

GREGORIAN CHANT, THE GREATEST UNISON MUSIC

By GEORGIA STEVENS*

I WANT to say at the outset that it is from the musical and the practical point of view that I write of the Chant, with the hope of convincing musicians and educators that it can be brought into the lives of the people. Learned books have been written to show its historical development, and this has been done in such a masterly manner that I refer you to these recent books, which all the larger libraries possess. I speak simply as a teacher of a choir that has labored for many years and as an ardent though humble student of the great musical literature of Gregorian Chant.

What is the function of music? In answer a book could be written, and, assuming it was well done, to musicians and thinkers it would be an interesting book, opening new vistas. One answer as to church music has already been given by Pope Pius X in the *Motu Proprio* on music, dated November 22, 1903; to quote: "its proper aim is to add greater efficacy to the text." The Pope is speaking of the religious services of the Catholic Church, and the Chant can and does do this if given a chance.

To speak intelligently of the Chant, we must go back to its birth and early years. It was born with the Christian Church in a golden age and spoke the language of that great age. It is characterized by simplicity, which is generally the result of depth—a simplicity that is artless but full of suggestion. It voices the sufferings and the triumphs of the human being in his greatest moments. What are these moments? They may be those illuminated by points of vision, of light; or they may be those that accompany the supreme effort to hold on through utter blackness, hopelessness, in the void, when nothing but the will acts—for the will does act, as it has power to act in dire need. What has this to do with the Chant? Everything. Its birth pangs were in the ecstasy of a great

* In this article, Mother Stevens has written out of her rich experience as Director of the Pius X School of Liturgical Music. We feel that the title she has chosen for her paper is particularly apt. The Chant, with its continuous history of many centuries, constitutes a body of music with a spiritual and artistic appeal to people of all faiths.
—Ed.

revelation and in martyrdom implemented by pagan cruelty—when the soul was lifted to heaven, the body given to beasts in the arena. It has retained its inheritance, its power to carry a message of hope and of love. Let us recall the Roman Empire at the time when the Christian religion was striving to live, to utter its message, and we shall readily understand in how deep a sense the Chant possesses beauty and the haunting power of suggestion when we realize that its origins include the cry of spiritual heroism—of souls filled with an exalted faith, bodies tortured unto death. Our own day curiously resembles the early centuries of the Christian era—we too live in a great age of learning and art, and yet the world is torn today as it was then by the onslaughts of barbarians.

Perhaps the differences, however, are greater than the likenesses. In our day we have the radio, and I rejoice at the glorious power that gives so much to the world, to rich and poor; yet it robs us of a precious thing—of silence. There always is loss in gain, and here it is a loss in some sense of the creative, communing spirit, which thrives in silence and travails secretly in the necessity of bringing forth something out of the soul's hunger.

Gregorian Chant is unison music. This great art could only have evolved from the listening ear. For centuries, it would seem, the Psalms of David had been sung on a few tones, and we can readily imagine that in those days of inspiration and exaltation of spirit the tone meant something all-comprehensive. Evidently it was in listening to the single tone, and the power of that tone, that the great chants came to be; the soul was alive to the beauty close at hand. The violinist, the player of any unison instrument, knows what it means to listen to a tone and try to evoke beauty and *timbre* from it. The pianist has many advantages over the violinist, but in this creating of tone beauty—I mean that of the simple melodic line—evidently the players of stringed instruments have the advantage. Only from those accustomed to listening to and loving tone could the Chant have evolved.

The great sonorities of our present day were unknown. I hope in our gain we do not lose the power of listening for the line of rhythm and tone that marks the difference between "very good" and the perfection that we discover in simplicity rather than in multiplicity.

Dom Mocquereau, a monk of Solesmes, founder of the *Palé-*

ographie musicale, was perhaps the greatest of those eminent scholars who worked continuously during nearly a hundred years at the restoration of Gregorian rhythm. It is the interpretation of this rhythm, evolved at Solesmes, that is followed in the present article. Dom Mocquereau came to America in 1920 to conduct the Gregorian Congress held in New York, at St. Patrick's Cathedral, and stayed at Manhattanville. He returned for the Summer Session of the Pius X School of Liturgical Music in 1922; there he made his headquarters and gave a course in Gregorian Chant. It was an unforgettable experience, and the inspiration of his teaching and his presence have been like a rock-foundation for the School. Dom Mocquereau often told us that Gregorian Chant, although it had its roots in Greek and Hebrew music, is a distinct art, and I think that to any student of the Chant this becomes apparent—the rhythm is utterly unlike anything else in musical literature.

