically Frankish liturgical genres that we surveyed in the previous chapter.

One of the most fully worked out of these early plays, with detailed directions for the costumes and the movements of the actors, is found in the *Regularis concordia* of 973, a code of monastic law produced by a council of bishops under Ethelwold (ca. 908–984) at the cathedral of Winchester. Its music is preserved in the famous Winchester Tropers, two great books of liturgical supplements, the earlier of them roughly contemporaneous with the council. (Unfortunately the Winchester Tropers are both notated in staffless neumes, and their contents cannot be reliably transcribed for performance.)

Like the tropes and sequences, the church plays evolved—between the tenth and twelfth centuries—from a prose into a verse genre. Twelfth-century liturgical dramas were elaborate composites of newly composed *versus* (music set to verse texts in the latest Frankish style), older hymns and sequences, and Gregorian antiphons, these last being retained as a kind of scriptural allusion or invocation. Their subjects included *Peregrinus* plays (dramatizations of the risen Christ's appearances to his disciples), shepherds' plays for Christmas, the Slaughter of the Holy Innocents (sometimes called the "Play of Herod"), the Wise and Foolish Virgins, the Raising of Lazarus, the miracles of St. Nicholas, and the so-called *Ludus Danielis*, the "Play of Daniel."

The largest single source of these twelfth-century verse plays is the so-called Fleury Play-book, a manuscript copied at the Benedictine monastery of St. Benoit at Fleury-sur-Loire near Orleans, the burial place of King Philip I of France (d. 1108). The best-known single item in the repertory is the Play of Daniel, thanks to its spectacular revival in 1958 by Noah Greenberg's New York Pro Musica ensemble, a milestone in the "early music" performance movement (a recording was still in print as of 2001). It was composed by students at the Cathedral school of Beauvais for the Feast of the Circumcision (January 1): "In your honor, Christ, this



Daniel play was written at Beauvais, the product of our youth," the first words proclaim. In this treatment, the Old Testament story of the prophet Daniel and his deliverance from the lion's den (vividly evoked in prescribed sets and costumes) is turned at the end into a prophecy of the coming of Christ: *Ecce venit sanctus ille, / sanctorum sanctissimus*, Daniel sings: "Behold, he comes, the Holy One, the Holiest of Holies," followed by a traditional Christmas hymn and the ancient hymn of thanksgiving, *Te Deum laudamus*, the concluding chant at matins, to which the whole foregoing complement of dramatic verses, processional songs, and expressive lyrics could be interpreted as a huge explanatory preface or trope.

The processional songs that accompany the entrances and exits of the *dramatis personae* in the Play of Daniel are labeled *conductus* (escorting-song) in the manuscript rubrics, one of the earliest uses of a term that later became synonymous with *versus*, or freely composed Latin song in verse. Ex. 3-11 gives the first of these *conducti*, to the verse *Astra tenenti / cunctipotenti*, which accompanies the entrance of King Belshazzar at the very beginning of the play, and then Daniel's lyrical petition after King Darius sentences him to die in the lions' den. (In order to accompany the actual procession of actors more effectively in performance, Noah Greenberg decided on the basis of the word-accent to impose a regular compound-triple meter on the five-syllable lines of text in the *conductus*; there is no evidence to gainsay him.) Between them, these two samples will give an idea of the extraordinary range of poetic and musical style encompassed by post-Gregorian *versus* settings.

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See also from Grove Music Online

Antiphon

Marian antiphon

# MARIAN ANTIPHONS

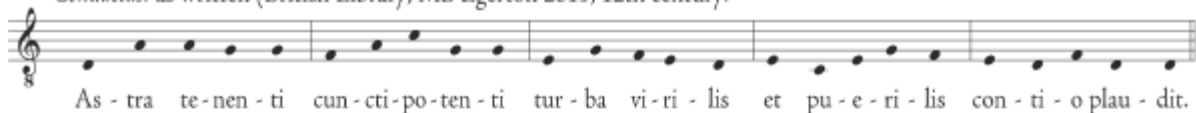
Chapter: CHAPTER 3 Rethorizing Music

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Author(s): Richard Taruskin

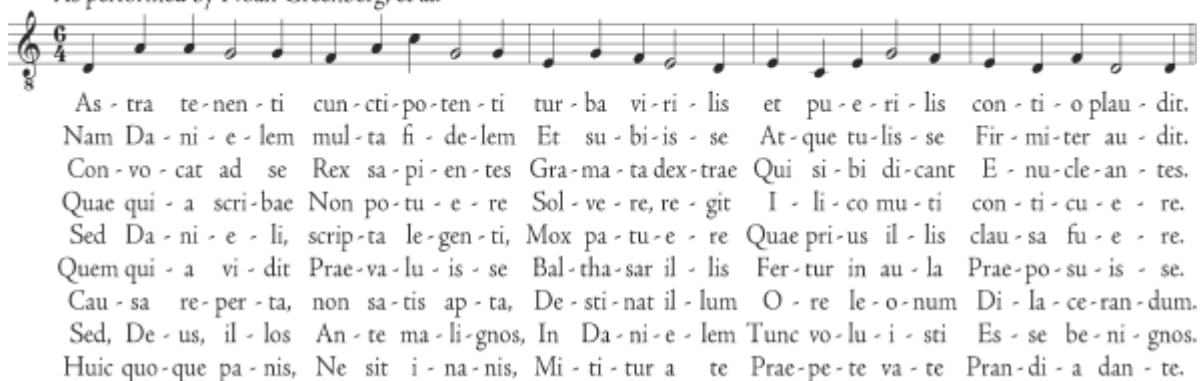
The very latest genre of medieval chant to be incorporated (in some part) into the canonical liturgy was the votive antiphon. Votive antiphons were psalmless antiphons—that is, independent Latin songs—attached as riders onto the ends of Office services to honor or appeal to local saints or (increasingly) to the Virgin Mary. As a human chosen by God to bear His son, Mary was thought to mediate between the human and the divine. One fanciful image casts her as the neck connecting the Godhead and the body of the Christian congregation. As such she was the natural recipient of personal prayers or devotional vows (and it is from “vow” that the word “votive” is derived). From the cult of Mary arose the Marian antiphon or “anthem to the Blessed Virgin Mary.” Our English word “anthem,” meaning a song of praise or devotion by now as often patriotic as religious, descends (by way of the Old English *antefne*) from “antiphon.” These ample songs of salutation to the Mother of God appear in great numbers in written sources beginning early in the eleventh century. By the middle of the thirteenth, a few had been adopted for ordinary use in monasteries to conclude the Compline service (hence the liturgical day itself). At English cathedrals they enhanced the Evensong service, which lay worshipers attended. It was to keep these prayers for intercession going in perpetuity that the “choral foundations”—endowments to fund the training of choristers—were set up at English cathedrals and university chapels. They have lasted to this day.

Conductus: as written (British Library, MS Egerton 2615, 12th century.)



As - tra te - nen - ti cun - cti - po - ten - ti tur - ba vi - ri - lis et pu - e - ri - lis con - ti - o plau - dit.

As performed by Noah Greenberg, et al.



As - tra te - nen - ti cun - cti - po - ten - ti tur - ba vi - ri - lis et pu - e - ri - lis con - ti - o plau - dit.  
 Nam Da - ni - e - lem mul - ta fi - de - lem Et su - bi - is - se At - que tu - lis - se Fir - mi - ter au - dit.  
 Con - vo - cat ad se Rex sa - pi - en - tes Gra - ma - ta dex - trae Qui si - bi di - cant E - nu - cle - an - tes.  
 Quae qui - a scri - bae Non po - tu - e - re Sol - ve - re, re - git I - li - co mu - ti con - ti - cu - e - re.  
 Sed Da - ni - e - li, scrip - ta le - gen - ti, Mox pa - tu - e - re Quae pri - us il - lis clau - sa fu - e - re.  
 Quem qui - a vi - dit Prae - va - lu - is - se Bal - tha - sar il - lis Fer - tur in au - la Prae - po - su - is - se.  
 Cau - sa re - per - ta, non sa - tis ap - ta, De - sti - nat il - lum O - re le - o - num Di - la - ce - ran - dum.  
 Sed, De - us, il - los An - te ma - li - gnos, In Da - ni - e - lem Tunc vo - lu - i - sti Es - se be - ni - gnos.  
 Huic quo - que pa - nis, Ne sit i - na - nis, Mi - ti - tur a te Prae - pe - te va - te Pran - di - a dan - te.

ex. 3-11a The Play of Daniel, *Astra tenenti* (conductus)

He-u, he-u, he-u quo ca - su, sor - tis  
 ve - nit hec damp-na - ti - o mor - tis?  
 He - u, he - u, he - u sce-lus in - fan-dum  
 cur me da-bit ad la-ce - ran - dum  
 hec fe - ra tur-ba fe - ris?  
 Sic me rex per-de - re que-ris  
 He - u qua mor - te mo - ri me co - gis  
 par - ce fu - ro - ri.

**ex. 3-11b The Play of Daniel, *Heu heu* (Daniel's lament)**

At first the Marian antiphons were sung, like the psalms, in a weekly cursus. In the modern liturgy, only four have been retained, and they follow a seasonal round. In winter (that is, from Advent until the Feast of the Purification on February 2), the seasonal anthem to the Blessed Virgin Mary is the penitential *Alma Redemptoris Mater* ("Sweet Mother of the Redeemer ... have pity on us sinners"). In spring (from Purification until Holy Week), it is the panegyric *Ave Regina coelorum* ("Hail, O Queen of the heavens"). For the exultant fifty-day period between Easter and Pentecost, known as Paschal Time, *Regina caeli, laetare* ("O Queen of heaven, rejoice") is the prescribed antiphon (Ex. 3-12a); and during the remaining (biggest) portion of the year, encompassing late summer and fall, it is *Salve, Regina* ("Hail, O Queen"), the most popular of the Marian antiphons (Ex. 3-12b) and the only one for which a plausible author has been proposed: Adhémar, Bishop of Le Puy and a leader of the First Crusade (d. at Antioch, 1098).



Regina caeli \* laeta re, alle - lu - ia: Qui - a quem me - ru - isti  
 por - ta - re, alle - lu - ia: Resurre - xit,  
 sic - ut dixit, alle - lu - ia: O - ra pro no - bis De - um, alle \*  
 \*\* lu - ia.

ex. 3-12a Marian antiphon, *Regina caeli, laetare*



Sal - ve, \* Re - gi - na, mater mi - se - ricordi - ae: Vi - ta, dulce - do,  
 et spes nostra, sal - ve. Ad te clama - mus, exsu - les, fi - li - i Hevae. Ad te suspi - ra -  
 mus. gementes et flen - tes in hac lacrima - rum valle. E - ia ergo, Advoca - ta nostra,  
 illos tu - os mi - se - ri cordes ocu - los ad nos conver - te, Et Jesum, benedi - ctum fructum  
 ventris tu - i, no - bis post hoc exsi - li - um os - tende. O cle - mens: O pi - a:  
 O dulcis \* virgo Ma - ri - a.

ex. 3-12b Marian antiphon, *Salve, Regina*

These eleventh-century melodies, the one exultant and the other penitent, exemplify in their contrast of modes the persistence of the doctrine of *ethos*, alive even today in our conventional assignment of contrasting moods to the major and the minor. *Regina caeli*, in fact, is in the major mode to all intents and purposes. Its final, F (tritus), became ever more prevalent in the later Frankish genres; and when it appeared, it was usually given a “signature” of one flat to “soften” progressions from B to F (of which *Regina caeli* is especially full). The resulting “Lydian” octave species, TTST–TTS, is identical to what we would call the major scale. (Its “natural” diatonic occurrence, beginning on C, was not recognized as a mode in its own right until the middle of the sixteenth century, but it was obviously in practical use for centuries before its

theoretical description.) The mode here works in tandem with other traditional earmarks of rejoicing, notably “jubilation” (melismas on *portare* and, especially, *alleluia*, replete with internal repeats clearly modeled on those of the Mass Alleluia).

*Salve Regina* is dark. Like so many late Dorian chants it covers the combined (or “commixed”) plagal-authentic ambitus, but its tessitura favors the lower end. (Its official assignment to mode 1 was due, most likely, to the repeated cadences of the concluding acclamations—*O clemens: O pia: O dulcis*—on A.) Although there are no real melismas, there is a great deal of melodic parallelism; indeed, the first two main phrases (“*Salve Regina...*” and “*Vita dulcedo...*”) are nearly identical. This last, it turns out, is a common feature of many medieval songs, although it is not found in many chants. (It should not be confused with the paired versicles of a sequence, because the first line of a sequence was the one line that was not usually paired.) Compare the melody in Ex. 3-1. This is a *canso*, a song of “courtly love.” Its language is Provençal, then the language of what is now central and southern France. The composer, Raimon de Miraval (d. ca. 1215), was a troubadour, that is, a member of the first school of European poets to use for creative purposes one of the then “modern” languages of Europe. Their line began with Guillaume IX, Duke of Aquitaine and Count of Poitiers (1071–1127), a younger contemporary of Adhemar, the putative author of the *Salve Regina*. Like Adhemar, Guillaume took part in the Crusades, as did many other troubadours.

C'ableis q'es de toz bes sa - bors Ai cor c'a sa mer - cé plai - dei,  
 E ges per lo pri-mer des - rei, Don faz mainz so - spirs e mainz plors,  
 Nom de - se - sper del ric so - cors C'ai lon - ja-ment a - ten - dut.  
 E sill plaz q'el - le mai - ut, So-bre toz lei - als a - manz  
 Se-rai de joi be-na - nanz

ex. 3-13 Raimon de Miraval, *Aissi cum es genser pascors*

Raimon's *canso* begins, like the *Salve Regina*, with a repeated melodic phrase. Like the *Salve Regina*, it is a song of devotional praise to a remote, idealized lady. Like the *Salve Regina*, it is a Dorian tune in a lightly neumatic style. The *Salve Regina*, in effect, may thus be looked upon as a *canso* to the Blessed Virgin. There is no inherent or intrinsic difference between the idioms of sacred and of “secular” devotion, and no stylistic difference between the sacred verse-music of the eleventh and twelfth centuries and such “secular” verse-music as was deemed worthy, beginning in the twelfth century, of preservation in writing.

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

### See also from Grove Music Online

Hermannus Contractus

Guido of Arezzo

Hexachord

Solmization

# THEORY AND THE ART OF TEACHING

**Chapter:** CHAPTER 3 Rethorizing Music

**Source:** MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

**Author(s):** Richard Taruskin

Before exploring the implications of these statements, though, or taking a closer look at music set to vernacular poetry, or discussing the reasons why the word “secular” is being set off in this context by quotation marks, let us return briefly to the original subject of this chapter, the formulation of new theoretical concepts and their influence on musical practice. There is one more tale to tell.

For a long time, two of the Marian antiphons, *Alma Redemptoris mater* and *Salve Regina*, were attributed to Hermannus Contractus (Hermann the lame, 1013–1054), a monk at the Swiss abbey of Reichenau. That attribution is no longer credited, but Hermann was a notable poet-composer (of sequences and Offices for local saints) and a major theorist. In his treatise, *Musica*, Hermann proposed surrounding the tetrachord of four finals (D, E, F, G) with a tone on either end, thus producing a six-note diatonic segment or hexachord from C to A, and with symmetrical intervallic content TTSTT.<sup>3</sup> This module, Hermann implied, sums up with the greatest possible economy the tonal range of Gregorian chant. The tetrachord beginning with the first note, C, gives the beginning of the Mixolydian scale as well as that of the adjusted Lydian with B-flat: TTS. (In view of what we have observed about the F mode with B-flat, we could call this the major tetrachord.) If one begins on the second note of the hexachord, one gets the beginning of the Dorian scale, TST (we can call it the minor tetrachord). And by beginning on the third note one derives the essence of the Phrygian, STT. For all practical purposes, this model implies, there are only three finals—not four—and their scales are best thought of as beginning on C, D, and E. It was a step in the direction of what we call major-minor tonality.

Hermann appears to have been unaware of the fact, but his conceptual module had already been abstracted from the chant itself as part of a great pedagogical breakthrough—perhaps the greatest in the history of the literate tradition of music in the West. For it was precisely this breakthrough that at last made “sight-singing” possible and put Western music on a literate footing in truly practical terms. Its importance would be hard to overestimate.



fig. 3-5 Guido of Arezzo instructing his pupil Theodal at the monochord, from a twelfth-century manuscript in the Austrian National Library, Vienna.

The man responsible for this signal achievement was the same Italian monk, Guido of Arezzo, who around 1030 (in the prologue to an antiphoner) first proposed placing neumes on the lines and spaces of a ruled staff to define their precise pitch content. Guido used special colors, later replaced by alphabet signs, to denote the C and F, “key” lines—*claves* in Latin—that have semitones below them; these letters survive as our modern “clefs.” We, who still rely on his inventions nearly a thousand years later, owe him a lot, as did all the generations of Western musicians preceding us. No wonder he was a legend in his own time, and by now is something of a myth, a musical Prometheus.

The actual Guido lived from about 990 to about 1033 and specialized for most of his fairly brief life in the training of choirboys. Like many teachers of ear training, he was ever on the lookout for melodies (in his case, chiefly chant antiphons) with which to exemplify the various intervals. Imagine his excitement, then, when (as he tells us) he chanced upon a tune that could exemplify all of them. This was the hymn *Ut queant*



*laxis* (“So that tongues might loosen”), composed in the late eighth century by Paul the Deacon, a monk at the Benedictine abbey of Monte Cassino, in honor of the abbey’s patron saint, John the Baptist. This hymn tune is so constructed that the first syllable in each half-line is one scale degree higher than the one that precedes it, the whole series exactly tracing out the basic hexachord from C to A (Ex. 3-14). So well does it fit the pedagogical bill that scholars now suspect that Guido actually wrote the melody himself on the familiar words of the hymn.

Ut que-ant la - xis re - so - na - re fi - bris Mi - ra ge - sto - rum fa - mu - li tu - o - rum,  
 Sol - ve pol - lu - ti la - bi - i re - a - tum, San - cte Jo - an - nes.

Guido's hexachord  
 Ut Re - Mi - Fa - Sol - La

ex. 3-14 Hymn, *Ut queant laxis*; words by Paul the Deacon, music possibly by Guido d'Arezzo

This module gave a syllable-name (or *vox*, “voice”) to each degree (or *locus*, “place”) in the hexachord. Once internalized, the set of “musical voices” (*voces musicales*) served a double purpose for ear training. In the first place any interval, ascending or descending, could be demonstrated in terms of a *vox* combination (thus: ut–re, the tone; ut–mi, the major third; ut–fa the perfect fourth; re–fa the minor third; etc.). And, second, the difference between the tone and the semitone, the all-important definer of mode quality, could be mastered by drilling the interval mi–fa.

Around the beginning of the seventeenth century, the syllable *si*, derived from the initials of “Sancte Ioannes,” was added by some singing teachers to the Guidonian module so that a full major scale could be sung with model (“solmization”) syllables. (In modern practice, as every music student knows, *si* has been replaced by *ti*, and the closed syllable *ut* has been replaced by the open syllable *do*, sometimes spelled “doh” in English speaking countries to avoid confusion with the verb “to do.”) Guido, however, who did not as yet have or need the concept of the major scale, managed to complete the octave by transposing the basic module so that it began on G, the hexachord G–E being intervallically identical (or “affined,” to use Guido’s vocabulary) with C–A. In this new placement, the progression mi–fa corresponds with the semitone B–C. To solmize the full scale from C to c, one “mutates” at some convenient point (either on sol–ut or la–re) from one location of the module to the other, thus (dashes denoting semitones):

C D E – F G A B – C .....

ut re mi – fa sol la

ut re mi – fa sol la

To take care of the F-with-B-flat situation, later theorists recognized another transposition of the module, beginning on F, that would place the mi–fa pair on A and B-flat. The whole range of hexachord transpositions thus achieved, mapping out the whole musical space within which Gregorian chant was habitually sung, finally looked like Ex. 3-15.



ex. 3-15 The gamut, or full range of pitches represented on the Guidonian hand, together with the seven hexachords that are required for its solmization. The recurrent pitch names across the bottom of the diagram are called *claves* in medieval music theory; the recurrent solmization syllables are the *voces*. An individual pitch, or *locus* (“place” within the gamut), is specified by a combination of *clavis* and *vox*, from Gamma *ut* (whence “gamut”) to E *la*. What we now call “middle C” was C *sol-fa-ut* to medieval singers

In order to gain an *ut* at the bottom on which to begin the first set of *voces*, Guido placed a G below the A that normally marked the lower end of the modal system. This extra G was represented by its Greek equivalent, gamma. Its full name within the array of *voces* was “Gamma *ut*,” which (shortened to *gamut*) became the name of the array itself. (The word “gamut,” of course, has entered the common English vocabulary to denote the full range of anything.) The two versions of B (the one sung as *mi* over G, corresponding to our B natural, and the one sung as *fa* over F, corresponding to B-flat), were assigned to a single mutable space, whose actual pitch realization would depend on the context. The higher B was known as the hard one (*durus*), and was represented by a square-shaped letter that eventually evolved into the modern natural sign. The hexachord containing it was also known as the “hard” hexachord (*hexachordum durum*). The lower one, which softened augmented fourths into perfect ones, was known accordingly as soft (*mollis*) and was represented by a rounded letter that eventually evolved into the modern flat sign. The hexachord containing B-flat (*B-mollis*) was known as the “soft” hexachord (*hexachordum molle*; the original module, derived from the hymn, was called the “natural” hexachord.)

Eventually, the use to which Guido put the C–A hexachord module, and the concepts that arose from it, began to influence the more theoretical notion of the hexachord as expounded by Hermann. One now could distinguish pieces ending “on *ut*” (*Regina caeli*, for example) from pieces ending “on *re*” (like *Salve Regina*). A whole interval-species could be summoned up by a single syllable. This, too, reinforced the tendency to simplify the concept of mode and reduce it all the more to our familiar major-minor dualism. Eventually the “*ut*” modes (like G with a B natural) were called *durus*, and “*re*” modes (like G with a B flat, a “transposed” Dorian) were called *mollis*. This terminology survives to this day in some languages, like German and Russian, as equivalents for major and minor (thus in German *G-dur* means “G major” and *g-moll* means “G minor.”) In French and Russian, the word *bémol* (from “B-mollis”) denotes the flat sign.

As an aid toward internalizing the whole set of *voces* and applying them to the actual notes written on Guido’s other invention, the staff, Guido—or, more likely, later theorists acting in his name—adopted a mnemonic device long used by calendar makers and public speakers, whereby items to be memorized were mapped spiralwise onto the joints of the left palm (Fig. 3-6). (The once widespread use of such devices is still reflected in our daily language by expressions like “rule of thumb” and “at one’s fingertips.”) In its fully developed musical form (not actually reached until the thirteenth century, two hundred years after Guido), each location on the “Guidonian hand” (and one in space, above the middle finger) represented a musical *locus*, defined by the conjunction of two overlapping cycles: the octave-cycle naming the notes as written (the *claves*, or letter names), and the series of hexachord placements that assigned *voces* to each of the *claves*. A specific locus, then, represents the product of a *clavis* and a *vox*. C *fa ut* (lowest joint of index finger), for example, is the C below middle C (C), and only that C: it can be solmized only in the hard hexachord (in which it is *fa*) and the natural (in which it is *ut*); there is no F below it in the gamut, so it cannot be solmized as *sol*. Middle C (c, top joint of ring finger) is C *sol fa ut*: it can be solmized in all three

hexachords. The C above middle C (*cc*, second joint of ring finger), and only that C, is *C sol fa*, for it can only be solmized in the soft and hard hexachords. To sing it as *ut* would imply that the gamut (or “hand,” as it was fondly called) continued past its upper limit.

Armed with the memorized and internalized gamut, a singer could parse a written melody into its constituent intervals without hearing it or hunting for it on a monochord. The first phrase of *Salve Regina* (Ex. 3-12b), for example, could be seen at a glance to lie exactly within the compass of the natural hexachord, in which it would be solmized with these *voces*: /*la sol la re*/ (*Salve*); /*la sol fa mi fa sol fa mi re*/ (*Regina*); /*ut re re ut re mi fa sol re mi ut re* / (*mater misericordiae*). All of *Regina caeli* (Ex. 3-12a) lies within a single soft hexachord. The beginning of the second phrase (“*Quia quem meruisti*”), the first that encompasses the entire range of the chant, would take these *voces*: /*ut sol sol la la sol fa mi re ut re mi mi*/. Finally, here are the *voces* for the first “*Kyrie*” acclamation and the first “*Christe*” in *Kyrie IX* (Ex. 3-5):

*Kyrie*: /*re fa sol la sol fa mi re fa re ut re ut re fa sol fa mi re*/(natural hexachord).

*Christe*: /*mi mi re fa mi re re ut re fa re mi*/ (soft hexachord).

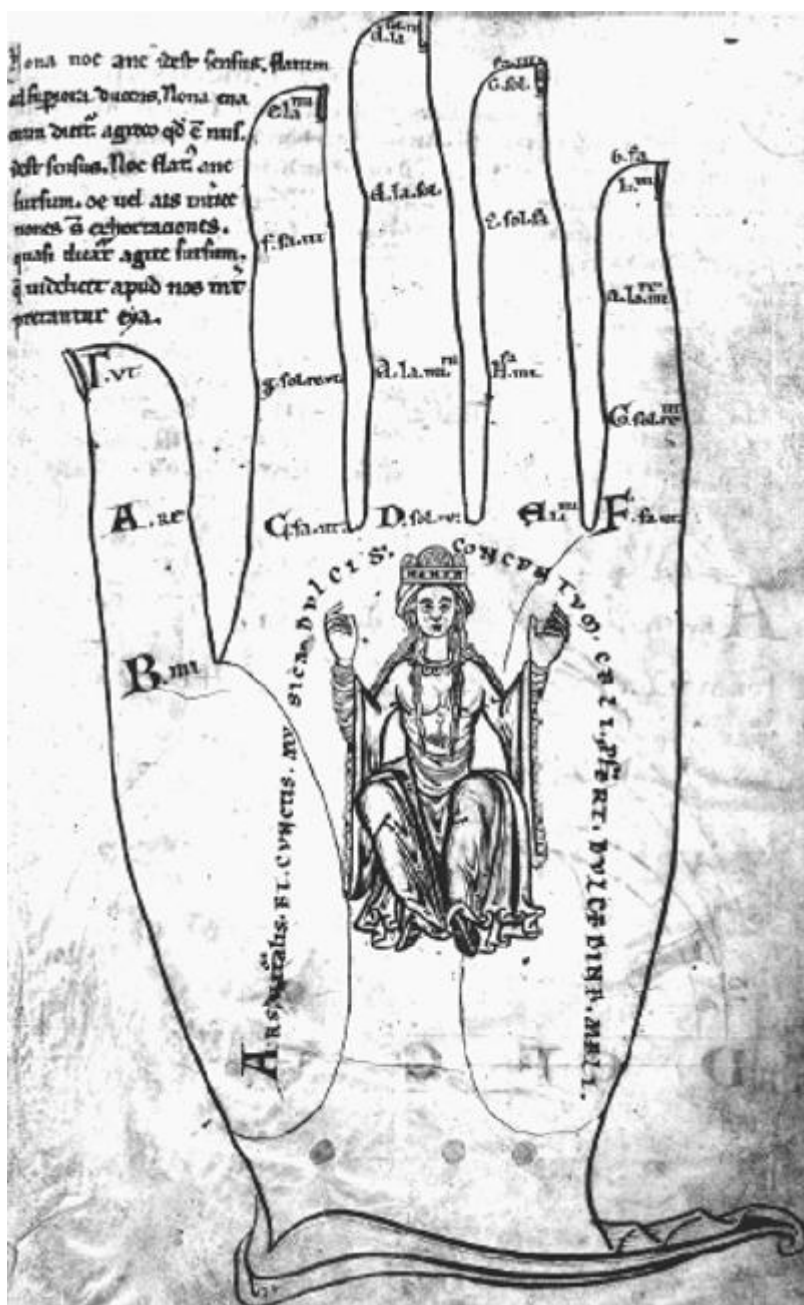


fig. 3-6 The “Guidonian hand” as represented in a thirteenth-century Bavarian manuscript.

Except for the beginning of the second “Kyrie” invocation, which extends down into the first hard (or “gamma”) hexachord (syllables: re fa sol sol), the whole of Kyrie IX can be solmized using one natural and one soft hexachord. It would be a good exercise for the reader. Another good exercise would be to seek out phrases in the chants used as examples in this book so far that exceed the interval of a sixth, and that therefore require a mutation for their proper solmization. *Salve Regina* contains a number of interesting examples of this type. The phrase “Ad te suspiramus, gementes et flentes” requires a mutation from natural to soft and back again, thus: /re fa la (think *mî*) sol re re ut re mi (think *la*), re fa sol sol re fa mi re ut/. The phrase “Eia ergo, Advocata nostra, illos tuos misericordes oculos” is tricky: it begins in the soft hexachord, and descends into the natural; but when the upper range is regained, mutation must be not to the soft hexachord but to the hard, since the melody (as the alert singer will have scanned ahead to notice) has a B-natural, not a B-flat, thus: /ut ut re ut re mi mi, sol re mi re ut (think *fâ*) re sol la (think *re*), sol sol fa mi fa sol re sol fa re ut (think *fâ*) la sol fa mi fa mi re ut/. At “nobis,” however, where the B-flat is called for, so is the soft hexachord: /re la (think *mî*) fa mi/.

Armed with these techniques, and with Guido’s hand stored in memory for ready reference, a singer could truly sing at sight, or (as Guido put it in the title of his famous epistle of 1032) “sing an unknown melody.” Reinforced over centuries of practice, this pedagogical aid wrought enormous changes in the way music was disseminated and thought about. When transmission from composer to performer could take place impersonally, without direct oral/aural contact, music became that much less a process or a social act, and that much more a tangible, autonomous thing. The notion of a “piece” of music could only arise when music began to be thought of in terms of actual pieces of paper or parchment. For these far-reaching conceptual changes, we have the legendary Guido, the greatest ear trainer of them all, to thank. He turned out to be even more a trainer of eyes and minds than of ears.

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## Notes:

(3) See Richard Crocker, “Hermann’s Major Sixth,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* XXV (1972): 19–37.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

## CHAPTER 4 Music of Feudalism and *Fin's Amors*

### The Earliest Literate Secular Repertories: Aquitaine, France, Iberia, Italy, Germany

Chapter: CHAPTER 4 Music of Feudalism and *Fin's Amors*

Source: MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

#### BINARISMS

One of the lessons the study of history can teach us is to appreciate the futility of rigidly oppositional distinctions and to resist them. Hard and fast antitheses, often called binarisms, are conceptual rather than empirical: that is, they are more likely to be found in the clean laboratories of our minds than in the messy world our bodies inhabit. (And even to say this much is to commit several errors of arbitrary opposition.) One can hardly avoid categories; they simplify experience and, above all, simplify the stories we tell. They make things intelligible. Without them, writing a book like this—let alone reading it!—would be virtually impossible. And yet they involve sacrifice as well as gain.

The invention of staff notation, placed at the climax of the previous chapter and presented as a great victory, is a case in point. The gain in (apparent) precision was accompanied by a definite loss in variety. The staff is nothing if not an instrument for imposing hard distinctions: between A and B, between B and C, and so forth. These distinctions are gross as well as hard; singing from a staff is like putting frets on one's vocal cords. One has only to compare the staffless neumes of early chant manuscripts with the staved notations of the "post-Guidonian" era to see how much more stylized notation had to become—and how much farther, one must conclude, from the oral practice it purported to transcribe—in order to furnish the precise information about pitch that we now prize. A whole category of ornamental neumes (called *liquescent*, implying fluidity, flexibility of voice, and, most likely, intonation "in the cracks") was sacrificed, and eventually lost from practice. No one knows today just what they once signified. The precision of staff notation, like the precision of the modal theory that preceded and preconditioned it, regularized certain aspects of music and made many developments possible. Yet at the same time they foreclosed other aspects and potential developments that other musical cultures have continued to prize and to cultivate. Anyone who has heard the classical music of Iran or India will have an idea of what may have been lost from the European tradition.

On a more conceptual plane, consider the distinction between sacred and secular. Up to now only the former has figured in our story, simply because only it was available for description. Now we are about to encounter the earliest available secular repertories—the first musical repertories that were not intended for use in divine worship but were nevertheless deemed worthy of preservation in writing. On the basis of the firm distinction between the sacred and the secular on which, for example, our present-day institutions of government depend, we may tend to assume that secular music will contrast radically with sacred. Perhaps some did; the writings of the early Church Fathers abound in condemnations of "licentious songs" that express and arouse "passions sprung of lack of breeding and baseness,"<sup>1</sup> or that call forth "the Devil's great heap of garbage."<sup>2</sup> But we don't know these songs. We will never know exactly how they differed from the music of which the Fathers approved, and we may even suspect that what made them objectionable had less to do with their essential nature or "style" than with the occasions at which they were sung, or with the people who sang them. "Sacred" and "secular" are not so much styles as uses. The distinction between them is at least as much a social as a generic one.

## Notes:

(1) St. Basil, *The Letters*, Vol. IV, trans. Roy J. Deferrari (London: W. Heinemann, 1934), p. 419.

(2) James McKinnon, "The Church Fathers and Musical Instruments" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1965), p. 182.

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

# AQUITAINE

Chapter: CHAPTER 4 Music of Feudalism and *Fin's Amors*

Source: MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

### TROUBADOURS

The earliest secular repertoires of which we have direct knowledge consist of songs by knightly poets of courtly love and feudal service. Stylistically, they are remarkably like the sacred repertoires with which we have been dealing so far. Not that this should surprise us: if these secular songs were thought worthy of commemoration and permanence (that is, worthy of writing down), they must have had some transcendent or elevating purpose like that of the sacred. And as surely as style follows function, a like purpose should entail a like manner.

The earliest such written-down knightly songs in a European vernacular (that is, a currently and locally spoken language) originated in Aquitaine, a duchy whose territory occupied parts of what is now southern and south-central France. It had been conquered by Charlemagne in the late eighth century and incorporated into the Carolingian Empire; but with the weakening of the Empire as a result of invasions by Normans on one side and Muslims on the other, royal influence over Aquitaine gave way over the course of the ninth and tenth centuries to several independent noble families who established local jurisdictions and maintained networks of patronage and protection among themselves. Eventually the counts of Poitou emerged as the most powerful among these clans and, from 973, asserted dominion over the whole territory and took the title of Duke. (Later, the marriage of the duchess Aliénor or Eleanor of Aquitaine to the French king in 1137 joined Aquitaine to France; and her second marriage, to the Norman duke who later became King Henry II of England, led to a long struggle over the territory that would not be ended until the fifteenth century.)

It was during the period of Aquitaine's relative independence that its courtly poetic and musical traditions arose. William (Guillaume), seventh count of Poitiers and ninth duke of Aquitaine (1071–ca. 1127), was the first European vernacular poet whose work has come down to us. The tradition, socially speaking, thus began right at the top, with all that that implies as to “highness” of style, tone, and diction. The language William used was Provençal, alias Occitan or *langue d'oc*, from the local word for “yes.” (Old French, spoken to the north, was called *langue d'orl* for the same reason.) In Provençal, poetry was called *trobar*, meaning words “found,” and a poet was called a *trobador*, a “finder” of words. In English we use the Frenchified form, troubadour.

A troubadour's subject matter was the life he led, viewed in terms of his social relations, which were ceremonial, idealized, and ritualized to the point of virtual sacralization. In keeping with the rarefied subject matter, the genres and styles of troubadour verse were also highly formalized and ceremonious, to the point of virtuosic complexity of design and occasional, sometimes deliberate, obscurity of meaning.

The genres reflected social relations directly. Feudalism, arising in unsettled conditions of weak central power and frequent ruinous invasion, was based on land grants and on contractual, consensual exchanges of service and protection on which everyone's welfare depended. The bonds of honor thus pledged were taken very seriously indeed. The utopian ideal—never realized except (more or less theoretically) in the tiny, short-lived “Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem” established by the Crusaders in 1099—was a wholly hierarchical—and therefore, theoretically, a wholly harmonious—society. Under feudalism, all land was legally owned by an elected (rather than a hereditary) king, who deeded and parceled it out to the greatest nobles in the form of “fiefs” (from the Latin *feodum*, whence “feudal”), who deeded it in turn to lesser nobles, and so on down to the manorial barons and their serfs, who actually worked it.

The granting of a fief created the relationship of lord (or suzerain) and vassal. The bond thus created was solemnized downright liturgically, in a ritual of homage whereby the vassal, placing his hands in the lord's, swore an oath of fealty that obliged him to perform certain specified acts and services, including military service. The suzerain, in turn, bound himself to protect the vassal from incursions. The feudal nobility was thus primarily a military caste system, a hierarchy of knights or warriors-in-service. These military bonds were at first envisioned as a system of mutual defense (although in reality disruptive conflict among lords was common), but in the period of the Crusades the knightly armies went on the offensive. William IX of Aquitaine, our first troubadour, led a Crusade himself in 1101; his unlucky army never reached the Holy Land.

Several genres of troubadour verse celebrated feudal ideals. A *sirventes* was a song from vassal to lord about knightly service or about some theme of political alliance; such a song could be either serious or satirical. An *enuég* (compare the French *ennui*) was a complaint about infractions of knightly decorum. A *gap* (compare *jape* or *gibe*) was a bluster-song, glorifying one's own exploits or issuing a challenge. The most serious of such types was the *planh* (compare the French *plainte*), a eulogy on the death of a lord. There were also many songs about crusading zeal.

The true heart of the troubadour legacy, however, was the *canso*, which means a love poem—or better, perhaps, a poem about love. For the love celebrated by knightly singers was just as “high,” just as formalized and ritualized, as any other publicly enunciated theme. And the poems of the troubadours were always meant for public performance—hence the music!—not for private reading; theirs was still an eminently oral tradition. Modern scholars have christened the subject of the *canso* “courtly love” (*amour courtoise*); the troubadours themselves called it *fin' amors*, “refined love,” defined by one modern authority as “a great imaginative and spiritual superstructure built on the foundation of sexual attraction.”

It is widely thought that Arabic sung poetry—known in southern Europe from the ninth century, and also emphasizing secret love and the spiritualization of the erotic (including the homoerotic)—had a formative influence on the concept of *fin' amors*. Its main genre is the *nawba* (or *nuba*), a lengthy vocal performance accompanied by the *oud* (literally “wood”), a gourd-shaped plucked-string instrument from which the European lute had been adapted by the thirteenth century. It consisted of several stanzas (some in Arabic and some in Persian), connected with improvisatory instrumental interludes. No musical relationship between the *nawba* and the troubadour repertory has as yet been definitely established, but some modern performers of early music have experimented effectively with performance practices derived from those of present-day Arab musicians.

The love songs of the troubadours were like their knightly songs in that they emphasized service and the idolization of those above, as the lady was invariably held to be. The style was self-consciously lofty, as exemplified by the imagery of the most famous of all *cansos*, *Can vei la lauzeta mover* by Bernart de Ventadorn (d. ca. 1200), which begins with an unforgettable metaphor comparing the joy of love to the soaring and swooping of a lark in flight. This is contrasted with the lovesick poet's unhappy state, condemned to adore a cold and unresponsive lady from afar.

*Fin' amors* was furtive and hopeless as a matter of course, because the lady was always held to outrank her lover. She was married into the bargain, as a rule, though often left alone for long periods while her husband was out on campaigns or Crusades. At such times she was the effective ruler of his domain, as the Occitan word for lady—*domna*—already suggests (compare the Latin *domina* and the Italian *donna*). Her identity is always concealed behind a code name (*senhal*; in Bernart's song it is Tristan), supposedly known only to the lady and her lover.





fig. 4-1 Medieval lutenist, from an illumination in a thirteenth-century manuscript now at the Biblioteca Nazionale in Florence, Italy. The instrument he is playing entered Europe as war booty from the Crusades.

But secrecy and illegitimacy should not be confused with licentiousness. The conventions of *fin' amors* heightened the unavailability of the lady as actual lover and made her an object not of lust but of veneration. The *canso* was thus essentially a devotional song, a song of worship—another link with the sacred sphere, especially with the burgeoning liturgy of the Blessed Virgin. Veneration of the lady, like veneration of Mary, promoted not license or sensuality but rather the sublimation of amorous desire in charity, self-mortification, and acts of virtue. It was another bond of honor, hence a quintessentially feudal attitude.

## MINSTRELS

In Bernart's case it was easy enough to feel outranked by the lady: like many of the later troubadours, he was a commoner—according to various traditions the son of the baker or the furnace stoker in the castle of Ventadorn, near Poitiers—who rose to prominence, and received noble patronage, strictly on his merits as a poet. (Bernart's patron was Eleanor of Aquitaine herself, with whom he traveled to France after her first

marriage, and to England after her second, thus spreading his art abroad.) While the art of the troubadours was a quintessentially aristocratic art, an art of the castle, it was not an art practiced only by aristocrats. Rather, whoever the actual practitioner may have been, it was an art cultivated and patronized by aristocrats and expressive of their outlook.

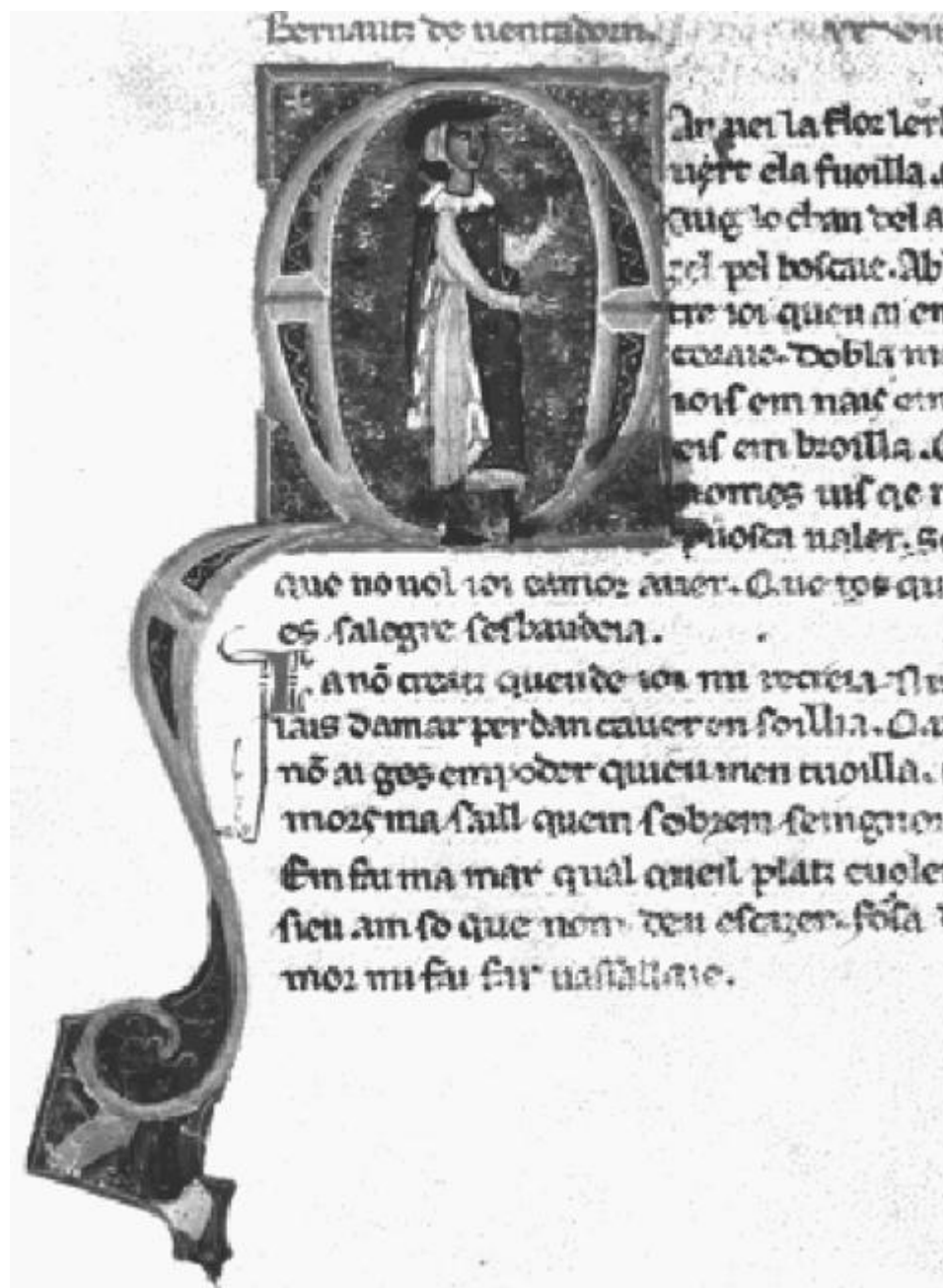


fig. 4-2 Bernart de Ventadorn, from an illumination accompanying his *vida*, the biographical preface to his collected song texts without melodies, in a manuscript copied in Italy in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, by which time the Occitan culture of southern France had already been destroyed. (Only five of the thirty-seven manuscripts known to have contained troubadour songs had musical notations.) The manuscript found its way to the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris as war booty, having been confiscated from the Vatican Library by Napoleon's army. The portrait of Bernart, dating from at least a century after his death, is obviously fanciful.

