

## Chapter 1: Music from Antiquity to Gregorian Chant: ca. 1200 BCE–ca. 1200 CE

### I. Introduction

- A. Music of ancient times is described in sources from the Bible to writings of Greek philosophers
- B. The history of notated music begins one thousand years ago with chants written for services of the early Roman Catholic Church.
  - 1. It became known as Gregorian chant because of a legend that Pope Gregory the Great received unaccompanied melodies from the Holy Spirit.
  - 2. Gregorian chant was sung in the Mass and the Offices.
  - 3. Neumes were written signs to describe unaccompanied monophonic chants.

### II. Music in the Bible and Ancient Greece

- A. Surviving illustrations of ancient music exist in cave paintings, Egyptian murals, Greek pottery, and the Bible.
- B. Theories of music
  - 1. Pythagoras discussed physical properties of music, noting which were consonant and dissonant. St. Augustine wrote about the rhythmic aspects of music in *De musica*.
  - 2. Boethius wrote the treatise most studied in the Middle Ages, *De institutione musica*, in which he translated earlier ideas.
  - 3. Early Medieval notation employed a diatonic pitch set similar to the Greek system. The first systems included only pitch; rhythm enters around the late twelfth century.
  - 4. Notated music of the early Middle Ages is predominantly sacred. It is known as monophonic chant.
  - 5. Notated chant represents only a small part of musical life in this period.

### III. Music of the early Christian church

- A. The first great surviving Western repertory is Gregorian chant.
  - 1. Gregorian chant is one aspect of a life devoted to God, not concert or party music.
  - 2. We should try and hear Gregorian chant in the context of its original contemporaries to gain a clearer understanding of and appreciation for it. By so doing, we may gain perspective on our own world.
  - 3. Several different chant repertories existed in the early Middle Ages (before Charlemagne), representing practices from different parts of the Christian world.
  - 4. The Roman Church has the most extensive written legacy and came into prominence under the reign of Charlemagne (c. 742–814).
- B. The legend of St. Gregory
  - 1. Through legend, Pope Gregory I (pope 590–604) became credited with creating the entire musical repertory of the Roman Church.

2. He was purported to have been taught the sacred chants by the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove. This made it holy, divine, better than any other chant repertoires, and unchangeable.
  3. Gregorian chant was central to a monastic life.
- C. The development of the liturgy: the Offices
1. The Offices were eight daily services that featured the psalms—all psalms were to be heard within the space of a week.
  2. Offices were spaced roughly every three hours, and some of them bear names derived from that spacing (*Prime, Terce, Sext, and None*). The others relate to a specific part/activity of day (*Matins, Lauds, Vespers, and Compline*).
  3. Offices contain at least a psalm, a scripture reading, and a *hymn*.
  4. Some of the Offices contain *canticles*, which are similar to psalms but from the New Testament.
  5. Feast days marked the liturgical year.
  6. An antiphon is a short sentence or verse sung before and after a psalm and sometimes between individual verses, usually sung in alternation by halves of the choir. A respond is the first part of responsorial chant, where the full choir alternates with a soloist singing a verse to follow.
- D. The order of the Mass
1. The most elaborate music of the Christian church is associated with the *Mass*. During the Mass, celebrants reenact the Last Supper of Jesus, the Jewish Passover Seder.
  2. The Mass Proper consists of the texts that are “proper” to the day—that change based on the feast day, liturgical calendar, etc.
  3. The Mass Ordinary consists of the “ordinary” texts—the ones done every time. These developed over time, but have existed in their present form for centuries. The five sections are Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei.
- E. Writing it down: neumes
1. Chant notation evolved through the invention of *neumes*.
  2. Scholars believe that neumes were invented to indicate accent, which implied direction, although these explanations are not completely proven.
  3. In the early eleventh century, neumes were placed on lines and spaces. We call these *diastematic* neumes.
- F. Guido of Arezzo
1. The Italian monk Guido of Arezzo wrote a treatise on music theory (*Micrologus*) and provided the earliest guide to staff notation in the early eleventh century. The norm for early notation is four staff lines.
  2. Guido used the hymn *Ut queant laxis* as a device to teach sight-singing. Each syllable of this text is one step above the next. (Think “Doe, a deer,” from the *Sound of Music*.) This is the beginning of *solmization*.
  3. Guido describes a system in which music is organized around groups of six consecutive pitches, hence *hexachord*.