The distinctive characteristic of the Chant is its free rhythm. Rhythm, in its simplest definition, is a rise and fall. Look at the waves of the sea, at the swaying branches, the tall meadow grass when moved by a breeze, and see life in the movement; something totally free and akin to the rhythm of life. We feel ourselves to be a part of it. The rhythmic wave is composed of arsis and thesis—a beginning and an end. The arsis or upbeat is energy; the thesis, generally a letting-go, a *decrescendo*. The strange, unearthly quality of the Chant comes from the absolute evenness of most of the notes—no note may be shortened, though some tones may be lengthened. The expression must come within the phrase with no distortion of melody or rhythm. To understand this, look at the Agnus Dei given below. This prayer, "Lamb of God, Who takest away the sins of the world, have mercy on us", is sung as quietly as possible, allowing the melody to pray—and to speak through beauty of line, like a Greek statue. Notice the two groups of ascending tones, and the two groups of descending twos; nothing could be more simple, yet if the ascending and descending twos are sung with perfect exactitude, each tone is alive. If the flawless *legato* of Gregorian rhythm is preserved, the effect of the repeated tones, added to the beauty of the Latin word, makes for an all-pervading simplicity. Listen to two tones, first a repetition such as ♯♯; then to two different but linked tones, ♯ , the *podatus*. The first one is a leader, a beginner of a group. It has a distinct

quality, the quality of leader, such as the second tone can never achieve, even though it be a higher one, and so brighter—perhaps louder, but certainly brighter. To go back to the *Agnus Dei*: note the two descending groups. They die away, and the neums give us the picture of something unobtrusive, a certain receding that cannot be represented in modern notation. Notice the second isolated *punctum*, which makes the third pulse of the group that begins with the preceding dotted *punctum* and unites “who” (“*qui*”) to “Lamb of God”; then an ascent and descent—a group of two followed by two groups of three tones.

Ex. 1

A -gnus Dé - i,* qui tollis peccáta mún-di: mi-se-ré-re nó-bis. Agnus Dé-i *

qui tollis peccáta mún-di: mise-ré-re nó-bis.

Where may the Latin accent occur? Sometimes (as in the first “*peccáta*”) on the weak last pulse of a group of three. From this we can readily see the freedom of rhythm in reference to the Latin accent. The Latin accent is merely lifted, regardless of what melodic pulse it falls on; the rhythm moves along, as rhythm must; it does not fall asleep, then wake again, but keeps moving gently, flowing onward like time itself, towards eternal goals. What conclusion must we draw from this? That the Latin accent may appear on any pulse of a group of two or three tones, as the Latin accent is a melodic element, not a thing of stress or what we ordinarily regard as accent. Gregorian Chant is a type of *oral contemplation*. The *Agnus Dei* ends with “*mi-se-re-re nobis*” (“have mercy on us”)—a descending major third, elaborated.

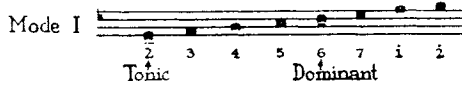
It would be difficult to say which is the most important element in Gregorian Chant, the rhythm, the modes, or the text; the three have become definitely *one*.

A brief study of a few chants in each mode will help to show this. The chants chosen to illustrate the various modes will show also the free treatment of the Latin accent, and its relation to melody and to rhythm. At the head of each section, there will appear the modal scale under discussion: the tonic (or *finalis*) and dominant will be marked; a circle (appearing in only three instances) will indicate the scale-degree that formerly served as dominant. For the sake of convenience, I shall throughout num-


ber the scale-degrees with figures that would be proper in major, but I must stress that I do this without imputing a major character where none exists. Also, where for convenience I refer to a broken-chord line in a melody, I do so without imputing any harmonic significance. In order to make the rhythmic groupings in the musical illustrations clearer to the reader, I have taken the liberty of inserting a rest (as before the second "Agnus" of Ex. 1) at the openings of phrases that begin off the *ictus* (i.e., the rhythmic support that is provided by the first pulse of a group).

The range of the examples, like that of Gregorian Chant generally, is small—rarely more than an octave. Consequently leaps and continued scalewise motion in one direction take on more saliency and sweep than leaps of the same size and scalewise passages of the same duration would assume in modern music—particularly that for instruments. It is interesting to note how readily the necessary adjustment is made by the listener—sensing, perhaps unconsciously, that there is a more or less constant ratio between effect and the means employed.

MODE I



Mode I is the best known of the modes, because the chants most frequently sung are written in it.