Indeed the actual practice—the actual performance, that is, of the noble song-product—was usually left to

what we now call minstrels: professionals of a lower caste, singer-entertainers called *joglars* in Provençal (*jongleurs* in French, both from the Latin *joculatores*, “jokers”); the derivation of our English word “juggler” from *joglar* should leave no doubt about its subartistic connotation. Most of the commoner-troubadours like Bernart started out as minstrels who learned the work of the noble poets by rote and who later developed creative facility in their own right. The relationship of troubadour to minstrel, and particularly the means of transmission from the one to the other, attest that the art of the troubadours remained an oral art. A noble poet would compose a song and teach it to a minstrel, thus sending it out into the oral tradition from which it might be transcribed, with luck, a hundred years later.

For written documentation of the troubadour art began only when the tradition was already moribund. The manuscripts containing troubadour songs, called *chansonniers*, are retrospective anthologies prepared in the middle of the thirteenth century. (Any song found in multiple copies in these late sources exists in multiple variants, thus precluding the restoration of a definitive “text,” assuming there ever was such a thing.) Besides the songs themselves, *chansonniers* contain fanciful portraits and biographies (*vidas*) of the poets. Their purpose was commemorative and decorative; they had nothing to do with practice or performance. They were “art objects,” rich “collectibles.”

That the composition of troubadour songs was just as much an oral practice as their transmission and performance is shown by a very revealing anecdote in the *vida* of Arnaut Daniel, one of the greatest knightly poets, known for his exceptional virtuosity in rhyme. It supposedly happened at the court of Richard I (Lion-Heart), Eleanor’s son. Another troubadour had boasted that he could compose a better poem than Arnaut and challenged him to a contest. The king confined the two poets to different rooms in his castle, stipulating that at the end of the day they were to appear before him and recite their new poems, whereupon Richard would determine the winner of the bet. Arnaut’s inspiration failed him; but from his room he could hear his rival singing as he composed his song, and learned it by heart. When the time of the trial came he asked to perform first and sang his rival’s song, leaving the latter to look like the copycat.

Like many of the anecdotes in the *vidas*, this one probably never happened. (There is no corroborating evidence that Arnaut, himself a nobleman, was ever in anyone’s employ, or that he knew Richard, or that he went to England.) But, as the Italian proverb has it, *se non è vero, è ben trovato*: “even if it isn’t true, it’s very apt (literally, well made-up)”—and note how the Italian for “making up” comes from the same root stock as *trobar*. What is so apt about it, and revealing, are the points the author of the *vida* took for granted: first, that a troubadour in the act of composition did not write but sang aloud; and second, that a troubadour could memorize a song at an aural glance. These are the assumptions of an oral culture.

It was that congruence of creating and performing as oral acts, and that ease of memorization, that made the minstrel an apt and necessary accessory to the troubadour. Yet because the creation of poetry, as opposed to its performance, was nevertheless viewed as a noble pastime rather than a profession, it could be practiced by lords—and by ladies, too. The *vidas* tell us of at least twenty lady troubadours (for which the Provençal word was *trobairitz*) who created courtly songs but never sang them, at least in public.

## HIGH (LATINATE) AND LOW (“POPULAR”) STYLE

The only type of troubadour love song that emphasized the joy of consummation was the thrilling genre known as the *alba*, or “dawn-song.” The lovers, having passed a clandestine night together in oblivious bliss, are aroused—by the sun, by singing birds, by a watchman’s cry, or by a confidant—to the breaking day and to the peril of discovery. The most famous *alba* was *Reis glorios* by Guiraut de Bornelh, a contemporary of Bernart and, like him, a commoner whose skill found favor with the noble audiences (Ex. 4-1). Where Bernart’s stanza (or *cobla*, to use the Occitan word) had consisted, in *Can vei la lauzeta*, of eight different phrases, each corresponding to a line of poetry, Guiraut’s is regularized by an initial melodic repetition (or *pes*)—as in the *Salve Regina* melody discussed in the previous chapter—and by a concluding refrain as in, say, a Frankish Kyrie. The resemblance of Guiraut’s melody to that of the Kyrie verse *Cunctipotens genitor* (Ex. 2-14b) has been noted.

Reis glo-ri-os ve - rais lums \_ e clar - tatz \_ Deus po-de-ros, Se - nher, si \_\_\_ a vos \_\_\_ platz, \_

Al \_\_\_ meu com-panh si-atz fi-zels a-iu - da \_ Qu'eu non lo vi \_\_\_ pos \_\_\_ la nochs \_ fo ven-gu - da

Et a-des se - ra \_\_\_ l'al - ba. \_

ex. 4-1 Guiraut de Bornelh, *Reis glorios* (first verse)

The higher the style of a troubadour melody, the more likely were its chant affinities. Comparison of Bernart's or Guiraut's melodies with those of the late Frankish chant discloses a great similarity of style. Like *Salve Regina* or Kyrie IX, they are exemplary "first mode" melodies according to the rationalized concept of mode studied in chapter 3. (The composers probably picked up the style by ear on the basis of the chants they heard sung.) There are even instances that show the influence of late chant poetry on troubadour diction and sentiment. A familiar Provençal dictum—*fin' amors, fons de bontat*, "courteous love is the source of all goodness"—echoes in close cognates the tenth-century Kyrie verse *Fons bonitatis*. (Its third-mode melody, shorn of the verse but still sporting the incipit as a title, can be found in modern chant books as "Kyrie II.") The hypothesis that the music of troubadour song—the performance medium of a liturgy of aristocratic mores—aped the actual liturgical music of its time has been gaining strength as more is learned about actual twelfth-century chant. Quite near William the Ninth's seat at Poitiers was Limoges, another Aquitanian town and the site of the Benedictine abbey of St. Martial, the greatest center for the production of Latin *versus* on which the troubadours modeled their *vers* (to use the Provençal word for poetry-with-music).



fig. 4-3 The Languedoc region in the twelfth century. Note the close proximity of Limoges, the monastic center, where Latin liturgical poetry to music was composed in profusion; and Poitiers, the center of troubadour activity.

Rhythmically and formally, Latin *versus* (or *conductus* as it was called in northern France) was just as various and almost as virtuosic as troubadour songs. Actual Provençal words occasionally appear in *versus* from St. Martial. Most striking of all, there are subgenres of *versus* that, like the most elevated troubadour genres, straddle the nebulous line between the sacred and the secular. Some of them have actual troubadour parallels, for example the *planctus* (= *planh*). St. Martial manuscripts contain a celebrated *planctus* for Charlemagne and an even more illustrious song called *planctus cigni* (“The lament of the swan”), a moving metaphor of exile, in which a swan, caught in a storm over the sea, laments the loss of its verdant homeland. The famous theologian Pierre Abelard (1079–1142), an exact contemporary of William of Aquitaine, wrote six *planctus* on biblical themes, two of which exist in staff notation. A large collection of *versus* in an early thirteenth-century French manuscript best known for polyphonic music includes *planctus* commemorating a whole honor roll of recently deceased aristocrats and churchmen, and what may be described as Latin *sirventes* (one of them concerning Pope Innocent III’s excommunication of Otto IV, the Holy Roman Emperor, in 1210 and the ensuing war of succession). Many *planctus* settings (including the *planctus cigni*) are in a form resembling the older (pre-“Victorine”) liturgical sequence, with its melodically paired verses of differing lengths. This form, too, had its Provençal counterpart, called the *descort*. The name, translated literally, means “discordant,” the idea being that its component stanzas are in varying (disagreeing) rhyme and meter schemes, requiring new melodies for each. Such a structure particularly suited narrative poems.

Other troubadour genres or individual melodies affected a mock-popular style that may have drawn stylistically not on chant but on otherwise unrecorded folk idioms. *A chantar m'er de so gu'en no volria* ("I must sing of that which I would rather not"), the one poem with surviving tune attributed to the late twelfth-century *trobairitz* Beatriz, Countess of Dia, departs markedly from the chant idiom. Its overall structure is that of the regularized or "rounded" canso with its repeated couplet and final refrain (AB AB CD B), but the tune alternates cadences on E and D in a fashion never encountered in first-mode chants but common in the dances and dance songs of a slightly later period. (Such endings would be designated *ouvert* and *clos*—"open" and "shut"—in thirteenth century dance manuscripts; they correspond to, and prefigure, what we would now call half and full cadences.) One genre that always affected a mock-popular tone was the *pastorela*, in which a knight seduces (or tries to seduce) a shepherdess. The best-known survivor of this genre is *L'autrier jost' una sebissa* ("The other day by a hedge row") by Marcabru (or Marcabrun), one of the early troubadours, who served in his youth at the court of William of Aquitaine and who memorialized his patron in a Crusader song (*Pax! In nomine Domini*, "Peace! In the name of the Lord") that actually mixes Latin verses with vernacular ones. Texts that do this are called *macaronic* ("jumbled" like macaroni).

Another mock-popular genre was the *balada*, or dance-song, of which a rare surviving example is the anonymous *A l'entrada del tens clar* (Ex. 4-2). This melody, of an altogether different character from the preceding ones, seems to be a sophisticated imitation folk song with its call-and-response verses (ending with "Eya," Occitan for "Hey!"), its half and full cadences, and its lengthy refrain.

A l'en-tra-da del tens clar, E y a, Per joi-a re-com-en-çar, E y a,  
 E per je-los ir-ri-tar, E y a, Vol la re-gi-na mos-trar Qu'el es si a-mo-ro-za

Refrain  
 A la vi', A la vi-a, Je-los Lais-saz nos, Lais-saz nos Bal-lar en-tre nos, en-tre nos.

As usually rendered (in "popular" style) by modern performers:

A l'en-tra-da del tens clar, or: E - ya Per joi-a re-co-men-çar or: E - ya  
 E per je-los ir-ri-tar E - ya, Vol-la re-gi-na mo-strar Qu'el es si a-mo-  
 ro-za A la vi', A la vi', Je-los Lais-saz nos Lais-saz nos  
 Bal-ler en-tre nos, en-tre nos.

ex. 4-2 *A l'entrada del tens clar* (balada)

## RHYTHM AND METER

If, as the text suggests, this song is meant to accompany a *carole*, an actual public dance, then its rhythm has got to be metrical. No such information is conveyed by the actual notation, which like that of the other troubadour melodies is indistinguishable from the “quadratic notation” (notation with square-note-heads) used in contemporary chant manuscripts. (“Contemporary” here means thirteenth-century, the period of the retrospective *chansonniers*.) Meter has to be supplied conjecturally, on the basis of the words. In the case of a dance, no one is likely to object to such a conjecture; but the question of the proper rhythmic style for troubadour songs—indeed, for verse-music in general before the thirteenth century—is one of the most hotly contested issues in musical scholarship.

The poetry is of course metered; indeed, metrical design (along with rhyme scheme) was a field in which the troubadours vied to excel one another in virtuosity. The question is whether the metric patterning was reflected in the music in patterns of note lengths or by means of stress patterns. Or, as some maintain, were the troubadour songs performed in a supple rhythm modeled, perhaps, on that of the sacred chant? Such an attribute of “high” style would free the troubadour art from any taint of the “popular”—if indeed that was thought desirable.

This is certainly not the place to adjudicate such a question; but it should be emphasized that we are just as much in the dark about the intended rhythmic performance of *versus* (or even Frankish hymns and sequences) as we are about *vers*. And it should be noted that the scholarly consensus has lately been swinging, in the case of all of these repertoires, away from the a position (now regarded as anachronistic) that favored applying quantitative meters wherever possible. This theory, which dominated editions and performances of troubadour melodies and late chants alike in the earlier part of the twentieth century, was based on a misreading of treatises on the rhythmic performance of late medieval polyphonic music (to be described in chapter 6).

The approach most favored now is the so-called “isosyllabic” approach, whereby all syllables, whether sung to a single note or to a group or two or three notes, are given roughly equal length. Another possibility, which also has its adherents, is the “equalist” approach that makes precisely the opposite assumption. It gives all notes the same length, regardless of how many of them are given to a syllable. This fairly radical “solution” to the problem of rhythmic interpretation is the one recommended by the editors of modern chant books (officially adopted by the Catholic church in 1904 and in general Catholic use until 1963), and is therefore the one most widely practiced today wherever the Gregorian chant is still sung as service music.

## TROBAR CLUS

There is one more important genre of troubadour poetry with music: the *tenso* (or *joc-partit*), an often jesting debate-song that involves two or more interlocutors, and that was sometimes, but not necessarily, actually a joint composition by two or more poets. The subject matter could be some fine point of love or feudal service (like, “if you love a lady, would it be better to be married to her or to have her love you back?”), or it could be—and most often was—about poetry itself. Here the troubadour addressed his craft directly and with marvelous self-consciousness. The *tenso* was thus a sort of school for poets and can be extremely instructive for us.

One of the favorite themes for debate was the eternal conflict between *trobar clus* and *trobar clar*, between “closed” or difficult poetry for connoisseurs and “clear” poetry designed for immediate pleasure and easy communication. The virtues claimed for the first were its technical prowess, its density of meaning, and the exclusive nature of its appeal, which lent it an ability to create an elite occasion and foster solidarity among a coterie of insiders. It promoted social division and hierarchy, and was therefore an art quintessentially expressive of aristocratic values. The virtues claimed for the second were its *greater* technical prowess (or so it was argued, since as the Roman poet Horace famously remarked, the greatest art is the art that conceals art) and its power to create a sense of community and shared values. Within the narrow social context of troubadour culture this is hardly to be looked upon as a “democratic” ideal. It might better be regarded as a feudal piety.

These arguments were given an early, classic exposition in a *tenso* by Guiraut de Bornelh, a recent convert to *trobar clar*, in mock debate with a fellow troubadour, Raimbaut d'Aurenga (called Linhaure), who remained loyal to *trobar clus*. The melody, unfortunately, has not survived. In somewhat abridged translation, the dispute runs as follows:

- 1. I should like to know, G. de Bornelh, why you keep blaming the obscure style. Tell me if you prize so highly that which is common to all? For then would all be equal.
- 2. Sir Linhaure, I do not take it to heart if each man composes as he pleases; but judge that song is more loved and prized which is made easy and simple, and do not be vexed at my opinion.
- 3. Guiraut, I do not like my songs to be so confused, that the base and good, the small and great be appraised alike; my poetry will never be praised by fools, for they have no understanding nor care for what is more precious and valuable.
- 4. Linhaure, if I work late and turn my rest into weariness to make my songs simple, does it seem that I am afraid of work? Why compose if you do not want all to understand? Song brings no other advantage.
- 5. Guiraut, provided that I produce what is best at all times, I care not if it be not so widespread; commonplaces are no good for the appreciative—that is why gold is more valued than salt, and with song it is just the same.<sup>3</sup>

For the troubadours, these opposing sentiments were not so much passionately held convictions as postures; many poets cultivated both styles depending on the occasion and saw no compelling reason to choose between them. And yet the debate continues. It will run through this book like a red thread, steadily gathering force and urgency as the audience for art changes (and inexorably widens) over time. For one of the enduring characteristics of “high art,” and a perennial source of contention, is the fact that it is produced by and for political and social elites. That, after all, is what makes it “high.” But then there can be many reasons for hiding meaning, and not all of them are proud.

Nor is original purpose an inherent limitation on meaning or value. Art devised to serve the interests or the needs of a feudal aristocracy must be serving other interests now, if it is serving any interests at all. And yet *trobar clus* and *trobar clar*, by other names and in other forms, are with us still. Each still has its ardent defenders and its adamant detractors. Their subtexts and agendas are many. There is no more consequential theme in the history of art.

The art of the troubadours lasted about two hundred years. It declined together with the Provençal culture that sustained it. Many of the later troubadours fled southward, into present-day Spain and Italy, at the time of the so-called Albigensian Crusade (from 1208). This was a drawn-out, devastating war of aggression waged by the northern French against the courts of Languedoc under pretext of a religious campaign. (The ostensible targets were the so-called Cathari or Albigenses, adherents of an old philosophical tradition called Manicheism that had been declared a heresy by the Catholic Church.) Guiraut Riquier (ca. 1230–ca. 1300), the last of the troubadours, found employment at the court of Alfonso X of Castile, which became a major center of vernacular courtly and devotional song in the later thirteenth century, but no longer in Provençal. Nor was Guiraut the only troubadour who stimulated the spread of vernacular poetry into other languages. As we will see, the nobleman Arnaut Daniel (by common consent the preeminent master of *trobar clus*) had a formative, if posthumous, influence on the art of Dante and Petrarch, as well as their fourteenth-century Italian musical contemporaries. But long before that, indeed by the end of the thirteenth century, the art of the troubadour was at an end.

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## Notes:



(3) H. J. Chaytor, *The Troubadours* (London, 1912), pp. 38–9.

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

# FRANCE

Chapter: CHAPTER 4 Music of Feudalism and *Fin's Amors*

Source: MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

### TROUVÈRES

By that time, however, it had spawned a hardy successor in northern France itself, despite hostilities between the northern courts and those of Languedoc. The earliest French imitations of Provençal lyrics, by poet-musicians who called themselves *trouvères* (in direct translation from the Occitan), were composed something less than a century after the Provençal tradition had its start, and gathered strength all through the thirteenth century while the art of the troubadours declined.

One of the main brokers of this northward migration was Eleanor of Aquitaine herself. She was the granddaughter of the first troubadour, the patron of a great troubadour (Bernart de Ventadorn), whom she brought with her up to France, and both mother and great-grandmother of notable *trouvères*. Eleanor's *trouvère* son, Richard I (Lion-Heart), though born in England and eventually his father's successor as king (1189–99), had succeeded first to the titles of his great-grandfather William and lived most of his life in Aquitaine. He never learned English. His poems are found in both Provençal and French sources; the only one to survive with its melody (or, at any rate, with a melody) is found only in French.



(a)



(b)

fig. 4-4 Tomb effigies of (a) Eleanor of Aquitaine and (b) her son, Richard I (Lion-Heart), in the crypt of the Plantagenet kings at the Abbey of Fontevrault, France.

That song, *Ja nun hons pris* (Ex. 4-3), while cast in a form resembling the *canso* (or, in French, *chanson*

*courtoise*), is not about love but about honor. It is a lament on his famous captivity (1192–94) following the Third Crusade, when his enemy Leopold V of Austria held him for the proverbial “king’s ransom,” a ruinous levy that was eventually raised by Richard’s English subjects. (Apocryphal though it almost surely is, one cannot omit the “well-found” legend that Richard’s squire and fellow trouvère Blondel de Nesle succeeded in learning the captured king’s whereabouts by singing one of Richard’s songs within the royal earshot and hearing the King come back in turn with the refrain. The tale goes back to the thirteenth century and in 1784 was turned into an opera by the French composer André Grétry, in which Richard’s “romance,” as imagined by Grétry, is a dramatically recurring “leitmotif.” True or false, the story certainly shows the importance the knight-crusaders attached to their musical activity.)

The image shows two staves of musical notation in G-clef and 3/4 time. The melody is written on a five-line staff with a treble clef. The notes are mostly quarter and eighth notes, with some slurs and rests. Below the first staff, the lyrics are written in French: "Ja nus hons pris ne di - ra sa re - son a - droi - te - ment, s'en - si com do - lans non; mes par con - fort puet il fe - re chan - çon. Moult ai d'a - mis, mes po - bre sont li don;". Below the second staff, the lyrics continue: "hont en a - bront, se por ma re - an - çon sui ces deus y - vers pris.".

ex. 4-3 Richard Coeur-de-Lion (Lion-Heart), *Ja nun hons pris* (first verse)

In its thirteenth-century sources Richard’s song is classified as a *retrouenge*, a term modern scholars have not yet succeeded in defining. It may mean no more than a song in the vernacular rather than Latin, but it probably has to do with the use of a concluding tag line or refrain. The form of the song will be familiar with its initial melodic repetition or *pes*, producing the stanzaic pattern *aab*. We first encountered it in the *Salve Regina* (it can be traced further back yet, all the way to the classical Greek ode), and we will re-encounter it again and again in later repertoires. The German guild poets called *Meistersinger* (“master singers”; about them see below) finally gave it a name—“bar form”—in the fifteenth century, and we might as well borrow it back from them to describe their forgotten model. (The term came from the jargon of fencing, in which a *bar* or *barat* meant a well-aimed thrust.)

Eleanor’s trouvère great-grandson was Thibaut IV (1201–53), Count of Champagne and King of Navarre in what are now the Spanish Pyrenees. He was one of the most prolific of the French noble poets at the very height of their activity. His grandmother, Countess Marie of Champagne, Eleanor’s daughter by her first marriage, was the patron of Gace Brulé (ca. 1160–sometime after 1213), the first great trouvère, from whom Thibaut may have begun to learn his craft. Between them Gace and Thibaut turned out 110 songs with surviving music (62 and 48 respectively; of course these numbers reflect the much higher general survival rate among trouvère songs compared with those of the troubadours). Thibaut’s *De bone amour vient seance et bonté* (“>From love all wisdom and goodness come”) expresses the conventional, by now somewhat hackneyed if elegant sentiments of *fine amours* (to use the French variant of the phrase) in the equally stereotyped ode or bar form, by now the stock formal mold for channeling lofty expression (Ex. 4-4).

De bone a - mor vient se - ance\_ et bon - té, et a - mors\_ vient de ces deus\_ au - tre - si.  
Tuit troi sunt un, qui bien i\_ a pen - sé; ja a nul\_ jor ne se - ront\_ de - par - ti.

Par un con - seil\_ ont en - sen - ble e - sta - bli li co - re - or, qui sont a - vant a - lé: \_

de mon cuer\_ ont fet leur che - min fer - ré;\_ tant\_ l'one u - sé, ja n'en se - ront par - ti. \_

ex. 4-4 Thibaut IV de Champagne, *De bone amour vient seance et bonté* (first verse)

The foregoing pair of songs, by a pair of kings, shows how closely the early trouvère repertory was modeled on its Provençal progenitor. As long as the art of the trouvère remained an art of the castle, it seemed to differ little, except in language, from the art of the troubadour. And yet from the very beginning there were in fact some subtle but significant differences, both on the level of form and style and on that of social attitude and practice; and they became more pronounced with the passage of time.

## SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

To begin with, narrative genres loomed much larger in the trouvère repertory and vied more seriously with the lyric genres for pride of place. The *lai*, a sequence-like series of changing stanzas held together by a story line, was much more important to the trouvères than its Provençal counterpart, the *descort*, had ever been to the troubadours. This reflects the longstanding popularity of narrative poetry (romances and *chansons de geste*, “songs of deeds”) in the north. It was a Celtic rather than a Mediterranean inheritance. One of the earliest trouvères, Chrétien de Troyes, who was active at the court of Marie of Champagne from the 1160s to the 1190s, was much better known for his epic romances, including the original Arthurian legends of Perceval and Lancelot, than for his handful of lyrics.

New genres of narrative song based on the folklike *pastorela* (*pastourelle*) idiom became popular in thirteenth-century France. One of these, the *chanson de toile*, always reflected the woman’s point of view, whatever the sex of the singer. The name of the genre, literally “picture-song” (from *toile*, “a canvas”), referred to the opening device of setting a domestic scene (what in painting is called a “genre scene”), usually of a lovely maiden (Bele Doette, Bele Ysabiauz, Bele Yolanz, etc.) spinning, weaving, or reading a book—but mainly pining for her lover. Each stanza ended with an exclamatory refrain to underscore the maiden’s tender feelings.

Most *chansons de toile* have come down to us without attribution. The name of only one poet is primarily associated with this genre: Audefroï le Bastart, to whom are attributed six out of the two dozen or more specimens that survive. Like the songs of Thibaut IV, Audefroï’s *Bele Ydoine* is found in the so-called *Manuscrit du Roi*, prepared for Charles d’Anjou, the brother of King Louis IX of France (and himself a trouvère), between 1246 and 1254. With over five hundred songs (fifty by troubadours, the rest by trouvères in descending order of social rank), it is the largest and most sumptuous of all chansonniers.

Refrains lived a life of their own in the works of the trouvères. Detached from their original contexts—in pastourelles, in chansons de geste, in otherwise unrecorded dance songs (*caroles*) and popular ditties—they circulated like proverbs from song to song, and it became a mark of skill for a trouvère to contrive new settings for familiar tags. *Ier mains pensis chevauchai* by Ernoul Caupain, an especially elaborate *chanson avec des refrains*, incorporates no fewer than eight of them, one into each stanza.

Narratives and migrating refrains were both popularizing touches, and so was the general lack of concern

among the trouvères for the values of *trobar clus*, so beloved of the troubadours. *Chançon legiere à entendre ferai*, wrote Conon de Béthune (d. 1220), one of the noblest trouvères by birth and a knight-crusader to boot: “I will make a song that is light upon the ear, for it matters to me that all may learn it and willingly sing it.” Few among his northern counterparts were inclined to contradict him, and Conon’s sentiment would only gain in force as the courtly art he practiced underwent a phenomenal social transformation.

For past the middle of the thirteenth century, the main site of musico-literary activity among the French shifts from castle to town, mirroring the general movement of society. Urbanization, on the rise since the eleventh century, had begun to gallop. Over the century ending around 1250, the city of Paris doubled in size. Its streets were paved and its walls expanded. The first Louvre (a fortress) and several major churches including Notre Dame were built, and the city’s schools were organized into a university. The episcopal town of Arras to the north was granted a commercial charter in 1180 and soon became an international center of banking and trade, the bastion of France’s emerging class of town-dwelling freemen—*bourgeoisie*, in the original meaning of the term. It was at Paris and (especially) Arras that musical activity burgeoned among this capacious class and came to be organized along lines comparable in some respects to crafts guilds.

This tendency was epitomized in the Confrérie des Jongleurs et des Bourgeois d’Arras (Brotherhood of Minstrels and Townspeople of Arras), nominally a lay religious guild founded near the beginning of the thirteenth century, which became a leading sponsor of musico-poetic pursuits. Audefroï le Bastart, the specialist in *chansons de toile*, was a member, as were the three most important trouvères of the late thirteenth century: Moniot d’Arras (d. 1239), Jehan Bretel (d. 1272), and Adam de la Halle, the last of the line (d. ca. 1307).

To the first of this trio, whose pseudonym means “The Little Monk of Arras,” belongs the most famous *pastourelle* in the repertory, *Ce fut en mai* (“It happened in May”; Ex. 4-5). Its text contains a valuable bit of testimony, corroborated by other witnesses, about how such songs were performed: it describes a dance accompanied by a fiddle (*viele*). On the assumption that it is itself a dance song, it is transcribed in a regular alternation of long and short syllables yielding a sort of iambic meter. The musical structure approximates the “binary” form of later dance styles: two phrases of equal length, each repeated with contrasting “open” and “shut” cadences. That plus the use of the major mode (Lydian with B-flat) makes this a consummate imitation folk song. There is little left here of the Latinate.

Ce fu en mai, Au douz tens gai Que la saison est be le, Main  
me le vai, Jo er m'a lai Lez u ne fon te ne le. En  
un ver gier Clos d'ai glen tier O i u ne vi e le; La  
vi dan cier Un che va lier Et u ne da moi se le.

ex. 4-5 Moniot d’Arras, *Ce fut en mai* (pastourelle)

Jehan Bretel was the great master of the *jeu-parti* (“mock-debate”), the trouvère equivalent of the troubadour *tenso*. These jousts-in-song were performed and judged before the so-called Arras Puy, a branch of the Confrérie that held regular competitions at which songs were “crowned.” At least one manuscript from the period actually indicates with little cartoon crowns the *chansons couronnées* that were so honored by the

Puy. Jehan Bretel, not a nobleman but a wealthy burgher of the town, won these contests so often with his *jeux-partis* that he was elected "Prince" or presiding judge of the Puy, thus putting him out of contention. His elevation was a formal assertion of artistic "meritocracy"—aristocracy achieved by merit, not birth.

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Adam de la Halle

Formes fixes

Rondeau

Virelai

Adam de la Halle

Opera: Origins

# ADAM DE LA HALLE AND THE FORMES FIXES

**Chapter:** CHAPTER 4 Music of Feudalism and *Fin's Amors*

**Source:** MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

**Author(s):** Richard Taruskin

Jehan's musical debating partner at the Arras Puy was often Adam de la Halle, called "Adam le Bossu"—Adam the Hunchback—by his contemporaries ("although I am not one," he complained in one of his poems). At the time of their jointly composed *jeux-partis*, Adam was a young man, just back from his studies in Paris. His advanced studies had acquainted Adam with the various forms of "university music" that we will take up in later chapters. They equipped him to compose polyphonic music, and he became the only *trouvère* to do so. His skills made him famous, and he had an international career that ranged from Italy, which he visited in the retinue of Charles d'Anjou, to England, where he is reputed to have performed, as an old man, at the coronation of Edward II in 1307. An entire *chansonnier*, evidently compiled late in the thirteenth century, is given over almost wholly to a retrospective collection of his works, grouped by genres: first traditional *chansons courtoises*, then the *jeux-partis*, and finally the polyphonic works.

Of these last there are two groups. The first consists of French verses, harmonized the way Latin *versus* (or, up north, *conductus*) were often harmonized at the time, in a fairly strict homorhythmic (-note-against-note or "chordal") texture, and notated in score. (The second group consists of more complicated polyphonic compositions called motets; we will deal with them in chapter 7.) Like all polyphonic music of the period, Adam's used a new type of notation that fixed the rhythms exactly. (We will deal with that in chapter 7, too.) Polyphonic writing was a very "learned" style for a *trouvère*, so what is especially interesting—even curious—about Adam's polyphonically set verses is that they are cast in the folksiest (or rather, the most mock-naive) of all quasi-pastoral genres, the dance-song called *rondel*.

Mock-naive, because for all its rustic pretension the *rondel* (or *rondeau*, as it is more commonly called by musicians) is actually a quite sophisticated kind of poem. The name ("round" or "circular") may originally have stemmed from the nature of the dance it accompanied; but it also well describes the "rounded" form of the poem, in which a "contained refrain" both frames the verse and appears, truncated, within it. A contained refrain is one that uses the same melody as the verse itself; thus the form of a *rondeau* can be represented with letters as follows: AB a A ab AB, where the capital letters stand for the refrain text, and the lower case letters for new text, all sung to the same tune. The trick was to contrive a poem in which the refrains both rounded the verse and also made linear sense when the whole verse was sung or recited in sequence. The clever effect that can be achieved in this way, even without music, has kept the "rondel" (as it is still called by poets) popular with makers of "light verse" into recent times. Here is an example by Austin Dobson (1840–1921):

A KISS

- [A] Rose kissed me today
- [B] Will she kiss me tomorrow?
- [a] Let it be as it may,
- [A] Rose kissed me today,
- [a] But the pleasure gives way
- [b] To a savour of sorrow;—
- [A] Rose kissed me today,—
- [B] *Will* she kiss me tomorrow?

And here is an example by Adam de la Halle, perfect for memorization even in this hopelessly literate day and age because the “A” and the “B” have each been whimsically held down to a single measure (Ex. 4-6).



1. Bon' a - mou - re - te    2. Me    tient gai;  
 3. Ma com - pai - gne - te,  
 4. Bon' a - mou - re - te,  
 5. Ma' chan - ço - ne - te    6. Vous    di - rai.  
 7. Bon' a - mou - re - te    8. Me    tient gai.

ex. 4-6 Adam de la Halle, *Bone amourete*

The first written rondeaux (texts only) are “found objects,” popular songs interpolated into old narrative romances to “illustrate” dance scenes. (The first such usage is in a manuscript dated 1228.) Rondeaux were the source of many of the popular refrains in the store from which thirteenth-century composers of *chansons avec des refrains* would draw. In fact, the word “rondeau” may have originally meant a song framed (sur-rounded) by a quoted refrain. No rondeau with surviving music seems to be any older than Adam’s polyphonic ones, however. There are ten monophonic rondeaux by Adam’s contemporary Guillaume d’Amiens, who was a famous manuscript illuminator besides being a trouvère, and another dozen by a Parisian cleric named Jehannot de l’Escurel (hanged for debauchery in 1304). There is no reason to think these pieces any earlier than Adam’s, though, just because they are written in a simpler texture.



Refrain

Dieus soit en - ches - te mai - son, - Et biens e goie a - fui - son!

Fine



Verse

1. Nos si - res Nou - eus Nous en - voie a ses a - mis,  
2. Nos si - res est teus Qu'il pri - e - roit a en - vis,

Ch'est as a - mou - reus Et as cour-tois bien a - pris  
Mais a frans hon - teus Nous a en son lieu tra - mis

Pour a - voir des pai - re - sis A no - he - li - son.  
Qui som - mes de ses nou - ris Et si en - fan - çon.

Back to refrain

ex. 4-7 Adam de la Halle, *Dieus soit en cheste maison* (ballade)

The rondeau was one of three types of dance-song (*carole*) with refrain that came into widespread use as models for composed music beginning with Adam in the late thirteenth century. They differed from one another chiefly in the deployment of the refrains. What they had in common was more significant. Take away the refrains from a rondeau—that is, simply take away the capital letters from the alphabet scheme up above—and we are left with the long-familiar *canço*, the basic stanza in ode or bar form, thus:

Add a refrain (not a “contained” refrain but one with different music) on either side of the basic stanza, and we get the form of Adam’s *Dieus soit en cheste maison* (“God be in this house”):

It was called a *ballade* (Ex. 4-7). Give the refrain the same music as the “tail” (*cauda*) or nonrepeating line of the stanza, so that it is “contained,” and we get the form of Adam’s

*Fines amouretes ai* (“Many fine lovers have I”):

It was called a *chanson balladé*, “danced song,” or more commonly, *virelai*, from the Old French verb *vire*, “to turn around” (Ex. 4-8; since it is conventional and commonsensical to begin an alphabet scheme with the letter A, the virelai form is almost always given as A bba A, which unfortunately disguises the basic stanza within it). These three genres—ballade, virelai, rondeau—encompass the whole repertoire of what would be

called the *formes fixes*, the “fixed forms” in which lyric poetry, no longer associated with the dance, would continue to be written and set to increasingly elaborate music over the next two centuries. Rather quickly, moreover, the ballade shed its refrain when set as a fancy polyphonic composition; in doing so, of course, it merely reverted to the basic *canço* shape.

Refrain (= b)

Fi - nes a - mou - re - tes \_ ai, Dieu! si \_\_\_ ne sai, quant les ver - rai.

Fine

Verse

1. Or man - de - rai m'a - mi - e - te, Qui est \_ coin - te et jo - li - e - te  
2. Et s'ele est de moi en - chain - te, Tost de - ven - ra paile et \_ tain - te;  
3. Mieux vaut que je m'en as - tien - gne Et pour \_ li jo - li me \_ tien - gne

Back to refrain

ex. 4-8a Adam de la Halle, *Fines amouretes ai* (virelai)

(a)

1.4.7. Je muir, je muir d'a - mo - re - te, Las! ai - mi!  
 3. A pre - miers le vi - dou - che - te, Las! ai - mi!  
 5. D'une a - trai - ant ma - nie - rete A - dont le vi,

(b)

2.8. Par de - fau - te d'a - mi - e - te. De mer - chi.  
 6. Et puis le truis si - fie - re - te, Quant li pri.

ex. 4-8b Adam de la Halle, *Je muir* (Rondeau)

## THE FIRST OPERA?

It was during his sojourn in Italy that Adam wrote what has become his best known work, *Le jeu de Robin et de Marion*, best translated as “Robin and Marion, a play with music.” It was a sort of offering from his employer, the Count of Anjou (based in Sicily), to the king of Naples, before whom it was performed in 1283. With its alternation of dialogue and sixteen diminutive monophonic dance-songs and duets, this work has often been anachronistically compared with the later “singspiel” or comic opera. More appropriately, it can be described as an acted-out *pastourelle*, for that is the narrative tradition to which its dramatized plot belongs. Marion, a shepherdess, loves the shepherd Robin (as she tells us in the opening song, a modified virelai; Ex. 4-9); accosted by Sir Aubert, a knight out hunting, she resists; Robin goes to town in search of protection for her; while he is gone Sir Aubert comes back, abducts Marion; Robin, warned by his friend Gautier, pursues, is beaten back; Marion escapes anyway; the lovers, reunited, celebrate.

Refrain Fine

Ro-bins m'ai - me, Ro-bins m'a, Ro-bins m'a de - man - dé - e, Si - m'a - ra.

6 (a)

Ro-bins m'a - ca - ta co - te - le D'es - car - la - te bonne et be - le,

10 (b) D.C. al fine

Sous - ka - nie et chain - tu - rele A - leu - ri - va!

ex. 4-9 Adam de la Halle, *Robins m'aime* (from *Le jeu de Robin et de Marion*)

Because Adam's collected work is so readily available in the retrospective manuscript described above, it was published in an edition by the French musical antiquarian Charles-Edmond-Henri de Coussemaker as early as 1872. "Le trouvère de la Halle," as he was called there, thus became the earliest medieval musician whose work was comprehensively recovered in modern times. Performances of *Le jeu de Robin et Marion* (usually harmonized in a contemporary fake-medieval style), billed as "the world's first opera," enjoyed a big vogue in all the capitals of Europe. There was a particularly successful revival in St. Petersburg's "Antique Theater" in 1907, with harmonizations by the local conservatory musicologist, an Italian named Liberio Sacchetti. It was produced by the same team that later brought "Russian ballet" to Paris and made musical and theatrical history. Thus it is a striking instance of the interest musical modernists have often shown in "early music" and the inspiration they have drawn from it—another theme to be pursued in later chapters.

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Hans Sachs

# GEOGRAPHICAL DIFFUSION

**Chapter:** CHAPTER 4 Music of Feudalism and *Fin's Amors*

**Source:** MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

**Author(s):** Richard Taruskin

The earliest written vernacular repertoires in several other European countries are traceable to the influence, both artistic and ideological, of the troubadours and trouvères. The troubadour influence went south, as we have seen, into the Iberian peninsula and Italy. That of the trouvères went east into Germany.

### CANTIGAS

In some parts of what is now Spain, especially the eastern part (then Aragon, now Catalonia), the presence of troubadours stimulated the rise of a latter-day Provençal school, of little interest to music history. On the western side, however, and especially at the northwestern court of Castile and León, the troubadours were emulated in the local literary vernacular, Galician-Portuguese. This brief efflorescence left a major musical monument in its wake, the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, compiled over a period of as much as thirty years (1250–80) under the supervision of King Alfonso X (*el Sabio*, “The Wise”).

The word *cantiga* (or *cantica*) is the equivalent of *canço*: a courtly song in the vernacular. Alfonso’s collection of courtly songs expressed loving devotion to the Virgin Mary, and once again blurred the line we now insist on drawing between the sacred and the secular. (Sometimes the blur is finessed by using the word “paraliturgical”—“outside the liturgy” yet still somehow sacred—to cover it up; the belief that demons and fractious categories can be exorcised by naming them is indeed an old superstition.) In its most comprehensive sources, Alfonso’s book of cantigas comprises over four hundred pious love lyrics, organized into decades (groups of ten) consisting of nine strophic narrative songs relating miracles performed by the Virgin (often in the mundane context of contemporary daily life), followed by a hymn of praise to her in a more exalted style.



fig. 4-5 *Le jeu de Robin et Marion* as staged at St. Petersburg's "Antique Theater" in 1907 (costumes and set design by Mstislav Doboujinsky).

The opening song in the collection (the *prologo*), following the most venerable troubadour traditions, is a poem about poetry, with a characteristic pious twist (Ex. 4-10). It is cast in the first person, which implies (but certainly does not prove) that it was composed by Alfonso himself, who is known to have been a poet. The melody takes the form of a very gracefully modified "bar," in which the *pes* is given dancelike open and shut cadences before opening out on the *cauda*. Most of the narrative *cantigas* are dance songs with refrains, combining a verse structure similar to the Arabic *zajal* (though it is an open question whether the *cantigas* were modeled on *zajals* or the *zajals* on *cantigas*) with music following a modified *virelai* pattern, in which the refrain borrows its music from the "tail" (*cauda*) of the strophe. In Spanish this form would be known as the *villancico*.

Prologo (causo type)

1. Por - que tro - bar e cau - sa en que - jaz en - ten - di -  
 2. E - ma - car - e - stas duas cou - sas non - ey com' - eu quer -

men - to por én - quen o - faz á - o d'a - ver, et de  
 ri - a, pe - ro - pro - va - rei a - mo - strar - en - de un

ra - zon as - saz, per - que en - tend - a et sa - bia di - zer. O que en - tend' e de  
 pou - co que - sei con - fiand' en De - us ond' o - sa - ber ven; ca por e - le ten - no

di - zer lle praz; - car - ben tro - bar as - si s'a - de ffa - zer.  
 que po - de - rei - mo - strar do que que - ro al - gu - na - ren.