4. Hexachords began on G, A, C, and D and followed what we consider the “white notes” of the piano. See Ex. 1-4
5. Guido is well known to musicians for his Guidonian Hand, a visual guide to sight-singing based on solmization. See Fig. 1-10.

#### IV. Church modes

- A. Church modes took centuries to develop and helped classify and order the chant repertory. By the tenth century there were eight modes.
  1. They are defined by their most important notes, the final one and the reciting tone.
  2. Chants ending on each of the four final notes—D, E, F, and G—were further broken down into two classes.
  3. In the ninth century, collections of antiphons were grouped according to a formula for singing a psalm, called a psalm tone. Eight psalm tones are used in the Latin liturgy. These collections are known as tonaries.
- B. Psalmody in practice: the Office and the Mass
  1. The twelfth verse of Psalm 92 was often set. The Latin is *Justus ut palma florebit, et sicut cedrus Libani multiplicabitur* (The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon).
  2. The psalm tone in 1-5a is simple. First there is the intonation, given by a soloist to establish the pitch. It ascends to a repeated pitch, the reciting tone. The pitch is repeated as often as necessary to accommodate the syllables of the text.
  3. The *Justus ut palma* text appears in Office services but also in Mass Propers, the chants for the yearly round of feasts. Elaborateness depends on occasion and liturgical function.
  4. Settings of *Justus ut palma* were sung between scripture readings. These are the most florid of the Mass chants.
- C. The layout of the Mass service
  1. The *Introit* is the first Proper chant, followed by the first Ordinary chant: the *Kyrie*.
  2. The *Gloria* follows the *Kyrie*.
  3. Two elaborate Proper chants (the Gradual and Alleluia, which may be replaced in more somber liturgical seasons with the *Tract*) precede the next part of the Mass Ordinary: the Credo.
  4. The Eucharist (reenactment of the Last Supper) is the second half of the Mass. It begins with antiphons for the *Offertory*. Then follows the *Sanctus*, part of the Mass Ordinary. Most settings indicate that the choir sings the *Sanctus*.
  5. After the consecration of the bread and wine (called the *Canon*) and the Lord’s Prayer (*Pater noster*), the final Ordinary chant is sung: the *Agnus Dei*.
  6. The Mass can end with different prayers, versicles, and responses.
- D. Frankish additions to the chant repertory
  1. One way of altering a traditional chant was with the sequence.

- a. A sequence initially comprised added melismas, replacing the traditional jubilus.

V. Hildegard of Bingen

- A. Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179) also composed sequences.
  - 1. The biography of Hildegard illustrates a remarkable composer, preacher, and administrator.
  - 2. She wrote a large amount of poetry and music, expressing mystic visions.
- B. Hymns
  - 1. Hymns were another type of innovation in Frankish music.
  - 2. Hymns can be interpreted as liturgy's popular songs and differ significantly from psalmody in their creativity.
- C. Tropes were another type of new music composed under the Franks.
  - 1. Unlike sequences and hymns, however, tropes did not stand alone.
- D. Liturgical dramas
  - 1. Liturgical dramas were plays sung in Latin. They were acted out and helped tell the story to largely illiterate audiences. Famous examples include the play of Herod and *Ordo virtutum* (by Hildegard of Bingen). They were yet another form of embellishment to the liturgy.
- E. Marian antiphons
  - 1. Votive antiphons were the last genre of Medieval chant added to the liturgy.
  - 2. They are antiphons that are not based on the psalms. "Marian" antiphons honor the Virgin Mary.

VI. Notated music and the persistence of oral traditions

- A. Notation gave access to music of the past, but only permitted partial preservation. It took much longer than in other arts for music to be preserved.
- B. Writing music down did not end the oral tradition.