The "Pópule méus", sung on Good Friday at the Adoration of the Cross, is to be rendered by the entire congregation, voicing the tragic sorrow of Christ at the defection of His people. Sing it, and you will understand why this lament has sounded down the centuries with no diminution of grief. Look at the world of today and you will know why this should be as true now as it was in ages past, when this chant was first sung. The opening is most simple. There is but one single note on the accent "Pó-" of "Pópule", then there are two tones ascending on the next syllable; on the weak syllable "-le", there is a half step (on degrees 3-4) followed by a descent—an up and down on three tones only. On "méus" there is a cadence on 1-2-2, a whole-step cadence such as only one who *felt* would have selected at this point—thought alone could not have chosen it. It says so much in saying so little. After another ascent, there is a *pressus* , two

identical notes "pressed" together, on Sol; and the remainder of "What have I done to thee?" continues the melody. Then comes a major chord line—1-3-5. Seldom has the major chord been used to such effect—it startles as a deeper realization of grief startles and almost forces an outcry. It finds its peak on the step 6-7-6, on the upper of the two groups of three $\text{♩} \text{♩} \text{♩}$; the tremulous *torculus*, with its higher tone in the middle, does what is intended, and the line descends with the 4-3 motif elaborated; the rest is a repetition of old material, with slight changes here and there, necessitated by the words. Only singing with the evenness of a perfect violin tone can produce the desired effect. This will always remain one of the great laments, a lament such as only the freedom of the rhythm in its oneness with the text could have achieved.

I have taught Gregorian Chant for many years to varied groups, to children of elementary and high school years, to older students, but never without noting a very receptive appreciation of the "Pópule méus" by all the students, and many times even a wonder at the sorrow expressed; and this not only by those of the Catholic Church—many non-Catholics have been moved to tears at the beauty of the chants of the Holy Week Services.

Ex. 2

P Opu-le mé-us quid fé - ci tí-bi? aut in quo contristávi te? respónde mí-hi.

*

The "Gloria laus" by Theodulf, Bishop of Orleans (760-821), is sung at the Procession after the Blessing and Distribution of the Palms. This chant, both syllabic and neumatic in style—that is, with a single note or a simple neum of more than one note for each syllable, but no florid passages—is a good example of the alternation of *ictus* and Latin accent. A simple neum, such as ♩ , has the *ictus* on the first note, so that it need not be marked; I have inserted a + where *ictus* and Latin word accent do *not* come together; the first place is at *hónor*. The Latin accent is a lift, a melodic element, *not* a stress. The *ictus* is a rhythmic support, also not a stress; but when the two come together, singers show a tendency to punch and overaccent. The accentuation in many modern languages, notably English, naturally forms speech-habits which constitute a danger here. Consequently the melody should

be learnt separately, with care to have the notes absolutely even except where there is an *episema* (over “Chris-” and “-cus”); at these points there is a *slight* prolongation, but the length must not be doubled; the *episema* is a mark of expression and must not change a group of two notes into a group of three.

The section up to the first double-bar serves as a refrain, since it is repeated after each of the numbered verses, of which there are five in all. In this refrain we have utter childlike joy in a procession, and one can see and hear the marching crowds carrying their palms. The melody is composed largely of three notes (6-5-4): 6 5 5 6 5 5 4 5 5 6 4 3 2. The drop to Re adds fresh impulse to the joyous refrain, yet provides the touch of restraint that is characteristic of Gregorian Chant. The Verse “Israel” builds its melody on La, the dominant of Mode I, and it uses the upper part of the scale. As an example of the beauty of Gregorian rhythm in a syllabic chant and of the inspired use of a few tones, I think this hymn is outstanding. Would it be beautiful without the words? I think so, but certainly without them it would not convey more than half of that meaning which lifts it even above music, and something would be missing not only to those who associate the words with it, but to the non-Catholic ear also. Still, we are considering the Chant as music as well as in its function as an integral part of the liturgy.


The verse begins with a rest, so the Latin accent is lifted on the second pulse (first note). The power of pure music is shown in the way use is made of the upper half of the scale, 5-6-7-i, as it was shown earlier in the use of the descending 6-5-4. The easy range is an indication that this part was assigned to the full chorus or congregation. To hear the “Glória laus” sung well is a refreshing musical experience; sunlight and the coolness of early dawn seem to animate one’s spirit, no matter how jaded it may be.

Ex. 3

G Ló-ri-a, laus, et hōnor, tibi sit Rex Chrīste Redēptor: Cú-i pu-e-rí-le dé-cús

prōmpsit Hosāna pí-um I. Israel es tu Rex, Davi-dis et ínclýta próles: Nómīne

qui in Dómi-ni Rex benedícite, vénis.