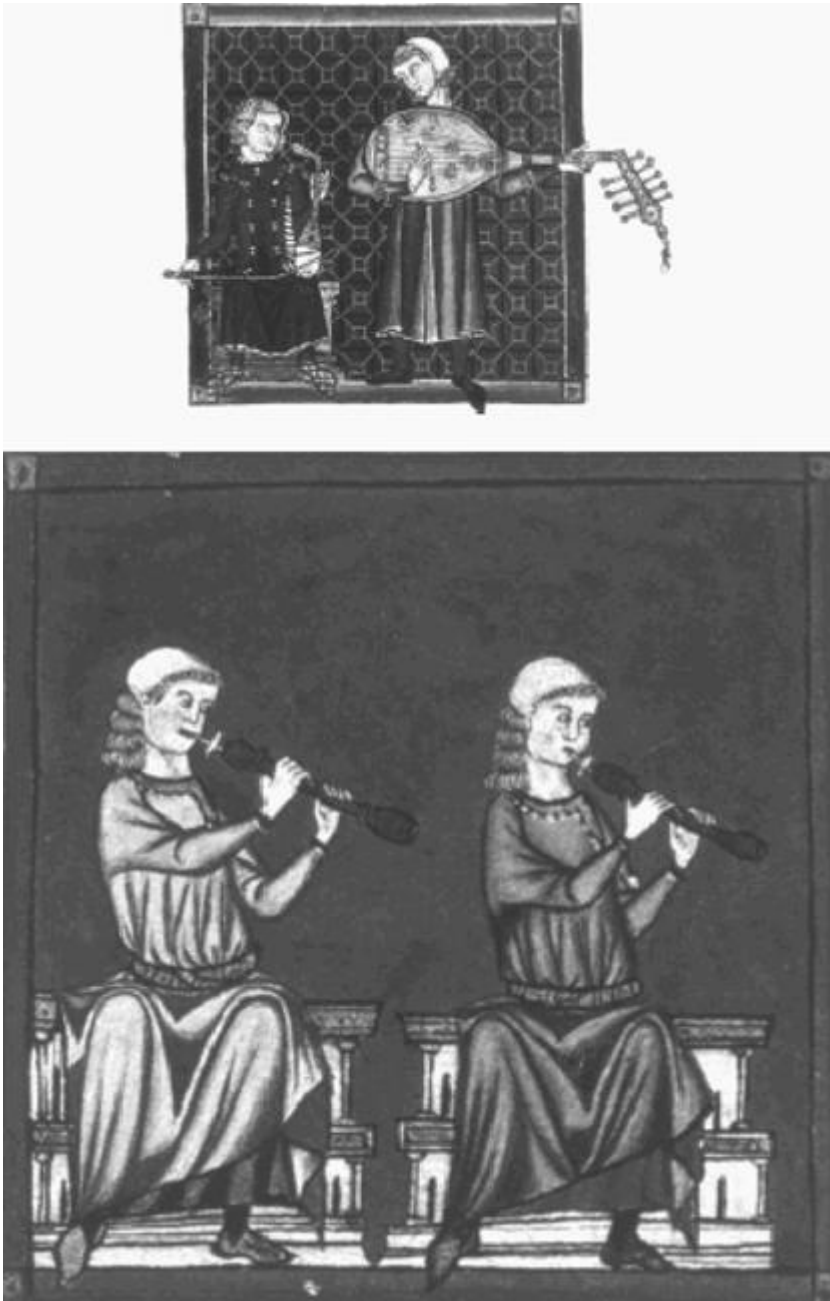
(notation interpreted as semi-mensural)

ex. 4-10 *Porque trobar* (canso)

## A NOTE ON INSTRUMENTS

Even if the rich thirteenth- and fourteenth-century cantiga manuscripts contained no actual music, they would still be prize documents for music history on account of the dozens of colored miniatures that decorate them. These little paintings are so detailed and precisely drawn that they are believed in some cases to be portraits of actual people. They show courtiers and minstrels of every stripe—Spanish, Moorish, Jewish, male and female—all rubbing shoulders at Alfonso's Toledo court and playing an encyclopedic assortment of instruments (more than forty, from the ubiquitous minstrel's fiddle to Moorish exotica, encompassing zithers, bladder pipes, castanets, and hurdy-gurdies).

These illustrations inevitably raise more questions than they answer. They stimulate the performer's imagination (and the cantigas have been well and colorfully served by early music ensembles, especially in recordings), but as historical evidence they must be approached with caution, despite their evident realism. The encyclopedic impulse—the urge to include everything (here, every instrument and costume known to the artist)—serves the purposes of rich decoration and conspicuous consumption, not those of accurate depiction. One cannot merely assume that all the instruments so marvelously depicted in the cantiga manuscripts ever played together, or that they played cantigas.



**fig. 4-6 Miniatures from the cantiga manuscript at the Escorial Palace, Madrid, showing various contemporary instruments.**

And yet the opposite assumption, that the notation of monophonic (“unaccompanied”) medieval songs reflects their actual performance practice, would be equally unfounded. As we have observed more than once, the written sources of medieval music were more often prestige items—“collectibles”—than performance materials. And, as we may recall from the first chapter, the strictly unaccompanied unison style of Gregorian chant was regarded as something of a special effect. So there is really no reason to allow the stark appearance of early written music in itself to influence or limit our notion of what it may have sounded like in performance.

If a team of Martian musicologists were to visit the desolate earth after World War III and discover a “fake-book” (a big compilation—often produced illicitly, in violation of copyright—of pop tunes with shorthand chord symbols for the use of nightclub or “cocktail” pianists), would they know they were seeing a blueprint for elaborate impromptu arrangements, or might they draw false conclusions about the



“monophonic” musical culture of twentieth-century America?<sup>24</sup> And yet even the fake-book is more closely allied with actual performance, and gives far more performance information, than the average medieval manuscript, especially retrospective anthologies containing “monophonic” vernacular songs that were performed by nonliterate professionals (joglers or minstrels).

On the basis of all the available evidence—contemporary pictures, literary descriptions of musical performances, the writings of music pedagogues and theorists, archival documents—historians now believe that the use of instruments to accompany the written repertoires of medieval song depended a great deal on genres and their social connotations. The higher the style and the closer its alliance with the ethos of liturgical chant, the more likely was performance by solo voice alone. (Among the troubadours, instrumentalists are known to have participated only in the marginal genres—*descorts* and dance songs.) With the lowering of the social standing of trouvère song and its urbanization in the thirteenth century came a greater participation in it by minstrel instrumentalists, especially fiddlers (*viellatores*), who had their own professional guild in Paris. Such musicians regularly took part in *pastourelles*, in Latin *conductus*, in church plays, and the like.

As Moniot d'Arras's *Ce fut en mai* explicitly informs us, fiddlers had a repertory of their own in the form of dances. The most elaborate dance form was variously called *estampie*, which suggests a heavy, vigorous step, and *danse royale*. Its form was a little like that of the lai or sequence: a series of paired strains called *puncta* (singular *punctum*) with alternately open and shut cadences. The earliest estampies preserved in writing are those in the mid-thirteenth-century *Manuscrit du roi* (Fig. 4-8). Their notation is very advanced for the time and completely encodes their rhythm (according to principles to be discussed in chapter 7), as untexted dance notation needs to do.



fig. 4-7A Notation of Ex. 4-10 (*Porque trobar*) in the cantiga manuscript. Compare this with Fig. 4-7b.

The image shows a page from a mid-twentieth-century fake book, featuring three musical pieces. Each piece consists of a vocal line with lyrics and a guitar accompaniment line with chord symbols. The pieces are:

- Sweet Dreams, Sweetheart**: Lyrics by TED KOEHLER, Music by W. K. JEROME. The lyrics include: "Good night, sweet dreams, to - mor - row's an - oth - er day; Till in the night, sleep tight, sweet dreams, I'll see you a - long the way in the Good".
- Sweetheart**: Lyrics by CLIFFORD GREY, Music by GEORGE GERSHWIN. The lyrics include: "I'm so glad that I met you, Sweet-heart, Oh you thrill me through and through, Sweet-heart! You've got me go - ing, And I want to say My love is grow - ing Ev - 'ry day In ev - 'ry way, dear, You're the hon - or, I'm the love, Sweet-heart! Oh what you can do to me, Sweet-heart! When all this life is through, And when no more are here, I'll be the sweet - heart, I'll keep lov - ing you!".
- I'm Wonderful**: Lyrics by IRA GERSHWIN, Music by GEORGE GERSHWIN. The lyrics include: "'S won - der - ful! 'S mar - ve - lous! You should care for me! 'S aw - ful nice 'S per - a - dize! 'S what I love to see! You've made my life so glam - o - rous You can't blame me for feel - ing a - mir - a - ble dear, It's four - leaf clo - ver time From now on my heart's work - ing on - ly for you!".

fig. 4-7B Page from a mid-twentieth-century fake book, to be compared with Fig. 4-7a.

So far the evidence seems to suggest that instrumentalists performed such pieces and accompanied singers where appropriate, predominantly as soloists rather than in “bands”—which is not to say that such accompaniments were necessarily modest or primitive. Both historical evidence and observation of contemporary instrumentalists who mostly work without notation suggest that medieval fiddlers and harpers were often prodigious technicians, and that they cultivated techniques of self-accompaniment (drones, heterophonic doubling, even counterpoint). Evidence of ensemble performance is rare, ambiguous, and often (like the cantiga miniatures) questionable. But it cannot be discounted.

One genre that is especially well documented as a site of instrumental performance is the *carole*, the public springtime dance-festivity. Its musical component remained for the most part an unwritten tradition—but some of the music, transformed, may have survived in the *formes fixes*, the villancico, and all the other genres that descend from ring-dances with refrains. The relationship between the forms and practices that

survive in written form and those that came and went without a paper trail has been aptly characterized as “the iceberg problem.” The written elite dominates our view, but it accounts for only the smallest fraction of what existed at the time. The great vanished mass is what dominated the view—that is, formed the assumptions and the expectations—of contemporaries, even (or especially) those who performed the elite fraction. Vague references to “instruments,” in the plural, can be found in many descriptions of the carole. And with that we circle back to the cantigas, many of which, as virelai types, can trace their lineage back to the carole. All the questions raised by those lovely, pesky miniatures remain open after all.

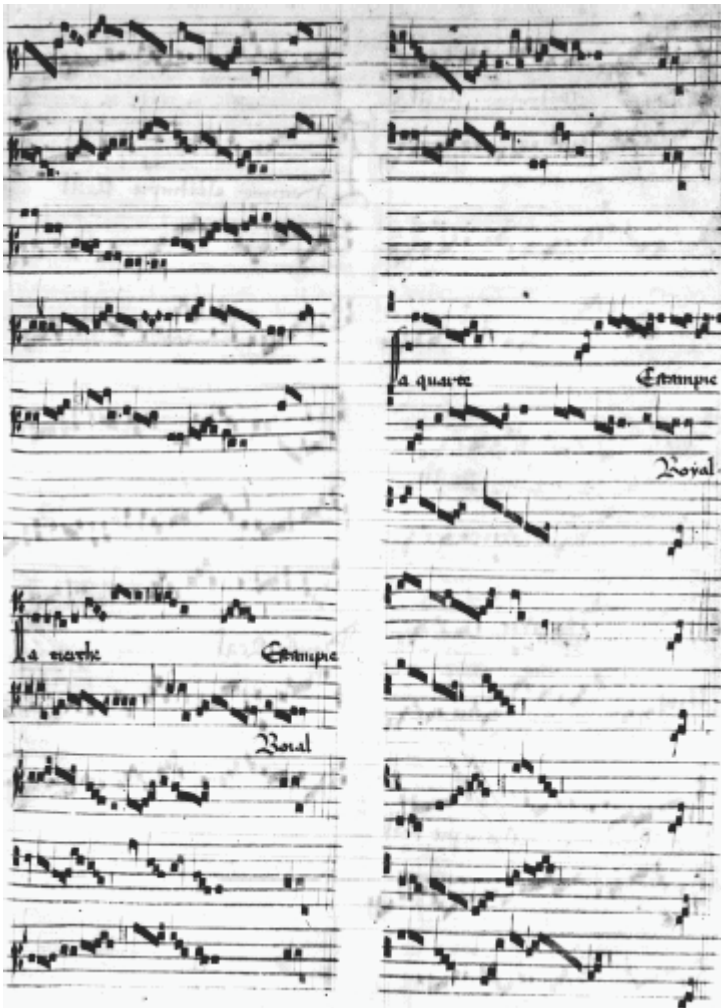


fig. 4-8 Dances from the *Manuscrit du Roi*, a huge codex, copied in the mid-thirteenth century, that contains songs of the troubadours alongside those of the trouvères, and even a few items, like these dances, in mensural notation (that is, notation prescribing rhythm).

## LAUDE AND RELATED GENRES

The earliest surviving genre of Italian vernacular song was cultivated by a very different sort of musician from those we have examined thus far. The thirteenth-century *lauda spirituale* (“devotional [song of] praise”) was not a courtly genre but a frankly religious one, sung in congregational unison by lay fraternities who called themselves *laudesi*, by Franciscan street missionaries who called themselves “God’s minstrels” (*joculatores Dei*), and by ardent penitents, called *disciplinati* or *flagellanti*, who sang them while walking naked through the streets and lashing themselves with whips. Many *laude* were sung as contrafacta to familiar melodies and could thus be characterized as pious pop songs. Others, particularly those used by the Franciscans, were the work of skilled and highly educated poets from the urban upper classes like the

Florentine Jacopone da Todi (ca. 1230–1306), a jurist turned monastic ascetic, two of whose *laude* survive with music. Jacopone is also credited in the Vatican chant books, however dubiously, with the Marian sequence *Stabat mater dolorosa* (“The mother stood by sorrowfully”), one of the latest additions to the canonical liturgy.

Like most genres of medieval vernacular song, *laude* were written down somewhat after the fact, in large “gift-shop” manuscripts that had little to do with their performance occasions. (Flagellants, even if they could read, had their hands full.) Like many of the *cantigas*, to which they were contemporary, *laude* were apt to be cast in the popular form of the *virelai* (stanza plus contained refrain: A bba A bba A, etc.). In Italy, beginning in the fourteenth century, such songs would be called *ballate*, betraying their descent from the dance.

The flagellant movement was international. From northern Italy it spread into Germany and thence as far east as Poland, as far west as Britain, and as far north as Scandinavia, becoming especially intense in the mid-fourteenth century, when the population of Europe was devastated by epidemics. It was then that the German variants, known as *Geisslerlieder* (from *Geißel*, German for whip) were written down by clerics who found the spontaneous fervor of the flagellants both inspiring and frightening.

*Geisslerlieder* borrowed their form not only from the *laude spirituale* but also from indigenous pilgrimage and processional folk hymns known as *Rufe* (“calls”) or *Leisen*. In these, the refrain is whittled down to a single call—often *Kyrioleis!* (from *Kyrie eleison*)—in the manner of a litany. These are in fact actual folksongs, noted down (not for perpetuation in singing but as documentation) from actual popular performance, chiefly by a Swabian priest named Hugo Spechtshart von Reutlingen in his chronicle of the plague of 1349. Nowadays we would call such a transcriber an ethnomusicologist.

Nu ist die bet - fart so here. Crist rait sel - ber gen Je - ru - sa - lem,  
Er fñrt an crñtz an sei - ner hant. Nu helf\_\_ uns der Hai - lant

ex. 4-11 Flagellants’ song: *Nu ist diu Betfart so here* (Geisslerlied, transcribed by Hugo Spechtshart von Reutlingen)

## MINNESANG

By that date, however, there was already a large body of German courtly song. Originating as an imported luxury item, it soon took on a distinctive coloration and underwent a vigorous indigenous development in which many social classes participated. The eastward migration of the art of *fine amours* is often said to begin with the wedding, in 1156, of Frederick I (known as Barbarossa, “Redbeard”), the Holy Roman Emperor and German king, to the duchess Beatrice of Burgundy. A notable early trouvère, Guyot de Provins, was a member of Beatrice’s retinue, and some of the earliest German *Minnelieder*, like the one in Ex. 4-12, were set as *contrafacta* to melodies by Guyot.

Ma joi - e pre - me - rai - ne M'est tor - neie en pe - san -  
 Ich den - ke un - der wí - len, Ob ich ir nâ - her wal -

8  
 ce, Las, je ne sai por - coi; Mais en - si me de - mei -  
 re, waz ich ir wol - te sag'n. Daz Kür - zet mir die mî -

15  
 ne La fois et l'es - pe - ran - ce K'a - mors a mis en  
 len, Swenn ich ir mî - ne swae - re So mit ge - dan - ken

22  
 moi, Se je par bo - ne foi Doi a - voir pe - ni - tan -  
 Klage Mich se - heut mani - ge tage Die liute in den ge - bae -

29  
 ce De moi ne sai nul roi, Fors que ma mort i roi.  
 re Als ich niht sor - gen habe, Wan ichs al - só ver - trage.

ex. 4-12 Guyot de Provins, *Ma joie premeraine*, with German text (*Ich denke under wilen*) by Friedrich von Hausen

Minnelieder were songs composed by *Minnesinger*—singers of *Minne*, German for courtly love. The earliest Minnesinger assumed to have made up their own melodies were those who, in the early thirteenth century, began composing in new and specifically German meters that required them. The important name in this generation was that of the Austrian Walther von der Vogelweide (d. ca. 1230), regarded both by his contemporaries and by his successors as the preeminent master of *Minnesang*, the German medieval lyric. His poetry survives abundantly in many manuscripts, but only one contemporaneous source contains a complete melody attributed to him—the famous crusader song *Allererst lebe ich mir werde* (“Only now do I live in dignity”), called the *Palästinalied* (“Palestine song;” Ex. 4-13). It was evidently composed in 1224 or 1225, when the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II, of the German house of Hohenstaufen, was conscripting an army to lead on a much-postponed Crusade.

ⓐ  
 Nú al-rêst leb' ich mir \_\_\_\_\_ wer-de \_\_\_\_\_ Sit mîn Sün-dic \_\_\_\_\_ ou - ge \_\_\_\_\_ siht \_\_\_\_\_

ⓐ  
 Daz rei-ne lant und \_\_\_\_\_ ouch die \_\_\_\_\_ er - de \_\_\_\_\_ Den man vil der \_\_\_\_\_ ê - ren \_\_\_\_\_ giht. \_\_\_\_\_

(b)  
Mirst ge-sche-hen des\_ ich ie\_ bat Ich bin\_ ko - men\_ an die\_ stat

(a)  
Dá got mensch-li - chen\_ trat.\_\_\_\_\_

ex. 4-13 Walther von der Vogelweide, *Palästinalied*

Its melody, a “rounded bar” in which the last line is set to the ending phrase of the initial pair, has been compared both to a melody by the troubadour Jaufré Rudel and to the Gregorian hymn *Te Joseph celebrent* (for the feast of St. Joseph the Workman, Mary’s husband). One does not have to call it a contrafactum of either of these in order to recognize its derivation from the common fund of “Dorian” melody on which anyone who heard and sang chant in church, and who aspired to a lofty style, would surely have drawn.

The knightly Minnesinger cultivated three main genres, all more or less directly adapted from the Romance vernacular tradition. The narrative *Leich* derived directly from the French lai. The *Lied* was the equivalent of the *canço* or *chanson courtoise*, and like its Romance counterparts it encompassed an important subgenre, the *Tagelied* (daybreak song), equivalent to the troubadour *alba* (*aube* in French). Finally, there was the *Spruch*. The word means a “saying,” and the genre encompassed many of the same topics as did the Provençal *sirventes* and *tenso* and their French equivalents (though the Minnesinger did not use dialogue form): praise of patron, complaint at base behavior, political commentary and satire, moral precept, poetic craft. Many moralizing *Sprüche* are in single stanzas and have the character of sung proverbs. These seem to go back to an indigenous German tradition not directly related to Romance models.

As with the work of the trouvères, the art of Minnesang underwent a “popularization” over the course of the thirteenth century, involving what looks like assimilation of unwritten folk models (though one can never be sure). The first signs can be detected in the work of the knight and crusader Neidhardt von Reuenthal (d. ca. 1250), who despite his lofty social standing specialized in dance songs, divided into two subgenres: *Sumerlieder* (summer songs) for outdoor dancing and *Winderlieder* (winter songs) for indoor dancing. Like the French *chansons de toile*, they begin by setting a scene: in Neidhardt’s case (as perhaps in some folk tradition on which he may have drawn) the scenes they set invariably had to do with nature and with seasonal weather. The ensuing narrative poem often departs from courtly subject matter, and very much departs from courtly tone and diction, lapsing into a sort of dialect and using blunt or even downright coarse language.

Neidhardt’s work was exceedingly popular. He had legions of imitators. Some are known by name, and at least one of these names, that of a thirteenth-century Bavarian poet-singer who called himself *der Tannhäuser*, was restored to fame in the nineteenth century thanks to Richard Wagner, who made him the title character of an opera. Many more are anonymous; their works have been collected by modern scholars under the charming rubric “Pseudo-Neidhardt.” The folksy and hilarious *Meienzit* (“In Maytime”; Ex. 4-14) is a work by a latter-day (early fourteenth-century) Pseudo-Neidhardter. Its melody, like many folk melodies, is “gapped.” By diatonic reckoning it lacks a sixth degree (and the second degree is clearly an auxiliary degree, used only in the Dorian cadence formula). The tune is so simple, in fact, that it is more to be looked upon as a “tone” (*Ton* in German), a reciting formula in which every third phrase is varied to give a whiff of the old courtly *aab* stanza. But the melody itself seems no more courtly than does the gross behavior of “hairy Hildemar,” a boorish knight who, as the poem goes on to relate, plays an embarrassing practical joke on the poet’s lady.

Mei-en-zit a - ne nit vrou-den git wi-der strit, \_ sin wi-der-ko-men kan uns al-len hel - fen.

Uf den plan a - ne wan siht man stan wol-ge - tan \_ lieh-tu bru-niu blü-mel bi den gel - fen.

Durch daz gras sint si schon uf ge-drun-gen, und der walt ma-nee-valt un-ge-zalt ist er - schalt, \_

daz der wart mit dem nie baz ge - sun-gen.

ex. 4-14 Anon. ("Pseudo-Neidhardt"), *Meienzit*

## POPULARIZATION, THEN AND SINCE

The other way in which we know Neidhardt's songs were popular is that some of them have actually become folk songs. That is, they have rejoined the oral tradition, and were unwittingly collected (in considerably altered form, of course, but still recognizable) by the early folklorists of the German Romantic movement in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Along with this, Neidhardt himself became a folk hero, acclaimed in legend (by storytellers unaware of his noble rank) as the leader of peasant revolts. Tannhäuser, too, became a figure of legend; the tall tale about his dalliance with Venus and his pilgrimage to Rome, traceable to the fourteenth century, was memorialized as a major plot ingredient of Wagner's opera of 1845. (Walther von der Vogelweide makes an appearance in the opera too, as does Wolfram von Eschenbach, more an epic poet than a Minnesinger, from whose *Parzival* Wagner would draw plot ingredients for his next opera, *Lohengrin*, and for *Parsifal*, his last one.)

As these references to Wagner and to early folklore collectors suggest, the art of the Minnesingers greatly appealed to the German artists and art historians of the nineteenth century, a time when progressive thinkers were striving to unite the German nation. The earliest German vernacular poetry and its music became an important symbol of German nationhood, and a rallying point for German nationalists.

So, too, a bit later, did the Latin *versus* settings by the wandering poet-musicians who called themselves *goliards*. (The name may derive from the Latin *gula*, "gullet," suggesting gluttony; or from the biblical Goliath, suggesting brawn). These were impecunious, unattached monks and scholars, learned mendicants and itinerant teachers, who loved using the language of the Roman classics and the church to entertain themselves not just with serious religious or mythological poems but also with hymns to the pleasures of youthful flesh—drinking, feasting, gambling, roistering, and (especially) lechery, the best theme of all with which to satirize the lofty motifs of *Minnesang*.

An especially large collection of some two hundred goliardic poems (about one-quarter with old-fashioned staffless neumes) is found in an early thirteenth-century manuscript from the environs of Munich. Long housed in a Benedictine abbey called Benediktbeuren, it was published in 1847 under the title *Carmina burana* ("Songs of Beuren"). Even though much of the manuscript's contents can be traced back to French sources (and a few concordances with French manuscripts with staff notation enable the deciphering of a few of its melodies), and although it contains much serious religious poetry (including two impressive

“liturgical dramas”), the bawdy Latin songs in the *Carmina burana* became for romantic nationalists of a later age another trophy of native German genius, flaunted especially during the period of the Third Reich (1933–45), when German nationalism, under the by-name of National Socialism, achieved its most extreme manifestation. A cantata called *Carmina burana* (1937), with rousing music set to boisterous verses from the Benediktbeuren manuscript by Carl Orff (1895–1982), was heavily promoted by the National Socialist regime at a time when it was engaged in a strenuous propaganda battle with the Christian churches of Germany. The *Carmina burana* verses, with their glorification of youth culture and their neo-paganism, effectively epitomized the “New Germany.” This was a blatant case of appropriation after the fact, of course, but it is now part of the history of the *Carmina burana*, and therefore part of its meaning. No appropriation, however, is ever complete or conclusive. Since the fall of the Third Reich, Orff’s *Carmina burana* has retained a place in the standard choral-orchestral repertory. Audiences now respond more directly, and perhaps more innocently, to its message of springtime pleasures and renewal.

## MEISTERSINGER

The original romantic nationalist view of medieval German art music reached its peak in another Wagner opera, *Die Meister-singer von Nürnberg* (“The master singers of Nuremberg,” 1868), of which the first libretto sketches were made in 1845, the same year as *Tannhäuser* reached the stage. The Meistersinger were guild musicians who flourished in southern German towns between the fourteenth and the seventeenth centuries (but chiefly in the fifteenth and sixteenth). Like the very late *trouvères*, on whose *confréries* their guilds were evidently modeled, the Meistersinger were burghers, not nobles. Their chief activity consisted in convening assemblies, like the *puy*s of northern France, at which song contests were held and prizes awarded. A *Meisterlied* (master-song) was the musical equivalent of a *Meisterstück* (master-piece, from which we get our English term masterpiece), the culminating offering by which an apprentice graduated to the rank of master artisan in a medieval guild. Like a master-piece, a master-song was judged on the success with which its maker demonstrated his *mastery*—that is, his command of established rules and practices. These rules—ostensibly derived from the practices of the Minnesinger, whom they venerated—were strictly codified by the Meistersinger in books called *Tabulaturen*. This is where the old “bar form” was actually christened and described in terms of its constituent parts: two *Stollen* (pillars) followed by an *Abgesang* (“sing-off”) corresponding to the *pedes* and *cauda* of the troubadour *canso* (first described, incidentally, by Dante in the fourteenth century, also long after the fact). One can hear this lore actually being imparted in the third act of Wagner’s opera, when the shoemaker Hans Sachs, the leader of the Nuremberg master singers (an actual historical personage who lived from 1494 to 1576, and whose musical works survive) instructs the entirely fictional Walther von Stolzing in the making of a prize-song.





fig. 4-9 Opening page of the so called *Carmina burana* manuscript, showing Dame Fortune and her fateful wheel, a favorite topic of Goliard verse.

The *Tabulaturen* also contained what were said to be exemplary melodies by the leading Minnesinger, especially Walther von der Vogelweide. Modern scholars strongly doubt the authenticity of these melodies, as well as the Meistersinger's claim to have inherited their art as a direct legacy from the noble poet-singers of the earlier tradition. The art of the Meistersinger consisted mainly of the fashioning of *Töne*, song-formulas à la Pseudo-Neidhardt, which they then decorated with melismas called *Blumen* or "flowers" that had no counterpart in the Minnesinger tradition. By the sixteenth century, their literary themes were fairly remote from those of the original Minnesinger. *Minne* itself had disappeared as a subject in favor of *Spruchdichtung*, the moralizing poetry of the later German poet-singers, notably Heinrich von Meissen (d. 1318), called *Frauenlob* (Lady's Praise) because of his many songs in honor of the Virgin Mary. By Hans Sachs's time, the Virgin had been replaced as a subject, under pressure of the Reformation, by Bible stories and pious proverbs, and especially by verses celebrating the theory and practice of *Meistergesang* itself. Such

a song is Hans Sachs's own Meisterlied, called *Silberweise* ("The Silver Tune"), composed in 1513.



Ich \_\_\_\_\_ lob ein Brünn-lein \_\_\_ Kü - le mit Ur-sprun-ges auf -  
Sich \_\_\_\_\_ al - lein muss be - se - chen mit zu - flies - sen - den \_\_\_

wüh - le für ein gros - Was-ser - hü - le, die \_\_\_ kei - nen Ur-sprung hat, \_\_\_ Wan  
Be - chen der Brünn-lein, mag ich spre - chen; die \_\_\_ Hül nit lang be - stat, \_\_\_ die

von der Su-nen gros-ser Hitz im su-mer-lan-gen Tak sie truck-net ein, wirt grün und gelb;  
Hül wirt faul und gar un-nütz, ge - wint bo-sen ge - schmak;

so \_\_\_ frisch-et sich das Brünn-lein selv mit sei - nem U - re - sprun - ge, be -

lei-bet un - be - zwun-ge von der Su - ne \_schei - nun - ge, es \_\_\_ wirt nit faul noch mat. \_\_\_

ex. 4-15 Hans Sachs, *Silberweise*

## PEOPLES AND NATIONS

Wagner, of course, accepted the Meistersinger's claims implicitly, and even projected the attributes of *Meistergesang* back onto the Minnesinger with the enormous (and enormously anachronistic) scene in *Tannhäuser* of the song contest at Wartburg. So for Wagner (as earlier, it should be added, for the eighteenth-century poet Goethe), the Meistersinger, too, stood for a united German nation and a rallying point for nationalism, the more so since the Meistersinger were "democratic" burghers, not nobles, therefore progressive from the nineteenth-century point of view.

Just how anachronistic this view really was can be seen at the end of Wagner's opera, when Hans Sachs sings his famous, thrilling (and for some by now perhaps somewhat chilling) hymn to *die heil'ge deutsche Kunst* (holy German art) with its call to keep it *deutsch und echt* (German and pure) against the threat of "base alien domination" (*falscher wälscher Majestät*). The notion of a German nation—and, by extension, of a German art—was foreign to the thinking of the Meistersinger, let alone the Minnesinger. Both Germany and (as we have already seen) France were many nations, not one. Larger political entities—the Holy Roman Empire or its Carolingian predecessor, to say nothing of the earlier Roman empire on which both were modeled—were multinational abstractions. They were not nations at all by any modern definition (and nations, as we now conceive of them, have only a modern definition).



fig. 4-10 The Minnesinger Heinrich von Meissen, known as Frauenlob (“praiser of women”), one of the many magnificent illuminations in the *Grosse Heidelberger Liederhandschrift* (“Great Heidelberg Song Manuscript”), an early fourteenth-century collection of German song texts. The noble courtly singer is shown directing or admonishing from on high a group of plebeian *Spielleute* (“player folk”), playing or holding a variety of recognizable instruments like the fiddle, the shawm (the conical oboe-like instrument being raised aloft), and drums. Whether such an orchestra ever accompanied *Minnesang* is debatable. The depiction might rather imply the relative social standing of musicians and musical genres.

Political and social allegiance, under conditions of feudalism, was dynastic and personal, not national or collective. When Western Europe did act collectively, as in the Crusades, it was in the name of religious, not political, unity. The major European division by this time was likewise religious, not political: the schism between the Eastern and Western Christian churches, brewing since the ninth century, became formal and

final in 1054, with the excommunication of the patriarch of Constantinople by Pope Leo IX. The followers of Eastern Orthodoxy, cut off from Western Europe not only by their allegiance to Constantinople but, later, by centuries of Turkish and Mongol political domination, will not rejoin the history of literate art music in the West until the eighteenth century—that is, not until the modern notion of the secular nation state was born.

Thus, while kings and their vassals went to war against one another frequently, nations (as we think of them) never fought with or resisted other nations. Most literate Europeans were polyglot and owed no primary allegiance to a mother tongue. (If they had a linguistic allegiance, it was, as Christians or as scholars, to Latin; and local dialects—mother tongues—were often scorned by the literate as “low.”) When Wagner’s Sachs warns against *wälscher Majestät*, “foreign domination,” the nation he (that is, Wagner) had above all in mind was France, the nation against which Germany was about to fight a war in 1868, and against which the German Romantics had been waging esthetic war for a century. How far this attitude applied in medieval Germany can be judged from the fact that the whole “holy German art” of the Minnesinger was knowingly and cheerfully borrowed from the French. The meaning of the French artistic legacy to the Germans had to do with its courtliness, not its nationality. That courtliness, at the outset at least, was indeed next to godliness, and it encompassed all nations that valued it.

### WHAT AS AN ANACHRONISM?

The point to ponder about *Minnesang* and *Meistergesang* is their longevity, not their putative national character. The original appropriation from France was made not very long after the French had appropriated the art of Languedoc. By the end of the twelfth century all three linguistic branches of the courtly song tradition were thriving side by side and did not differ greatly from one another. By the end of the thirteenth century, the troubadours were a memory, and the trouvères, having been absorbed into the urban *confréries*, were singing pop songs at *puy*s and (in the person of Adam de la Halle) making contact with the clerical and university arts of polyphonic composition.



fig. 4-11 Oswald von Wolkenstein, as depicted in a manuscript at the University Library of Innsbruck, Austria, one of two fifteenth-century collections of his works.

Adam de la Halle, as it happened, had a close German counterpart in the latter-day Minnesinger Oswald von Wolkenstein, a knight and imperial emissary from the Tyrol region in the Austrian Alps. Like Adam, he is regarded as the last of his line. Like Adam, he composed in a wide range of genres, both narrative (including the autobiographical masterpiece *Es fuegt sich*, "It so befell me...") and lyric. Again like Adam, Oswald supervised the collection of his complete works, grouped by genres, into valuable retrospective manuscripts. Yet again like Adam, Oswald (alone among his breed) dabbled in polyphonic composition, mainly in the dance-derived *formes fixes*, and in so doing proclaimed his knowledgeable love of French song: many of his polyphonic settings (like many of the earliest Minnelieder) were contrafacta of French originals. (The best known of these is Oswald's *Der May*, a summer-song with imitation bird calls, modeled on a virelai with bird calls by a French contemporary named Vaillant.)

The only thing that separated Adam and Oswald was time. They were not contemporaries at all. Oswald was born around 1376, at least seventy years after Adam's death, when the monophonic art of the *trouvères* was long since superseded. He died in 1445, by which time the *Meistersinger* were already well established (and, in Western Europe, monophonic song was hardly practiced any longer as a literate art). Oswald himself cannot be classified as a guild musician, though. Both his social class and his subject matter preclude that, and his poetic and musical style was remote from that prescribed by the *Tabulaturen*.

Persistence, like Oswald's, in old ways is often represented by historians as anachronism—in this case, as a pocket of “the Middle Ages” surviving like a fossil into “the Renaissance,” or as resolute “conservatism,” resistance to change. What is anachronistic, however, is the modern linear view of history that produces such an evaluation, and the implicit isolation of artistic practices or styles from the historical conditions that enabled them.

Feudal society and “castle culture” retained their currency longer in Germany than they did in France. The rise of towns and, consequently, of urbanized mores happened later there. The institution of serfdom, for example, the *sine qua non* of feudal economy, which bound the lower classes of society to the land and retarded urbanization, made a sort of eastward migration over the course of time covered by this chapter: from the Romance countries (France, Italy, Spain) to Germany, and finally (during the fifteenth century) to the Slavic countries. (Essentially “feudal” conditions persisted in Russia until the Emancipation Act of 1861; were Russia not culturally cut off from the West during its long period of Mongol occupation, it would probably have developed an art of courtly song last of all, and kept it latest.) The growth of towns and the beginnings of a mercantile (money-based) economy came later to Germany than they did to France and arrived along with the *Meistersinger*—or rather, obviously, the art of the *Meistersinger* guild was made possible by the growth of the urban and mercantile society that supported it and to which it gave expression.

To regard an Oswald von Wolkenstein or a Hans Sachs as an artistic anachronism, then, is to regard their societies as historical anachronisms. And one has to ask by what premises—indeed, by what right—and from what vantage point one can make such a judgment. When things become truly anachronistic, they disappear (as did the *Meistersinger* guild when it officially disbanded in 1774). As long as they thrive, they are *ipso facto*—by that very fact—relevant to their time, and it is the historian's job to understand how. Judging cultures by the standards of other cultures (most often, by the standards of one's own culture) is called ethnocentrism, and it has been the source of many fallacious historical verdicts, to say nothing of ethnic, religious, or racial intolerance.

Another premise that can lead to the illusory notion of historical anachronism is the premise that history is teleological—that it has a purpose or an end (*telos* in Greek). This kind of thinking leads to determinism: the explanation of events in terms of inevitable movement toward the perceived goal, and the assignment of value to phenomena (or to artifacts, like works of art) depending on their nearness to it.

## PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

An argument like the one made here, which seeks to account for the circumstances of art history (here, its nonsynchronicity) by appealing to factors deemed external to “art itself,” is often mistaken for a determinist argument. (In this case, some balance of historical, social, and economic determinisms would appear to be invoked.) That is a misnomer, engendered by the confusion of causes or purposes with enabling conditions. To say that certain conditions made a development—say, the art of the *Meistersinger*—possible is not the same as predicting the nature of that development from a knowledge of those conditions, or ascribing a value to it on that basis.

And yet even this much appeal to “external” factors is often avoided. Until recently it was not customary in books like this. That is because the historiography of art in the West has long been dominated by a view of art that arose in the wake of the social emancipation (or, perhaps, the social abandonment) of the artist in the nineteenth century. The concept of “the emancipated and abandoned artist,” the artist-loner, is thus the product of nineteenth-century aesthetics—in a word, of Romanticism. Since the nineteenth century it has been, and still often is, the custom to view art romantically, which means viewing it as being *autonomous*.

An autonomous entity is one that follows an independent course and a self-determined one. To regard art as autonomous is to regard its history as being determined solely by those who produce it.

Yet the “autonomist” position, as already implied, was itself called forth by social and economic conditions. It does a poor job of explaining the work even of its own adherents, let alone that of much earlier artists who functioned in harmony with their society (indeed, at the very top of it) at a time when all art served a well-defined social purpose. To regard the art of the troubadours or the Meistersinger—however it may still delight or move us, and however we may still treasure it—as if it were no different from the autonomous output of the emancipated and abandoned artists of our own time, and therefore subject to similar “laws of evolution,” is the very height of anachronism.

That may seem obvious enough, but the view of history that arises from that basic anachronism is still the prevailing one. The only model of change the autonomist view of art history can recognize is strictly linear stylistic evolution, often described using biological or otherwise “organic” metaphors (styles being born, reaching maturity, declining, dying). Art history is viewed as a procession of styles in a single file, along which different artists occupy positions either ahead or behind one another, depending on the style they employ.

From such a vantage point an artist’s style defines the artist in essential terms. (Recall the old French saying, *Le style, c’est l’homme*—“the style is the man.”) Depending on his or her style, an artist is judged either “advanced” (“forward-looking,” “progressive”) or “regressive” (“backward-looking,” “conservative”). To make such a judgment, of course, is unwittingly to turn style into politics, for politics is the primary point of reference for terms like “progressive” or “conservative.” And these terms, whether in politics or in style-politics, are never value-free, though the valuation will vary depending on the evaluator’s political outlook.

In any case, style-politics engendered by autonomist esthetics, paradoxically enough, turns out to be an especially deterministic view of history. It is from that standpoint, especially when concepts of style are allowed to congeal into hard-and-fast categories of “period style” (“medieval,” “Renaissance”), that one is most apt to regard artists and whole artistic movements as “ahead of their time” or as “lagging behind” it. These are invidious judgments, and (except as historical events in their own right) irrelevant to history. Everything possible will be done in this book to avoid them.

Which, alas, makes our story even harder to tell, since it militates against the construction of a single linear narrative. If all times are plural even within a single ostensible tradition (just think of the European scene in the twelfth century, when sacred chants and Latin *versus* and courtly song in three vernaculars were all being composed side by side, not to mention the massive, unprecedented cultivation of written polyphony that will be the subject of the next chapter), then so are all histories. Our story will have to keep moving back and forth, tracing beginnings and endings, showing not only how beginnings lead to endings, but also how endings lead to beginnings. Having in this chapter traced one strand—or rather, one complex of strands—from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries (with many glances backward as far as antiquity and forward as far as the present), we will now return to square one and trace another.

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## Notes:

(4) This lovely analogy was suggested in conversation by Imanuel Willheim of the University of Hartford.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

## CHAPTER 5 Polyphony in Practice and Theory

### Early Polyphonic Performance Practices and the Twelfth-Century Blossoming of Polyphonic Composition

Chapter: CHAPTER 5 Polyphony in Practice and Theory

Source: MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

## ANOTHER RENAISSANCE

As we have seen, and as it is important to remember, there has never been a time in the recorded history of European music—or of any music, it seems—when polyphony was unknown. Descriptions of music-making in classical Greece and Rome are full of tantalizing suggestions about harmonic and contrapuntal practices, and music theory, all the way back to “Pythagoras,” is full of elaborate accounts of harmonic consonances. As soon as they were in possession of the means for writing their liturgical music down, moreover, the Franks illustrated sundry methods of harmonically amplifying that music. We have evidence of polyphonic performance practice for medieval chant as early as we have written evidence of the chant itself.

Polyphonic performance practices, even if we have only a sketchy idea of them, were surely applied (or at least available for application) to all the early genres of courtly and urban music encountered in the previous chapter as well. Reports of rustic part-singing are likewise tantalizing. Gerald de Barri, a Welsh churchman and historian who wrote under the name Giraldus Cambrensis, made a famous description of his countrymen’s singing in a volume completed in 1194:

They sing their tunes not in unison, but in parts with many simultaneous modes and phrases. Therefore, in a group of singers you will hear as many melodies as there you will see heads, yet they all accord in one consonant and properly constituted composition.<sup>1</sup>

Giraldus also commented with enthusiasm on the virtuosity of unlettered instrumentalists, harpers who played “with such smooth rapidity, such unequaled evenness, such mellifluous harmony throughout the varied tunes and the many intricacies of the part music”—harmony and polyphonic intricacies of which actual musical documents disclose nothing.

Since there is no period in which the known practices of European music did not include polyphony, polyphony cannot be said to have an origin in the European tradition. Written or not, it was always there. As with any other kind of music, its entry into written sources was not any sort of “event” in its history. (The event, as such, was in *our* history, the history of what we are able to know.) And by the same token, there is no point at which polyphony completely supplanted “monophony” in the history of Western music, especially if we recognize that monophony is only a style of notation, not necessarily a style of music.

Even if we take the strictest view of monophony, the view that equates it with liturgical chant that is unharmonized in accord with the preference of the Roman Catholic church, the history of its composition continues for centuries beyond the point at which we can afford the time in a book like this to go on tracking it. (Still, when a young researcher named Barbara Hagggh discovered in the early 1980s that Guillaume Dufay, a major “Renaissance” composer, had composed elaborate chant offices in the middle of the fifteenth century, her findings made scholarly headlines—and rightly so, for it served as a forcible reminder that the march of musical genres and styles down through the ages in single file is something historians, not composers, have created.)<sup>2</sup>

Yet even granting all of this, we can still identify the extraordinary twelfth century as the one in which European musical practice took a decisive turn toward polyphonic composition. And if we are interested in isolating the fundamental distinguishing feature of what may be called “Western” music, this might as well be it. After this turning point, polyphonic composition in the West (not just polyphonic performance practice) would be indisputably, increasingly, and uniquely the norm. From now on, stylistic development and change would essentially mean the development and refinement of techniques for polyphonic composition.

Training in composition would henceforth be basically training in polyphony—in “harmony and counterpoint,” the controlled combination of different pitches in time—and such training would become increasingly “learned” or sophisticated. *Combination*, the creation of order and expressivity out of diversity or even clash, became the very definition of music (or, to be more precise, the primary musical metaphor). During the later Middle Ages, the early polyphonic age, music was often called the *ars combinatoria* or the *discordia concors*: the “art of combining things” or the “concord of discord.” The terms go back to the *Musica enchiriadis*. They not only underscore the new preoccupation with polyphony but also reconcile it with older notions of *Musica* as an all-embracing cosmic harmony. The word “harmony” was given a new context and a new meaning—the one that is still primary for us.

So the “polyphonic revolution,” while real, should not be mistaken for the beginning, or the invention, or the “discovery” of polyphony. It was, rather, the coalescing into compositional procedure of what had always been a performance option and its intensive cultivation. The great spur to this vastly accelerated development of compositional technique was not so much a change in taste or “aesthetics” as it was a change in educational philosophy. The twelfth century was the century in which the primary locus of education shifted first from monasteries to urban cathedral schools and thence to something new: secular universities. In the course of this shift, Paris emerged as the undisputed intellectual center of Europe.

The burgeoning of polyphonic composition followed exactly the same trajectory. Beginning in monasteries, it reached its first great, transfiguring culmination in the cathedral schools of Paris, and in a new form it radiated from that cosmopolitan center throughout Western Christendom, receiving a special ancillary cultivation in the universities. It was all a part of what cultural historians call the “renaissance of the twelfth century.”

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## Notes:

(1) Giraldus Cambrensis, *Descriptio Cambriae*, trans. adapted from that of Ernest H. Sanders in F. W. Sternfeld, ed., *A History of Western Music*, Vol. I (New York: Praeger, 1973), p. 264, by comparison with that in Shai Burstyn, “Gerald of Wales and the *Sumer Canon*,” *Journal of Musicology* II (1983): 135, where the original Latin may also be found.

(2) Hagggh wrote up her discovery in “The Celebration of the ‘Recollectio Festorum Beatae Mariae Virginis,’ 1457–1987,” *International Musicological Society Congress Report XIV* (Bologna, 1987), iii, pp. 559–71.

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Musica enchiriadis, Scolica enchiriadis

Organum

# “SYMPHONIA” AND ITS MODIFICATIONS

Chapter: CHAPTER 5 Polyphony in Practice and Theory

Source: MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

To trace this trajectory we need to begin by reviewing some earlier, more or less scattered manifestations of written polyphony. As a performance practice associated with plainchant, polyphony makes its documentary debut (as noted briefly, with an example, in chapter 2) in the ninth-century treatise *Musica enchiriadis*. A contemporary commentary to it, called the *Scolica* (or *Scholia*) *enchiriadis*, describes two basic techniques of embellishing a melody harmonically. One consists of simply accompanying a melody in bagpipe fashion, with a drone on the final of the mode. That method—under the name of “ison chanting” after the Greek word for “the same note”—still survives as a traditional way of performing the so-called Byzantine chant of the Greek Orthodox church. The other technique consisted of “parallel doubling”—that is, accompanying melody with a transposition of itself at a constant consonant interval (for which the Greek term, used in the treatise, was *symphonia*). Three intervals were considered eligible as *symphoniae* for this purpose; they are the ones we still call “perfect” (fourth, fifth, and octave).

These methods are easy to describe and to illustrate (Ex. 5-1), and they seem eminently practical. In actual fact they were entirely “theoretical” and, in the case of the second, impracticable. As the examples in the *Musica enchiriadis* itself suffice to prove, these simple devices were actually practiced in a complex synthesis requiring considerable artistry—which, of course, is why a treatise needed to be written about them in the first place. That artistic synthesis—not (as often assumed) mere parallel doubling—was what the author of the treatise called *organum*.

The image displays musical notation for three parts: P (Psalmist), H (Hymn), and A (Antiphona). Each part is accompanied by a drone on the final of the mode. The notation includes clefs, notes, and rests, with the text "No/ qui vivimus benedicimus" written below the notes. The parts are labeled Pr. XI, Or. VIII, and Pr. III.

fig. 5-1 Polyphonic or organal settings of the sequence *Nos qui vivimus* (We the living) in *Scolica enchiriadis*, ca. 850.

The reason why parallel doubling is not acceptable without modification can be expressed in a single word: *tritones*. If a given diatonic melody is doubled at a constant fourth or fifth below, then tritones will emerge whenever the note B has to be doubled at the fourth or the note F at the fifth. Adjustment of the doubling-voice (called the *vox organalis*) at these places produces a built-in discrepancy between its mode species and that of the original chant (*vox principalis*). The result is “polytonality”—quite literally so, given that parallel lines by definition never meet, and so two voices in strict parallel motion at any interval except the octave will appear to end on different finals.

Consider Ex. 5-1b, the demonstration of “the symphonia of the diapente” (parallel doubling at the perfect fifth) in the *Scolica enchiriadis*. The ending note of the *vox organalis* (G) contradicts the Dorian final, and the B-natural in the *vox principalis* (a psalm tone) is answered in the *vox organalis* by a B-flat. If the *vox principalis* is modified with a B-flat to agree with the *vox organalis* (and to smooth the contour between its highest note and the F of its own medial cadence), then an E-flat (a note not present in the normal diatonic system) must be introduced beneath it, which creates a new discrepancy between the voices. (It can never be erased; if the *vox principalis* takes over the E-flat, the *vox organalis* will need an A-flat, and so it will go on forever.)

Musical score for Ex. 5-1a. It consists of three staves labeled P, H, and A. The P staff (treble clef) has a B-flat above the first note. The H staff (bass clef) has a B-natural above the first note. The A staff (bass clef) has an E-flat below the first note. The lyrics are: "Nos qui vivimus, benedicimus Do-mi-no, ex hoc nunc et us-que in sae-cu-lum."

ex. 5-1a Transcriptions of *Scolica enchiriadis* examples (Fig. 5-1), Double diapason

Musical score for Ex. 5-1b. It consists of two staves labeled Pr and Or. The Pr staff (bass clef) has a B-flat above the first note. The Or staff (bass clef) has a B-natural above the first note. The lyrics are: "Nos qui vivimus, benedicimus Do-mi-no, ex hoc nunc et us-que in sae-cu-lum."

ex. 5-1b Diapente

Musical score for Ex. 5-1b. It consists of two staves labeled Pr and Or. The Pr staff (bass clef) has a B-flat above the first note. The Or staff (bass clef) has a B-natural above the first note. The lyrics are: "Nos qui vivimus, benedicimus Do-mi-no, ex hoc nunc et us-que in sae-cu-lum."

ex. 5-1c Diatessaron

ex. 5-1d Composite

To “hear” (that is, aurally conceptualize) strict parallelism at the fifth without any sense of “polytonal” contradiction, one must be able to imagine “fifth equivalency” on a par with the octave equivalency we have all learned to take for granted as a listening norm. The author of the *Musica enchiriadis* recognized as much and even constructed a scale that exhibits fifth equivalency as the basis for “the symphonia of the diapente” (Ex. 5-2a). Instead of reproducing interval species at the octave, this scale duplicates interval sequences at the fifth. Just as one encounters discrepancies in fifth-size (perfect vs. diminished) when harmonizing within the “normal” diatonic scale, so in the *Musica enchiriadis* scale there will be uniform fifths but discrepancies in octave-size (perfect vs. augmented).

ex. 5-2a Disjunct tetrachord scale from *Musica enchiriadis*

ex. 5-2b Hypothetical conjunct tetrachord scale

Unlike the octave system, with a scale constructed (as we saw in chapter 3) out of alternately conjunct and disjunct tetrachords, the *Musica enchiriadis* scale is constructed entirely out of disjunct tetrachords. Beginning with the familiar tetrachord of the four finals, *d–e–f–g*, you add a disjunct tetrachord below, and thus obtain the B-flat in Example 5-1b. Add a disjunct tetrachord above and you get the B-natural as part of the same scale. Add another tetrachord above that and F-sharp appears. Above that there will be a C-sharp. (This much is actually demonstrated in the treatise. If one were to extend the scale at the bottom, of course, one would keep adding flats, beginning with the E-flat hypothetically added to Ex. 5-1b.) The result is a scale altogether without diminished fifths. An analogous hypothetical scale composed of nothing but conjunct tetrachords would eliminate augmented fourths; it is not given in the treatise but can be easily deduced: see Ex. 5-2b.

These scales produce perfect parallel counterpoint in theory but bear no relationship to normal oral (that is, aural) practice. And that is why strict parallel doubling, though conceptually as simple as can be, is literally utopian. It occurs nowhere in the “real world” of musical practice. Polyphonic music actually composed

according to the *Musica enchiriadis* scales (to quote a wry comment of Claude Debussy on a piece the young Igor Stravinsky showed him in 1913) “is probably Plato’s ‘harmony of the eternal spheres’ (but don’t ask me on which page); and, except on Sirius or Aldebaran or some other star, I do not foresee performances ... especially not on our more modest Earth.”<sup>3</sup>

On our modest Earth, in other words, compromise with theory—that is, with imagined perfection—is usually required. The author of the *Scolica enchiriadis* tacitly recognized this crucial point when constructing an example to illustrate “the symphonia of the diatessaron” (parallel doubling at the perfect fourth). The counterpoint in this case (Ex. 5-1c) has been “cooked,” precisely so as to avoid the “polytonal” situation encountered in the case of fifths. The two lines end on the same final; that is to say, they end on a unison. In order to meet, of course, they must stop being parallel. Instead, they approach the final note in contrary motion. Such an approach is called an *occursus*, literally “a meeting.”

In order to smooth the way to the *occursus* (and also to avoid the B-flat from the *Musica enchiriadis* scale, which would produce an augmented fourth against the E in the *vox principalis*), the *vox organalis* behaves, in the second half of the example, like a drone—or like a sequence of drones. Instead of following the contour of the *vox principalis*, the *vox organalis* hugs first the D and then the C, moving from the one to the other when the opportunity presents itself to recover the correct *symphonia* (perfect fourth) against a repeated note in the *vox principalis*. The *vores organales* above and below the *vox principalis* in Ex. 5-1d, a composite organum simultaneously demonstrating octaves, fifths, and fourths, behave similarly.

Curiously (and rather characteristically), the author of the *Scolica enchiriadis* does not actually explain the modifications—the drones, the *occursus*—by which the purely conceptual idea of parallel doubling is transformed into the actual practice of organum. Acknowledging that the case is not as straightforward as the other examples, the author refers the discrepancy to “a certain natural law about which we shall speak later” (but of course “we” never get around to it), meanwhile counseling the student not to ask questions but just to perform the example and learn to imitate its “smoothness of harmony.” This deferral of explication should perhaps be viewed not as mere dogmatism (“‘Shut up,’ he explained,”<sup>4</sup> in the immortal words of Ring Lardner). Rather, it reflects the author’s reliance on time-honored oral/aural methods—hearing, repeating, imitating, applying, as opposed to “analysis”—in training musicians. It also suggests that the technique being imparted was no recent invention but already a tradition, “oral” by definition.

When the *vox organalis* moves in this modified, somewhat independent (though still entirely rule-bound) way, using not just parallel motion vis-à-vis the *vox principalis* but oblique and contrary motion as well, a variety of harmonic intervals are introduced into the texture, and the resulting line or voice-part can be described as a true “counterpoint.” The intervals are still ordered hierarchically. In addition to the actual *symphonia* (perfect consonance) of the fourth, Ex. 5-1c contains thirds and unisons. The organum setting of the sequence *Rex caeli* from *Musica enchiriadis*, discussed in chapter 2 and shown in Ex. 2-6, contains actual dissonances. The *vox organalis* begins with a dronelike stretch against which the *vox principalis* rises by step from unison until the *symphonia* is reached. Its second note, then, forms a “passing” dissonant second against the accompanying voice.

The thirds, “imperfect” consonances, are contrapuntally subordinate in Ex. 5-1c and 5-1d: a *vox organalis* can move only to a perfect consonance; the thirds (like the second in Ex. 2-6) can occur only over a stationary accompaniment. Thus the fourth, being unrestricted in its possible occurrences, is “functionally consonant” according to the style-determining rules here in force, while the third is “functionally dissonant.”

It has been worth our while to take a very close look at these primordial specimens of written counterpoint because the principles we have observed in them will remain the bedrock principles of Western polyphonic practice for centuries. The art of counterpoint (and of harmony as well, which is just counterpoint slowed down) is most economically defined as the art of balancing normative harmonies (“consonances”) and subordinate ones (“dissonances”), and elaborating rules for “handling” the latter. The quotes around the terms are a reminder that criteria of consonance and dissonance are culture-bound, hence relative and changeable, and are best described not on the basis of their sound as such but on the basis of how they function within a style. The styles we all assimilate today in the process of acculturation (otherwise known

as “growing up”) teach us to hear—hence use—intervals a different way. We have all been trained to “hear” thirds as consonances and fourths as dissonances.

The chief distinguishing characteristics of any contrapuntal or harmonic style, including those used today, come down to two: the ways in which voices move with respect to one another (in terms of rhythm as well as pitch direction), and the ways in which dissonance functions vis-à-vis consonance. To assess any contrapuntal or harmonic style we need to make the same sorts of observations that we have been making with regard to our primordial specimens.

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## Notes:

(3) Claude Debussy, letter to Igor Stravinsky of 18 August 1913, facsimile and transcription in *Avec Stravinsky*, ed. Robert Craft (Monaco: Éditions du Rocher, 1958), pp. 200–201. The work of Stravinsky's that elicited the comment was *Zvezdoliki (Le Roi des Étoiles)*.

(4) Ring Lardner, *The Young Immigrants* (1920).

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Guido of Arezzo

## GUIDO, JOHN, AND DISCANT

Chapter: CHAPTER 5 Polyphony in Practice and Theory

Source: MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

As if the achievements with which he has already been credited—the invention of the staff, the operational rules of sight-singing—were not enough, Guido of Arezzo also made a decisive contribution to the development of contrapuntal technique. It was yet another of that brilliant monk's many impressive contributions to the early rationalization of literate musical practice and its transformation into transmissible technique. In his *Micrologus* ("Little treatise"), a guide to the rudiments of music theory, Guido devoted one section to a very influential discussion of organum. The main emphasis was on obtaining maximum variety in interval succession (though the fourth is still recognized as the primary *symphonia*) and on fashioning a good *occursus* (a term Guido was in fact the first to use in connection with musical cadences).

The main innovation in Guido's discussion—and it was crucial—was attitudinal rather than substantive, something that seeped from between the lines. Like the author of the *Enchiridion* treatises, Guido illustrated his points with examples; but unlike the earlier writer he gave more than one solution to contrapuntal problems, between which the student was invited to choose *ad libitum*, "at pleasure." Here, for example (Ex. 5-3), are two counterpoints to a psalm that produce the same *occursus*: in one case by direct leap to the final (*occursus simplex*), in the other by the use of a passing tone to smooth the way (*occursus per intermissas*).

The image shows two musical staves, labeled 'a.' and 'b.', illustrating counterpoints to the psalm 'Jhe - ru - sa - lem'. Both staves are in a single bass clef and show a sequence of notes: G, A, B, C, D, E, F, G. Staff 'a.' shows a direct leap from G to E (the final), while staff 'b.' shows a passing tone (F) between G and E. The notes are written as whole notes with stems pointing down.

ex. 5-3 Guido d'Arezzo, *Micrologus*; Two counterpoints to *Jherusalem*

Note that for Guido the major second can be used as a secondary consonance (it was, after all, a "Pythagorean" interval), whereas, as he tells us, the perfect fifth was to be avoided as "hard-sounding." So much for the "natural" basis of counterpoint! And Guido makes the rejection of the "natural" explicit. He does not claim that his methods follow "a certain natural law," only that they are pleasing. And by allowing the reader to choose between his two cadences on the basis of personal preference ("taste"), and implicitly allowing that there may be other solutions for the student to discover (or invent), Guido is in fact taking an important step in the direction of what we would call an "art," rather than a mere mechanical or technical procedure.

Another point Guido did not make explicit, but which was extremely influential nevertheless, was the fact that the pursuit of maximum variety of interval content implied a "parsimony principle," a minimum of motion in the *vox organalis*. (Today's counterpoint teachers still grade on the basis of "smoothness" of voice-leading, in fact.) Some of Guido's examples resemble drones, though he never says as much. One example (Ex. 5-4), ostensibly intended as an illustration of the desirability of occasional voice-crossing, yields an actual drone that is maintained throughout the chant.



ex. 5-4 Guido d'Arezzo, *Micrologus*; Counterpoint to *Sexta hora*

Guido's *Micrologus* was the most frequently copied-out and widely disseminated book on music theory before the age of printing. Every monastery or cathedral library had a copy, and it was used in primary music instruction as late as the fifteenth century. We should not be surprised to discover its influence in the early centers of polyphonic composition that begin to leave documentary traces at about the same time, but which really flowered about a century later.

The earliest such trace is actually pre-Guidonian: a huge collection of polyphonic tropes from Winchester in a manuscript (the later of the so-called Winchester Tropers) copied over a ten-year period ending in 1006. As mentioned in chapter 3, the Winchester Tropers are notated in staffless neumes, showing that the Winchester cantors (or the monks of the nearby Abbey of St. Swithin, including the celebrated Wulfstan to whom the whole corpus has been attributed) sang their counterpoints by heart. We cannot decipher them with much precision, but their contours definitely accord with Guidonian preferences regarding voice-crossing and *occursus*. In fact, the implicit Guidonian predilection for contrary motion at cadences now begins to spread to other parts of the setting, so that the older concept of *symphonia*—parallel doubling—survives only sporadically. The contents of the Winchester organum manuscript mix the monastic repertory of St. Swithin (Responsories, processional antiphons) with the public repertory of the cathedral Mass (Kyries, Gloria tropes, tracts, sequences, and no fewer than fifty-three Alleluias).

The earliest fully legible practical source of composed polyphonic music is a late eleventh-century fragment from Chartres containing Alleluia verses and processional antiphons set in two-part, note-against-note (homorhythmic) counterpoint. There is virtually no parallel doubling; nor is there much note-repetition in the *vox organalis*, even when the original chant has a repeated note. Instead, there is pervasive contrary motion and ceaseless intervallic variety; this, or what we would call an “independent” voice line, was what the composer of the *vox organalis* was clearly striving for. (The word “independent,” of course, should be understood in relative terms: no line constructed in a style that is subject to so many harmonic constraints can ever be truly independent of the given melody—but this is just as true of later contrapuntal styles, including those still academically taught).

Most often cited from the Chartres fragment is the verse “Dicant nunc judei” from the Easter processional *Christus resurgens* (“Christ rising again”), an especially bold setting in which every interval from the unison to the octave except the seventh is employed, including both major and minor sixths (unrecognized as concords by theorists), and in which voice-crossing gives the *vox organalis* almost equal prominence with the *vox principalis* (Ex. 5-5a). In another verse, “Angelus Domini” from the Easter Alleluia *Pascha nostrum immolatus est Christus* (“Christ our paschal lamb is sacrificed”), different counterpoints are added to a repeated phrase in the *vox principalis*, and the *occursus* is made not to the unison but to the octave (Ex. 5-5b).

Two staves of music in a low register, likely bass clef. The notation shows two voices: a principal voice and an organal voice. The notes are connected by stems and some have flags. Below the first staff, the Latin text "Di-cant nunc ju - de - i quo - mo - do" is written with hyphens under the syllables. Below the second staff, the text "mi - li - tes cu - sto - di - en - tes se - pul - chrum per - di - (derunt)..." is written with hyphens under the syllables.

ex. 5-5a From the Chartres fragment. “Dicant nunc judei”



ex. 5-5b "Angelus Domini"

The style of counterpoint exemplified in the Chartres fragment strikingly resembles the one described (or prescribed) by John of Afflighem, a Flemish theorist of the early twelfth century whose treatise *De musica* was the only one to rival Guido's *Micrologus* in distribution and authority. In the later twelfth century this style would become known as *discantus* or "descant." The Latin word means literally "singing apart," whence "singing in parts." Music historians generally prefer "discant" to "descant" as an English equivalent; not being standard English, it can be more easily restricted in meaning to refer specifically and technically to medieval polyphony.

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Johannes Cotto [Johannes Affligemensis]

St Martial

Sources, MS: Organum and discant

# POLYPHONY IN AQUITANIAN MONASTIC CENTERS

Chapter: CHAPTER 5 Polyphony in Practice and Theory

Source: MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

By the time the word *discant* became current, a new style of organum had arisen in contrast to it. This new style resembles some of Guido's examples (which may have helped inspire it) in that one voice is relatively stationary while the other moves freely, creating a variety of intervals against the first. The great difference is that in the new style the dronelike voice is the *vox principalis*, and the *vox organalis* is the moving voice—or, as we now should call it, the melismatic voice, since it sings several notes against each syllable-carrying note of the original chant. Hand in hand with this difference went another just as big: the *vox principalis* is now the lower, not the upper voice.

What brought about these momentous practical departures? They amount virtually to standing the older polyphonic texture on its head: what was top is now bottom; what was mobile is now stationary, and vice versa. And perhaps most important from the listener's perspective, what had been subordinate (namely, the added voice) is now dominant. In the new melismatic organum, the chant seems paradoxically to accompany its accompaniment.

In keeping with this changed perspective, a new terminology is warranted, one that will remove the apparent paradox. Instead of *vox principalis*, let us simply call the voice that sustains the long-held notes of the original chant the "holding part." Since the Latin infinitive "to hold" is *tenere*, the chant-bearing part will henceforth be known as the *tenor*. The word actually begins appearing in this sense in the treatises of the thirteenth century, and though its meaning has varied over the years, it is still an important musical term today. This was its first meaning for polyphonic music—the voice that holds a preexistent melody out in long notes over which another voice sings a florid counterpoint. It was the relegation of the chant melody to the tenor that was the new event, for it inaugurated a texture—and a procedure—that would last for centuries. Indeed it is still practiced (or at least administered), under the thirteenth-century name *cantus firmus* or "fixed tune," in academic counterpoint studies today. For a sample of the new texture see Fig. 5-2.

This composition is from a manuscript that dates from around 1100 and was long kept in the library of the biggest Aquitanian monastery, the Abbey of St. Martial at Limoges. Its Aquitanian origin and its association with St. Martial is already a clue to the new style's why and wherefore, for we have encountered St. Martial before, as a center of trope and *versus* composition. The tenor in Fig. 5-2 is in fact a metrical *versus* composed to adorn the end of Christmas matins. What is melismatic organum then but an adornment of an adornment, a polyphonic gloss? It is a *longissima melodia* (to recall some terminology from chapter 2) sung not in place of an older chant, or in between its phrases, but (imagining two singers now) literally alongside it. "St. Martial"-style polyphony is thus a new kind of trope, simultaneous rather than prefatory, and a literal (that is, sonic) amplification of the liturgy.

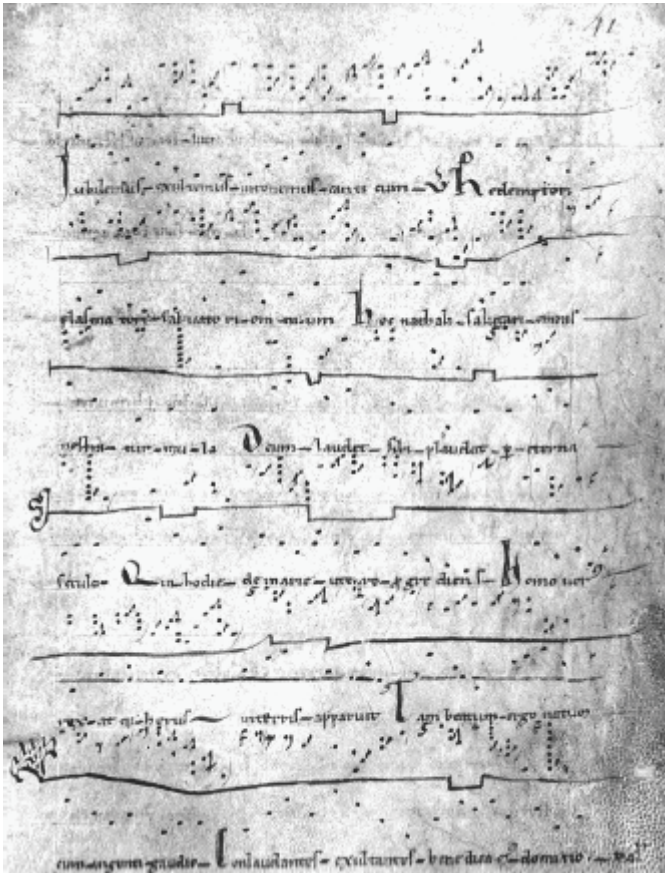


fig. 5-2 Melismatic organum on the versus *Jubilemus, exultemus* from one of the twelfth-century “St. Martial” manuscripts (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Fonds Latins MS 1139, fol. 41).

“St. Martial” polyphony is found in four bound volumes comprising nine separate manuscripts, compiled between ca. 1100 and ca. 1150. (The quotes here are a reminder that the music was kept and used at St. Martial but not necessarily composed there.) The notation, like that of the contemporary chant, is specific as to pitch but not as to rhythm, reminding us once again that the music was composed, learned, and performed by oral methods. We, who must read these texts in order to sing the music the twelfth-century monks knew by heart, are more seriously handicapped by their rhythmic indeterminacy than we are in the case of chant, and for a fairly obvious reason. When two parts are sung simultaneously, the singers have to know how they “line up.” In particular, the singer of the holding part has to know when to change to the next note—or else the singer of the moving part has to know when to cue his colleague on the tenor.

All we have to go on today in guessing at what contemporary singers knew cold is the rough—the *very* rough—vertical alignment of the parts in the manuscript “score,” and the rule (already implied as far back as *Musica enchiriadis*) that the sustained part can move only when its motion will create a consonance against the faster-moving part. Applying these rules is not enough to arrive at a definitive text, assuming there was such a thing (which is a great deal to assume). Nor do we know if it is the tenor’s notes that are meant to be “equipollent” (that is, roughly equal in length, like spoken syllables), or those of the melismatic part, or neither.

Thus the notation in Fig. 5-2 is (by the standards today’s literate musicians are taught to demand) vague and insufficient for performance. The transcription of the beginning of the piece in Ex. 5-6 is entirely speculative. The transcriber, Carl Parrish, sums up the problem:

The number of notes in the upper part to those in the lower varies considerably—from one to fifteen, actually—so that an effort to keep the lower part [i.e., the original chant] uniform in pace would cause a great variety of speeds in the upper note groups. On the other hand, a uniform pace in the upper part would cause as much variety in the notes of the slower-moving tenor.<sup>5</sup>

Citing mutually exclusive solutions favored by equally respected specialists, Parrish comments that “both interpretations produce satisfactory musical results, although there is no way of knowing which, if either, corresponds to the manner originally intended.” In addition to the one to which Parrish called attention, there is the further problem of guessing exactly which notes of the tenor coincide with which notes of the melismatic voice at moments of change in the slower-moving part. For assured transcription or performance of this music, then, we would need to hear it sung by its “native” singers, and that is something we will never hear.

The image shows a musical transcription of the beginning of the chant 'Jubilemus, exultemus'. It is presented in three systems, each with a vocal line (treble clef) and a tenor line (treble clef). The lyrics are: 'Ju - bi - le - mus, ex - ul - te - mus, in - to - ne - mus, can - ti - cum. Re - demp - to - ri,'. The notation features a mix of single notes and melismatic passages with many beamed notes.

ex. 5-6 Transcription of the beginning of *Jubilemus, exultemus* (Fig. 5-2)

That has not stopped imaginative early-music performers from conjecturing a performance practice for this music, often very persuasively. As Leo Treitler, a specialist in early notation and polyphony, has justly observed, “the question for us is not ‘how must they have sung this music?’ but rather ‘how can we sing it?’” In seeking an answer to “our” question, Prof. Treitler goes on, “it may be that analysis and performance can teach us what exact methods have so far withheld about the problems confronting the musicians of the twelfth century.”<sup>6</sup>

But whatever we learn from our own analyses and our own performances must obviously go far beyond the evidence of the sources into a realm where only artists dare tread, not historians. The speculative or conjectural performance of early music to delight modern audiences has provided an arena where artists and historians have been collaborating fruitfully, sometimes within the heads of a new breed of scholarly or musicologically-minded performer. But such performers know best of all that the historian cannot always helpfully advise the artist, and that the artist’s successes, though they may convince an audience that includes the historian, still cannot provide the latter with evidence.

Not all the polyphonic pieces in the St. Martial manuscripts present modern performers with such difficulties. Along with sustained-note organum settings like the one in Fig. 5-2, the St. Martial sources

contain numerous *versus* and hymn settings in discant style, in which the two frequently crossing voices, if not precisely note-against-note, are at least rhythmically similar. In such settings it is not often possible to identify a preexisting tune or cantus firmus in either part; thus there is nothing in them to distinguish a *vox principalis* from a *vox organalis*. In such cases the two parts were in all likelihood conceived as a pair.

To say this is not necessarily to imply that the two-part texture was actually conceived as a unit, even if it was composed in one sitting. One voice might have been written first and then treated as an ersatz cantus firmus for the second; some theoretical discussions seem to imply as much. But in some settings the two voices are so intricately (and playfully!) interrelated that simultaneous conception of the whole texture seems a virtual certainty. One such is given in Ex. 5-7.

The texture here is “neume-against-neume” rather than note-against-note. (The slurs in the example show how the notes in the original notation were joined into neumatic groups or *ligatures*—literally, “bindings”—of two, three, four, or more.) The transcription, by Leo Treitler, follows the “isosyllabic” principle we encountered as an option in transcribing troubadour songs; every neume is assumed to last the same amount of time, represented in the transcription as a quarter note’s duration. At the beginning of the piece this duration also corresponds to the syllables, but the neumes in the decorative melismas that come at the ends of verses are treated in the same way.

Ad su - - per - - ni re - gis de - - cus,  
qui con - ti - net om - ni a.  
Se - cus li - tus Ga - li - le - e con - temp - sis - ti  
pro - pri a. Tu pe - tis - ti iux - ta Chris - tum  
tunc se - de - re - nes - ci us.  
Pro - tho mar - tir du - o - de - mus fu - is - ti in  
pa - - tri a.  
Fac nos er - go in - te - res - - se po - lo abs - que  
ter - - mi no.



ex. 5-7 Versus sung as a prosulated *Benedicamus Domino* response at St. Martial and elsewhere (Paris, BN, LAT. 1139)

Notice the way the melismas “accelerate” through the piece from two-note to four-note to five-note patterns. (This seems to argue in favor of the isosyllabic scheme, in which ligatures actually gather speed as they grow in size.) Notice, too, the repetitive or sequential patterns into which the melismas are organized, and the way the voices complement one another’s contour by the use of contrary motion. This complementary relationship definitely betokens “whole-texture conception”: the individual lines have meaning only in terms of their complementation. For a third thing, notice the way in which the two voices exchange roles in the first two measures (=lines of the poem), but also notice the slight differences between them (ligature G–F in the first measure, upper part, answered in the second measure by a single G in the lower; the two-note ligature F–E in the first measure, lower part, answered in the second measure by a three-noter, E–F–E, in the upper) that insure variation within repetition, small irregularities within a larger regularity. Fascination with abstract patterning here produces a fascinating result.

Even though it uses a texture that was described by earlier writers such as Guido and John, while the cantus-firmus settings seem to be unprecedented, this composition is in fact a much more “modern” piece—and a much more “artistically” shaped product, as we understand the word—than the one in Fig. 5-2. Where a cantus firmus may happen to show up in the texture is less of a defining trait than its sheer presence or absence, and here we have a composition that seems to have been elaborated musically from scratch, out of sheer joy in pattern-making. “The spirit” of such music, Prof. Treitler has written, “is that of the magic square and the palindrome.”<sup>7</sup> Such a spirit of playful creativity is more in keeping with modern understanding of the word “art” than are the functional amplifications of plainchant that we have been encountering up to now. All at once we seem to behold a planned and finished “artwork”—a fully shaped *res facta*, a “made thing,” as musicians would later call such works to distinguish them from ephemeral improvisations.

Yet we should resist the temptation to imagine that such works, because they are so meticulously worked out, had to be literally worked out on paper in advance. We are still dealing with the products of a predominantly oral culture, of which only a few specimens—the cream, presumably—ever found their way into writing. A piece like the one in Ex. 5-7 was in all likelihood composed by a singer—or more likely, by two singers—in the act of singing.

The regularities and symmetries—the voice exchanges, the complementation of contour, the melodic repetitions and sequences—may appear to us to suggest the shaping hand of an “author,” as “classical” musicians have come to understand the term. (That is to say, a creator who works apart from performers, out of “real time.”) But they are more likely just the opposite. Patterns like these are not abstract ideas but memory aids—which is why we use the word “catchy” to describe them. They bear witness to the process (and the fun) of creativity within an oral culture. *Homo ludens* and *homo faber*—“humanity at play” and “creative humanity”—were close allies in such a culture.

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## Notes:

(5) Carl Parrish, *The Notation of Medieval Music* (New York: Norton, 1959), p. 65.

(6) Leo Treitler, “The Polyphony of St. Martial,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* XVII (1964): 42.

(7) Treitler, “The Polyphony of St. Martial,” p. 38.

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online

Codex Calixtinus

Conductus

# THE CODEX CALIXTINUS

Chapter: CHAPTER 5 Polyphony in Practice and Theory

Source: MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

What the rare written-down specimens could do was travel. The *versus* in Ex. 5-7 was a great favorite. It is found in three of the four “St. Martial” manuscripts containing polyphony, and it is found as a conductus in the other main source of early-to-mid-twelfth-century polyphonic composition. This other source is a magnificent copy of the Codex Calixtinus, more accurately known as the “Book of St. James” (*Liber sancti Jacobi*), a huge memorial potpourri dedicated to the apostle James the Greater, commissioned by Pope Callistus (Calixtus) II, who reigned from 1119 to 1124.

According to tradition, the body of St. James was miraculously translated, after his martyrdom in Judea, to Spain, where he had preached and where he is now venerated (under the name Sant’ Iago or Santiago) as patron saint. His relics are said to be housed in the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, an Atlantic coastal town in the extreme northwest corner of Spain (above Portugal), built over his reputed gravesite in 1078. The copy of the Codex Calixtinus at Saint James’s own shrine, one of the great pilgrimage spots in late-medieval Europe, is of course an especially lavish one, and it is fitted out with many special features. One of these is an appendix of a dozen parchment leaves containing some two dozen polyphonic compositions, some specially written for the Office of St. James, others (like the one given in Ex. 5-7) borrowed from the common monastic repertory of southern and central France.

The appendix is now thought to have been compiled in the cathedral town of Vézelay by around 1170 and shipped or carried down as a gift to the shrine at Compostela. One of the reasons for associating the manuscript with a fairly northern point of origin is its use of the word *conductus* in place of *versus* for pieces like the one in Ex. 5-7. Another is the inclusion of standard Mass and Office items in polyphonic elaborations along with the more usual tropes and *versus*. These settings consist of six responsorial chants—four matins Responsories, a Gradual, and an Alleluia—from the special local liturgy of St. James, as given in chant form in an earlier part of the Codex. The polyphonic versions are in the sustained-tone organum style, with the original chant as the tenor and an especially florid counterpoint above it. As we shall see, this is cathedral, not monastic, polyphony.

The most florid of all the settings in the Codex Calixtinus is the Kyrie *Cunctipotens genitor*, familiar to us already as a chant. It was something of a favorite for polyphonic treatment in the twelfth century. An anonymous treatise of ca. 1100 called *Ad organum faciendum* (“How to do organum”) had already used it to demonstrate note-against-note discant in a rather dogged contrary motion (Ex. 5-8a). The example has its own historical significance because it is one of the earliest settings to give the *vox organalis* a higher tessitura than the original melody.

The placement of the counterpoint above the chant makes comparison with the melismatic setting of the same item in the Codex Calixtinus (Ex. 5-8b) particularly apt. Putting them side by side, one can easily imagine the one, or something like it, turning into the other over time (especially if one recalls the observations in chapter 1 about the gradual elaboration of “the old way of singing”), and finally getting written down as a “keeper.” Proceeding on the assumption that we are dealing with an embellished discant, the transcription in Ex. 5-8b has been spatially laid out so that the notes in the tenor come beneath notes in

the *vox organalis* that form perfect consonances with it. This arrangement corresponds only loosely with the way in which the parts line up in the manuscript, it is true (see Fig. 5-3). But since the notation still conveys no specific information about duration, the manuscript alignment may not seem as reliable a guide to the actual counterpoint as the theoretical principles on which all writers agree. (Particularly important to the theorists, of course, is the principle of *occurus*, which the transcription does its bit to reinforce.)

Cun - cti - po - tens ge - ni - tor De - us o - mni - cre - a - tor

e - lei - son.

Chri - ste De - i splen - dor vir - tus pa - tris - que so - phi - a

e - lei - son.

Am - bo - rum sa - crum spi - ra - men ne - xus a - mor - que

e - lei - son

ex. 5-8a *Cunctipotens genitor* setting, from *Ad organum faciendum*

Cun - ti - po - tens  
ge - ni - tor De - us o - mni -  
cre - a - tor e  
lei - son. Chri - ste De - i  
for - ma vir - tus pa - tris -  
que so - phi - a e - lei - son.  
Am - bo - rum sa - crum spi - ra - men  
ne - xus a - mor - que e lei - son.

ex. 5-8b *Cunctipotens genitor* setting, from Codex Calixtinus

Of course it could be argued just as logically that in the absence of a precise rhythmic notation, the manuscript alignment was the only possible—and therefore an indispensable—guide to the counterpoint. Yet a glance at Fig. 5-3 will suffice to show that the alignment was not a matter of great concern to the copyist. Even more basically, to argue that the alignment was meant to guide performance is to assume that the piece was transmitted primarily in writing, and that its performers read it off the page. The opposite assumption, that the piece was transmitted orally and performed from memory (with the notation having little more than the status of a souvenir or an art-object), accords better with what we know of medieval practice.

The most famous piece in the Codex Calixtinus appendix is famous for the wrong reason. It is a conductus, *Congaudeant catholici* (“Let all Catholics rejoice together”), that is furnished with two counterpoints, one in a fairly florid “organal” style, the other a simple discant. Although it is quite obvious that the two counterpoints were entered separately (the moderately fancy organal voice occupies a staff of its own, above the tenor; the note-against-note discant is entered, in red ink for contrast, directly on the staff containing the

tenor), the piece was long taken to be a unique three-part polyphonic setting, supposedly the first of its kind (Fig. 5-4; Ex. 5-9). (*Congaudeant catholici's* "rightful" claim to fame is the fact that it may be the earliest polyphonic piece to carry an attribution in its source; the Codex names "Magister Albertus Parisiensis" as composer, identifiable by his title as the Albertus who served as cantor at the cathedral of Notre Dame from around 1140 to 1177.)



fig. 5-3 *Cunctipotens genitor*, as set melodically in the Codex Calixtinus, a late twelfth-century French manuscript now kept at the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Spain. The setting begins halfway through the first system and ends at the beginning of the fifth system.



fig. 5-4 The conductus *Congaudeant catholici* as it appears in the Codex Calixtinus (fol. 214, the bottom half of the page).

The extremely high level of dissonance that resulted from performing the two settings simultaneously was not at first considered a deterrent. Careless reading of the medieval music theorists, together with equally incautious assumptions about the relationship of writing to composition, encouraged the belief that the harmonic style of early polyphony was entirely rationalistic, based on speculative numerology, and, from a practical—that is, aural—point of view, virtually haphazard. (It was thought, to be specific, that voices written in succession against a cantus firmus had to accord harmonically only with it, not with each other; both “written” and “in succession” are now acknowledged to be anachronistically limiting terms.)

What may in fact be the earliest surviving three-part polyphonic composition is a Christmas conductus, *Verbum patris humanatur* (“The word of the Father is made man”). It is found as a two-part discant setting in one of the Aquitanian manuscripts, and in three parts (of which one, the tenor of course, is common to both settings) in a small French manuscript of the late twelfth century now kept in the library of Cambridge University. The notation is still noncommittal with respect to rhythm. The transcription in Ex. 5-10 is “isosyllabic,” resulting in an implicit duple meter based on the accentual scansion of the text. The longer values on the exclamatory O’s and elsewhere are conjectural; they arise out of the same implicit (or perhaps it would be more honest to say “presumed”) musical pulse.

Con - gau - de - ant ca - tho - li - ci, lae - ten - tur ci - ves coe - li - ci  
 di - e i - sta

ex. 5-9 *Congaudeant catholici* transcribed as two separate two-part pieces, but aligned

1. Ver - bum pa - tris hu - ma - na - tur O, O, dum pu - el - la sa - lu - ta - tur, O, O.  
 2. No - vus mo - dus ge - ni - tu - re O, O, et ex - ce - dens vim na - tu - re O, O.  
 3. In pa - ren - te sal - va - to - ris O, O, non est par - tus no - stri - mo - ris; O, O.  
 Sa - lu - ta - ta fe - cun - da - tur vi - ri ne - sci - a — He - i, he - i, no - va gau - di - a.  
 Dum u - ni - tur cre - a - tu - re cre - ans om - ni - a — He - i, he - i, no - va gau - di - a.  
 Vir - go pa - rit nec pu - do - ris mar - cent li - li - a — He - i, he - i, no - va gau - di - a

ex. 5-10 *Verbum patris humanatur* (twelfth-century conductus setting in three parts)

The basic “harmony of three voices” emerges here as octave (or unison) plus fifth. The octave-filled-by-fifth



sonority includes every perfect consonance (or *symphonia*, to recall the old organum terminology). In places where imperfect consonances had been common before (especially the “precadential” position), we are now apt to find triads, or else a combination of fourth or fifth plus a seventh over the lowest voice that is justified by its characteristic approach to the concluding consonance by contrary motion—a harmonically amplified *occursus*.

The strategic placement of dissonance (or imperfect consonance) immediately before perfect consonance, and its “resolution” to the latter by contrary voice-leading, was henceforth regarded as the essential “function” of discant harmony and the definer of musical “motion.” It became the primary signal of “closure,” or phrase-ending in polyphonic music, the necessary determiner of cadences, and eventually the primary shaper of musical form. As befits something so important to musical structure and perception—to musical “language,” in effect—it was eventually standardized in practice, and particularly in teaching, as “laws of counterpoint.”

Still and all, the note-against-note harmony of the earliest surviving three-part discants, like *Verbum patris humanatur*, is the kind of harmony that is easily worked out in the act of “harmonizing”—that is, by ear—and depicts in writing, like a kind of snapshot, an informal oral practice of evident long standing, and with many descendants in today’s world. There is no telling how far back in time such practices may extend.

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

# CHAPTER 6 Notre Dame de Paris

## Parisian Cathedral Music in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries and its Makers

Chapter: CHAPTER 6 Notre Dame de Paris

Source: MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

## THE CATHEDRAL-UNIVERSITY COMPLEX

Many circumstances conspired to make Paris the undisputed intellectual capital of Europe by the end of the twelfth century. The process of urbanization, traced to some degree in chapter 4, brought about a decline in the importance of monasteries as centers of learning and a swift rise in the prestige of cathedral schools. These schools were learning centers attached to cathedral churches, the large urban churches that were the seats (*cathedrae*) of bishops and that served as administrative centers for a surrounding ecclesiastical territory called a diocese.

The enhanced importance of the cathedral beginning in the twelfth century, especially in northern Europe, was underscored by the gigantism of cathedral architecture. The Gothic style (so called since the nineteenth century to emphasize its northern European provenance), with its soaring lines and huge interior spaces, had its start precisely at this time. Paris and the surrounding area (including the northern suburb of Saint-Denis, site of the royal crypt) was one of its earliest sites. The abbey and basilica of Saint-Denis were constructed between 1140 and 1144. The cornerstone of the present-day cathedral of Paris, dedicated to the Virgin Mary and affectionately known therefore as *Notre-Dame de Paris* ("Our Lady of Paris"), or simply as Notre Dame, was laid in 1163 by Pope Alexander III himself. The altar was consecrated twenty years later, and the building began to function, although the whole enormous structure was not finished until the beginning of the fourteenth century.

Within and around the great Gothic cathedrals, the clergy was organized into a community modeled in many of its aspects on the feudal ideal. The resident staff or faculty was sworn to a quasi-monastic regime defined by a *canon* or consensual law. From this word they derived their title: a full member of the community was a "canon regular," or simply canon. The canons elected the bishop who ruled them, and who parceled out the church lands and their incomes to the canons in the form of *prebends* (from *praebenda*, that which is to be granted), much as a lord would deed land to his vassals. The community of canons, known as the college or chapter, was organized into a hierarchy of ranks and offices overseen by the chancellor or dean, the bishop's chief of staff. They included the *scolasticus* (school director) and the *precentor* (musical director).