The "Jubiláte Déo", the Offertory for the Second Sunday after Epiphany, is religious ecstasy removed from all doubt and confusion. The whole earth is paying tribute to God. There seems to be no inch or corner that does not join in this outburst. On the third syllable of "Jubiláte Déo", the *salicus* (the three-note ascending neum) is used to give a slight extra pressure; the accent in each of the two words is treated melodically—that is, the melody rises to a higher note. The jubilation reaches its peak when the words "Jubiláte Déo" are repeated. Look at the example below; even to the eye its picture conveys some idea of the soaring of tone in this melody and its utter freedom of rhythm: from low Do to high Fa is a great range for Gregorian Chant—a rather big range in any vocal composition, but very exceptional in Gregorian Chant, which is so restrained. The wide compass has called for a modulation into Mode V. The second incise in the second phrase (that is, the music between the first incise mark  on the second *jubiláte* and the incise mark after it) is in this rhythm (each 1 representing a rhythmic pulse): III II II III III II; the next incise is more regular: II III II III II III. This falling into regular irregularity is delightful, and the whole chant, to quote the words of William J. Henderson, the music critic, written after one of the concerts of the Pius X Choir in Town Hall, "sounds like spontaneous improvisation." The "Jubiláte", if sung well, with inspired feeling, always produces this elation. The following example does not give the whole of the chant, but the excerpt is sufficiently long to convey the boundless joy of it, and, I think, demonstrates what we all know but perhaps seldom realize or admit, that joy is stronger, more penetrating, than grief. In these days of tragedy one hardly dares to say this, but I believe it is true.

Ex. 4



Úbi-lá-te * Dé-o u-ni-vér-sa tér-ra: jubi-lá-
 te Dé-o u-ni-vér-sa tér-
 ra: psálmum dí-ci-te nó-mi-ni é-jus:

MODE II



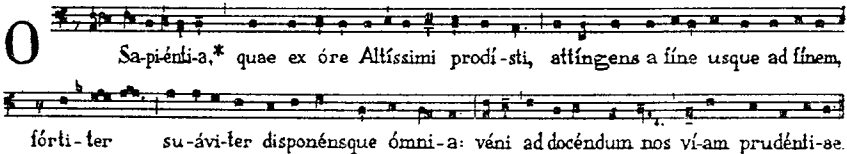
The O Antiphons, so called as each begins with “O”, are a preparation for the Nativity of Christ. One is sung each day, from December 17 to December 23 inclusive, as the Antiphon for the Magnificat. The melody remains the same for each day; only the words change. The first Antiphon is given below. Here is a translation of its text: “O Wisdom, that proceedest from the mouth of the Most High, reaching from end to end mightily, and disposing all things sweetly! come and teach us the way of prudence.” The music of the O Antiphon is a very fine example of Mode II. The rhythm, melody, and suitability to each text show Gregorian Chant at its greatest period. The rhythm is free, but there is a certain form, which is most interesting. The outline of the first phrase as far as “prodísti” is: ♪ I III III II II ¡II II II II II III I. Sing the rhythm on a neutral syllable, and it will speak for itself. To achieve the true beauty of the Antiphon in performance, the rhythm must have the natural flowing movement that does not obtrude itself, but vivifies the words and becomes one with them.

The use of the fourth in the melody shows a consummate skill in tone-lore. The interval at the opening expresses the wonder of the human soul in contemplating and even in speaking to our Lord under the title of Wisdom. The first section winds its way down to Do, recites on Re, goes up once more to Fa, and ends on Do over “-sti”. The next phrase has a fourth, La-Re, on the accent of “attíngens”. It recites on Re. The last word of the phrase, “fórtiter”, again uses a fourth, this time a hidden fourth, Mi-La. After elaboration on “-ter”, the sentence descends to low Do. It moves as the dignity of the text demands, the soul communing with the infinite. The last phrase, to the words, “come and teach us the way of prudence”, opens with a fourth; but the prolongation in this case is only a slight one and comes on the last syllable of “véni”. “Sapiéntia” and “véni” have an *episema* on the final syllable. Each also has an *ictus* on this syllable and is therefore a “rhythmic word”: according to the doctrine of Solesmes, a rhythmic word is one that ends on an *ictus*—that is, on the rhythmic

support—, so that the beginning of a musical group occurs on its last syllable.

The effect of this great art on both children and older students may be described as an awakening. They feel the rhythm. The melody of this Antiphon is beautiful, the structure simple but full of surprises; the unity appeals to them even without analysis.

Ex. 5

O 

Sa-pi-én-ti-a,* quae ex óre Altíssimi prodi-sti, attingens a fine usque ad finem,
 fórti-ter su-ávi-ter disponénsque ómni-a: váni ad docéndum nos ví-am prudénti-ae.