Much of this vocabulary, as the reader has surely noticed, is now used to designate the ranks and offices in a university, and that is no coincidence. The university as we know it—or as it was originally called, the *universitas societas magistrorum discipulorumque* (universal association of masters and disciples, i.e., teachers and pupils)—was a twelfth-century innovation, formed initially by consolidating and augmenting the faculties of cathedral schools. The University of Paris, the first great northern European university, was by far the largest. It was preceded only by the University of Bologna, originally endowed in the eleventh century as the pope's own vocational school of "canon law" for training church administrators.



fig. 6-1 Interior of the cathedral of Notre Dame, Paris.

Its instructional and administrative staff was formed out of the faculties of three large existing schools: that of Notre Dame, that of the canons regular at the abbey of St. Victor (known to us already as a center of sequence composition), and that of the collegiate church of St. Geneviève. (A collegiate church was the next lower rank after cathedral: it had a dean and chapter but no resident bishop.) As a physical plant the University of Paris grew up alongside the new cathedral. It was fully functioning by around 1170 with the cathedral's chancellor as its ecclesiastical superintendent, charged with granting its faculty the *licentia docendi* (license to teach), known to us as the doctor's degree. It was formally chartered by a papal bull—a letter carrying the pope's *bull*a or seal—in 1215. Since the sixteenth century it has been known as the Sorbonne, after its largest constituent college, an elite doctoral school of theology founded—that is, funded—by Robert de Sorbon, the royal chaplain, in 1253.



fig. 6-2 Philip II of France (Philip Augustus, r. 1180–1223), handing the royal privilege to the masters and students of the University of Paris in 1200. Illumination from a mid-fourteenth-century Latin chronicle known as the *Book of Procurors*, now kept at the *Bibliothèque Nationale*, Paris.

This unprecedented royal/papal ecclesiastical/educational establishment was the environment in which an equally unprecedented musical establishment thrived. Our knowledge of it, while extensive, is curiously indirect, pieced together by collating evidence from two or three skimpy descriptive accounts, four immense musical manuscripts, and half a dozen more or less detailed theoretical treatises. What we now call the “Notre Dame School” of polyphonic composition, and are accustomed to regarding as the first great “classical” flowering of Western art music, is actually a sort of grand historiographical fiction. Constructing it was one of the earliest triumphs of modern musicology—and still one of the most impressive.

The musical documents, three service books compiled in Paris in the mid-to-late thirteenth century and one compiled in Britain somewhat later (but seemingly containing a somewhat earlier version of the repertory), house an imposing body of polyphonic chant settings that stands in relation to the modest repertories of the “St. Martial” and Compostela manuscripts in more or less the same way that the great central cathedral-university complex itself stood in relation to the outlying monasteries and shrines of an earlier age.

The earlier repertories had been local ones in the main, emphasizing patron saints and intramural observances, and concentrating on recent chants like sequences and *versus*. The new one emphasized the general (“catholic”) liturgy, the great yearly feasts, and the largest, musically most elaborate liturgical items. The Parisian or Parisian-style music books consisted mainly of settings of the Great Responsories for matins and the highly melismatic “lesson chants” (Gradual and Alleluia) of the Mass, arranged in the order of the church calendar, with particular concentrations around Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost (along with the Feast of the Assumption, in recognition of the Virgin Mary’s status as patron at Notre Dame; but even so, she was hardly a local figure).

Where the earlier repertories had consisted, with only the rarest (and oft-times dubious) exceptions, of two-part settings that paired the original chant tenor with one added voice, there is a whole cycle of Notre Dame settings with two added parts for a total texture of three voices, and even a few especially grandiose items with three added parts for an unheard-of complement of four. The earlier repertories had favored two styles: a note-against-note style called discant, and a somewhat more florid style called organum, with the tenor sustained against short melismatic flights in the added voice. A typical Notre Dame composition alternated the two styles and took them both to extremes. In “organal” sections, each tenor note could literally last minutes, furnishing a series of protracted drones supporting tremendous melismatic outpourings; the discant sections, by contrast, were driven by besetting rhythms that (for the first time anywhere) were precisely fixed in the notation.

The chant settings associated with Notre Dame, in short, were as ambitious as the cathedral for which they were composed. They took their stylistic bearings from existing polyphonic repertories but vastly outstripped their predecessors in every dimension—length, range, number of voices. They set the world (well, the Western-world) record for “intrasyllabic melodic expansion,”<sup>1</sup> to use a wonderfully precise term a Russian

folklorist once coined to describe melismatic proliferation and the way it eats up a text. (That record still stands, by the way, after eight hundred years.)

To find the motivation for this astonishing copiousness, one might look no further than St. Augustine's metaphor of "a mind poured forth in joy." But there may be more to it. The overwhelming dimensions these composers achieved may not only have accorded with the size of the reverberant spaces their works had to fill, but may also have carried a message of institutional triumph at a time notable for its triumphant institutionalism.

In any case, the Notre Dame composers aspired to an unprecedented universality. Their works, unlike those created at previous polyphonic centers, could be used anywhere the Latin liturgy of the western Christian church was used. And they aspired to encyclopedic completeness: it is evident that the surviving codices reflect an attempt—indeed, multiple attempts—to outfit the entire calendar of feasts with polyphony. (A codex, plural *codices*, is a large manuscript consisting of several smaller component "fascicles" collected and bound together.) Thus, with their works, the musicians of Notre Dame symbolized the strong, united church they served, and promoted catholicism in the literal and original sense of the word. As we know from the dispersion of their works in the extant sources, their program was successful. The central Parisian repertory was copied far and wide and sung well beyond its home territory. Either as such or as the basis for further elaboration, moreover, the repertory lasted for generations after its creators' lives had ended.

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## Notes:

(1) In Russian, *vnutrislogovaya raspevnost'*; see Izaly Zemtsovsky, *Russkaya protyazhnaya pesnya: Opit issledovaniya* (Leningrad: Muzika, 1967), p. 20.

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Sources, MS: Parisian and related sources

Pérotin

Léonin

# PIECING THE EVIDENCE TOGETHER

Chapter: CHAPTER 6 Notre Dame de Paris

Source: MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Those who copied and sang these works for generations did not, however, know their authors' names. Like most manuscripts containing music for ecclesiastical use, the Notre Dame sources carried no attributions. (Only "secular" works like courtly songs could carry an author's name without taint of pride, a deadly sin.) We do think we know the identities of some of the authors, though, and we think we know something about the history of the repertory and its development. And we know what we know (or what we think we know) precisely thanks to the alliance of the cathedral church of Notre Dame with the University of Paris.

From the very beginning, the student body at the university had comprised a strong English contingent. Even earlier, it had been the rule for English theologians to go to Paris for their doctoral training. An example was John of Salisbury (ca. 1115–80), the great neo-Platonic (or "realist") philosopher and biographer of Thomas à Becket, who traveled to Paris in his youth to study with Pierre Abélard. His first important work, a treatise on good government called *Policraticus*, was written around 1147, when he had just returned from Paris, and contains a notorious complaint about the gaudy music he heard in churches there. We don't know what music he heard; maybe it was something like *Congaudeant catholici* (Ex. 5-9), whose composer, Albertus, was the cantor at Notre Dame around the time of John's visit. More likely it was never written down at all. But the fact that the dour English clergyman found so much to condemn is already an indication that Paris was a special place for music.

Something over a hundred years later, around 1270 or 1280, we get another Englishman's testimony—in this case entirely approving, even reverent—about music in Paris. This second Englishman was the author of a treatise called *De mensuris et discantu* ("On Rhythmic Notation and Discant") that was published as the fourth item in a batch of anonymous medieval writings on music brought out by the great music bibliographer Charles-Edmond-Henri de Coussemaker in 1864, when musicology was in its infancy. The treatise was headed *Anonymus IV* in this celebrated publication, and the name, anglicized by the insertion of an "o," has unfortunately come since to be associated, thanks to popular writers and textbook authors, with the writer instead of the text. The poor fellow, whatever his name may have been, is irrevocably known to music history students as "Anonymous Four." We can surmise that he was English since the treatise survives in English manuscript copies and makes reference to local English saints (and even to the "Westcuntrie," the author's immediate neighborhood). We assume that he learned the contents of his treatise as a student in Paris, since he based most of his discussion slavishly (at times verbatim) on the known writings of Paris University *magistri* (lecturers), which he may have first encountered in the lecture hall.

If, as seems evident, the treatise is something like a set of university lecture notes, we may imagine the lecturer pausing amid the technical complexities he was laboriously imparting to reminisce briefly about the traditions of Parisian polyphony and the men who made it. This brief memoir—it is without doubt the most famous passage in any medieval treatise on music—begins with an obeisance to "Leoninus magister" (Master Leonin, short for Leo), who, "it is said," was the best *organista* (composer of organum). He made a *magnus liber*, a "great book" of organa *de gradali et de antiphonario*, "from the Gradual and the Antiphoner"; that is, he made organa on chants from the Mass and the Office books. That is all we are told about Master Leonin.

Next, Anonymus IV reports what the lecturer said about *Perotinus magnus* (the great Perotin or Pierrot, short for Pierre), who was the best *discantor* (composer of discant) and “better than Leoninus.” Perotin is identified first as the reviser of Leonin’s work. He *abbreviavit* the great book (let the translation of that word wait for now) and inserted many *clausulae* (“little discant sections”) of his own devising into Leonin’s compositions.

Then comes a list of Perotin’s original works, beginning with the real newsmakers, the *quadrupla*, organa in four parts (that is, three parts added to the Gregorian tenor). Two titles are given: *Viderunt* and *Sederunt*. Both, it turns out, are graduals: *Viderunt omnes fines terrae* (“All the ends of the earth have seen”), for Christmas, was reserved at Notre Dame for the newly instituted Feast of the Lord’s Circumcision (January 1); *Sederunt principes et adversum me loquebantur* (“Princes sat and plotted against me”) was the gradual for the Feast of St. Stephen the Martyr (December 26).

Next some famous *organa tripla* by Perotin are listed, including an Alleluia for the Mass commemorating the birth of the Virgin Mary. Finally, Perotin is credited with continuing the already venerable tradition of composing music to new Latin religious lyrics in the form of conductus, both polyphonic and monophonic. Three titles are mentioned, of which one—*Beata viscera* (“O blessed womb”) in honor of the Virgin—was set to a poem by Philip the Chancellor (of Notre Dame), head of the University of Paris from 1218 to his death in 1236.

The link between Philip and the work attributed to Perotin is choice evidence for the close creative relationship that obtained between the cathedral clergy and the university faculty. Philip’s death, moreover, marks what is known as the *terminus ante quem*, the latest possible date (literally, “the end point before which” something happens) for Perotin’s compositional activity. (It also marks the virtual end of the Latin *versus* tradition, for Philip was one of the last of that line.)

There is no telling, of course, exactly how Perotin’s lifetime overlapped with Philip’s, and good reason to believe that he did most of his work considerably before 1236. For there is another category of historical document that can be linked with him—or rather, with the works attributed to him in Anonymus IV. In 1198 and again in 1199, the Bishop of Paris, Eudes (or Odo) de Sully, issued letters cautioning against excessively boisterous holiday celebrations in the cathedral.<sup>2</sup> Keep the bell-ringing down, they instruct; keep the mummers and maskers out of the sanctuary; no fools’ processions, please. Instead, let there be good music, and let it be lavish.

In both letters, the bishop promises payment for *organum quadruplum*: in 1198 he requests it for the Feast of the Circumcision; in 1199, for the Feast of St. Stephen. Comparison with the list of Perotin’s works in Anonymus IV shows a remarkable correspondence; for these feasts are precisely the ones at which the two *quadrupla* enumerated there would have been sung. So again we have a probable *terminus ante quem*: the largest of the works attributed to Perotin must have been composed by—or, most likely, just at—the end of the twelfth century. One or both of the famous *quadrupla*, moreover, can be found in every one of the four big “Notre Dame” manuscripts mentioned above, as well as other manuscripts of the time or shortly after. And that observation holds as well for every other piece named in Anonymus IV. On the basis of that list, Perotin’s “complete works” have been collected and published.

So we appear to have a remarkable convergence of prose description, archival document, and actual musical source, each corroborating the content of the others. It is owing to Anonymus IV and the bishop’s letters that we can identify the four manuscripts as containing a repertory specifically and officially associated with Notre Dame. And the musical sources corroborate the specifics of the documentary accounts.

The only uncorroborated information, frustratingly enough, is the identity (or indeed, the existence) of the musicians named in Anonymus IV. Three are named in all: besides Leonin and Perotin, there is one Robert de Sabilone, who is lavishly praised but otherwise unidentified and whose name is found nowhere else. But neither is the name of Perotin! About the greatest musician of his time, as the author of Anonymus IV emphatically insists he was, we have no evidence at all except a chance mention in a set of lecture notes taken down by a nameless Englishman at least fifty and possibly as many as seventy years after Perotin’s

death. (There did happen to be a cantor at Notre Dame named Petrus, who was born Pierre Hosdenc near Beauvais and served at the Paris cathedral from 1184 to 1197; needless to say, strenuous efforts have been made to identify him with Anonymus IV's Perotin, but the facts and the chronology do not add up.) The situation is more promising in the case of Leonin. Two candidates have been more or less plausibly identified. One is a certain Henricus Leonellus, who owned a house near Notre Dame and was a lay member of the abbey of St. Victor. According to the available documents, he died some time between 1187 and 1192, which would place him in the generation of Anonymus IV's "Leoninus." There is nothing in the documents to connect him with music, though.

The other candidate, recently put forward by the music historian Craig Wright, is especially appealing: a canon and priest at Notre Dame and St. Victor whose name was Leonius but who was sometimes referred to in official documents by the same affectionate diminutive—Leoninus, "old man Leo"—used in Anonymus IV.<sup>3</sup> The peak of his documented activity was reached in the 1180s and 1190s, and he died in 1201 or 1202. This Leonius is not identified as a musician, but he was a poet of considerable renown, best known for his *Hystorie sacre gestas ab origine mundi* ("Acts of sacred history since the beginning of the world"), a paraphrase of the first eight books of the Old Testament in verse—some 14,000 lines of it! Anyone who could write that, it seems, could also write "a great book of organa from the Gradual and the Antiphoner to adorn the Divine Service." But this still does not constitute factual corroboration of Anonymus IV's terse report, and we ought to proceed with utmost caution when it comes to identifying the composers of the "Notre Dame school" with actual persons. For the unconfirmed account in Anonymus IV, written long after the fact, has all the earmarks of a "creation myth"—that is, a story that seeks to account for the existence of something wonderful (here, the matchless repertory of polyphonic music at Notre Dame) by supplying it with an origin and an originator. (Compare the way the Bible accounts for the existence of music by naming its inventor—Jubal, son of Lamech, "the forerunner of all who play the harp and flute"—in Genesis 4:21. Or the way Haydn has been named the "father of the symphony" or the string quartet, to say nothing of Saint Gregory and his dove.)

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## Notes:

(2) Eudes de Sully, *Contra facientes festum fatuorum*, in Jacques Paul Migne, ed., *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina*, CCXII (Paris, 1853), col. 70ff. See Janet Knapp, "Polyphony at Notre Dame of Paris," in R. Crocker and D. Hiley, eds., *The New Oxford History of Music*, Vol. II (2nd ed., Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 561–62.

(3) See C. Wright: "Leoninus: Poet and Musician," *JAMS* XXXIX (1986): 1–35.

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# MEASURED MUSIC

**Chapter:** CHAPTER 6 Notre Dame de Paris

**Source:** MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

**Author(s):** Richard Taruskin

Even if the poet Leoninus was Anonymus IV's (or rather, the Paris university lecturer's) Leoninus, that still would not guarantee the story's status as fact. A famous church poet would in fact be the ideal mythological creator of Notre Dame polyphony, for the great glory of that repertory in the eyes of its latter-day practitioners was the fact that it was *metrical*. That is to say, it managed to incorporate precise time-measurement into musical composition and notation, and it did so by adapting to musical purposes the principles of "quantitative" poetic meter.

This, too, shows the connection between musical practice at Notre Dame and the University of Paris curriculum. By the twelfth century, quantitative meter—defined by syllable-length rather than by "accent" or stress—was no longer used by contemporary poets, even when writing in Latin. But it was studied academically as part of the quadrivium, often from the famous textbook by St. Augustine suggestively titled *De musica* ("About music"—that is, the "music" or sonic organization of verse). The rhythmic practice at Notre Dame was based on similar principles of versification.

In a quantitative meter, one assumes at least two abstract durations—one "long," the other "short"—that are related to each other by some simple arithmetic proportion. The simplest proportion is a factor of two: a long equals two shorts. That already gives the gist of the earliest abstractly conceived musical meter, as practiced at Notre Dame. Two note-lengths were assumed: a *nota longa* (shortened in normal parlance to *longa*, or in English, a "long") and a *nota brevis* (shortened to *brevis*, or in English, a "breve"). A long was assumed to equal two breves, and the simplest way of turning their relationship into a metrical pattern (called an *ordo*, plural *ordines*) was simply to alternate them: LBLBLBLBLBL ...; in effect "tum-ta-tum-ta-tum-ta-tum-ta-tum-ta-tum ...," and so on. This was the basic *modus* (or "rhythmic mode," or "way of doing rhythm") in use at the time of the "Leonin" generation.

So the standard musical "foot" (*pes*) was like the classical "trochee": a long followed by a short. The difference between a *pes* (mere building-material) and an *ordo* (an actual "line" of musical poetry) was that the *ordo* ended with a "cadence" on the long, after which a pause (for the sake of scansion or simply for a breath) could take place. The basic pattern, then, was not LB but LBL, "tum-ta-tum." The shortest finished "line" of rhythmicized melody, consisting of one of these patterns, was called the "first perfect *ordo*." (Thus LBLBL, or "tum-ta-tum-ta-tum," was the "second perfect *ordo*," the third was LBLBLBL, or "tum-ta-tum-ta-tum-ta-tum," etc.)

The beautifully elegant thing about this abstractly conceived "modal" meter was that its notation did not require the invention of any new signs or shapes. The old "quadratic" chant neumes could be adapted directly to the new purpose. There was no special sign for a long or for a breve. There was no need for one, because the unit of notation was not the note but the *ordo*, the pattern. And the most efficient way of representing such a pattern of measured sounds was by a pattern of familiar neume shapes—that is, "ligatures," in which two, three, or more pitches were "bound together" in a single sign.

Generically, a ligature of two notes (whether ascending or descending) was called a *binaria*, one of three notes a *ternaria*, of four notes a *quaternaria*. An ordo was represented by a particular sequence of these shapes. The basic modus, described above as “trochaic” meter, was shown by an initial ternaria followed by any number of binariae, as in Ex. 6-1a. If one wanted the opposite metrical arrangement (“iambic” rather than trochaic meter), in which the basic foot is BL and the first perfect ordo is BLB, all one had to do was reverse the pattern of ligatures. Now there will be a series of binariae followed by a ternaria, as in Ex. 6-1b.



ex. 6-1a Trochaic pattern notated with “modal” ligatures



ex. 6-1b Iambic pattern notated with “modal” ligatures

Comparing Ex. 6-1a with Ex. 6-1b, one readily sees that the rhythmic significance of a given neume shape is not stable or immanent, but depends on the context. The ternaria in Ex. 6-1a is read LBL, while the ternaria in Ex. 6-1b has exactly the opposite meaning: BLB. The fact that the binariae in both are read BL should not be regarded as an inherent property of the sign, but as the coincidence or overlap of two different contexts. Later, as the result of a new notational refinement, shapes—both of single notes and of ligatures—did acquire inherent meanings. At that time the binaria did finally assume the “proper” meaning BL. But the invention of that refinement, like all inventions, had to await its necessity.

To observe Notre Dame polyphony in action, rhythm and all, we can begin with a two-part setting (*organum duplum*; or, as some theorists called it, *organum per se*) of the kind associated in Anonymus IV with the original “great book” of Leonin. The obvious choice for this purpose is the original two-part setting of the Gradual *Viderunt omnes*, used variously, as we have seen, at Christmas and at the Feast of the Circumcision (January 1), and eventually recomposed as a *quadruplum*.

The two-part *Viderunt* is the great book’s opening piece as preserved in all its extant sources, since they are all organized according to the church calendar, which begins with Advent, the lead-up to the Christmas season. Fig. 6-3a reproduces the original chant from the *Liber usualis*, until 1963 the official modern chant book of the Roman Catholic church. Fig. 6-3b shows the organum, as found in its most lavish source, a codex copied in Paris during the 1240s, now kept in the Medici library in Florence. (It is usually called the “Florence manuscript,” and is known to its friends as Flo or simply as F.) As befits its pride of place, the organum is decorated with an impressive “illuminated” capital *V* containing a three-part illustration or triptych. Reading from the top down, the three panels illustrate three successive phases of the Christmas story: the Adoration of the Magi, the Flight into Egypt, and the Slaughter of the Innocents. The tenor corresponds to the chant, and it is evident at a glance that the Notre Dame style gave new meaning to the word “melisma.” The first syllable of text (“Vi-”) carries an outpouring of more than forty notes of duplum. That’s “intrasyllabic melodic expansion” with a vengeance!

The image shows a page of musical notation for a Christmas gradual. It features a single melodic line on a five-line staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The tempo is marked 'Grad.' and the time signature is '5.'. The text is in Latin and is written below the notes. The text is: 'Viderunt omnes \* fines tē- rae sa- lu- tā- re Dē- i nōstri : jubi- lā- te Dē- o ó- mnis tē- ra. Y. Nō- tum fé- cit Dō- mi- nus sa- lu- tā- re sú- um : ante conspēctum génti- um re- ve- lā- vit \* justí- tí- am sú- am.' The text is written in a Gothic-style font with some ligatures and asterisks indicating accents or breath marks.

fig. 6-3a The Christmas gradual *Viderunt omnes* as it appears in *Liber usualis*, the standard modern chant book of the Catholic church (in use from 1903 to 1963).

Translation: "All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God; sing joyfully to God, all the earth. The Lord hath made known his salvation; he hath revealed his justice in the sight of the Gentiles" (Psalm 97).

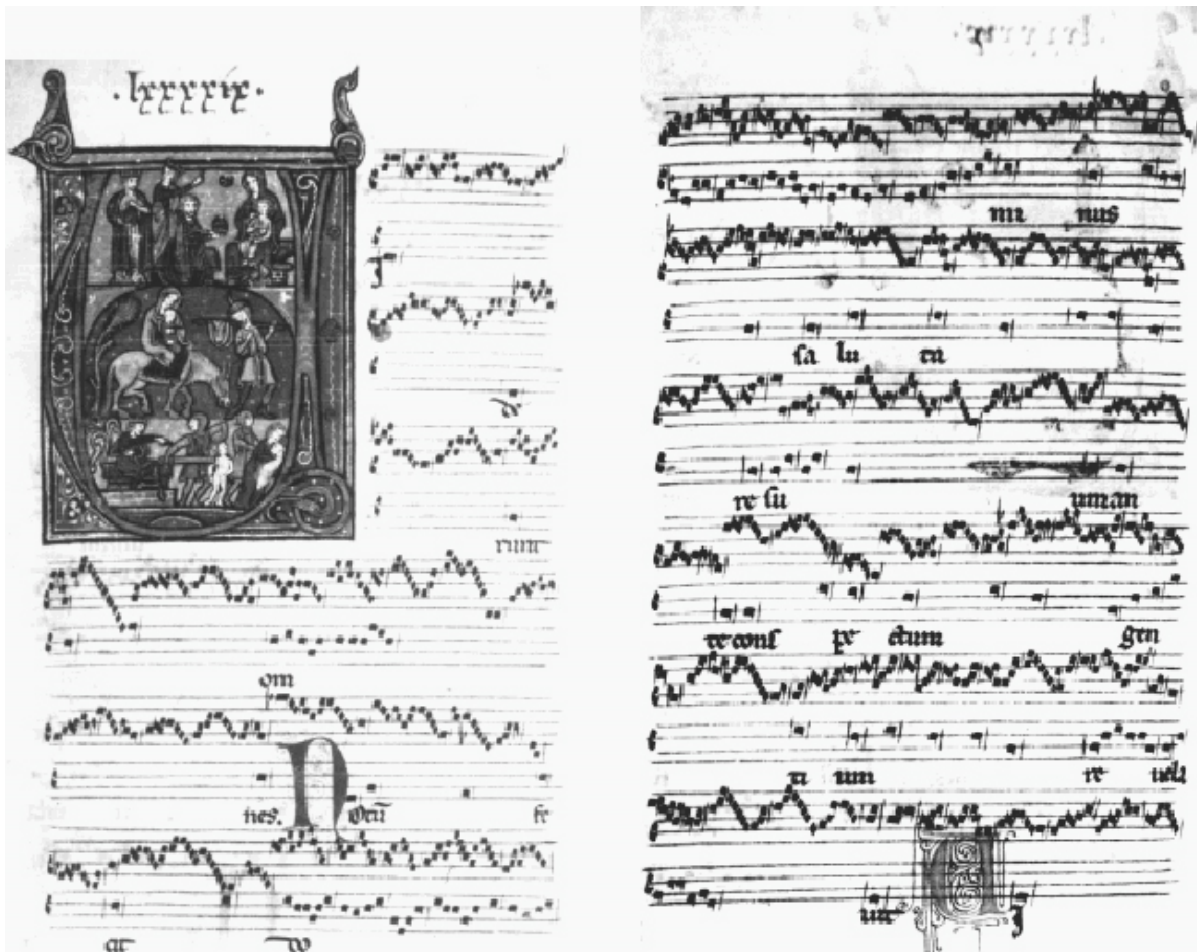


fig. 6-3b *Viderunt omnes* set as organum duplum, perhaps by Leoninus, as the first item in *Magnus liber de gradali et antefonario* (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut.29.I, fols. 99-99v; this source will be abbreviated *Flo* in subsequent references).

A second glance discloses something that may seem puzzling. The organum setting is drastically incomplete. After the opening pair of words, “Viderunt omnes,” the organum skips all the way to “Notum fecit,” the beginning of the verse. The verse is set almost complete but is missing just the final pair of words, “justitiam suam.” What happened to the rest? The asterisks in the chant text as given in the *Liber usualis* are our clue. They are the cues that show how the soloist and choir divide up the text in this responsorial chant. The opening respond, once past the *incipit* (the opening pair of words), belongs to the choir. The verse, excepting the final melisma, belongs to the soloist.

Putting that information together with the polyphonic setting reveals that the composer set as organum only the soloist’s portion of the chant. The two-voice polyphony thus represents a multiplied soloist, so to speak. The parts sung by the choir are not set but were supplied in performance from memory. Since the choristers did not need to learn their part from the book, the book does not contain their part. Materials were expensive and space was at the highest premium.

From all of this we learn that polyphony at Notre Dame was the art of virtuoso soloists—the cantor and his assistant, the succentor. (And that is why only responsorial chants—matins responsories, Graduals, Alleluias—were set as organum there.) The astonishingly expansive treatment of the *incipit* is something of a counterpart to the illuminated capital: a rich decoration.

Again comparing the chant in Fig. 6-3a with the organum in Fig. 6-3b, we notice that when the soloist’s portion of the chant has its own melismas (at “om-” of *omnes* and especially at “Do-” of *Dominus* in the

verse), the organum tenor notes are written in clumps, taking up far less space (=time). The primary motivation for hurrying the tenor along at such spots was undoubtedly practical: just imagine how long the music would have to last if every tenor note were held out like the first few! But what begins in necessity often ends in play—that is, in “art.” It was precisely these hurried-along sections of the organum, where the tenor is melismatic, that evoked from the composers what we would call the greatest artfulness or creativity. We will be tracing the repercussions of that creative response for the next three chapters.

The ratio of notes in the duplum to notes in the tenor in such sections becomes much closer; we are now obviously dealing with a type of discant. It is here, too, that we are most apt to find the clear organization of ligatures in the *duplum* voice into “modal” patterns, invoking the abstract metrical schemes described above.

From this we learn that in *organum duplum* or *organum per se*, the kind associated in Anonymus IV with the name of Leonin, measured rhythm is essentially an aspect of discant. In sections where the tenor is held long, called *organum purum*—“pure (or plain) organum”—to distinguish it from the discant, the rhythm is not organized in this way. The notes are sung “freely,” as in chant. But not entirely freely, of course. Guides to organum emphasize that notes forming consonances with the tenor were or could be sung longer than those forming dissonances. This habit, or rule, was probably what prompted the adoption of trochaic (long-short) patterns as the rhythmic norm: the note that in the added voice intervenes between two harmonic consonances is often dissonant (a “passing” or “neighbor” tone, as we now call such things), hence sung short.

The image shows a musical transcription of an organum setting. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system has a vocal line (treble clef) with a melisma over the word '-de-' and a tenor line (bass clef) with a long note. The second system has a vocal line (treble clef) with a melisma over the word 'runt' and a tenor line (bass clef) with a long note. The notation includes various ligatures and accidentals.

ex. 6-2 Transcription of *-derunt* from organum setting shown in Fig. 6-3b

In a style where “organal” and discant sections are so radically contrasted in rhythm, meter, and (consequently) tempo, it is not surprising that there is an intermediate texture as well, called *copula* (from the Latin for “something that binds,” like a string). In a copula, the duplum sings (usually) two phrases in regular modal patterns over sustained tenor notes. In *Viderunt omnes* this happens most clearly over “-de-” and “-runt.” In Ex. 6-2 you can see the two *copulae* in transcription, following the notation in a manuscript roughly contemporaneous with Flo but copied in England or Scotland for the Augustinian abbey of St. Andrews. (It is now the older of two Notre-Dame codices kept at the former ducal library in the German town of Wolfenbüttel, for which reason it is known to its adepts as  $W_1$ .) The modal ligatures are somewhat clearer in  $W_1$  than in Flo.

In discant sections or *clausulae*, where the tenor moves rapidly against the “modal” rhythms of the duplum, it too must be organized into notes of determinate length. The usual method was to have each note of the tenor equal a metrical foot in the duplum. Such a note would equal the sum of a long and a breve. So now we are dealing with three durations: a breve consisting of one *tempus* or time unit, a long consisting of two *tempora*, and a tenor note consisting of three *tempora*, which defines the length of a foot.

Different theorists called this longest value by different names. The varying nomenclature reveals a change in attitude. Some writers were content to call the three-tempora length a *longa ultra mensuram*, which simply means “a long beyond (normal) measure.” Others, however, called it a “perfect” (that is, completed) long, recognizing it as the primary unit, of which the shorter values were now both regarded as subdivisions. Theorists began to speak abstractly of “perfections”—time units measured out in advance, as it were, waiting to be filled. Such a concept corresponds in some ways to our modern idea of a “measure.” Ex. 6-3a is a transcription of the big discant *clausula* on the chant melisma “Do-” as shown in Fig. 6-3b, from the Florence manuscript. Note that the perfect longs in the tenor group the notes of the chant melisma irregularly: 6, 4, 4, 6, 4, 4, 4, 6, 5, etc. (The barring of the transcription follows this grouping, set off in the manuscript by vertical lines called *tractus*, which look like bars and eventually developed into bars, but which are actually rests at this point.) But also note that the opening pattern of 6+4+4, when repeated, corresponds to a melodic repetition in the tenor. The overall organization of the discant section is clearly being “modeled” on that of the chant melody. And yet the most conspicuous component of the *clausula*, the duplum melody, does not participate in the repetition. The cantor, in other words, sings a continuously evolving, quasi-improvisatory string of ordines over the highly organized tenor.

Ex. 6-3b shows the same “Do-” *clausula* as it is found in a different manuscript, also copied in Paris but about two or three decades later than Flo. (This is the later of the two now kept in Wolfenbüttel, known as W<sub>2</sub>.) Although the *Viderunt* organum as a whole is more or less the same in the two sources, this particular *clausula* is altogether different. It is a later insert, much more tightly organized into short ordines than its predecessor, and the tenor participates fully in the modal rhythm with a mode of its own that is based on groups of perfect and “duplex” or double-measure longs (the latter designated D).

These tenor notes are organized according to a pattern reminiscent of the classical “spondee.” The spondaic foot consists of two long syllables, and the tenor’s rhythmic mode organizes the spondaic foot into two alternating perfect ordines: the first consists of a single spondaic foot with a cadential long (LLL+rest); the other ties the initial foot into a duplex (DL+rest). This modal pattern is now allowed to override the melodic repetition in the original chant. The repeated phrase is still discernible, but its notes now have different metrical placements: as the rhythm becomes more abstract and independent as an organizing factor, pitch and rhythmic organization are somewhat dichotomized. The more abstract the organization, one might say, the more “artificial” (in the sense of “artful”) the resulting musical shape. This *clausula*, with its regular tenor patterns of four “perfections” each, can be conveniently transcribed into our modern compound-duple meter.

The same *clausula* is found in Flo as well, but in a special section that contains no fewer than ten *clausulae* on the “Do-” melisma: a set of spare parts, so to speak, for insertion into the organum at pleasure. Just about anything can happen in these playfully (“artfully”) imaginative discants. One of them (Ex. 6-3c) puts the tenor through a double cursus in strict LLL ordines while the duplum carols away ever more decoratively, its notes “broken up” into extra breves by a process called *fractio modi*, literally “breaking the rhythmic pattern.” (One of the easiest ways of doing this was to add a little stroke called a *plica* or “fold” to a neume. The stroke usually stood for a breve on the next higher or lower note in the scale, its duration “folded” into that of the long to which it is attached. In the transcription, *plicae* are indicated by little strokes through the note stems.) There is even an especially souped-up *clausula* (Ex. 6-3d) in which both duplum and tenor contain longs and breves in ordines similar to the “iamb” shown in Ex. 6-1b.

The image displays a musical score for a clausula, consisting of four systems of two staves each. The notation is in mensural style with a 6/8 time signature. The first system begins with the word 'Do' written below the first staff. The second system starts with a measure number '4'. The third system starts with a measure number '7'. The fourth system starts with a measure number '10' and ends with the word 'mi' written below the second staff. The score features various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. A flat sign (b) is present in several measures across the systems.

**ex. 6-3a “Do-” clausulae transcribed from Flo, f. 99’, with barring following the tractus in the tenor**

This musical score is transcribed in 6/8 meter. It consists of four systems of two staves each. The first system (measures 1-5) begins with a treble clef and a 'Do' label. The second system (measures 6-10) starts with a measure number '6'. The third system (measures 11-16) starts with a measure number '11'. The fourth system (measures 17-21) starts with a measure number '17' and ends with the text 'mi - nus etc.' in the right-hand staff. The notation includes various rhythmic values such as quarter, eighth, and sixteenth notes, as well as rests and accidentals.

ex. 6-3b "Do-" clausulae transcribed from W2, f. 63-63', in 6/8 meter

This musical score is transcribed in 6/8 meter. It consists of four systems of two staves each. The first system (measures 1-4) begins with a treble clef and a 'Do' label. The second system (measures 5-8) starts with a measure number '5'. The third system (measures 9-12) starts with a measure number '9'. The fourth system (measures 13-16) starts with a measure number '13'. The notation includes various rhythmic values such as quarter, eighth, and sixteenth notes, as well as rests and accidentals.



17

21

etc.

ex. 6-3c "Do-" clausulae transcribed from Flo, f. 150' (with double cursus)

12

Do

5

(-mi)

ex. 6-3d "Do-" clausulae transcribed from Flo, f. 149' (both parts in iambic patterns)

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Magnus liber

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# WHYS AND WHEREFORES

**Chapter:** CHAPTER 6 Notre Dame de Paris

**Source:** MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

**Author(s):** Richard Taruskin

There are large sections devoted to spare parts like these, sometimes called “substitute clausulas” or “ersatz clausulas,” in all four major Notre Dame codices. (In addition to *Flo*, *W*<sub>1</sub>, and *W*<sub>2</sub>, there is a slightly smaller one called *Ma*, roughly contemporaneous with *W*<sub>2</sub>, copied in Spain for the cathedral at Toledo, and now kept at the National Library in Madrid.) They raise tantalizing questions about the nature of this music, its transmission, and its history.

Every piece in the so-called *Magnus Liber*—the “great book” attributed to Leonin by Anonymus IV—exists, as we have observed in the case of *Viderunt omnes*, in significantly different versions in its various sources, and since all the extant written sources were copied at least two or three generations, and in some cases as much as a century, after the purported time of Leonin, it is impossible to determine what the original form of any of these pieces was. And every piece in the *Magnus Liber* is equipped with a multitude of interchangeable parts like the clausulae we have observed on “Do-.” Besides the ones on “Do-,” the Notre Dame codices contain interchangeable *Viderunt* clausulas on the tenor fragments “om-” (from *omnes*), “su-” (from *suum*) in the verse, and even on “conspectum gentium” from the verse, which is not a melisma.

One can only conclude that the identity of a “piece of music” was a far more fluid concept for the Notre Dame cantors than it is for us. An organum as actually performed was essentially a patchwork created more or less on the spot, or after a brief consultation, from the many available parts in the manuscripts we have (and who knows how many others that were never entered in those lucky survivors or—now here’s a thought—that were never written down at all).

Even if we limit the choice to what is written and what is extant, it is nevertheless hard to imagine the Notre Dame cantors furiously leafing forward and back through their books during the service to find the clausulas they wished to perform on a given day. And as we have already observed about the earliest chant books, the Notre Dame codices, while “immense” (as noted above) in terms of their total contents, were tiny in actual physical dimensions. The actual written area of a page from *W*<sub>1</sub> measures approximately 5 1/2 × 2 1/2 inches, while *Flo*, the largest, measures approximately 6 1/4 by 4. A musicologist in her study, working at leisure, has to squint at *W*<sub>1</sub> to make its bitsy flyspecks out; one can hardly assume that such a book could have been used in the act of performing. The assumption has to be, rather, that the Notre Dame cantors, and anyone else who sang their music in the dark confines of a medieval church, performed from memory.

The question of memory once again opens out quickly onto a much larger, more critical terrain. There are absolutely no written sources of Notre Dame polyphony from the period from the 1170s to the 1190s, when Anonymus IV’s Leonin supposedly lived and worked (or, for that matter, when Professor Wright’s Leonius actually lived and worked). All the extant sources postdate the lifetime of Anonymus IV’s Perotin as well, even if we grant Perotin the longest conceivable life span (say, to the time of Philip the Chancellor’s death in 1236). The sources were all written between the 1240s and the 1280s, and the author of Anonymus IV, as well as all the other theorists of “modal rhythm” and its notation, lived and worked around the same time.

A strong suspicion arises from these circumstances that the organa dupla of the so-called Magnus Liber were not part of a *liber* at all during their period of greatest use, but were created, sung, and transmitted from singer to singer within what was, yes, still predominantly an oral culture. Far from adding to the mystery of this music, however, the assumption of an oral tradition actually suggests the best answer to the riddle of how Notre Dame polyphony came to be the epoch-making thing it was—namely, the first “measured music” in the West.

Now it is time to pose explicitly the questions that have been stalking our discussion of modal rhythm from the beginning: What was its purpose? What did it accomplish? Often it is claimed that the Notre Dame composers, whoever they were, finally managed to “solve” a longstanding “problem,” namely that of notating rhythm precisely, thereby making it possible for precisely measured music to be composed. But that puts the cart before the horse, in fact several carts before several horses.

If we know one thing for certain from the history of medieval music to the point where we have traced it, it is that notation follows rather than precedes practice. In the case of Gregorian chant, it followed by a matter of centuries, not to say millennia. In the case of chant-based polyphony it also followed, perhaps by centuries, as we know from the implicit testimony of the *Scolica enchiridis*. So if the theorists of the thirteenth century finally took up and “solved” the problem of notating a metrically organized melismatic polyphony, our assumption should be that they were finding a notation for something that was already well established in oral practice.

Furthermore, to say that rhythmic notation was a “problem” to be solved before there could be rhythmic composition is to assume that without such notation music was perceived as lacking something. We easily imagine such an absence as a lack, because the absence of a method for notating precise rhythms would be a crippling lack for making our music. To assume that the composers of twelfth-century Paris felt such a lack is to assume that they wanted to make our music, too. Only the assumption that it is up to “them” to become “us”—in other words, the ethnocentric assumption—can sanction the notion that discovering modal rhythm was a progressive evolutionary step (from “themness” to “usness”).

So, if it was not the solution to an obvious notational problem, what was the motivation for developing the patterning techniques collectively known as modal rhythm? The best theory so far, recently advanced by the medievalist Anna Maria Busse Berger, is that modeling musical rhythm on classical versification served the same purpose that versification itself originally served—namely, a mnemonic (or more precisely, a “mnemotechnic”) purpose.<sup>4</sup> It enhanced memory skills, an essential function in an oral culture.

Rhythm has always been an imprinting device, and remains one to this day. That is why so many rules and aphorisms are cast as jingles. (*Cross at the green, /Not in between; or Red sky at morning: /Sailor, take warning!; or Early to bed and early to rise /Makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.*) It is why no medieval treatise on anything from shipbuilding to organum-singing was without rhyming rules. It is why the poet Leonius, who may or may not have been Leonin, gave as his reason for writing his 14,000 lines of biblical verse that it helped “the mind, which, delighted by the brevity of the poetry and by the song, may hold it more firmly.”<sup>5</sup>

Here is a catchy Latin rhyme, attributed to Guido of Arezzo, that every literate or academic musician from the eleventh to the fifteenth century learned at the beginning of his training since is a popularization of one of Boethius’s main ideas:

**Musicorum et cantorum magna est distancia.**

**Isti dicunt, illi sciunt, quae componit Musica.**

**Nam qui facit, quod non sapit, diffinitur bestia.** It’s a long way from a musician to a singer. The one knows what music is made of, the other just talks about it. And he who performs what he knows nothing about is considered an animal.

So “Guido well puts it in his *Micrologus*,” wrote John of Afflighem.<sup>6</sup> But the rhyme is not found in the *Micrologus* at all; and John surely heard it, and memorized it, years before he ever read it, which is why he forgot where he actually came across it. It is found in Guido’s *Regulae rhythmicae*, a brief digest of Guido’s teachings on the gamut, intervals, staff notation, modes, and finals, all cast for easy retention (as the title, “Rhyming Rules,” already indicates) in verse.

And that is why the composers of Notre Dame, who were creating a music of unheard-of melismatic profusion, found it advantageous to cast their enormously long melodies in an untexted musical counterpart to verse. In this form it evidently went from mouth to mouth for a generation or two before a notation for it was invented. And when the notation for it was invented, it was not really for it, but for something else. Again, and even more spectacularly, what was prompted by practical need became the stimulus for luxuriant artistic play.

Here is where the generation of Anonymus IV’s “Perotin the Great” comes in. As you may recall, the treatise credits the great discantor with having *abbreviavit* the Magnus Liber. The translation has been put off until now because the word has an ambiguous range of meaning in Latin. The closest English cognate, “abbreviated,” though followed by many writers, does not seem to fit the facts of the case, since so many “substitute clausulas” (like the one on “Do-” in Ex. 6-3c) so clearly lengthen rather than shorten the pieces into which they are inserted.

Another possible translation of *abbreviavit* is “edited.” This fits better, since the differing versions of the *organum duplum* repertory in the four Notre Dame sources obviously show the hand of a reviser—or likelier, of many revisers. And yet, to cite a case we have already seen, the presence of the same revised “Do-” clausula within the body of the organum in W<sub>2</sub> and in the section containing the “substitute clausulas” in Flo would seem to indicate that whoever revised the Magnus Liber did not have in mind the goals of a modern editor. That is, he (or they) aimed not at establishing an improved, corrected, or definitive text. The aim, rather, seems to have been just to make a wealth of interchangeable material available.

And so we are left with the third and most general possible translation of *abbreviavit*—simply, “written down.” This one not only fits but explains a great deal. If we assume that the “Perotin” generation finally wrote down the music of the “Leonin” generation (in the process devising a notational method that opened up a whole new world of musical possibilities that they were quick to exploit), then we can not only account for the gap between the twelfth-century repertory and its thirteenth-century sources, but also make sense of the fact that the theoretical descriptions of modal rhythm come as late as they do. As a fully elaborated *system* of metrics and notation, modal rhythm pertains not to the orally created and rhythmically transmitted music of the Leonin generation, but to the very intricate and stylized output of the Perotin generation, which is found in all its many sources in essentially one version, and which may have been the first musical style in the West that actually depended on notation for its composition.

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## Notes:

(4) See Anna Maria Busse Berger, “Mnemotechnics and Notre Dame Polyphony,” *Journal of Musicology* XIV (1996): 263–98.

(5) Wright, “Leoninus: Poet and Musician,” p. 19.

(6) John of Afflighem (a.k.a. John of Cotton), *De Musica*, trans. Warren Babb, in *Hucbald, Guido and John on Music*, ed. Claude Palisca (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978), p. 105.

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Organum

Pérotin

# ORGANUM CUM ALIO

**Chapter:** CHAPTER 6 Notre Dame de Paris

**Source:** MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

**Author(s):** Richard Taruskin

The major works of the Perotin generation differ from those of the previous generation in one fundamental respect. They are written for more than two parts—or, to make the point in most essential terms, they are written for more than one part against the Gregorian tenor. That is why contemporary theorists called their style *organum cum alio* (“organum with another [voice]”) to distinguish it from *organum per se* (“organum by itself”).

The presence of the added voice or voices changed everything. They moved at the rate of the duplum, not the tenor (so they were called the *triplum* and, when present, the *quadruplum*). Two or three parts moving at a similar rate are in effect in discant with one another, regardless of whether there is a long-held tenor note, and so they had to be notated throughout in strict modal rhythm (*modus rectus*, as it was called). Everything now had to move in countable perfections; there could be no spontaneous coordination in performance, the way there could be with a single cantor in the driver’s seat, ad-libbing “freely” and giving all necessary signals to his subordinates on the tenor line.

For an example of *organum cum alio* at its most luxuriant, we can examine the four-part setting (*organum quadruplum*), attributed to Perotin in Anonymus IV and requested by Bishop Eudes de Sully for performance at the Feast of the Circumcision, 1 January 1198 (we would say 1199, but the New Year was celebrated in those days on 1 March). This was the recognized jewel in the Notre Dame crown, the opening work both in Flo (where it faces the famous Boethian allegory we have already encountered in Fig. 3-2) and in W<sub>2</sub> (according to its table of contents; the pages containing it have unfortunately been lost). The setting of the incipit is shown in the original notation (from Flo) in Fig. 6-4; Ex. 6-4 is a transcription of the part corresponding to the opening syllable.

This composition moves throughout in an especially stately version of the trochaic meter we first observed in “Leonine” discant and copula. What makes it “stately” is the liberal admixture into the rhythms of the upper parts of perfect and duplex longs. The basic modal pattern, established by a repeated phrase in the quadruplum, consists of a ternaria plus a binaria, establishing tum-ta-tum-ta-tum (“second perfect ordo”), but followed by a *nota simplex*, a freestanding note. That freestanding note, a long (since it follows a long), forces the preceding note to be perfect. (It is itself “imperfected” by the tractus, the breath mark, which takes the time of a breve and separates one ordo from the next.)

The first note in the duplum, triplum, and quadruplum alike is a duplex, indicated by the literal elongation of the note’s oblong shape. The chord thus created (and no doubt held extra long for dramatic effect) is a composite of all the *symphoniae*. There is an octave between the tenor and the triplum, a fifth between the tenor and the duplum (or the quadruplum), a fourth between the duplum and the triplum, and a prime or unison between the duplum and the quadruplum. This harmony (a sort of Pythagorean summary) would be the normative consonance for polyphony in three or more parts until the sixteenth century. Not every piece made such a spectacular opening display of it as this one, but every piece had to end with it. From its original signification—harmoniousness, fitting-in, “*e pluribus unum*”—it came to signify completion, consummation, achievement.

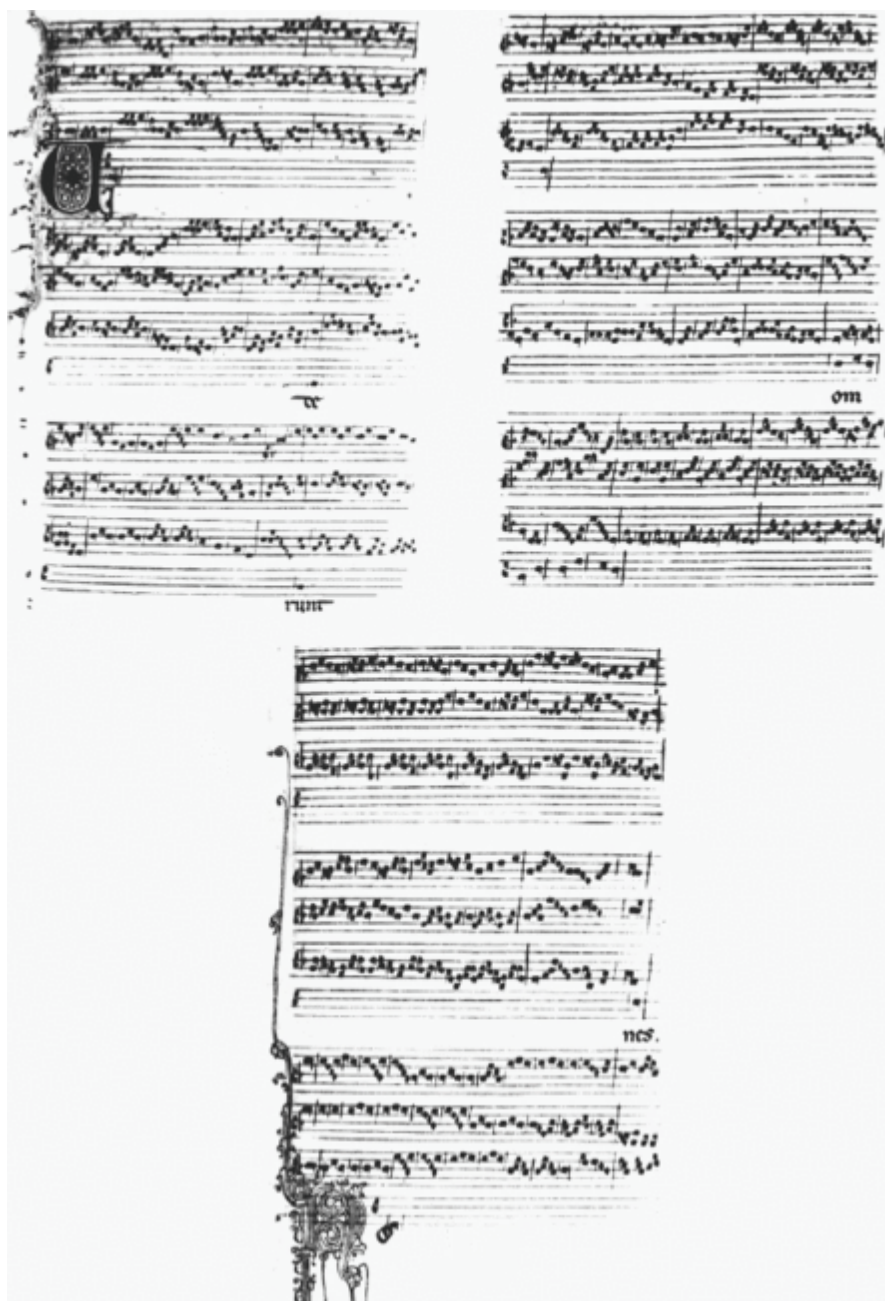


fig. 6-4 Opening of *Viderunt omnes*, set as organum quadruplum by Perotinus for performance in 1198 (Flo, fols. 1–2).

Notice now how at the outset every successive ordo re-achieves that normative perfect consonance. And notice, too, how in every ordo the perfect long preceding the final consonance makes a calculated maximum dissonance (*asymphonia*), both with respect to the tenor and within the upper parts themselves. In the first ordo the next-to-last note (penult) in the quadruplum is D, a major sixth from the tenor (the least consonant of the imperfect consonances as then classified). The penult in the triplum is E, a major seventh from the tenor and a major second from the quadruplum; its dissonance speaks for itself. The duplum's penult is B-flat, a tritone from the triplum's E. If isolated from its context and banged out at the keyboard, the chord would startle even a twenty-first-century ear.



Musical score system 1, featuring four staves. The first three staves are treble clefs with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The fourth staff is a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The notation includes a key signature change to one flat, a common time signature, and various rhythmic values. The first measure of the first three staves contains a whole note chord with a fermata, labeled 'VI -'. The first measure of the fourth staff contains a whole note chord, also labeled 'VI -'. The second and third measures of all staves contain rhythmic patterns of eighth and sixteenth notes.



Musical score system 2, featuring four staves. The notation continues with rhythmic patterns of eighth and sixteenth notes across all staves. The fourth staff continues with a bass line.



Musical score system 3, featuring four staves. The notation continues with rhythmic patterns of eighth and sixteenth notes. A first ending bracket labeled '1' is placed over the first measure of the first staff. The fourth staff continues with a bass line.



ex. 6-4 *Viderunt omnes a 4* (attributed to Perotin), first syllable of setting

In context, of course, the chord is heard as implying its resolution to the normative consonance. Note that in making the resolution, every voice proceeds by step. The dissonant second between the triplum and quadruplum arises not out of some “non-harmonic” medieval way of hearing (as we are sometimes tempted to imagine it), but out of the implied voice-leading rule that dissonance proceeds to consonance by step. We have, in short, the beginnings of a cadential practice here, in which the motions of the individual parts are subordinated to an overall harmonic function (maximum dissonance resolving to maximum consonance). This is the beginning of harmonic tonality (or, if you prefer, of tonal harmony). It exemplifies textural integration, control, and planning.

To see textural integration, control, and planning from another perspective, compare the triplum in the first ordo with the duplum in the second ordo, the triplum in the third ordo, the duplum in the fourth ordo, the triplum in the sixth, and finally the quadruplum in the seventh. Now compare the triplum in the second ordo with the duplum in the third, the triplum in the fourth, and the quadruplum in the fifth and sixth. Elaborate voice exchanges of this kind, the most conspicuous of integrative devices, can be traced throughout the piece.

For yet another, look at the third system of the first manuscript page in Fig. 6-4, halfway through the syllable “-DE-” (in “Viderunt”) in the tenor. Now the motion has slowed down to an alternation between “spondaic” perfect longs and the normative trochees. The figure C–D–C in longs, and its trochaic variant C–D–E–D–C, are tossed back and forth between the duplum and trinlum. Their exchanges are now dovetailed so that the

first note in one voice coincides with the third note in the other. In between, a note in one voice coincides with a rest in the other. This kind of exchange between notes and rests (done slowly here, but sometimes done with lightning speed, as we shall see) was a specialty of *organum cum alio* and its derivative genres. For the singers this kind of controlled textural fragmentation was great fun, as we can tell by the name they gave it: *hoquetus*—“hocket” in English—from the Latin for “hiccup,” no doubt because of the way the rests interrupt the melodic lines like spasms. An even more radically fragmented “hocket” texture comes over the first tenor note of “-RUNT.”

The spirit of creative exuberance, of delight in construction, so evident in this and every other Notre Dame quadruplum led inevitably to an expansion of the repertory of rhythmic “modal” figures. The obvious choice for a new metric foot to apply to music was the dactyl, the most widely cultivated foot for contemporary Latin poetry. (It was the foot adopted by the poet Leonius, for example, in his *Hystorie sacre gestas*.)

A dactylic foot consists of a long and two shorts. In contrast to the trochee (LB), which contains three tempora (2+1), the normal dactyl (LBB) contains four (2+1+1), which would make it longer than a “perfection.” To accommodate the dactylic foot to what had become the *de facto* ternary meter of modal rhythm, it was stretched out over two perfections, becoming inherently a *modus ultra mensuram*, a “mode beyond (normal) measure.” The first perfection was entirely occupied by the long, now perfect by definition. The remaining perfection was divided unequally between the two breves, one of them becoming a so-called *brevis altera* (“altered” or “alternate” breve) containing two tempora. Thus the six tempora occupied by the LBB of the dactylic foot was apportioned 3+2+1 or 3+1+2, with the latter much more frequently described (or prescribed, which amounts to the same thing) by mid-thirteenth century theorists, and that is the pattern commonly employed in modern transcriptions, though the other is not by any means precluded.

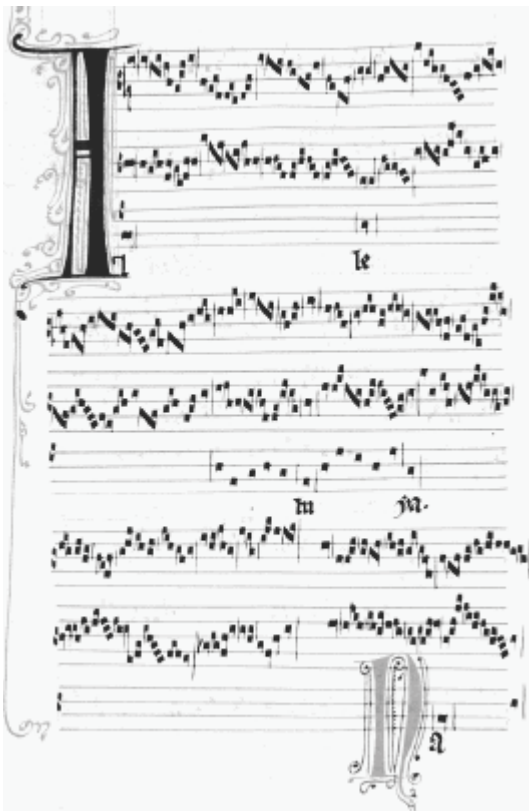


fig. 6-5 Opening of *Alleluia Nativitas*, set as organum triplum by Perotinus (W1, f. 16).

One of the most widely circulated dactylic pieces is the *Alleluia Nativitas*, an *organum triplum* for the Mass of the Feast of Mary’s Nativity (an especially important feast at “Our Lady’s” own church, Notre Dame)

attributed to Perotin in Anonymus IV. Its first page, as given in W<sub>1</sub>, is shown in Fig. 6-5; Ex. 6-5 is a transcription of three significant excerpts, beginning with the word “Alleluya” (Ex. 6-5a).

The image displays a musical score for three excerpts of a piece, likely 'Alleluya'. The score is organized into three systems, each with three staves. The first system shows the beginning of the piece with the word 'AL' written below the first two staves. The second system shows the word 'LE' written below the first two staves. The third system shows the word 'LE' written below the first two staves. The notation includes various rhythmic values and melodic lines across the staves.



Clausula no. 1



ex. 6-5a *Alleluia Nativitas* (attributed to Perotin), mm. 1-63

Clausula no. 5

The image displays a musical score for 'Clausula no. 5'. It consists of seven systems of staves. The first system includes three vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor) and three organum parts (Organum I, Organum II, Organum III). The lyrics 'Ex se - - mi - - ne' are written under the vocal staves. The organum parts are written in mensural notation on four-line staves. The score is divided into two main sections by a double bar line. The first section contains the first three systems, and the second section contains the remaining four systems. The organum parts are written in mensural notation, with some parts ending in a double bar line and a repeat sign.

ex. 6-5b *Alleluia Nativitas*, mm. 72-104

Clausula no. 7

lu -

lu -

lu -

da,

da,

da,

Cl- ra ex stir - - pe Da -

vid.

ex. 6-5c *Alleluia Nativitas*, mm. 168-89

The basic ligature pattern for this rhythmic mode consists of a *nota simplex*, representing the first perfect long, followed by a series of ternariae. This pattern is very clearly set out at the beginning of the *Alleluia Nativitas*, but gives way at various points, particularly near the ends of sections, to the more fluid trochaic pattern. (Look, for example, at “-YA,” the concluding portion in Fig. 6-4.) Remarkable in this composition is the sheer number of rhythmically active clausulae in the verse. There are half a dozen of them, including one (on *Ex semine*) that is of great historical significance for a reason we will discover in the next chapter (Ex. 6-5b). The last clausula, on “IU-” (Ex. 6-5c), is also of special interest for the way the 12-note tenor is put through a second cursus in diminution: irregular ordines of duplex and perfect longs give way to an uninterrupted and self-evidently climactic run of perfect longs that end the composition on a note of maximum excitement.

But while this remarkable run ends the composition, very narrowly defined, it does not end the Alleluia, or even the verse. The chorus must sing its brief response (including the melisma on the name of “David” that recapitulates the melody of the jubilus, the enormous melisma at the end of the choral repetition of the word “Alleluia”; it, too, will figure again in a later chapter). And then the whole Alleluia with jubilus must be repeated, either with polyphony (as some of the sources direct) or without. A polyphonically outfitted liturgical chant as sung at Notre Dame, though far more elaborately composed than any other polyphonic music of its time, is still not a composition in our modern sense. It is not solely the product of an author’s shaping hand but the complex response to a variety of ceremonial and artistic demands, some seemingly in mutual contradiction.

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Johannes de Garlandia

Rhythmic modes

# THEORY OR PRACTICE?

**Chapter:** CHAPTER 6 Notre Dame de Paris

**Source:** MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

**Author(s):** Richard Taruskin

The most authoritative source for our knowledge of the epochal rhythmic practices of the Notre Dame School is the treatise *De mensurabili musica*, written around 1240 by Johannes de Garlandia. He was a lecturer (*magister*) at the University of Paris, possibly the very one from whom the author of Anonymus IV learned what he passed on to us. His name derives from his university affiliation: the *clois de Garlande* was a colony on the left bank of the Seine where many members of the university arts faculty made their homes.

*De mensurabili musica* (“On measured music”) was one of two textbooks Johannes wrote for the university music curriculum to supplement the venerable treatise of Boethius. (The other one was called *De plana musica*, “On plainchant.”) Its method of organization and instruction vividly exemplifies the approach known as “scholasticism” (because it was practiced by *scholastici*, “schoolmen”). This approach was thought of as descending not from Plato, the “idea man,” but from Aristotle, the great observer of things as they are. It purported to be empirical (that is, based on observation) and descriptive rather than speculative.

The first task in any scholastic description was analysis and classification, and the establishment of clear conceptual relations between larger divisions (*genera*) and smaller divisions (*species*), proceeding, as we still say, from the “general” to the “specific.” Thus Johannes begins by dividing the consonances (a genus) into three classes (*species*): perfect (prime and octave), intermediate (fourth and fifth), and imperfect (thirds). He also makes a tripartite division of dissonances, with the “perfect” ones being the most dissonant, etc. He then proceeds to a similarly tripartite division of measured music into three species: organum, copula, and discant. And finally, he divides discant into six, or twice-three, “manners” (*maneries*) or rhythmic modes.

Garlandia’s classification was extremely influential in its time, as we can tell by how many other theorists copied it. And it has been equally influential in our time, as we can tell by the way modern musicology has adopted the Garlandian classification scheme and terminology. Our own discussion has accepted Garlandia’s classification of polyphonic genres, including the somewhat slippery category of copula “between discant and organum,” as Garlandia defined it long after the fact. Up to now, however, we have avoided the classic and ubiquitous Garlandian classification of the rhythmic modes.

The reason is that, like many scholastic classification schemes, Garlandia’s discussion of the rhythmic modes is not really descriptive—not entirely, at any rate. Its descriptive content has clearly been supplemented by a notional component so that the resulting system will satisfy *a priori* (that is, preconceived) standards of completeness and, above all, of symmetry.

Garlandia’s idea of completeness was evidently formed not on the basis of observed contemporary musical practice but on a list of meters taken over from another authoritative scholastic classification, a grammar textbook called *Doctrinale* (“Book of teachings”), written more than a generation earlier (in 1199) by another famous schoolman, Alexandre de Villedieu (or Villa-Dei). In this textbook, six classical poetic meters are defined in terms of long and short syllables, which are defined in exactly the same terms employed by contemporary musicians when speaking of note values. Villedieu even refers to singing the syllables, perhaps (though not necessarily) in recognition of the analogous musical meters of Notre Dame polyphony: “the syllable which is short holds one beat (*tempus*) in which it is sung you must double that length for the



long.”<sup>7</sup> In terms of our accustomed symbols for longs (L) and breves (B), Villedieu’s enumeration is as follows: dactyl (LBB), spondee (LL), trochee (LB), anapest (BBL), iamb (BL), and tribrach (BBB).

Garlandia took this list over directly and asserted that there were six rhythmic modes in use in Notre Dame polyphony. Then he went Villedieu one better by arranging the modes in three symmetrical pairs. Modes 1 and 2, according to Garlandia, were the trochee (LB) and its reverse, the iamb (BL). Modes 3 and 4 were the dactyl (LBB) and its reverse, the anapest (BBL). Modes 5 and 6 were the spondee (LL), confined to longs, and its conceptual opposite the tribrach (BBB), confined to breves.

At least one of these modes, the fourth, was pure fiction, included in deference to authority and for the sake of a symmetry that would justify the inclusion of the dactyl. There is not a single practical source that contains music in Garlandia’s fourth mode. It exists only in his didactic example of it, and the ones contrived by subsequent theorists on the basis of his authority. And yet in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries—and again in the nineteenth and twentieth—countless students have memorized its pattern and its notation. (The latter is easy enough to guess, being the exact reverse of the dactyl or third mode: a series of ternariae followed by a *nota simplex*.)

Garlandia’s sixth mode, too, is more or less notional, included on Villedieu’s authority as a complement or balance to the fifth, which of course has a long history in practice. Brief passages in uniform breves are found in many compositions of the “Notre Dame school.” They can be just as easily notated (with plicas, for example) without any special mode. There is one famous passage in an Alleluia attributed in Anonymus IV to Perotin that has a few ordines ostensibly in Garlandia’s sixth mode and using the notation he assigns to it. But the passage could as easily have been written in “fractured” trochees (first mode), and might very well have actually been written that way in its earliest sources.

That would mean that Garlandia’s treatise, which purported to describe a musical practice, ended up prescribing one instead. The same possibility, that the theorist influenced the composition style he ostensibly reported involves the second mode (iambic) as counterpart to the ubiquitous first. We have seen an example of the second mode in practice, in one of the spare “DO-” clausulas from the Florence manuscript (Ex. 6-3d). But that manuscript was compiled after Garlandia’s treatise had become a standard text, and there is little or no evidence for the use of Garlandia’s second mode at any earlier time.

What we seem to have in Garlandia, then, is a summary of an actual rhythmic practice that was more or less confined to three patterns (trochaic, dactylic, and spondaic), corresponding to Garlandia’s odd-numbered modes. And then there is a supplementary, even-numbered, trio (iambic, anapestic, tribrachic) that were there for the sake of the theory—but that were later incorporated to some extent into practice under the influence of the theory. It is an excellent paradigm or instructive model for considering the complex relationship that usually obtains between theory and practice.

Theory is almost never pure description. It is usually a representation not of the world the theorist sees but of a more orderly, more easily described world the theorist would like to see. A persuasive theory, particularly one of suggestible human behavior or practice, can often to some extent reshape the world to conform, for better or worse, to the utopian image. But an attractive theory uncritically accepted can also blind the believer to existing conditions, and lessen rather than enhance comprehension. Uncritical acceptance of Garlandia’s six-mode scheme can obscure the actual history of musical practice at Notre Dame, and that is why it should be regarded as a secondary rather than a primary source of knowledge.

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## Notes:

(7) Alexander de Villa-Dei, *Doctrinale* (1199), trans. Anna Maria Busse Berger in “Mnemotechnics and Notre Dame Polyphony,” p. 279.

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Notre Dame school

Conductus

Rhythmic modes

# CONDUCTUS AT NOTRE DAME

**Chapter:** CHAPTER 6 Notre Dame de Paris

**Source:** MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

**Author(s):** Richard Taruskin

The remaining polyphonic genre practiced at Notre Dame was the conductus. Its status there was far more modest than at previous monastic polyphonic centers, but well over a hundred conductus nevertheless survive, in two, three, and four voices.

Conductus was exceptional among Notre Dame genres in that it was not based on a preexisting chant, but was a setting of a contemporary poem, potentially composed from scratch. Contemporary theorists described the method of composing a conductus in terms as close as possible to those governing discant composition, however. Franco of Cologne, with whom we will become better acquainted in the next chapter, wrote that anyone wishing to compose a conductus should first “invent as beautiful a melody as he can,” and then “use it as a tenor for writing the rest.”<sup>8</sup> Sometimes, indeed, conductus are found in both monophonic and polyphonic versions; and when this is the case, the melody that exists alone is almost always the tenor in the polyphonic variant, confirming Franco’s prescription. But the texture of a conductus, while basically homorhythmic (note-against-note) can also be well enough integrated by means of hockets and voice exchanges to suggest that not all composers relied on the “write-your-own-cantus-firmus” method.

There was another way in which the conductus was an exceptional genre. It was the only type of polyphonic composition that was syllabically texted. In contemporary parlance it was *musica cum littera* (“music with letters,” i.e., words). And that meant it had to be notated in *notae simplices* rather than in ligatures, because ligatures functioned in Notre Dame notation just as they did in plainchant. They were used only to carry melismas, which means music without text (*musica sine littera*). There was no standard method for applying text to notation in ligatures.

The conductus thus exposed the chief shortcoming of the system or practice of “modal” rhythm. The four-voice Christmas conductus *Vetus abit littera* from the Florence manuscript (Fig. 6-6) shows how, and also shows a possible attempt to remedy the situation. (It also has a very interesting, quasi-modulatory tonal shape, but we’ll let that aspect of the piece speak for itself.)

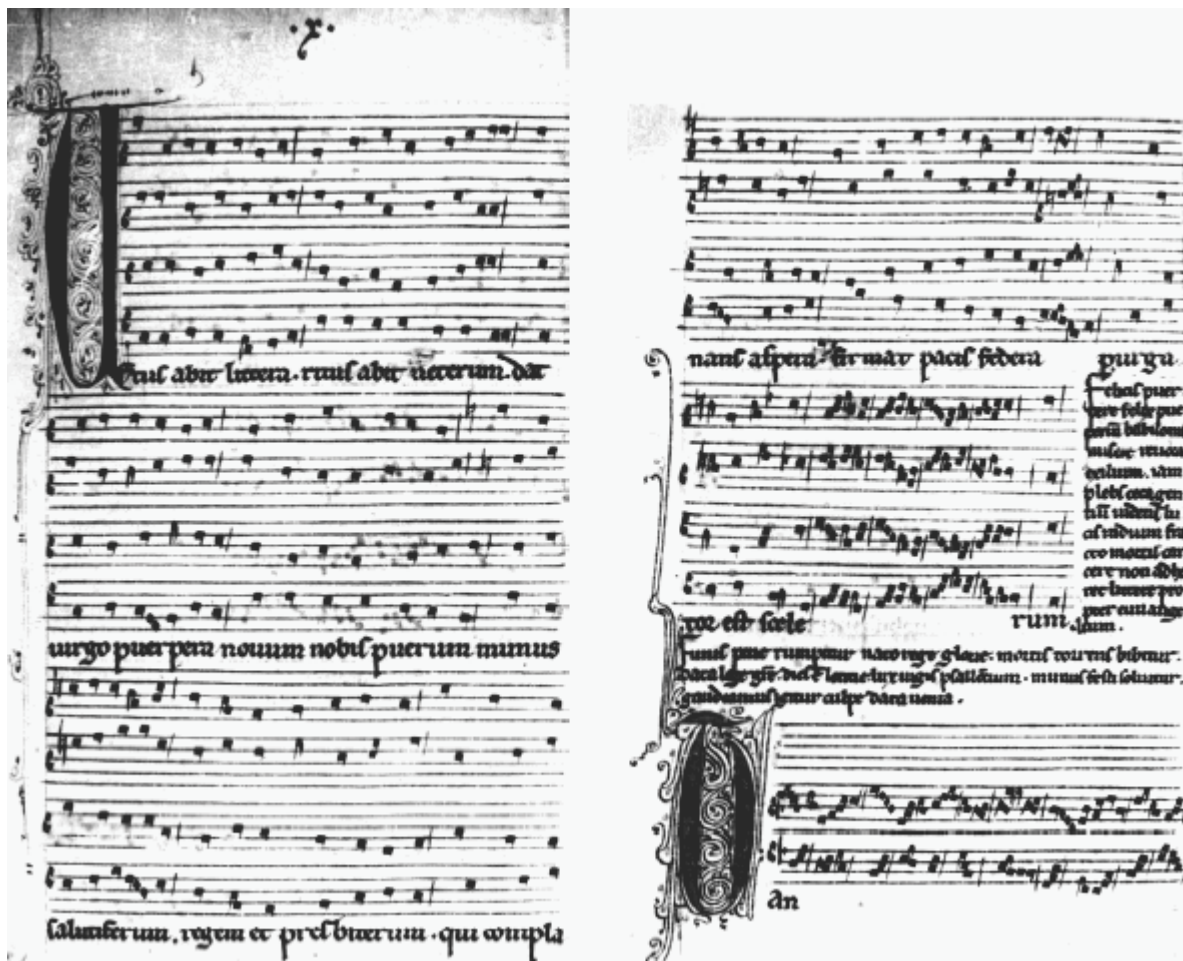


fig. 6-6 *Vetus abit littera*, four-part conductus attributed by some writers to Perotinus (*Flo*, fols. 10–10v).

Until the penultimate syllable of text, the notation consists almost entirely of single notes. If read strictly according to the rules of modal rhythm, they are all perfect longs, casting the setting in a very heavy spondaic meter throughout. But that penultimate syllable has a sizable melisma in all voices. A melisma at the tail end is a standard feature in Notre Dame conductus settings, common enough to have a generic name. It is called the *cauda*, which literally means the tail, as in tail end. (The term was re-introduced into musical terminology centuries later, when Latin had been replaced by Italian as musical *lingua franca*: we all know what a coda is and can see how it relates conceptually to the medieval *cauda*.)

Ve-tus a - bit lit - te-ra Ri-tus a - bit ve - te-rum, Dat vir-go pu - er - pe-ra

No-vum no - bis pu - e-rum, Nu-mis sa - lu-ti - fe - rum, Re-gem et pres-by - te - rum,

Qui com-pla-nans a - spe-ra Fir-mat pa-cis foe-de-ra Pur - ga-tor - et soc-le-rum.

(cauda)

ex. 6-6a *Vetus abijt littera*, transcribed in first mode

Being a melisma, the cauda is written in ligatures. As a second glance at them will show, the ligatures in question could hardly form a clearer trochaic (“first mode”) pattern. No question, then, that the cauda is supposed to go tum-ta-tum-ta-tum-ta-tum in good “modal” fashion. And so the question arises: Is the “first mode” cauda supposed to contrast with the “fifth mode” of the rest of the piece? Or, perhaps, is the cauda there not simply for the sake of embellishment but also to convey the otherwise un conveyable information that the whole piece is to be sung in “first mode”? Ex. 6-6a is a transcription of the whole piece in “first mode,” which turns the accentual pattern of the entire poem quite convincingly into a quantitative musical meter. But there is no authority to back that decision up; it is simply a preference. To give the other side its due, Ex. 6-6b shows another hypothetical transcription cast in fifth mode up to the cauda.

One cannot solve the rhythmic riddle this piece poses on the basis of the notation itself, because the notation has to be as it is regardless of the answer. But at least it is clear that the “fifth mode” or spondaic appearance of the syllabic notation does not tell us what the composer’s intention may have been with respect to rhythm. It is a default notation, and therefore an ambiguous one.

ex. 6-6b *Vetus abit littera*, transcribed in fifth mode

(cf. Fig. 6-7b and Ex. 6-8)

ful - mi - nan

te.

ex. 6-7 Final cauda from *Dic, Christi veritas* (text by Philip the Chancellor), transcribed from Flo, f. 204

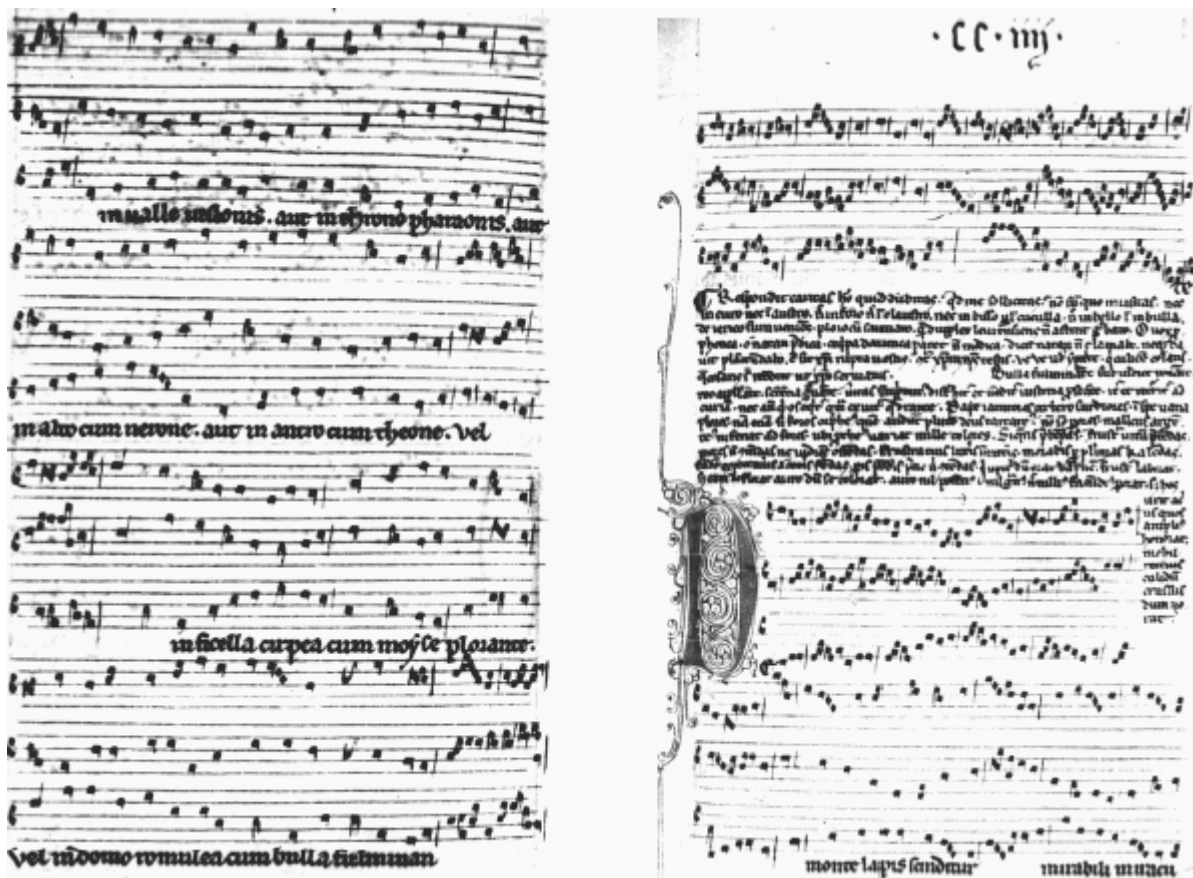


fig. 6-7a Last line of *Dic, Christi veritas*, beginning at bottom left and continuing at top right; from Flo, fol. 203v–204 (cf. final tenor melisma in Ex. 6-7).

Consider another example. *Dic, Christi veritas* (“Say, O truth of Christ”), an angry screed against clerical hypocrisy, was one of the most famous poems by Philip the Chancellor, the old rector of the University of Paris. As a conductus it is found in the *Carmina burana* manuscript in a monophonic version, and in all the main Notre Dame sources in an elaborate three-voice setting. The tenor in this version is clearly related to the monophonic *Carmina burana* tune, but like the other voices it is decorated with lots of *caudae*, with an especially lavish one at the end. The caudae, as usual, are in a clearly notated first mode. The meter of the verse, however, is not straightforwardly trochaic. The final cauda is given in Ex. 6-7.

The last line of the tenor part from the Florence version of *Dic, Christi veritas*, including the big first-mode cauda, is shown in Fig. 6-7a. But now look at Fig. 6-7b. It contains a monophonic conductus, *Veste nuptiali*, found in the last fascicle of the Florence manuscript, far away from *Dic, Christi veritas*. It is written, as music *cum littera* has to be, in what look like perfect longs. Compare it with Fig. 6-7a. Although the notation differs radically, it is the same melody exactly. Is *Veste nuptiali* a “prosulated” version of the cauda? Perhaps; but then again, perhaps not: the first two phrases of the melody are an ouvert/clos pair, suggesting that it may be a disguised love song. By now the fluidity of medieval genres should be no surprise to us. This is one of the most piquant instances in the repertory.





fig. 6-7b *Veste nuptiali* (monophonic conductus), beginning with the ornamental V; from *Flo*, f. 450v.

(a) (ouvert) (b)

Ve - ste nup - ti - a - li splen - do - re fi - gu - ra - li, non tam cor - po -

6 (clos) (b)

ra - li, quam ha - bi - tu men - ta - li nup - ti - as in - tro - e - as; sic ful - ge - as ut

12

se - de - as in se - de spe - ci - a - li ca - ve - as, ut ha - be - as in

17

ha - bi - tu te ta - li, quid non ex - e - as de do - mo pul - sus re - ga - li.

ex. 6-8 Transcription of *Veste nuptiali* (Fig. 6-7b) in rhythm of Fig. 6-7a

Whatever the case, one thing is certain. The singer of *Veste nuptiali* would not have been able to guess its rhythm from the notation in Fig. 6-7b, but (unless, quite fortuitously, he recognized the cauda of *Dic, Christi veritas* as notated elsewhere) he would have had to know the song already from the oral tradition (as reconstructed, hypothetically, in Ex. 6-8) in order to sing it correctly in its written guise. A singer who did not know the song in advance would thus have been keenly aware of the notation's limits. Such a singer would have felt a lack and would have wished for a more explicit way of notating the rhythm of measured music. In other words, the problem of *musica cum littera*, more and more acutely felt as texted genres (including some new ones) became more and more prevalent, created the necessity that mothered the invention of an explicit rhythmic notation, in which individual notes carried rhythmic information. First described in full around 1260, it sustained three centuries of development and continues, in a more remote way, to underlie the rhythmic notation we use today. Those genres, and that notation, will be the subject of the next chapter.

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## Notes:

(8) Franco of Cologne, *Ars cantus mensurabilis*, Chap. 11, as translated in Oliver Strunk, *Source Readings in Music History* (New York: Norton, 1950), p. 155.

**Citation (MLA):** Richard Taruskin. "Chapter 6 Notre Dame de Paris." *The Oxford History of Western Music*. Oxford University Press. New York, USA. n.d. Web. 26 Jan. 2011.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

## CHAPTER 7 Music for an Intellectual and Political Elite

### The Thirteenth-Century Motet

Chapter: CHAPTER 7 Music for an Intellectual and Political Elite

Source: MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

## A NEW CLASS

The rise of the university produced a new class, emanating from Paris, of *literati*: urban clerics with secular educations who were put to work as administrators on behalf of the universities themselves, on behalf of the increasingly feudalized church hierarchy (sometimes called the “cathedral nobility”), and above all on behalf of the burgeoning *civitas*, the secular state. The University of Paris, as one historian has put it, became “the training-ground for Europe’s bureaucrats.” This class found a musical spokesman in a university *magister* named Johannes de Grocheio (sometimes gallicized informally as “Jean de Grouchy”), the author, around 1300, of a remarkable treatise variously called *Ars musicae* (“The art of music”) or *De musica* (“About music”).<sup>1</sup>

What makes this treatise remarkable is its worldly bent. It contains neither cosmic speculation nor nuts-and-bolts theory nor guide to notation. Instead, it offers a survey of “the music which men in Paris use,” classified according to “how men in Paris use it.” It is, in effect, the first sociological treatise on music, in which musical genres are defined primarily in terms of their “class” affiliations. It is a potential goldmine of information for students of music history.

But it can only serve us in that way if its ore is properly refined. Like any theoretical treatise, it should be handled with care and with a certain skepticism. Its ostensibly descriptive content should be scrutinized with an eye out for covert prescription, and its explicit social content should be considered in relation to its implicit social content—namely, its author’s own tacit but all-important social perspective.



fig. 7-1 Professor lecturing at the University of Paris (from “Les Grandes Chroniques,” an early fifteenth-century historical manuscript now at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris).

The first of these interpretive tasks is not all that difficult in the case of Grocheio’s survey, because many of his social classifications are quite plainly prescriptive, and his prescriptions all serve a purpose he specifies without any undue reticence. That purpose is “leading all things to a good order” in the interests of social stability. His description of how various types of music are used, then, is really a description of how various types of music ought to be used. All the genres of music that we have encountered thus far are given not so much an actual as an ideal place in what is less a realistic than a utopian depiction of social harmony.

Thus epic songs (*chansons de geste*), for example, *ought to be* provided, Grocheio says, “for old men, working citizens, and for average people when they rest from their accustomed labor, so that, having heard the miseries and calamities of others, they may more easily bear up under their own, and go about their tasks more gladly,” and without threatening the peace with any newfangled notions about social justice.<sup>2</sup> “By these means,” Grocheio adds, “this kind of music has the power to protect the whole state.” The philologist and music historian Christopher Page has found some striking parallels for this passage in sermons by Parisian churchmen who, while basically rejecting the music of minstrels as a “low” or sensual pleasure, nevertheless conceded its utility in mitigating the sadness of human life and enabling men to bear their lot without

protest.<sup>3</sup> (For the same reason, he notes, some medieval churchmen were even “prepared to countenance prostitution within the *civitas* as a measure to preserve public order.”)

For an example at the other end of the social spectrum, Grocheio says that *cantus coronatus* (by which he means the kind of trouvère songs that competed for prizes) are ordained among kings and nobles in order to “move their souls to audacity and bravery, to magnanimity and liberality,”<sup>4</sup> qualities that also keep society running smoothly. Lower types of secular song, namely those with refrains, are meant for “the feasts of the vulgar,” where they serve a similar edifying purpose, but more artlessly.

The chant, and its polyphonic offspring, the organum, “is sung in churches or holy places for the praise of God and reverence of His high place.” Even dance music has its assigned place in a well-ordered polity, for it “excites the soul of man to move ornately” and in its more artful forms it “makes the soul of the performer and also the soul of the listener pay close attention and frequently turns the soul of the wealthy from depraved thinking.”

So despite Grocheio’s disavowal of all interest in metaphysics and his insistence that he meant only to describe music in the world he knew, his account of it is quite consistent with that of Plato, the greatest of all utopians and idealists. For both of them, music was above all a social regulator, a means for organizing and controlling society. As Page emphasizes, “Grocheio belonged to the class which supplied princes with their advisers and provided the whole of France with the principal agents and beneficiaries of bureaucratic power.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, his treatise reads like nothing so much as musical advice to a prince, of a kind that we now (after the greatest and most cynical of princely advisers) call “Machiavellian.”

The one part of Grocheio’s treatise that does have a realistic ring, and which can be taken as truly descriptive, is the part devoted to the music of Grocheio’s own class, the music he knew best and valued most. It was a new sort of music, one that we have not encountered as yet. Johannes de Grocheio was the preeminent social theorist of the medieval *motet*.

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## Notes:

(1) An English translation is available: Johannes de Grocheio, *Concerning Music*, trans. Albert Seay (2nd ed., Colorado Springs: Colorado College Music Press, 1974).

(2) Grocheio, *Concerning Music*, trans. Seay, p. 16.

(3) See Christopher Page, *The Owl and the Nightingale: Musical Life and Ideas in France, 1100–1300* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 19–25.

(4) Grocheio, *Concerning Music*, trans. Seay, p. 16.