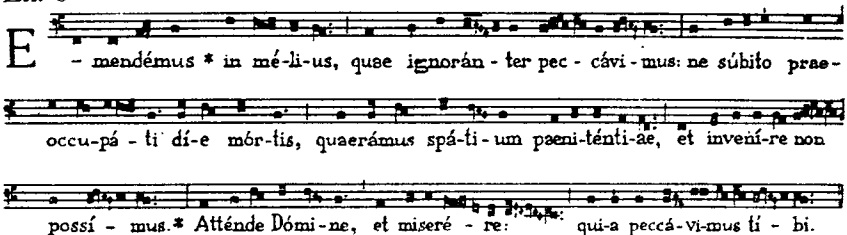
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The “Emendémus” is a Responsory sung on Ash Wednesday after the blessing of the ashes, while the people advance to the altar rail to receive the ashes signed on the forehead.

Some years ago a college girl, not especially pious, came to me after the service and said: “Now I understand why people love the Chant; I went to Mass with no great devotion, but when I heard the chants I felt sorry for my sins without the help of words—the Chant made me realize and made me sorry.”

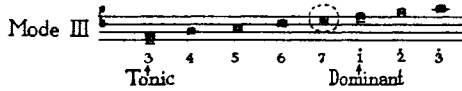
The “Emendémus” is a great prayer of repentance; it pleads for forgiveness. From the low La, up and down it goes with freedom of melody and rhythm, the words seeming to inspire the outpouring. It is a simple chant, having no great elaboration of melody, seldom exceeding four notes on a syllable and often being syllabic—that is, having but one tone to a syllable. It is in responsorial form, repeating the refrain “Atténde” after the verse and doxology that come after the following extract.

Ex. 6

E 

- mendémus * in mé-li-us, quae ignorán-ter pec-cávi-mus: ne súbito prae-
 occu-pá-ti dí-e mór-tis, quaerámus spá-ti-um pæni-ténti-æ, et invení-re non
 possí-mus.* Atténde Dómi-ne, et miseré-re: qui-a peccá-vi-mus lí-bi.

MODE III



I think the “Tantum ergo” is rightly considered one of the great melodies of the world. The words consist of the last two stanzas of the hymn, “Pange lingua”, the text composed by St. Thomas Aquinas. (When the earlier stanzas are sung, the same music is of course used for them also.) The melody is so simple that anyone can render it, yet so mighty that, when sung by great throngs in the larger churches, it can be overpowering in its cry of adoring love and faith. The range extends only an octave, from Re to upper Re. The first phrase up to “cérnuī” has only one three-tone rhythmic group (on “Véne-”); the next phrase consists entirely of twos; and the last phrase has two groups of three notes. How is this glory of sound produced? The rhythm keeps its freedom, so does the melody; the keynote Mi and the dominant Do are not obtrusive; the Latin accent floats on any part of the melody—and we have something so profound that a musician once said to me: “Why need we have any other melody for the ‘Tantum’?” Six times the Latin accent is on the upbeat. To point out one of the most subtle and beautiful rhythmic and melodic features: over “Sacraméntum” we have La-Do on the Latin accent, while the same notes recur on “cérnuī”, the former note being on the accent; in both instances La has the *ictus*; the second phrase (like the others) begins with a rest; consequently Sol does not have the *ictus*, for it is not the beginning of the group; but the melody continues for a space with the Latin accent off the *ictus*, thus giving the word accent the briefest time-value the chant affords. In performance, the melody is often quite changed at the second phrase, as a stress and weight are generally given to the Sol and Do, *i. e.*, to the Latin accent. The correct form of the melody is $\underset{|}{7}$ $\underset{|}{5}$ $\underset{|}{6}$ $\underset{|}{i}$ $\underset{|}{7}$ $\underset{|}{6}$ $\underset{|}{5}$ $\underset{|}{6}$ $\underset{|}{5}$, but it is generally incorrectly sung $\underset{|}{5}$ $\underset{|}{6}$ $\underset{|}{i}$ $\underset{|}{7}$ $\underset{|}{6}$ $\underset{|}{5}$ $\underset{|}{6}$ $\underset{|}{5}$.

The three phrases all begin on the upbeat, but the openings are generally sung: $\underset{|}{i}$ $\underset{|}{i}$ $\underset{|}{i}$ $\underset{|}{i}$, whereas they should be $\underset{|}{i}$ $\underset{|}{i}$ $\underset{|}{i}$; such a change would alter any motive. Still, though wounded, the

melody goes bravely ahead—not so beautiful, but still carrying on—a marvel of great art!