(5) Page, *The Owl and the Nightingale*, p. 172.

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online

Motet

Discant

Clausula

# THE NASCENT MOTET

**Chapter:** CHAPTER 7 Music for an Intellectual and Political Elite

**Source:** MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

**Author(s):** Richard Taruskin

The simplest definition of a motet, in its earliest form, would simply be a texted bit of discant. In its origins, as we may surmise from the genre's earliest sources, the motet was actually a *prosulated* bit of discant—discant (by definition melismatic in tenor as well as added voices) to which a syllabic text has been grafted onto the added voice or voices in the manner of a prosula. We can trace the process by returning to a piece already familiar from the previous chapter: the “Ex semine” clausula from the *Alleluia Nativitas* attributed by Anonymus IV to Perotin.

A transcription of the clausula was included in Ex. 6-5. Figure 7-2a shows the clausula in its original notation, from the Notre Dame manuscript W<sub>2</sub>. Fig. 7-2b shows the duplum from the same clausula in prosulated form, as it is found in a different fascicle of W<sub>2</sub>. The syllabic text it now carries is a Latin poem honoring both the Virgin Mary's birth and that of her son. It opens with a quotation from the text of the Marian Alleluia verse *Nativitas* at the very point where the clausula begins (*Ex semine Abrahe*, “from the seed of Abraham”), and closes with a repetition of the word *semine*. These, along with yet an additional allusion to the Alleluia text, are italicized in the following transcription of the prosula-poem:

<i>Ex semine</i>	<i>From the seed</i>
<i>Abrahe, divino</i>	<i>of Abraham, by divine</i>
Moderamine,	control,
Igne pio numine	in the holy fire of your presence,
producis domine,	Lord, you bring forth
Hominis salutem,	the salvation of mankind
Paupertate nuda,	from stark poverty,
Virginis nativitate	by the birth of a Virgin
<i>de tribu Iuda.</i>	<i>from the tribe of Judah.</i>
Iam propinas ovum	And now you proffer an egg
<u>Per natale novum,</u>	<u>for an additional birth,</u>

Piscem, panem dabis, by which you will give fish and bread

Partu sine semine. all delivered without seed.

Thus the prosula-poem is a textual interpolation into the canonical chant as well as a potentially self-contained song. It is a gloss on the text of the Alleluia in the manner of a trope, and was probably meant for insertion directly into a performance of the organum. (But note that Fig. 7-2b also contains the tenor, so that the texted clausula can also be performed independently of the chant and its other polyphony.)

Since it is now notated *cum littera* like the conductus studied at the end of the previous chapter, the duplum can no longer use the first-mode ligatures of the clausula. It is now a *motellus* (later, and more standardly, a *motetus*), a “texting” or a “wording” or a “part with words.” The term itself is a curious Latin back-borrowing from French, in which *mot* is the word for “word.” Anyone actually inserting the motetus into the organum would have to know the rhythms of the clausula by heart. So at this stage a prosulated discant or motet has to be notated twice: once for the tune, again for the text.

Indeed, when motets, freshly weaned from their incubator within the organum, began to be written as new, freestanding pieces of texted music rather than mere textual grafts on existing discants, they still needed at first to be notated twice, syllabically for the words and melismatically for the rhythm. The only reasonable explanation for the extravagant excess of discant clausulae one finds in the Notre Dame sources—as many as two dozen or more for a tenor that might only be sung liturgically once a year—is that many or most of these “clausulae” were actually rhythmic templates to guide the performance of already-composed motets. What this also shows is that one must take care to distinguish between the chronology of genres and that of individual pieces. The fact that the clausula as a genre precedes the motet as a genre in no way implies that any given untexted clausula must have preceded its texted counterpart or counterparts. The latter may indeed be prosulated versions of the former, but the former may just as easily be an aid to assist in performing the latter.

The image displays two pages of medieval musical notation, likely from a manuscript. Each page features multiple staves of music, with Latin text written below the notes. The notation is a form of square neumes on a four-line red staff. The text on the left page includes 'u m taglor o', 'seur gi ms ma ri e', and 'semine'. The text on the right page includes 'ba be or ta' and 'de ti'. A vertical grey bar is present on both pages, indicating a specific section of the music.



fig. 7-2a *Ex semine* clausula (W2, fols. 16v-17). It begins halfway through the bottom system on the left.



fig. 7-2b Motetus on the same clausula (W2, fol. 146v-147) as in Fig. 7-2a. It begins with the ornate capital E halfway down the left side and ends halfway down the right.

Now compare Fig. 7-3, a page from a later manuscript that contains nothing but motets. It is the same clausula on *Ex semine*, now given complete, in all three parts. The motetus, or texted duplum shown in Fig. 7-2b occupies the right hand column. Under it is the familiar tenor. Opposite it, in the left column, is the triplum from the clausula (compare Fig. 7-2a), now also outfitted with a text—another text! It is another gloss on the text of the same Alleluia, reflecting and enlarging, like its counterpart, on the marvel of the Virgin's birth and the miracle of the actual "virgin birth," that is, her son's. This triplum text, which begins and ends with the same verbal allusions as the motetus, was explicitly fashioned as a sort of rhetorical double or echo to it:

<i>Ex semine</i>	<i>From the seed</i>
Rosa prodit spine;	of a thorn, a rose comes forth.
Fructus oleae	The olive fruit
Oleastro legitur;	Is plucked from the olive tree.

Virgo propagine	A Virgin comes forth
Nascitur Judee.	From Judah's line.
Stelle matutine	The morning star's
Radius exoritur	radiance shines forth
Nubis caligine;	from the cloudy gloom;
Radio sol stelle;	The sun, from the star's ray;
Petra fluit melle	A stone flows with honey;
Parit flos puelle	A flower of maidenhood gives birth
Verbum sine <i>semine</i> .	to the Word, without <i>seed</i> .

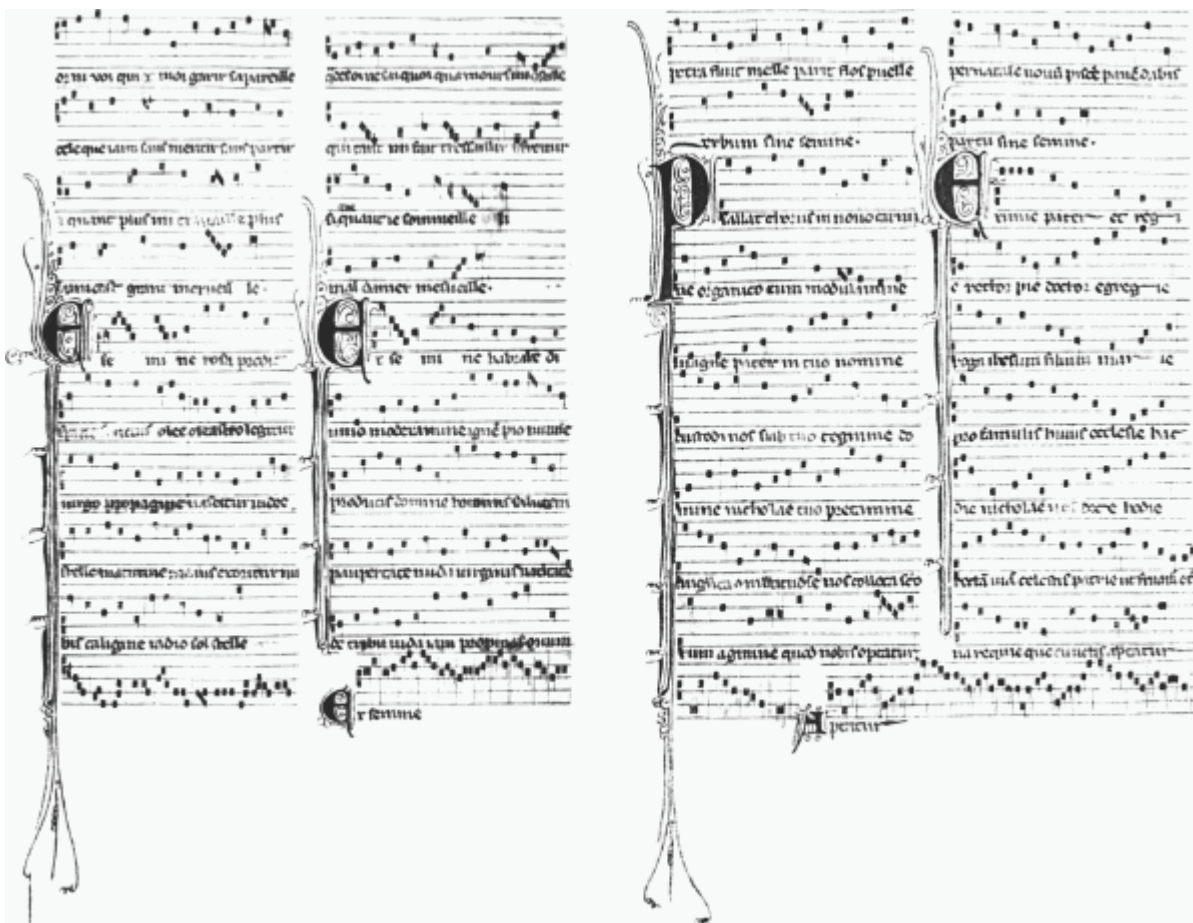


fig. 7-3 Double motet on *Ex semine* (Bamberg, Staatliche Bibliothek, Lit. 115, fols. 15v-16). The triplum and motetus voices are notated side by side (note the capital initial E's). The tenor is beneath the motetus (to its left is the end of the tenor for the preceding motet).

Our piece is now a doubly prosulated clausula, more commonly known as a double motet. (Ex. 7-1 is a transcription of it.) And that is both the fascination and the enigma of the medieval motet. In its developed

form, the one Grocheio knew and loved, the genre was “polytextual,” which is to say it had as many texts as it had voices over the Gregorian tenor. Before we get any deeper into the question of polytextuality, however, there is another matter, also well illustrated in Fig. 7-3, to investigate.

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Notation: Polyphonic mensural notation, c1260–1500

Franco of Cologne

# “FRANCONIAN” NOTATION

Chapter: CHAPTER 7 Music for an Intellectual and Political Elite

Source: MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The image shows a musical score for three parts: Triplum, Duplum, and Tenor. The notation is Franconian, using square neumes on a four-line staff. The time signature is 8/8. The lyrics are as follows:

Triplum: Ex — se — mi — ne ro - sa pro-dit spi - ne;

Duplum: Ex — se — mi — ne Ha-bra-he, di - vi - no

Tenor: Ex semine

7  
 fru-ctus o - le - e o - le - a - stro le - gi-tur; vir - go pro-pa - gi - ne  
 mo - de - ra - mi - ne, i - gnem pi - o nu - mi-ne pro - du - cis, Do - mi - ne,  
 13  
 na - sci-tur Iu - de - e; stel - le ma - tu - ti - ne ra - di - us ex - o - ri - tur nu -  
 ho - mi - nis sa - lu - tem pau - per - ta - te nu - da, vir - gi - nis na - ti - vi - ta - te  
 19  
 bis ca - li - gi - ne, ra - di - o sol stel - le; pe - tra flu - it mel - le;  
 de tri - bu Iu - da. Iam pro - pi - nas o - vum, per na - ta - le no - vum,  
 25  
 pa - rit flos pu - el - le ver - bum si - ne se - mi - ne.  
 pis - cem, pa - nem da - bis par - tu si - ne se - mi - ne.

ex. 7-1 Double motet on *Ex semine* (transcription of Fig. 7-3)

As one can see at a glance, the manuscript from which Fig. 7-3 has been reproduced uses a different kind of notation from the one that had been devised at and for Notre Dame. It is a notation specially tailored to the requirements of motets, that is *musica cum littera*. (It would have served nicely for conductus, too; but by mid-century the conductus was moribund.) It supplies the very thing that Notre Dame notation lacked, namely a means of specifying the rhythmic significance of individual “graphemes,” or written shapes. Notation that does this is called “mensural” notation, from *mensura*, Latin for measurement. Its invention was a watershed, not only in the history of notation but in the wider history of musical style. The new resources of mensural notation greatly lessened the dependency of “literate” music (here, literally, the music of the *litterati*) on oral supplements. From now on, literate genres could pursue a relatively autonomous line of development. We will never finish discussing the consequences of this turning point—some foreseen, others not; some indubitably “progressive,” others more equivocal. Their repercussions continue to affect musical composition, musical practice, musical attitudes, and musical controversies right up to the present day.

Like the melismatic notation that was developed to specify the rhythms of Notre Dame organum, the syllabic notation that was developed later in the thirteenth century to specify the rhythms of the motet was very efficiently fashioned out of the existing fund of “quadratic” plainchant neumes. The first prerequisite was to come up with single note-shapes to represent the longa and the brevis. The solution will seem obvious to us, who have lived with its consequences since birth, but at the time it was a considerable feat of imagination.

As we have known since chapter 1, chant notation already possessed two different *notae simplices* or single-note shapes: the point or *punctum* (simple square) and the rod or *virga* (square with tail at right). The distinction between them had to do with pitch: the *virga* represented a melodic peak. What some audacious soul had to do was re-imagine the distinction in rhythmic terms: the *virga* would henceforth represent the long and the *punctum* the *breve*. So it is in Fig. 7-3, which comes from the so-called “Bamberg codex” (known familiarly as Ba), a collection of exactly one hundred double motets that was put together at some point between about 1260 and 1290, to judge by its notational style.

Thanks to the explicit differentiation of longs and breves, it is now possible to indicate the trochaic rhythm of the familiar clausula without the use of ligatures. Because the individual notes now had intrinsic rhythmic values, and because there were no longer any indefinitely held-out notes like those in organum tenors, it was no longer necessary to align the parts in score. The layout first used in the motet manuscripts of the late thirteenth century, in which all the parts are entered on the same page but in their own separate locations, was a great space-saver and remained standard until the end of the sixteenth century. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries most of the music that was notated in this way was choral music, so this distributional layout came to be called “choirbook style.” The Bamberg Codex is one of the earliest examples of it.

We do not know exactly when or where the *virga* and *punctum* were first used to represent the long and the breve. It happens in practical sources, like Ba, before any surviving theoretical source discusses it. (In fact, hints of such a distinction can be found in chant manuscripts as far back as the tenth century.) The earliest known theorist to prescribe the practice was Magister Lambertus, probably a University of Paris instructor like Garlandia but of a later generation, in a treatise of ca. 1270. His description of mensural shapes and their relationship closely accords with the notation found in Ba, which probably means that Ba, though possibly copied in Germany, contains a Parisian repertoire. (The piece in Fig. 7-3 is obviously Parisian, of course, since it is just a texted version of a Notre Dame clausula.)

The fullest discussion of early mensural notation is found in a famous treatise called *Ars cantus mensurabilis* (“The art of measured song”) by a German writer, Franco of Cologne, whose name has become attached to the notation he so definitively described. The principles of “Franconian” notation, first formulated by ca. 1280, though much supplemented and modified over the years, basically held good for the next two to three centuries.

Despite the mensural breakthrough, and not to take away from it, Franco’s rhythmic notation did not absolutely transcend or replace the contextual aspects of “modal” notation. It represented a compromise of sorts between the intrinsic and the contextual (which is why there had to be all that supplementing and modifying over the years). A *virga* unambiguously represented a long rather than a breve, but that long could either be a perfect (three-tempora) long or an imperfect (two-tempora) long, depending on the context. In Fig. 7-3, the longs that alternate trochaically with breves in the motetus (texted duplum) and triplum parts are imperfect, while the longs that congregate spondaically in the tenor are perfect. A *punctum* unambiguously represented a breve and not a long, but that breve could be a normal one-tempus breve (*brevis recta*) or a two-tempora “altered” breve (*brevis altera*) as originally devised for the dactylic or “third mode” meter at Notre Dame, depending on the context. The contexts, which can be complicated, are spelled out to a degree in the accompanying table (Fig. 7-4), which outlines the basic principles of Franconian notation.

One of the cleverest Franconian innovations had to do with ligatures, where some apparently new graphemes were introduced. The new shapes, however, were based very systematically on the old. As observed in the previous chapter, the usual Gregorian binariae—the *pes* (ascending) and the *clivis* (descending)—happened to assume the rhythm BL in the first and second rhythmic modes as specified by



maximas) throughout. The three-note ligatures or *ternariae* that had represented spondaic or fifth-mode ordines in the Notre Dame style could no longer represent a group of three longs since middle notes were now breves by definition.

The remaining Franconian innovation was the division of the breve (or tempus) into semibreves, so that three note values were available. For the semibreve, too, an existing grapheme was co-opted. It was represented by the diamond shape that had originally been part of the *climacus*, the three-note descending neume in Gregorian chant notation. (For an example see the peak of the “omnes” melisma in the Gradual *Viderunt omnes* near the beginning of Fig. 6-3a in the previous chapter.) It had previously been adapted by the Notre Dame scribes to represent *currentes*, long descending “runs” of quick notes. (For the all-time champion run of *currentes* see the duplum voice in the organum on *Viderunt omnes*, right under the illuminated capital in Fig. 6-3b.) Although the semibreve shape was derived, logically enough, from the quickest notes in the Notre Dame sign-system, the use of the semibreve in motets was not simply a way of speeding things up. Rather, the introduction of the semibreve made it possible to distinguish a third level of rhythmic activity. As we shall see, this was something that the development of the motet demanded.

Theoretically, the division of the breve into semibreves was similar to that of the long into breves: the longer value was assumed to be “perfect,” meaning divisible by three. In practice, the division of the breve was duple from the first, and semibreves generally appeared in pairs. As the table shows, there was even a ligature shape to represent a pair of semibreves. Therefore most scholars assume that the notes in the pair were effectively equal in duration as performed, even though theorists called the first of them the *semibrevis recta* (one third of a breve) and the second the *semibrevis altera* (two thirds of a breve), implying a rather fussy lurching rhythm.

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Motet

Contrafactum

# CONFLUENCE OF TRADITIONS

Chapter: CHAPTER 7 Music for an Intellectual and Political Elite

Source: MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The motets examined thus far, all of them deriving from a specific clausula-prototype, demonstrate the descent of the motet from the liturgical repertory of Notre Dame. That is only half the story, though. A glance at another texting of the same *Ex semine* clausula will suggest the other half. Figure 7-4, allowing for the minor copying variants one must expect to find when comparing manuscripts, is musically identical to Fig. 7-3. The appearance of the notation, of course, is altogether different, but that difference should not mislead us. Since it comes from a Notre Dame source (our old friend W<sub>2</sub>), the notation in Fig. 7-4 is pre-mensural. The motetus and triplum are laid out in score (although the tenor is now entered separately, to save space, as in Fig. 7-3), and the notes are graphically undifferentiated as to rhythm. But by now we know that the intended rhythm is the same one represented in modal notation in Fig. 7-2a and mensural notation in Fig. 7-3.

The image displays two pages of medieval musical notation. The left page features a score with three staves. The top staff is labeled 'motetus', the middle 'triplum', and the bottom 'tenor'. The text on the left page includes: 'e ra ame nen doi estre blasme qui', 'qui asene a la plus couroise nen de puis', 'la ate onques en mon uiuant nen oi', and 'un viu semblant: si est atoz fois amoi'. The right page shows a single staff with the text: 'franche & humiliam mes sele seust de', 'non am ie lam sanz deceuoir ele nos', 'tast de touloz qe ele me donast samoe.', and 'L'exemine. out est fous qz fame avoic qz laime'. The notation consists of square notes on a four-line staff, with some notes connected by lines. A large, ornate initial 'L' is visible at the bottom of the right page.

fig. 7-4 French motet, *Se j'ai amé/EX SEMINE* (W<sub>2</sub>, fols. 136-136v). The triplum and motetus, sung to the same words, are vertically aligned. The tenor occupies the last two lines of music before the capital M that marks the beginning of the next motet.

The real difference between Fig. 7-3 and Fig. 7-4, and it is a huge one, is a matter not of notes but of text. A different text to be sung to the same tune is called a *contrafactum* (or, in anglicized form, a “contrafact”). This particular contrafact involves a change not only of words but of language. The *Ex semine* clausula has been effectively transformed into a French song for two voices over a vocalized or instrumental tenor. Its text, skillfully modeled to fit the irregular phrases of the original clausula, is as follows:

<i>Se j'ai amé</i>	If I have loved
<i>N'en doi estre blasmé</i>	I should not be blamed,
<i>Quant sui assené</i>	Since I am pledged
<i>A la plus cortoise riens</i>	To the fairest little
<i>de Paris la cité</i>	creature in Paris town.
<i>Onques en mon vivant</i>	Never in my life, though,
<i>N'en ai un biau semblant</i>	Has she given me so much as a friendly glance,
<i>Si est a touz fors (qu')à moi</i>	Yet to all but me she is
<i>franche et humiliant;</i>	openhearted and meek.
<i>Mes s'ele seust de voir</i>	If only she could see
<i>Cum je l'aim sanz decevoir,</i>	How guilelessly I love her,
<i>Ele m'ostast de doulor</i>	She would take away my pain
<i>Qu'ele me dounast s'amor</i>	By giving me her love.

Allowing for a bit of urbanization (“Paris town”), this is a trouvère poem in all but name. Indeed, at the point where we left it in chapter 4, we may recall, the trouvère *chanson* tradition was in the process of transplantation from its original abode in the aristocratic countryside to the towns of northern France. The new motet genre was its destination. It became the primary site for the production of French “literary song” in the late thirteenth century.

The motet in French was thus an interesting hybrid, crossbred from two exceedingly disparate strains. “We can imagine a schema,” Richard Crocker deftly observes, “in which music from the monastery [that is, organum] converges on the cathedral, hence on the town, from one side; and music from the court [that is, the *chanson*] converges on the town, hence on the cathedral, from the other. They meet at the residences of the cathedral nobility.”<sup>6</sup> If that seems a bit too schematic, since it casts the music, rather than the people who use it, in an active role, we can re-imagine the situation in more human terms. Let us imagine, then, that city-dwelling clerics (such as Johannes de Grocheio), who would have known and valued both the urbanized *chanson* and the prosulated discant, would have been the ones most apt to crossbreed the two and arrive at a new music that pleased them particularly. The great value of Crocker’s formulation is that it emphasizes the co-responsibility of the courtly and the cathedral genres and their respective milieux for the

birth and, especially, the rapid growth of the motet.

Again we need to be cautious when it comes to questions of priority and concordances. (A concordance is the reappearance of music or text in a new place.) Just as we cannot assume that a given clausula is older than a musically concordant motet just because historically the clausula came first, so we cannot assume that when a motet exists with texts both in Latin (sacred) and in French (secular), that the French must be the contrafact just because sacred music has the longer recorded history, or because measured rhythm was first notated in church. In the case of motets based on the *Ex semine* clausula, it is easy to make the false assumption, since all of them go back to a known Latin sacred prototype in modal rhythm. But as we have already seen, the French motet in Fig. 7-4 comes from an earlier source than the Latin one in Fig. 7-3 and uses an earlier method of notation.

Also of possible significance is the fact that the French motet is not a double motet. Its one text is evidently meant to be sung by the two upper voices in rhythmic unison. Take away the tenor and such a homorhythmic, syllabically texted piece would be called a conductus. So motets in which two voices sing a single text against a tenor have for that reason been christened “conductus motets,” and are presumed to be early. It is modern scholars, however, who have done both the christening and the presuming. And a presumption, by definition, lacks supporting evidence.

The evidence does not allow us to state that the Latin motet was invented before the French. Only “common sense,” our knowledge of early prosula technique, and our conjectures about the new genre’s possible liturgical use support the Latin-first idea. On the other side of the scale there is the source evidence. The earliest sources for motets in French are actual trouvère manuscripts, such as the huge *Manuscrit du Roi* that was mentioned in chapter 4. It was put together between 1246 and 1254, which may actually be a bit earlier than the date of *W<sub>2</sub>*, and no later than *Fb*, which seems to contain the earliest surviving Latin-texted motets.

There are even a few French pieces called “motet” in the *Manuscrit du Roi* that, being monophonic, are not related to the Notre Dame clausula at all. Like polyphonic motets they are written in mensural notation and are without sectional repeats. Like late trouvère chansons, on the other hand, some of them make use of “refrains”—the short, endlessly recycled verbal/musical tags or “hooks” we encountered in chapter 4. One of these monophonic motets quotes as a tag of this kind the refrain of Adam de la Halle’s little rondeau *Bone amourete*, already familiar to us as Ex. 4-6. In the motet (Ex. 7-3), the refrain is split up, and the whole rest of the poem is inserted between its two halves:

---

<i>Bone amourete m’a surpris</i>	Good love has caught me off guard
D’amer bele dame de pris,	and made me love a prized beauty,
Le cors agent et cler le vis.	Comely of form and fair of face.
Et por s’amour trai grant esmai,	And for love of her I pay dearly,
Et ne por quant je l’amerai.	However much I love her.
Tant con vivrai de fin cuer vrai.	Nevertheless I will I live with fine true heart,
Car l’esperance que j’ai	for the hope I have
De chanter tous jours	of singing all the while
<i>me tient gai.</i>	keeps me gay.

---

□ = ♩

8 Bone am - ou - re - te m'a sous - pris

8 d'a - mer be - le da - me de pris

8 le cors a gent et cler le vis

8 et pour s'am - our trai grant es - mai

8 et ne pour quant je l'a - me - rai

4 tant con vi - vrai

4 de fin cuer vrai

7 car l'es - per - an - ce ke j'ai

8 de chan - ter tou - jours

8 me tient gai

ex. 7-3 Paris, BN 844 (“Manuscrit du Roi”), interpolation no. 8, transcribed by Judith Peraino

Stanzas inserted within refrains like this were a distinct genre, called *motet enté* (“spliced” or “grafted motet”), and they were quickly assimilated to the polyphonic motet genre as it grew. The monophonic origins of the genre within the late trouvère repertory, however, should keep us from assuming that the motet is a polyphonic genre by definition. It is, rather, a hybrid genre, the product of multiple crossbreedings from various parent genres, both monophonic and polyphonic, both courtly and ecclesiastical.

## Notes:

(6) Richard Crocker, "French Polyphony of the Thirteenth Century," in R. Crocker and D. Hiley, eds., *The New Oxford History of Music*, Vol. II (2nd ed., Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 639.

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Motet

Polyphony

### A NEW TROBAR CLUS?

**Chapter:** CHAPTER 7 Music for an Intellectual and Political Elite

**Source:** MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

**Author(s):** Richard Taruskin

The undeniable fact is, however, that by the end of the century—that is, by Grocheio’s time—the motet *was* a strictly polyphonic genre, and it revealed more than any other genre in its polyphonicness. To deny this fact about the motet on account of the genre’s not-strictly-polyphonic origins or ancestry would be to commit what is called the “genetic fallacy”—the inadvertent or deliberate confusion of something as it is with what it may originally have been. (For a more obvious example, imagine claiming that our national anthem is not a patriotic song but just a drinking song.) And while we’re on the subject of fallacies, it is also a fallacy (the so-called “pathetic fallacy”) to say, as in this paragraph’s first sentence, that the motet “reveled in its polyphonicness.” Motets cannot revel. Only people revel. And it was people, notably Grocheio, who reveled in the complexity of the polyphonic, polytextual motet. For an example of the fully evolved, late thirteenth-century French motet that Grocheio reveled in, see Fig. 7-5, from the Bamberg Codex, and its transcription (Ex. 7-4).

The form of the piece is clearly discant- or clausula-derived, although there is no actual clausula counterpart to it. Two parts in trochaic meter (“first mode”) are composed against a spondaic (“fifth-mode”) cantus firmus borrowed from a Gregorian melisma. In this case the melisma comes from the Easter Gradual, *Haec dies*, already encountered in Ex. 1-7b. Compare the tenor in Ex. 7-4 with the notes sung to the italicized words in the final phrase of the Gradual: “*quoniam in seculum* misericordia ejus” (for His mercy endureth forever). The motet tenor consists of a double cursus of the chant melisma, its notes cut up into alternating groups of two and three longs or maximas.



fig. 7-5 French double motet, *L'autre jour/Au tens pascour/IN SECULUM* (Ba, fols. 7-7v). The layout resembles that of Fig. 7-3. The tenor begins under the motetus part on fol. 7 and continues most of the way across the bottom of fol. 7v .

Triplum



L'au-tre jour par un ma-tin de - jouse u - ne \_ va - le - e a une \_ a - jour -

Moretus



Au tens pas - cour tuit li pas - tour d'u - ne \_ con - tre - e ont fait as - sem -

Tenor



In seculum

6



ne - e pas - tou - rele ai tro - ve - e, je l'ai re - gar - de - e; seule es-toit, d'a -



ble - e de - sous u - ne va - le - e. He - bers \_ en la pre - e a de la pipe et





12

mours chan-toit; et je dis, "Simple e coi - e, vo - len-tiers se roi - e,  
dou ta - bour la dan - se de - me - ne - e; Ro - bin pas n'a - gre - e, quant

17

se il vous a - gre - e, vos a - mis." E - le res-pont cum - se - ne - e;  
il l'a es - gar - de - e; mais par a - a - ti - e fe - ra mieudre es - tam - pi - e.

23

"Si - re, lais - siés moi es - ter, ra - lés en - vo con - tre - e, j'aim Ro-bin sans  
Lors a sai - si son four-rel, prist son cha-pel, s'a sa cote es - cour - ci - e.

28

faus-se té, m'a-mor li ai don - ne - e, plus l'aim - que-riens ne - e; il s'en est a -  
s'a fait - l'es - tan - pi - e jo - li - e pour l'a-mour de s'a - mi - e. Ro-giers, Gui-os



34

lés ju - er au bois sous la ra - me - e; vi - le - ni - e fe - roi - e, se je ne l'a -  
e Gau - tiers en ont mout grant en - vi - e, n'i a nul qui ri - e, ains font a - a -

40

moi - e, car il m'aim - me sans tre - chier, ja pour vous \_ne le \_quier lais - sier."  
ti - e, k'ains ke soit l'a - ves - pre - e, iert sa pipe ef - fon - dre - e.

ex. 7-4 Transcription of Fig. 7-5

That much is *à la clausula*, all right, but the motetus and triplum texts are both little pastourelles reminiscent of trouvère poetry, even down to the name of Robin the shepherd and the cliché beginning (“the other day ...”) that goes all the way back to the troubadours:

*Triplum:*

L'autre jour par un matin	The other day at morn
dejouste une valée	down by a valley
A une ajournée	at break of day
Pastourelle ai trovée,	I spied a shepherdess
Je l'ai regardée;	and watched her a while.
Seule estoit,	She was all alone,
D'amours chantoit;	singing of love,
Et je dis:	and I said:
“Simple et coie,	“Guileless and bashful girl,”
Volentiers seroie,	gladly would I be,
Se il vous agrée,	If it would pleasure you,

<b>Vos amis.”</b>	<b>Your lover.”</b>
<b>Ele respont cum senée:</b>	<b>She replied, thoughtfully:</b>
<b>“Sire, laissiés moi ester,</b>	<b>“Sir, let me be,</b>
<b>Ralés en vo contrée,</b>	<b>go back where you came from.</b>
<b>J’aim Robin sans fausseté,</b>	<b>I love Robin without deceit;</b>
<b>m’amor li ai donnée,</b>	<b>I’ve pledged him my love.</b>
<b>Plus l’aim que riens née;</b>	<b>I love him more than any born thing.</b>
<b>Il s’en est alés juer</b>	<b>He’s gone off to play</b>
<b>au bois, sous la ramée;</b>	<b>in the woods ’neath the trees;</b>
<b>Villenie feroie,</b>	<b>I’d do an awful thing</b>
<b>Se je ne l’amoie,</b>	<b>if I didn’t love him back,</b>
<b>Car il m’aimme sans trechier,</b>	<b>For he has loved me faithfully,</b>
<b>Ja pour vous ne le quier laisser.”</b>	<b>And I’d never leave him for the likes of you.”</b>

*Motetus:*

<b>Au tens pascour</b>	<b>At Eastertime</b>
<b>Tuit li pastour</b>	<b>All the shepherd folk</b>
<b>D’une contrée</b>	<b>from one locale</b>
<b>Ont fait assemblée</b>	<b>gathered together</b>
<b>Desous une valée.</b>	<b>at the bottom of a valley.</b>
<b>Hebers en la préé</b>	<b>Herbert, in the meadow,</b>
<b>A de la pipe et dou tabour</b>	<b>with pipe and tabor</b>
<b>la danse demenée;</b>	<b>led the dance.</b>
<b>Robin pas n’agrée,</b>	<b>Robin did not like it</b>
<b>Quant il l’a esgardée;</b>	<b>when he saw it,</b>
<b>Mais par aatie</b>	<b>but out of conceit</b>
<b>Fera mieudre estampie.</b>	<b>thought he’d do a better estampie.</b>
<b>Lors a saisi son fourrel,</b>	<b>So he grabbed his bagpipe,</b>
<b>Prist son chapel,</b>	<b>put on his hat,</b>

---

S'a sa cote escourcie,	tucked in his coat,
S'a fait l'estanpie	and did an estampie,
Jolie	a jolly one,
Pour l'amour de s'amie.	to impress his girl.
Rogers, Guios et Gautiers	Roger, Guy and Gautier
en ont mont grant envie,	are right full of jealousy,
N'i a nul qui rie,	They none of them laugh,
Ains font aatie,	but say defiantly
K'ains ke soit l'avesprée,	that come nightfall
Iert sa pipe effondrée.	his pipe is going to be in pieces.

---

Naive and folksy as these texts seem, they are cast in a very urbane musical construction that belies their rustic nature. That jocular incongruity, which (along with polytextuality) intensified the essential heterogeneity of the motet genre, is already one delightful aspect of *ars combinatoria*, the art of combining things. And it is already a reason why Grocheio, the intellectual connoisseur, placed the motet at the summit of Parisian genres, for it was “a song composed of many voices, having many words or a variety of syllables, [but] everywhere sounding in harmony.”<sup>7</sup> The harmonization of contrarities (*discordia concors*) encompassed the texts as well as the tunes, even including the unsung, incongruously Latinate and liturgical text of the tenor. The duplum text, with its reference to “Eastertime” (*tens pascour*), alludes obliquely to the source of the chant melisma on which the whole polyphonic superstructure of the motet has been erected. Motets are full of in-jokes.

But that was not the only reason for Grocheio's devotion to the new genre. As usual, the theorist prescribes as well as describes, and this is his prescription for the motet:

This kind of song ought not to be propagated among the vulgar, since they do not understand its subtlety nor do they delight in hearing it, but it should be performed for the learned and those who seek after the subtleties of the arts. And it is normally performed at their feasts for their edification, just as the song they call rondeau is performed at the feasts of the vulgar.

Very interesting, this: a song all about the shepherds and their faithful lassies, but not to be sung before Robin, Roger, and their gang, because they'd never understand it. In fact, the complicated polytextual song itself served to mark off the occasion at which it is sung—a university recreation or, as Grocheio charmingly puts it, a “feast of the learned”—as an elite occasion, at which and *through* which the members of Grocheio's new class could celebrate and demonstrate their superiority to the “vulgar.” Now that seems to ring a bell. Where have we heard sentiments like these before? We heard them a few chapters back when we listened in on a mock debate (*joc parti*) between two troubadours, one of whom (Raimbaut d'Aurenga, alias Linhaure) espoused the values of *trobar clus*, the “difficult” poetry of the courtly elite. Do not prize “that which is common to all,” he warned, “for then would all be equal.” Grocheio's echo of these exclusionary values on behalf of the motet is a wonderful example of the way in which newly emerging elites—in this case an urban and literate elite, many of whose members had been drawn from the lower classes—ape or aspire to the status of an older, established aristocracy.

The self-congratulating “learned” class represented by Grocheio provided an audience that encouraged

composers to experiment and vie with one another in the creation of *tours de force*, feats of ingenuity. The motet became a hotbed of technical innovation and “combinatorial” adventure. The one in Ex. 7-5 is an attempt to combine three disparate musico-poetic styles in one “harmony of clashes.” The triplum is in the style of a *motet enté* like the one in Ex. 7-3: its non-repeating melody quotes an old refrain, *Celle m’a s’amour douné Qui mon cuer et m’amour a* (“She who has my heart and love did give her love to me”). The motetus is an actual *rondeau*, minus the opening refrain (also a famous one):

[A] *Li regart de ses vers euz* The glance of her green eyes

[B] *m’ocist* Just kills me.

a Que ferai, biau sire Diex? What can I do, good Lord?

A *Li regart de ses verz euz* The glance of her green eyes

A J’atendrai pour avoir mieix I will await in hopes of

B merci better treatment.

A *Li regart de ses vers euz* The glance of her green eyes

B *m’ocist* Just kills me.

And the tenor is the same tenor as in Ex. 7-4, only cast like the other parts in the trochaic first mode, with irregularities that only mensural notation could pinpoint with accuracy.

Rondeau-Motet Enté

The musical score is set in 3/4 time and consists of three staves: Triplum (top), Duplum (middle), and Tenor (bottom). The Tenor part is labeled 'In seculum'. The lyrics are written below the notes.

Triplum: J'ai les\_ maus\_ d'a - mours\_ Sanz\_ dou - lor Quant ce - le

Duplum: Que\_ fe - rai, biau si - re\_ Diex? Li\_ re - gart de

Tenor: m'a\_ s'a - mour\_ dou - né - e Qui mon cuer et m'a - mour

ses verz\_ euz\_ J'a - ten - drai pour a - voir\_ mieix\_ mer -

ex. 7-5 *J'ai les maus d'amours/que ferai/IN SECULUM* (Montpelier, Faculté de médecines H196 (Mo), f. 188')

Though short and sweet, not to say trivial at first glance, this piece is very much a tour de force of *composing* in the most literal, etymological sense (from *componere*, to put things together). The task involved shoehorning into one harmonizing texture not one, not two, but three preexisting melodies, of which one contained, as an additional hazard, many musical repetitions of its own. The audience would have derived great pleasure out of penetrating beyond the first glance to recognize the three preexisting tunes (all in different forms) and marvel at the skill with which they had been combined.

Such a piece was a triumph of literate contrivance, one whose craftsmanly intricacy depended utterly on the written medium. Like the *trobar clus* of the troubadours, its meaning was “shut up and obscure,” so that “a man is afraid to do violence to it” by casual oral delivery, as Peire d’Alvernhe (1158–80), one of the late Provençal poets, had declared in defense of *recherché*, “difficult” art.<sup>8</sup>

## Notes:

(7) Grocheio, *Concerning Music*, trans. Seay, p. 26.

(8) Peire d’Alvernhe, quoted in H. J. Chaytor, *The Troubadours* (1912; rpt. Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1970), p. 36.

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Tenor

Clausula

### TENOR "FAMILIES"

**Chapter:** CHAPTER 7 Music for an Intellectual and Political Elite

**Source:** MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

**Author(s):** Richard Taruskin

Of the three components that went into this brainy little song, the most frequently used was the tenor. The "In seculum" melisma, like several others (including "DO-"[mino] from the same parent gradual, *Haec dies*), was a great favorite with the university crowd, used over and over again as a motet tenor. This, too, was an aspect of "tour de force culture," in which emulation or outdoing—doing the same thing but doing it better—was a cardinal aim.

But why the "In seculum" tenor in particular? It might have had something to do with its eccentric tonal scheme. The Gregorian melismas, on which motets (like clausulas before them) were constructed, are groups of notes excerpted more or less at hazard out of larger tonal structures. They do not at all necessarily end on the final of the parent chant's mode. Indeed, the "In seculum" melisma does not. The *Haec dies* Gradual is in mode 2 transposed to cadence on A. The "In seculum" melisma ends on F. And even within the melisma the final note is surprising, since it occurs only at the end, after many repercussions (some of them quite convincingly cadential) on C.

When the melisma forms the tenor of a clausula that is then re-inserted into the context of a full performance of the Gradual, the tonal disparity is minimized. When it forms the tenor of a motet that is performed all by itself, the tonal disparity is emphasized and becomes perhaps—or indeed almost certainly, in view of the tenor's popularity—a source of pleasure in its own right, for it is yet another aspect of *discordia concors*. (For modern listeners, who are trained to value tonal unity in a composition, it is perhaps a guiltier pleasure than it was for Grocheio and his contemporaries.) Wayward or unpredictable tonal characteristics, deemed a deviation or a defect in more recent music, are normal in medieval motets, and were probably even an allurements.

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online

Talea

Color

Tenor

# COLOR AND TALEA

**Chapter:** CHAPTER 7 Music for an Intellectual and Political Elite

**Source:** MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

**Author(s):** Richard Taruskin

An extraordinary witness to the popularity of the “In seculum” melisma is a little appendix of textless pieces, all based on it, found at the end of the Bamberg manuscript after the hundred motets that make up its main *corpus* or “body” of works. Although they are without text and written in score, these pieces are not really “clausulae,” because they are written in mensural notation and have nothing to do with the actual Notre Dame repertory. (As far as the composers themselves were in all likelihood concerned, they were borrowing the “In seculum” tenor not from a Gradual but from other motets.) They were “abstract” pattern-pieces, intended for vocalizing or for instrumental performance, and as such count as the earliest written “chamber music.” Fig. 7-6, an “opening” of two facing pages from the Bamberg manuscript, shows three of these pieces and the beginning of a fourth; Ex. 7-6 contains transcriptions of two of the complete pieces.