Ex. 7

* 5. Tan-tum ergo Sacramentum Vene-remur cernui: Et anti-quum documentum Nō-vo cédat
6. Geni-tō-ri, Geni-tō-que Lauset jubi-lá-ti-o, Sá-lus, hó-nor, virtus quoque Sit et bene-ri-tu-i: Prae-stet fides supplemētum Sēnsu-um de-lectu-i.
dicti-o Pro-ce-dēnti ab utroque Compar sit lau-dá-ti-o. Amen.

*

The “Benedictus es Dómine” is a loving prayer begging God to show us His justifications. Look at the chant given below. Note how the frequent repercussions *** and the use of the *pressus* give a certain confident insistence. Almost always the Latin accent is elaborated, but without precluding the free use of only one tone where desired, as in “dóce”, the accented syllable of which has a single tone. In the first sentence, both words and melody are repeated exactly. At “lábiis” we have two ascending groups of three notes; the first group is divided into two syllables; the melodic accent is not treated regularly, as the melody goes up instead of down *after* the Latin accent. An interesting point is the way in which the Latin accent is prepared (so to speak) by what immediately precedes it; at “Benedictus”, “justificatiónes”, and “judícia”, this is done by single *puncta*. There seems always to have been a distinct sense of form in the framing of this music, and here we have an illustration of it; the more the melodies are studied the more is thought discovered to have its place in even the most spontaneous outbursts—a thought always deep and true, never wild and confused.

Ex. 8

B E-ne-dí-ctus es *Dómi-ne, dó-ce me justi-fi-ca-ti-ó-nes tú-as: be-nedí-ctus es Dómi-ne, dó-ce me justi-fi-ca-ti-ó-nes tú-as: in lá-bi-is mé-is pronunti-á-vi omni-a judí-ci-a ó-ris tú-i.



The first time the word “Sánctus” occurs in the Sánctus of Mass V, there are three skips—a fifth ascending, a fourth descending, and a fourth ascending—on the opening syllable. It is unusual to have so many skips over one syllable in Gregorian Chant. The melody sings with deep affection, yet there is a certain aloofness; the recurring leaps seem to give it this effect, if it is performed correctly. The second “Sánctus” is all awe; it begins with a held tone, which produces an effect of quiet. Then the first “Sánctus” is repeated.

Ex. 9



What I say about the Chant expresses not only my own feeling about it. For many years I have seen how faith is deepened by beauty, and I have watched the beauty of the Chant creep into the spirit of children; not only of children, but of others also, for beauty does creep into our souls to uplift the spirit and to bend to reverence—a precious gift to those who feel it, and who does not?

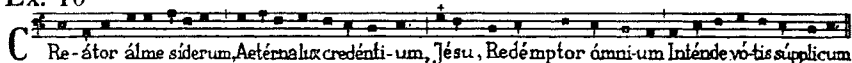
The Chant has such a beauty that even when reduced to the rags of mutilation it stretches forth healing hands to us all; so, it seems to me, is its future assured. What a triumph when even a bad rendering, such as we so often hear, brings forth little glints of light; that is, when anything remains of beauty of tone, of flowing and correct rhythm, or of clear tonal pronunciation! If these have gone, what remains? Perhaps an echo here and there; I don't know, but generally something does emerge from the wreck. I have seldom heard a rendering quite so bad as I have just described, but in my many years of teaching I have heard some very poor chanting—it did not make me sad, I rejoiced that the singers were striving towards a worthy goal.

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The “Creátor álme síderum” hymn never touches earth; it seems too elusive to have any material substance. How is this effect achieved? One thing that helps is that there are no breaks—the

melody is one sentence; the rhythm must flow unceasingly. It is extremely difficult to sing this chant well. The rhythmic support (the *ictus*) and the Latin accent coincide throughout, with only one exception. This is on the first syllable of "Jésu". Only those who have studied rhythm carefully can sing this properly. The syllable must be laid *on* the melody, not the melody on the word. It is advisable to sing the melody as a vocalise, from memory, and all in one breath; then the words float with it. The handling of the major-chord line at the beginning and again at the end (though hidden the second time) shows consummate skill in the use of tones and their possibilities.

Ex. 10



MODE V



In the "Christus factus est", the Gradual for Holy Thursday, the word "Christus" is pronounced with a *pressus* and two succeeding notes, the latter of which is held. This opening is generally sung very softly. The words, "Christ is made for us obedient unto death", are to the Christian so tremendous that only in the ages of faith, when by multitudes, as well as by individuals, they were grasped in their full overwhelming significance, could a melody have been found to bear the force of it. Dare one call this lofty musical utterance a melody? Yes, it is a melody, but one of such sublimity that it has *become the words*. Look at the chant below. On "factus est" there is a repetition of the 4-5 group of the opening, but now there is no *pressus*; on "nobis" the Sol occurs twice, the second time with an *episema* ♮; then comes the drop of a third, and the motif 4 5 4. ends the phrase. The "obédiens" is joined to it, the single *punctum* making a group of three, thus linking the two phrases together. The syllable "-bé-" cries with sorrow and compassion, as the melody soars up to the dominant in a great wave of anguish. The tones come down only to return to the dominant at "úsque"; then touching the lowered seventh for the

first time, the sentence ends on the tones of the “Christus”, but in the arrangement $\overline{4} \ 5 \ 4 \ 4.$, the *episema* intensifying the already intolerable sorrow. The rhythm alternates continually between binary and ternary groups. At the second “mórtem”, the whole-step group is changed to a half-step group.

The verse, beginning with “Própter”, uses a lowered clef for convenience, as the melody goes very high. It begins on the same Fa—“therefore God has exalted Him and given Him a name above all names.” What an exaltation for human nature to gaze upon the Saviour of the world crucified for us!

Ex. 11

C Hr-f-stus* fáctus est pro nó - bis obé - di-ens us - que ad mór-tem, mór-tem au-tem crú - cis. ¶ Propter quod et Dé-us exaltávit illum,

MODE V ON DO

The “Sálve Regína” is full of pathos and is all the more pathetic in that it is so brave. It begins with the line of the tonic chord, and in the first sentence ascends to upper Do. We have the alternation of *ictus* and word accent at “máter” and again at “Víta”; both accents fall on the third pulse and help to unite the two phrases. Notice—at “To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve”—that the skeleton of the melody is mainly on the Sol chord line; Sol is so bright a tone that it greatly relieves the sorrow of the words. In the third phrase—“To thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears”—high Do is used twice and strikes a note of courage; but the phrase ends on low Do. In spite of the sorrow, and this chant is a veritable lament, the note of hope rings throughout. We must remember that this is the cry of children to their Mother, and such a cry is never without hope and even confidence. The genius of the Chant effects an expression of sadness and trustfulness combined. Rhythm and melody help to do this, a rhythm largely binary, but never entirely so: each held note is connected with the following *punctum* . . . ,

giving a group of three. The curious power of Gregorian Chant to voice the entire spirit of a prayer is manifest throughout this Antiphon.

Ex. 12

S Al-ve Re-gi-na, * Má-ter mi-se-ri-cór-di-ae: Ví-ta dul-cé-do, et spes nó-stra, sál-ve.
 Ad te cla-má-mus, éx-su-les, fi-li-i Hé-vae Ad te su-spi-rá-mus gemén-tes et
 flén-tes in hac la-crí-má-rum válle. E-ia er-go, Ad-vo-cá-ta nó-stra, íl-los
 tú-os mi-se-ri-cór-des ó-cu-los ad nos con-vér-té. Et Jé-sum, be-ne-dictum
 frúctum vén-tris tú-i, nó-bis post hoc ex-sí-li-um o-stén-de. O clé-mens,
 O pí-a O dúl-cis Vir-go Ma-ri-a.

MODE VI

Mode VI

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 i
 Tonic Dominant

The Mass for the Dead is rightly considered one of the finest examples of Gregorian Chant at its earliest and best period. The Introit, "Réquiem aetérnam", is composed of but five tones, 4-5-6-7-i; the first incise uses only three of them. Look at the example below. What gives it its extreme expressiveness? First of all, there is the *pressus*—on the two tones "pressed" together; then the "Ré—" of "Réquiem" laps over into the succeeding group and the "ae—" of "aetérnam" does likewise, receiving, moreover, an extra stress from the *salicus*; the "tér—" of "aetérnam" again has a *pressus*. The rhythm, the repetition, the whole-step pattern, all help to give solemnity. The second sentence begins with "dóna", on which the motif of "aetér—" recurs, and then ascends to upper Do, repeating tones on the way; the *quilisma* (the little wavy note) on the second syllable of "éis" gives the note immediately preceding it a slight prolongation. The melody on this syllable lies partly

higher than it does on the preceding accented syllable. The motif is repeated exactly over the “-at” of “lúceat”. All this unites to give solemnity to the consoling words; we ask for rest and light. In the second sentence, at “et lux”, the 4-5-6 motif of “aetér-” and “dóna” is inverted in the form: 6 5 6 5 4. What a different effect the descending group gives!

The opening group begins with the “Christus fáctus” motif—associating all death with Christ’s death. Music has the power of associating ideas—words alone cannot do everything—, so that we sing this grave and beautiful melody, full of peace and a strange tranquillity that passes human understanding.