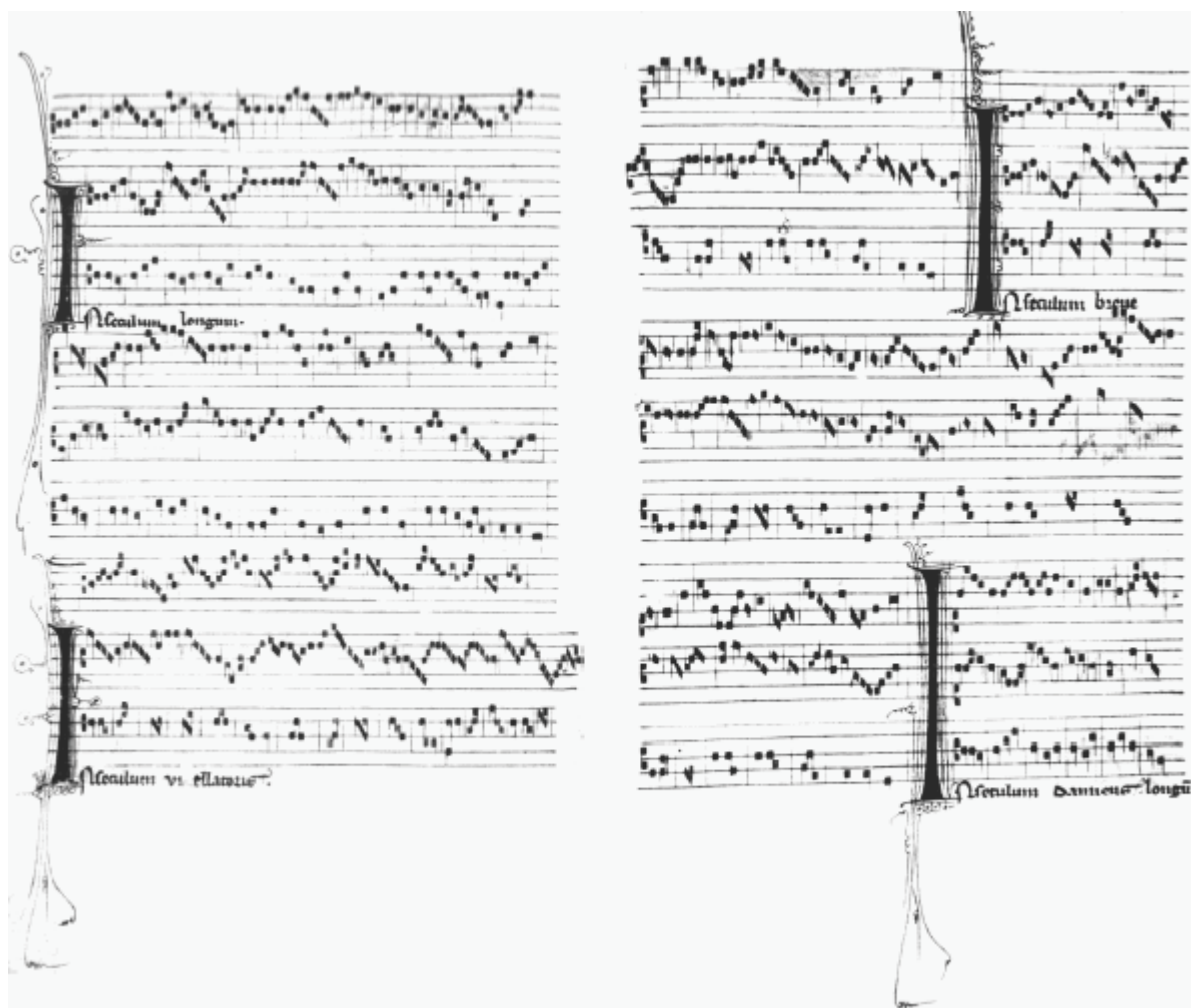


fig. 7-6 “Instrumental motets” on *In seculum* tenor (Ba, fols. 63v-64)

The image displays a musical score for three voices: Triplum, Duplum, and Tenor. The score is organized into systems, with measures numbered 5, 9, 12, 16, and 20. The notation includes various rhythmic values and rests, characteristic of early medieval notation. A specific instruction "(2nd cursus)" is noted in the Tenor part at measure 12. The score concludes with a double bar line and repeat signs at the end of the final system.

ex. 7-6a “Instrumental” (textless) motets, *In seculum longum*

Triplum  
Duplum  
Tenor

5

9

13

ex. 7-6b *In seculum breve*

Compare the tenors. They all cut up the “In seculum” melisma into three-note ordines. The first, called *In seculum longum* (“In seculum by longs”) casts the tune in perfect longs throughout, as in the spondaic “fifth mode.” The second, called *In seculum viellatoris* (“The fiddle-player’s In seculum”), uses trochaic (“first mode”) LBL patterns as fixed by the mensural ligatures. And the third, called *In seculum breve* (“In seculum by breves”) reverses the patterns of the second piece into iambic (“second mode”) BLB

patterns, also fixed by the mensural ligatures.

All three tenors put the “In seculum” melisma through a double cursus. The melisma contains 34 notes, which when divided into three-note ordines leaves a remainder of one after the eleventh ordo. So in all three pieces, the twelfth ordo consists of the last note of the first cursus and the first two notes of the second cursus. As a result, the melody and the rhythmic “foot-unit” seem to go out of phase with one another in the second cursus, producing a new set of three-note ordines on which to base the polyphonic texture. In other words, the two aspects or dimensions of the tenor—the melody or pitch-succession, and the rhythmic ordo—have been conceptually separated.

This method of constructing tenors, in which a predetermined, repeated pitch-succession borrowed from a chant was coordinated with a predetermined, repeated succession of durations, opened up vast new possibilities for intellectual *tours de force* that were mined intensively during the fourteenth century, when the motet underwent a spectacular growth. The abstractly conceived pitch-succession was called the *color* by fourteenth-century theorists, and the abstractly conceived rhythmic pattern, especially when it went beyond the simple modal *ordines* found in these early examples, was called the *talea*. (This word, which literally means “measuring rod” in Latin, is obviously related etymologically to the Sanskrit word *tala*, by which Indian musicians refer to the fixed, cyclically repeated beat-pattern underlying the complex improvised surface rhythms in a musical performance.)

“The fiddle-player’s In seculum” jibes well with the passage in Grocheio where the theorist praises fiddle players (*viellatores*) as the most versatile instrumentalists of the day. “A good performer on the *vielle*,” he writes, “normally uses every kind of song and every musical form.” It seems likely, then, that this piece was intended as an instrumental trio. The two pieces transcribed in Ex. 7-6 may also be instrumental trios, or at least performable that way, but there is no reason to rule out vocalized performance, especially since they are hockets, “cut-up songs,” as Grocheio describes them, “composed in two or more voices.” He lists hockets

among the vocal genres, following organum and conductus, and comments that “this kind of song is pleasing to the hot-tempered and to young men because of its mobility and speed.”

The pair of hockets in Ex. 7-6 certainly demonstrate that mobility and speed. They are in fact a single piece in two versions, *longum* and *breve*, of which the second goes exactly in “double time.” Where the first is written in perfect longs, imperfect longs, and breves, the second has imperfect longs, breves, and (for the first time among the pieces selected for examination here) *semibreves*. Assuming that the “perfection” or beat-unit remains constant when the two pieces are performed in sequence, the second hocket goes at a really breakneck speed, especially considering the split-second timing that hocket-exchanges require. This is virtuoso music, demanding a *tour de force* from performers and composer alike. One or both of these pieces may be the famous *Hoquetus In seculum* attributed in Anonymus IV to “a certain Spaniard.” They are found in a number of sources, and in one of them yet another voice—a texted quadruplum containing a trouvère-style love poem—is superimposed on the whole complex for a real combinatorial orgy.

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Motet: Middle Ages

# THE ART OF MÉLANGE

Chapter: CHAPTER 7 Music for an Intellectual and Political Elite

Source: MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Another motet with semibreves (in all parts this time, even the tenor) is given in Fig. 7-7 (facsimile) and Ex. 7-7 (transcription). Here the element of virtuoso composing (“fitting together”) is most apparent in the motetus part, which is none other than *Robins m’aime*, the opening virelai from Adam de la Halle’s *Jeu de Robin et Marion* (Ex. 4-9). The little tenor melisma, “Portare,” clipped originally from an Alleluia verse, was used for many motets, but never, it seems, for a clausula. It goes through a triple cursus here.



fig. 7-7 *Mout me fu grief/Robin m’aime/PORTARE* (Ba, fol. 52v).

Fig. 7-8 (transcribed in Ex. 7-8) displays one more virtuoso act of “combining” that uses material we have encountered before. This one is a real *quodlibet*—a grab-bag (literally “whatever you want”) of found objects. At last we have an example of a macaronic motet, combining texts in Latin and the vernacular. Both the triplum (a French pastourelle) and the motetus (a Latin sermon) are stuffed with refrains, making the piece doubly a *motet enté*. The tenor, meanwhile, is drawn from a new source: it is a traditional “Gregorian” or Frankish chant melody, but one unrelated to the polyphonic repertory at Notre Dame. Despite some slight melodic embellishment it is familiar to us as the first acclamation from the Kyrie “Cum jubilo” (Ex. 3-5). It has been cast into a little talea consisting of a single long plus a first mode ordo, with a single cadential long inserted to complete the color after the fifth repetition of the talea. The whole tenor melody goes through a

double cursus and starts up again a third time, but gets only as far as the third talea.

Triplum

Mout me fu grief li de-par - tirs de m'a-mi - e - te, la jo-lie au cler - vis,

Motetus

Ro - bins - m'aim-me, Ro - bins - m'a; Ro - bins m'a

Tenor

Portare

4

qui est blan-che, ver - meil - le - te com-me ro - se par de - sus lis, ce m'est a -

de - man - de - e, si m'a - ra. Ro - bins - m'a - che -

7

vis; ses tres dous ris mi fait fre - mir et - si vair - ieull ri - ant lan -

ta cou - roie et - au - mos - ni - e - re de - soi - e,

(2nd cursus)



10  
 guir. Hé, \_Dieus! \_ cum mal la lais - sai! Blan-che-te com-me flour de lis, quant vous ver -  
 Et pour quoi ne \_ l'a - me - roie? A - leu-ri - va! Rob - ins \_ m'aim - me,  
 3

14  
 rai? Da-me de va - lour, ver-meil-le com-me rose en mai! \_ Por vous sui  
 Ro - bins \_ m'a; Ro - bins m'a \_ de - man - de - e,  
 (3rd cursus [partial])

17  
 en si grant dou - lour.  
 si m'a - ra.

ex. 7-7 Transcription of Fig. 7-7

Thanks to the new resources of Franconian notation, the parts are neatly differentiated in rhythm—or, to be more exact, in *prosody*, the relationship of the text to the music. The triplum carries separate text syllables on semibreves; the motetus contains semibreves but places the text only on longs and breves, while the tenor, as noted, is confined to “modal” patterns of longs and breves.



fig. 7-8 *El mois de mai./De se debent bigami/KYRIE* (Ba, fol. 14v).

This macaronic motet comes from the so-called Montpellier Codex (Mo), the most comprehensive and lavishly appointed motet book to survive from the thirteenth century. It contains more than three hundred motets of every description, ranging in date over the whole century, all gathered in eight fascicles, or separately sewn sections, of which the first six (including the one containing the macaronic motets) seem to have been compiled around 1280. It is best known for its “classic” Franconian motets, in which the voices are rhythmically even more strictly “stratified” according to pitch range (the higher the range the quicker the pace). This, too, is a refinement on the *discordia concors* idea, and the prosodic contrast is often mirrored at the semantic level. In one famous example from Mo (*Pucelete/Je languis/DOMINO*), the merry triplum describes the poet’s enjoyment of his loving lassie in breves and semibreves; the droopy motetus complains of lovesickness in longs and breves; and the tenor keeps up an even tread of perfect longs.

The seventh and eighth fascicles of Mo date from the turn of the fourteenth century, Grocheio’s time exactly. By now the fun and games aspect of *discordia concors* has so burgeoned as to invite free choice of found objects in all parts including the tenor, and the more extravagant the better. The motet in Fig. 7-9/Ex. 7-9 is one of those racy things Grocheio particularly recommends for his “feasts of the learned.” Semibreves permeate all parts. The triplum and motetus texts are descriptions of just such medieval fraternity parties as Grocheio describes, at which young literati gathered to gorge on capons and guzzle wine and nuzzle girls and despise manual labor, and particularly to praise Paris, the fount of the good life for budding intellectuals. And the tenor? It consists of a fourfold repetition, prescribed by an early use of ditto or repeat marks in the notation, of a fruitseller’s cry—“Fresh strawberries, ripe blackberries!”—possibly drawn directly “from life” as lived on the Parisian streets.

A motet like this one, in which both musical and subject matter are entirely urban and entirely secular, no longer has any direct relationship to the courtly and ecclesiastical traditions that historically nourished the genre. Its connection to the clausula or the trouvère chanson can be better demonstrated historically than stylistically. It has become independent of its traditions and ready to nurture the growth of new ones. As the American composer Aaron Copland once observed, when the audience changes, music changes.

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Petrus de Cruce

Rhythmic modes

# THE "PETRONIAN" MOTET

Chapter: CHAPTER 7 Music for an Intellectual and Political Elite

Source: MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Triplum  
El mois de mai, que chan - te la mal - vis, que flou-rist la flour de glai,  
Motetus  
De se de - bent bi - ga - mi non de Pa - pa  
Tenor  
Kyrie

la rose et li lis: lev doit bien joi - e me - ner qui d'a-mours est es - pris;  
que - ri, qui se - pri - vi - le - gi - o spo - li -

5  
si n'en-voi - se - rai, car je sui lo-iaus a - mis a la plus be - le qui soit en ces pa -  
a - runt - cle - ri: sed - de - fa - cto pro - pri - o -

is; en lit a - mer - ai tout mon cuer mis; ja n'en par - ti -  
nunc pos - sunt - do - ce - ri et hoc - cum O -

10

rai, tant com se - rai vis. La grant biau - té de son cler vis,  
 vi - di - o pro ve - ro fa - te - ri: "Non mi -  
 sen cors le gai, qui est fait par de - vis, mi font a lié pan-ser tous dis.  
 nor est vir - tus, quam que - re - re par - ta - tu - e - ri."

ex. 7-8 Transcription of Fig. 7-8

To close our discussion of the thirteenth-century motet we can turn to the pair that opens the seventh fascicle of *Mo*. On the basis of citations by fourteenth-century writers they are attributed to a shadowy but evidently important composer and theorist named Petrus de Cruce (Pierre de la Croix?) in the treatises. These two motets, and another half dozen with similar characteristics (therefore also conjecturally ascribed to Petrus), are in a very special style that takes the device of rhythmic stratification to the very limit that contemporary notation allowed. Further, in fact, because Petrus modified Franconian notation and its attendant textures so as to exaggerate the layering effect.



fig. 7-9 *On a parole/A Paris/Frese nouvelle* (Montpellier, Bibliothèque Inter-Universitaire, Section Médecine, H196, fols. 368v-369). The beginning is again indicated by decorative capitals, halfway down the left-hand page.

*Aucun/Lonc tans/ANNUN(TIANTES)* gives us, in its motetus and triplum, a long and lingering last look at the loftiest class of trouvère chanson, and its tenor is also of a traditional type, borrowed from a Notre Dame organum. Fig. 7-10 shows its first page; Ex. 7-10 is a transcription of the same portion. The texture and prosody here are comparable to those in Ex. 7-8 (*El mois de mai/De se debent bigami/KYRIE*): the triplum has syllabically texted semibreves, the motetus has semibreves but carries syllables only on longs and breves or their equivalents, and the tenor moves in perfect longs throughout. And yet the sound and style of the piece are very novel indeed, owing to the flexibility with which the triplum part subdivides the basic beat (i.e., the *tempus* or breve unit).

Petrus marks off the triplum's breve units or *tempora* with little dots called *puncta divisionis* (division points) that function like modern bar lines, turning the tempora into measures. Between puncta there can be anywhere from two to seven semibreves (and according to several theorists, some composers around this time went as far as a ninefold subdivision of the tempus). In the setting of line 7, in which one measure is singled out to receive seven separate syllables, there is more than twice the usual number of semibreves in a tempus. Either they have to go by at more than twice the usual speed, turning a noble love song into a tongue twister, or the tempo of the whole has to be slowed down sufficiently to accommodate a "natural" delivery of the shortest note values.

**Triplum**  
 On pa - ro - le de ba-tre et de van-ner Et de fo - ir et de han - ner,  
**Duplum**  
 A Pa - ris soir et ma - tin Truev' on  
**Tenor**  
 FRE - SE NOU - VE - LE! MUE-RE FRAN -

Mais ces de-duis trop me des-plai-sent, Car il n'est si bo-ne vi - e que d'estre  
 bon pain et bon cler - vin, Bo - ne char et bon pois -  
 CE! MUE-RE! MUE-RE FRAN - CE! Fre - se nou - ve - le!  
 a ai - se De bon cler vin et de cha - pons, Et d'estre a - veuc bons com-  
 son, De tou - tes gui-ses com-pai-gnons, Sens sou - ti - e, grant  
 Mue-re fran - cel! mue-re! mue-re fran - cel! Fre - se nou -  
 pai-gnons, Liés et joi - ans, Chan-tans, Truf-fans Et a - mo-rous, et d'a-voir, quant c'on  
 bau - dour, Biaux joi - aus, da - mes d'ou - nour; Et - si truev' on bien  
 ve - le! Mue - re, fran - cel! mue-re! mue-re fran - cel! [Fre - se nou -  
 a mes-tier, Pour so - la - cier Be - les da-mes a de-vis: Et tout ce truev' on a Pa - ris.  
 en - tre-deus De men-re feur pour ho-mes de - si - teus.  
 ve - le! Mue-re fran - cel! mue-re! mue-re fran - cel!]

ex. 7-9 Transcription of Fig. 7-9



fig. 7-10 Petrus de Cruce, *Aucun/Lonc tans/ANNUN*, beginning (Mo, fol. 273), the first two pages of five.



Triplum  
 Au-cun ont trou-vé chant par u - sa - ge, Mes a moi en doune o - choi - son

Motetus  
 Lonc tans me sui te - nu

Tenor  
 ANNUN[TIANTES]

A-mours, qui res-bau-dist mon cou-ra - ge Si que m'es - tuet faire chan -  
 de chan - ter,

çon. Car a - mer me fait da - me bele et sa - ge Et de bon re - non;  
 Mes or ai - son de joi - e me - ner,

Et je, qui li ai fait hou-ma-ge, Pour li ser - vir tout mon a - ge, De loi -  
 Car bou - ne a - mour

al cuer sans pen-ser tra - hi - son, Chan-te - rai, car de li tieng un si douz he-ri-ta -  
 me fait de - si - rer La mieus

The image shows a musical score for a motet. It consists of five systems of music. Each system has three staves: Triplum (top), Motetus (middle), and Tenor (bottom). The lyrics are in French and are written below the corresponding staves. The music is in a medieval style, with a mix of treble and bass clefs. There are various musical notations such as notes, rests, and ornaments. The lyrics are: "Au-cun ont trou-vé chant par u - sa - ge, Mes a moi en doune o - choi - son", "Lonc tans me sui te - nu", "ANNUN[TIANTES]", "A-mours, qui res-bau-dist mon cou-ra - ge Si que m'es - tuet faire chan - de chan - ter,", "çon. Car a - mer me fait da - me bele et sa - ge Et de bon re - non; Mes or ai - son de joi - e me - ner,", "Et je, qui li ai fait hou-ma-ge, Pour li ser - vir tout mon a - ge, De loi - Car bou - ne a - mour", "al cuer sans pen-ser tra - hi - son, Chan-te - rai, car de li tieng un si douz he-ri-ta - me fait de - si - rer La mieus".

ge — Que joi-e n'ai se de ce non: C'est la pen-se-e que mon douz mal m'a-

en - se - gni - e K'on puist en tout le

sou - a - ge Et fait e-spe-rer ga - ri - son. Ne por quant seur moi puet cla-mer

mont — trou - ver. —

hau - sa - ge A-mours, et moi tout mon vi-vant te - nir En — sa pri - son.

A li ne doit on nul - le au - tre — com -

Ne ja pour ce ne pen - se-rai vers li mes pri - son: Tant set sou - til-ment

pa - rer. — Et — quant j'aim —

as-sail - lir, K'en con - tre li de-fen - dre ne s'en puet on: For - ce — de —

da - me — si — proi - si - e, Que —

cors ne plan - té de li - gna - ge Ne vaut un bou - ton, Et si li plaist  
grant de - duit ait du pen - ser, de ra - en - çon Ren - dre a son gré, sui pris et l'en fais ga -  
Je puis bien prou - ver Que mont a ge Mon cuer, que ie met du tout en a - ban - don. Si proi mer - ci, car au - tre a -  
sa - vou - reu - se vi - e, Quoi que nus van - ta - ge N'ai je, ne pour moi nule au - tre rai - son. di - e, En bien a - mer.

ex. 7-10 Transcription of Fig. 7-10

The latter, it seems pretty clear, must have been the intention and the practice. The result is that the normal semibreve now becomes comparable in actual duration to the normal breve in earlier motets, giving rise to a tempo at which the "perfect" division of the breve into three semibreves (or into an "altered" pair) is truly meaningful in transcription, like the one in Ex. 7-10. The spread between the longest and the shortest note values has reached a factor of 18 ( $3 \times 3 \times 2$ ). As a result, the normal "modal" rhythms underlying the supple declamation of the triplum have now become so slow as virtually to fade from the surface of the music.

Modal rhythm, in short, now loses the patterning and governing properties that were its original reason for being. Not only that, but the exaggerated rhythmic differentiation of the triplum from the supporting voices belies the origin of the motet style in the note-against-note texture of discant composition. Once again a connection that can be traced easily enough through time has been shed at the stylistic level. That is what is meant by stylistic evolution. One can trace it with interest, appreciate its vicissitudes, delight in the new possibilities it creates, and marvel at the ingenuity with which these possibilities are exploited, and yet remain skeptical of the notion that art makes progress.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

## CHAPTER 8 Business Math, Politics, and Paradise: The *Ars Nova*

### Notational and Stylistic Change in Fourteenth-Century France; Isorhythmic Motets From Machaut to Du Fay

Chapter: CHAPTER 8 Business Math, Politics, and Paradise: The *Ars Nova*

Source: MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

## A “NEW ART OF MUSIC”?

And yet (to pick up immediately on the closing thought of the previous chapter, and perhaps pick a fight with it) one can certainly point to times when changes in composing practice did take place for a definite composerly purpose, whether to enable specific technical solutions to specific technical problems, to enlarge a certain realm of technical possibility, or to secure specific improvements in technical efficiency. Why not call that progress?

No problem; but let us distinguish technical progress from stylistic evolution. The one affects the making only; the other is also the beholder’s business. Technique is an aspect of production; style is an attribute of the product. Style, one might therefore say, is the result of technique. Hence stylistic evolution can be, among other things, a result of technical progress. But although all makers constantly try to improve their techniques, until quite recently no one ever thought deliberately to change his or her style as such. And whereas new techniques can replace or invalidate old ones, new styles do not do this, so far as the beholder is concerned. The fact that so many of us still listen to old music as much as (if not more than) to new music is sufficient proof of that.

To seek or abet style change in the name of progress means merging the concepts of technique and style. To do that required a sea change in the way artists (and not only artists) thought about means and ends. That change began to happen only near the end of the eighteenth century, but the question needs airing now, because the fourteenth century was indubitably a time of intensive and deliberate technical progress in the art of the musical *literati*—of those, that is, who made and used the music of the burgeoning literate tradition. Its result, inevitably, was an enormous change in musical style.

The best evidence we have that fourteenth-century technical progress in music was a highly self-conscious affair are the titles of two of the century’s most important technical treatises, and the nature of the debate they sparked. The treatises were the *Ars novae musicae* (“The art of new music”), also known as *Notitia artis musicae* (“An introduction to the art of music”) by Jehan des Murs (alias Johannes de Muris), first drafted between 1319 and 1321, and the somewhat later, even more bluntly titled *Ars nova* (“The new art [of music]”), a torso or composite of fragments and commentaries surviving from a treatise based on the teachings of Philippe de Vitry (1291–1361), known by the end of his life as the “flower of the whole musical world” (*flos totius mundi musicorum*), to quote a British contemporary.<sup>1</sup> The *Ars Nova* treatises began appearing around 1322–1323.

The authors, both trained at the University of Paris (where Jehan des Murs eventually became rector), were mathematicians as well as musicians—not that this should surprise us, in view of music’s place alongside mathematics and astronomy in the traditional liberal arts curriculum. The new mensural notation that had been pioneered in the thirteenth century by Franco and company could not help but suggest new musical horizons to scholars who were accustomed to thinking of music as an art of measurement. And yet

“Franconian” notation, geared toward an already existing rhythmic style and limited to supplying that style’s immediate needs, only scratched the surface of the number relationships that might conceivably be translated into sound durations, whether for the sake of sheer intellectual or epicurean delight or as a way of bringing *musica practica*—or *musique sensible*, “the music of sense,” as translated by Philippe de Vitry’s younger contemporary Nicole d’Oresme<sup>2</sup>—into closer harmony with *musica speculativa* (the music of reason).

Though spurred originally by a speculative, mathematical impulse, the notational breakthroughs of Jehan and Philippe had enormous and immediate repercussions in the practice of “learned” music—repercussions, first displayed in the motet, that eventually reached every genre. So decisive were the contributions of these mathematicians for the musical practice of their century and beyond that the theoretical tradition of Philippe de Vitry has lent its name to an entire era and all its products; we often call the music of fourteenth-century France and its cultural colonies the music of the “Ars Nova.” Neither before nor since has theory ever so clearly—or so fruitfully—outrun and conditioned practice.

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## Notes:

(1) John of Tewkesbury, *Quatuor principiaila musice* (1351); see M. Bent, “Vitry, Phillippe de,” in *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Vol. XXVI (2nd ed., New York: Grove, 2001), p. 804.

(2) Maistre Nicole Oresme, *Livre de Politiques d’Aristote*, ed. A. D. Menut (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1970), p. 347; quoted in Julie E. Cumming, “Concord Out of Discord: Occasional Motets of the Eearly Quattrocento” (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Berkeley, 1987), p. 14.

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Philippe de Vitry

Ars Nova

Nicole d'Oresme

# MUSIC FROM MATHEMATICS

**Chapter:** CHAPTER 8 Business Math, Politics, and Paradise: The *Ars Nova*

**Source:** MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

**Author(s):** Richard Taruskin

From a purely mathematical point of view, the *Ars Nova* innovations were a by-product of the theory of exponential powers and one of its subtopics, the theory of “harmonic numbers.” It was in the fourteenth century that mathematicians began investigating powers beyond those that could be demonstrated by the simple geometry of squares and cubes. The leader in this field, and one of the century’s leading mathematicians, was Nicole d’Oresme (d. 1382), the first French translator of Aristotle, whose writings (as we have already seen) encompassed music theory as well. His career as scholastic and churchman closely paralleled that of Philippe de Vitry: Philippe ended his ecclesiastical career as the Bishop of Meaux, northeast of Paris; Nicole ended his as Bishop of Lisieux, northwest of Paris. Nicole d’Oresme’s *Algorismus proportionum* was the great theoretical exposition of fourteenth-century work in “power development” (recursive multiplication) with integral and fractional exponents; but it was precisely in Jehan des Murs’s music treatise that the fourth power first found a practical application.

As for “harmonic numbers,” this was a term coined by the mathematician Levi ben Gershom (alias Gersonides or Leo Hebraeus, 1288–1344), a Jewish scholar who lived under the protection of the papal court at Avignon. Gersonides’s treatise *De numeris harmonicis* was actually written at the request of Philippe de Vitry and partly in collaboration with him. It consists of a theoretical account of all possible products of the squaring number (2) and the cubing number (3), and their powers in any combination.

All of this became music, first of all, in the process of rationalizing the “irrational” divisions of the breve into semibreves, with which, as we saw at the end of the previous chapter, composers like Petrus de Cruce had been experimenting at the end of the thirteenth century. And the other “problem” that motivated the *Ars Nova* innovations was that of reconciling the original twelfth-century “modal” concept of the longa as equaling twice a breve (that is, the two-tempora long of “Leonine” practice as later codified by Johannes de Garlandia) with the thirteenth-century “Franconian” concept of the longa as equaling a “perfection” of three tempora.

In turn-of-the-century “Petronian” motets, like Ex. 7-10, a breve could be divided into anywhere from two to nine semibreves. The obvious way of resolving this ambiguity was to extend the idea of perfection to the semibreve. The shortest Petronian semibreve (1/9 of a breve) could be thought of as an additional—minimal—level of time-division, for which the obvious term would be a *minima* (in English, a “minim”), denoted by a semibreve with a tail, thus: . Nine minimae or minims would thus equal three perfect semibreves, which in turn would equal a perfect breve. All of this merely carried out at higher levels of division the well-established concept of ternary “perfection,” as first expressed in the relationship of the breve to the long. On a further analogy to the perfect division of the long (but in the other direction, so to speak), three perfect longs could be grouped within a perfect maxima or *longa triplex*.

We are thus working within a fourfold perfect system expressible by the mathematical term  $3^4$ , “three to the fourth,” or “the fourth power of three.” The minim is the unit value. Multiplied by 3 ( $3^1$ ) it produces the semibreve, which has three minims. Multiplied by  $3 \times 3$  ( $3^2$ ) it produces the breve, which has nine minims.

Multiplied by  $3 \times 3 \times 3$  ( $3^3$ ) it produces the long, which has 27 minims; and multiplied by  $3 \times 3 \times 3 \times 3$  ( $3^4$ ) it produces the maxima, which has 81 minims. Each of these powers of three constitutes a level of musical time-division or rhythm. Taking the longest as primary, Jehan des Murs called the levels

- 1. *Maximodus* (major mode), describing the division of the maxima into longs;
- 2. *Modus* (mode), as in the “modal” rhythm of old, describing the division of longs into breves, or tempora;
- 3. *Tempus* (time), describing the division of breves into semibreves; and
- 4. *Prolatio* (Latin for “extension,” usually designated in English by an ad hoc cognate, “prolation”) describing the division of semibreves into minims.

And he represented it all in a chart (Fig. 8-1) which gives the minim-content of every perfect note value in “Ars Nova” notation.

First degree (Major mode)	■ 81 Triplex long Longissima Maxima	■ 54 Duplex long Longior Major	■ 27 Simplex long Longa Magna
Second degree (Mode)	■ 27 Perfect long Long Perfecta	■ 18 Imperfect long Semilong Imperfecta	■ 9 Breve Breve Brevis
Third degree (Time)	■ 9 Perfect breve Breve Brevis	■ 6 Imperfect breve Semibreve Brevior	◆ 3 Minor semibreve Minor Brevissima
Fourth degree (Prolation)	◆ 3 Perfect semibreve Minor Parva	◆ 2 Imperfect semibreve Semiminor Minor	↓ 1 Minim Minim Minima

fig. 8-1 Harmonic proportions according to Jehan de Murs.

And now the stroke of genius: The whole array, involving the very same note values and written symbols or graphemes, could be predicated on Garlandia’s “imperfect” long as well as Franco’s perfect one, from which a fourfold imperfect system could be derived, expressible by the mathematical term  $2^4$ , “two to the fourth,” or “the fourth power of two.” Again taking the minim as the unit value, multiplied by 2 ( $2^1$ ) it produces a semibreve that has two minims. Multiplied by  $2 \times 2$  ( $2^2$ ) it produces a breve that has four minims. Multiplied by  $2 \times 2 \times 2$  ( $2^3$ ) it produces a long that has 8 minims; and multiplied by  $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$  ( $2^4$ ) it produces a maxima with only 16 minims.

So at its perfect and imperfect extremes, the “Ars Nova” system posits a maximum notatable value that could contain as many as 81 minimum values or as few as 16. But between these extremes many other values were possible, because the levels of maximodus, modus, tempus, and prolatio were treated as independent variables. Each of them could be either perfect or imperfect, yielding on the theoretic level an exhaustive array of “harmonic numbers,” and, on the practical level, introducing at a stroke as wide a range of conventional musical meters as musicians in the Western literate tradition would need until the nineteenth century.

To deal, briefly, with the speculative side (since it was that side that initially drove the engine of change), maximae could now contain the following numbers of minima between the extremes we have already established:

[High end (all perfect)  $3 \times 3 \times 3 \times 3$  ( $3^4$ ) = 81 minima]



**Any one level imperfect  $3 \times 3 \times 3 \times 2$  ( $3^3 \times 2^1$ ) = 54 minimae**

**Any two levels imperfect  $3 \times 3 \times 2 \times 2$  ( $3^2 \times 2^2$ ) = 36 minimae**

**Any three levels imperfect  $3 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$  ( $3^1 \times 2^3$ ) = 24 minimae**

**[Low end (all imperfect)  $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$  ( $2^4$ ) = 16 minimae]**

By similar calculations one can demonstrate that the long can contain 27, 18, 12, or 8 minims; a breve can contain 9, 6, or 4 minims; and a semibreve can contain 3 or 2 minims. The array of all numbers generated in this way, beginning with the unit—1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 12, 16, 18, 24, 27, 36, 54, 81—is the array of what Gersonides called harmonic numbers, since they are numbers that represent single measurable durations that can be fitted together (“harmonized”) to create music.

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Notation: Polyphonic mensural notation, c1260–1500

# PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Chapter: CHAPTER 8 Business Math, Politics, and Paradise: The *Ars Nova*

Source: MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Author(s): Richard Taruskin

So much for the theory, which like all scholastic theory had to be exhaustive. The implications of all this tedious computation for *musique sensible*, by appealing contrast, were simple, eminently practical, and absolutely transforming. To begin with, *maximodus* was pretty much a theoretical level (except in the tenors of some motets) and can be ignored from here on. Moreover, in practical music it was the *breve*, rather than the *minim*, that functioned as regulator. Its position in the middle of things made calculations much more convenient. Lengths could be thought of as either multiples or divisions of *breves*. But then, as the “tempus” value, it had long been the basic unit of time-counting. Petrus de Cruce’s use of “division points” (*puncta divisionis*) had already established it as the *de facto* equivalent of the modern “measure” (or bar, as the British say, and as we say when we aren’t being too fastidious). It was this measure and its divisions, then, rather than the unit value and its multiples, that defined mensurations for practical musicians and those who instructed them.

So we can henceforth confine our discussion to the levels of *tempus* and *prolation*—that is, the number of *semibreves* in a *breve* and of *minims* in a *semibreve*. The former level defines the number of beats in a measure; the latter, the number of subdivisions in a beat. And that, by and large, is the way we still define musical meters. (One must include the qualifier “by and large” because our modern concept of meter includes an accentual component that is not part of *Ars Nova* theory.)

We end up with four basic combinations of *tempus* (T) and *prolation* (P):

- 1. Both perfect (*tempus perfectum, prolatio major*)
- 2. T perfect, P imperfect (*tempus perfectum, prolatio minor*)
- 3. T imperfect, P perfect (*tempus imperfectum, prolatio major*)
- 4. Both imperfect (*tempus imperfectum, prolatio minor*).

The first combination, with three beats in a bar and three subdivisions in a beat, is comparable to our modern compound triple meter. The second, with three beats in a bar and two subdivisions in a beat, is like “simple” (or just plain) triple meter. The third, with two beats in a bar and three subdivisions in a beat, resembles compound duple meter; and the fourth, with two beats in a bar and two subdivisions in a beat, is like our “simple” (or just plain) duple meter.

The resemblance between these *Ars Nova* mensuration schemes and modern meters is notoriously easy to overdraw. It is worth repeating that “meter,” to us, implies a pattern of accentuation (strong and weak beats) whereas mensuration is only a time measurement. And it is also worth pointing out that when modern meters are compared, or when passing from one to another, it is usually the “beat” (the counterpart to the *semibreve*) that is assumed to be constant, whereas in *Ars Nova* mensuration the assumed constant was either the measure (the *breve*) or the unit value (the *minim*).

Because the beat (called the *tactus*, the “felt” pulse) was a variable quantity within the *Ars Nova* mensuration

scheme, and because authorities differed as to whether the measure (*tempus*) was also a variable, an ineradicable ambiguity remained at the heart of the system that had to be remedied over the years by a plethora of *ad hoc* auxiliary rules and signs. Eventually the whole field became a jungle and a new notational “revolution” became necessary. (It happened around the beginning of the seventeenth century, and we are still living with its results.) Still, the extraordinary advance Ars Nova notation marked over its predecessors in rhythmic versatility and exactness is evident, and unquestionably amounted to technical progress. Everything that was formerly possible to notate was still possible under the new system, and a great deal more besides. As Jehan des Murs triumphantly observed, as a result of the Ars Nova breakthroughs “whatever can be sung can [now] be written down.”

But do not confuse progress in notation with progress in music. In particular, do not think for a moment that duple meter was “invented” in the fourteenth century, as often claimed, just because the means of its notation and its “artful” development were provided then—as if two-legged creatures needed the elaborate rationalizations of the Ars Nova in order to make music to accompany marching or working or dancing. As Jehan’s triumphant claim itself implies, “musique sensible” surely employed regular duple meter long before there was a way of notating it—and had, no doubt, since time immemorial. The unwritten repertory was then, and has always remained, many times larger than the literate repertories that form the main subject matter of this or any history text.

But even if the “imperfect mensuration” of the Ars Nova had had its origins in speculation about musical analogues to squares and cubes, and ultimately in speculation about how music might best represent God’s cosmos, it nevertheless made possible the unambiguous graphic representation of plain old duple meter, and willy-nilly provided a precious link between what had formerly been an unwritable and historically unavailable practical background and the elite “artistic” or speculative facade. Lofty theory—the loftiest yet and perhaps the loftiest ever—had inadvertently provided the means by which musical art could more directly reflect the music of daily human life.

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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[Ars Nova](#)

[Time signature](#)

# REPRESENTING IT

**Chapter:** CHAPTER 8 Business Math, Politics, and Paradise: The *Ars Nova*

**Source:** MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

**Author(s):** Richard Taruskin

Like all previous notational reforms, the *Ars Nova* retained the familiar shapes of Gregorian “square” notation, modifying them where necessary (as in supplying the minim) but as slightly as possible. What mainly changed were the rules by which the signs were interpreted. The same notated maxima could contain 16 minims or 81 minims or any of several quantities in between. How was one to know which?

What was needed was a set of ancillary signs—time signatures, in short—to specify the mensural relationships that obtained between the notated shapes. Again, economy was the rule. These signs were adapted directly from “daily life”—that is, from existing measuring practices, particularly those involving time-measurement (*chronaca*) and “business math” (chiefly *minutiae* or fiscal fractions).<sup>3</sup>

In the fourteenth century, not only musical durations but weight, length, and the value of money were all measured according to the duodecimal (twelve-based) system inherited from the Romans, rather than the decimal (ten-based) system derived from counting on the fingers, only lately available in numerals borrowed from the Arabs. Roman weights and measures survived longest in Britain and its cultural colonies. In America, despite long pressure to convert to the decimal metric system, introduced as an “enlightened” by-product of the French Revolution, we still divide feet into twelve inches and pounds into sixteen ounces. (In Britain itself, the monetary system remained duodecimal until the 1970s, with twelve pence to the shilling, and 240 pence ( $12 \times 20$ ) to the pound.) Both “inch” and “ounce” are traceable to the Latin word *uncia*, which stood for the basic unit of duodecimal measurement, whether of weight, length, or money. The *uncia* was the equivalent, in those areas, of the basic unit of musical measurement, the *tempus*.

The standard Roman symbol for the *uncial*—on abacuses used for monetary transactions, for example—was the circle, and the symbol for one-half of an *uncia* (called the *semuncia*), logically enough, was the semicircle. It is hardly a coincidence, then, that the circle and semicircle were adopted as symbols for the division of the *tempus* (breves into semibreves) in *Ars Nova* notation, thus becoming the first standard time signatures used in Western music. The circle stood for *tempus perfectum*—i.e., the “whole” or “perfect” breve containing three semibreves—and the semicircle stood, correspondingly, for *tempus imperfectum*, with two semibreves to a breve.

The signs for major and minor prolation were adapted from the theory of *chronaca*, in which the shortest unit of time—sometimes called the *atomus*, sometimes the *momentum*, and sometimes, yes, the *minima*—was compared with the geometric point (*punctum*), defined by Euclid as that which cannot be subdivided. (“A point,” Euclid wrote in his *Elements*, “is that which has no part.”) The minimal time-unit was sometimes actually called the *punctum*, which is undoubtedly why the point, or dot, became the symbol for the musical minima and its mensuration. The major prolation, in which there were three minims to a semibreve, was at first indicated by placing three dots inside the circle or semicircle that represented the breve. The minor prolation was specified by a pair of dots.

Later on scribes figured out that they could save some ink by subtracting two dots from this scheme. Major prolation could just as well be indicated by a single dot, minor prolation by the absence of a dot. So by the end of the fourteenth century, the four *tempus cum prolatione* combinations or meters listed above were

represented by four standard time signatures: The last of them, the one that represented mensuration by two at all levels, still survives (as the sign for “common time”). In the light of the foregoing discussion, it should be obvious that explaining the “C” for meter as the initial of the expression “common time” is a folk-etymology. Its actual derivation was from medieval *minutiae* and *chronaca*, and its survival depended on its “imperfection.” The main difference between modern notation and mensural notation is that although we certainly have our modern ways of indicating triple *meter*, the whole ancient idea of triple or “perfect” *mensuration* has been shed.

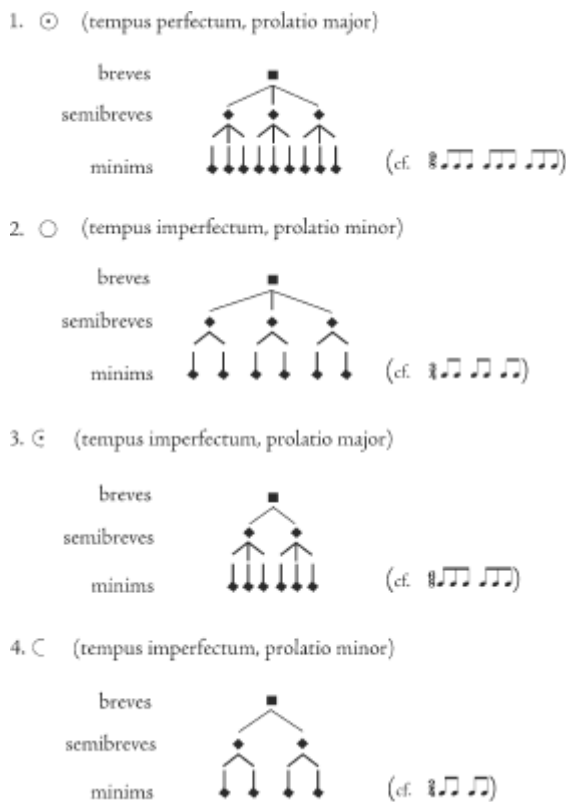


fig. 8-2 Ars Nova notation: the four signatures.

The table in Fig. 8-2 sums up the relationships specified by the mensural notation that was first employed by the Parisian musicians who promulgated the “Ars Nova” in the early fourteenth century, and these relationships remained the basis for musical notation in Europe almost to the end of the sixteenth century.

### Notes:

(3) See Anna Maria Busse Berger, *Mensuration and Proportion Signs: Origin and Evolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), Chap. 2.

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## Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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[Ars Nova](#)

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### BACKLASH

**Chapter:** CHAPTER 8 Business Math, Politics, and Paradise: The *Ars Nova*

**Source:** MUSIC FROM THE EARLIEST NOTATIONS TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

**Author(s):** Richard Taruskin

Just as the technology-minded theorists of the “Ars Nova” represented the first self-conscious *avant garde* faction in European literate music, so they inspired the first conservative backlash. It is found in the seventh and last book of the mammoth *Speculum musicae* (“The mirror of music”), at 521 chapters the largest of all medieval music treatises, completed around 1330 by Jacobus (or Jacques) de Liège. The author was a retired University of Paris professor (thus Jehan des Murs’s senior colleague) who had returned to his birthplace in Belgium to work on this grandiose project, which he intended as a *summa summarum*—a universal compendium—of musical knowledge. The young innovators of the “Ars Nova,” by extending the boundaries of musical theory, threatened the completeness of Jacobus’s account, so he tried to discredit their advance and thus neutralize the threat.

The basic ploy was to dismiss the Ars Nova innovations as so much superfluous complexity, and to show that their art, by admitting so much “imperfection,” was thereby itself made imperfect when compared with what Jacobus called the “Ars Antiqua,” represented at its unsurpassable zenith by Franco of Cologne. The term Ars Antiqua has also entered the conventional vocabulary of music history to denote Parisian music of the thirteenth century; it is a bad usage, though, since the term has meaning only in connection with its antithesis, and using it tends to ratify the notion that not just technique but art itself makes progress.

Citing a passage in Jehan des Murs’s treatise in which the author explained the use of the term “perfection” in music by saying that “all perfection does in fact lie in the ternary number” (beginning with the perfection of God Himself, who is single in substance but a Trinity of persons), Jacobus maintained that “the art that uses perfect values more often is, therefore, more perfect,” and that “the art that does that is the Ars Antiqua of Master Franco.”<sup>4</sup> But of course basing an argument on what amounts to a pun is the very essence of sophistry. And besides, the innovations of the Ars Nova, while demonstrably a breakthrough, and controversial to boot, were in no sense “revolutionary.” The granting of full rights to the imperfect was no challenge to the perfect. Rather, it was an attempt to encompass more fully the traditional “medieval” objective of translating number into sound, thus the more fully to realize the ideal significance of music as cosmic metaphor. By radically increasing the number of disparate elements that could go into its representation of harmony, moreover, the Ars Nova innovations only made the more potent the musical representation of *discordia concors*, the divine tuning of the world.

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### Notes:

(4) Jacobus de Liège, *Speculum musicae*, Book VII, Chap. 43, trans. R. Taruskin.

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