Ex. 13

R E-qui em * aetér - nam dó-na é-is Dómi - ne: et lux perpé-tu-a
lúce - at é - is.

*

To that ecstatic salutation, the “Regína caéli”, we can give only a few lines. This Antiphon, sung at Compline—the evening service of the Catholic Church—, is perfect in form and almost academic in its choice of tonic and dominant for cadences and *ictus* points. Whence then the freedom that we sense, a freedom like the swift flight of a bird at early dawn? As usual, there is but one answer: it is produced by the rhythm—by the delicate, light treatment of the Latin accent. *Ictus* and Latin accent never coincide until “meruísti”, and then not again until “Óra.” Finally, on the “-lú-” of the closing “allelúia”, they coincide once more. It is like a dance of sunbeams, but when, at the end, we beg for prayer in our behalf, we become very circumspect, and *ictus* and accent come together. The thought of Our Lady as Queen of Heaven lies behind this inspired gaiety.

Ex. 14

R Egína caéli * laetáre, alle-lú-ia: Qui-a quem me-ru-ísti portáre, alle-lú-ia:
Resurréxit, sic-ut dixit, alle-lú-ia: Ora pro nóbis Dé-um, alle-lú-ia.

The Musical Quarterly

MODE VII



St. Augustine has said that there are times of joy when words fail us, so that we must perforce use a *jubilus*. This means that, disregarding any concern about text, we simply sing joyfully. The name “*jubilus*” is given to the elaborate melody that is sung on the last syllable of the “*Allelúia*”. Note the example below, the *Alleluia* for Easter Sunday: it seems to be all jubilation. “*Páscha*” is a time word—that is, a word that does not end on an *ictus*; “*nóstrum*” provides a very expressive example of the use of the *episema* on repetitions; at “*immolátus*”, we find the accent breaking into what might easily be called *coloratura* singing; it is like the singing of a bird, so free, so exultant, reaching high La, then in utter joy repeating the first section—it was too satisfying not to repeat. The melody goes down gradually in the freest of free rhythm. “*Christus*” has the very telling *sablicus* on its first syllable. The second syllable is sung with a certain finality: 2·5; but the gladness is too much for such a song of heaven—we must not close there—, and the two next incises end in the lower part of the range, with a twinkling reminiscence of the great light that has been revealed at the end of “*immolátus*”. In the service, this chant is followed by the famous Sequence, the “*Victimae paschali*”, the story of the Resurrection.

Ex. 15



A *Alle-lú-ia. * ij. W. Páscha*

nóstrum immo-lá -

tus est * Chri - stus.

*

The Antiphon, “*In paradisum*”, from the burial service, is sung during the Procession after the funeral Mass. True to the spirit of Christian faith, this Antiphon seems to be all joy. The melody voices the gladness of the words, “the angels come to meet

the soul and lead it into heaven." The seventh mode has been chosen—rightly, of course, as it has a wonderful power of portraying the buoyancy that seems to spring forth out of hidden depths. The melody mounts immediately, rising steadily from Sol to Mi.

Both the *ictus* and the Latin accent have been carefully marked in the example given below. At "paradísium" they are not together, at "dedúcant" they meet, at "túo" they again separate, and so on until the Verse at "Chórus", when *ictus* and accent meet throughout. From the alternation between the coincidence and non-coincidence of the Latin accent and *ictus*, we obtain a sense of assurance and complete confidence; yet the music is never heavy, never didactic, never insistent. At "Chórus" an almost martial note is derived from the coincidence not only of *ictus* and accent, but also of a strong modal tone. To have these three elements come together is unusual in Gregorian Chant; but the free rhythm prevents any overaccentuation here. Note that the cadences are mostly on Sol and Re, but that at "Mártynes" the sad little half step appears. (It recurs at "suscípiat".) The Antiphon ends in utter quiet, going down to Fa in the last two phrases and coming to rest musically on the word "réquiem", which means "rest". A wonderful ending to a great and solemn service. It is like the upward gaze of a child into the face of a loving father.

Ex. 16

I N paradísium * dedúcant te Ange-li: in tú-o ad-ventu suscí-pi-ant te Márty-
res, et perdúcantte in ci-vi-tá-tem sánctam Jerúsalem. Chórus Ange-lórum te
sus-cí-pi-at, et cum Lázaro quondam páupere aetér-nam hábe-as réqui-em.

MODE VIII

Mode VIII

2 3 4 5 6 7 1 2
Tonic Dominant

Although the "Impropérium expectávit cor méum" touches low Do once and high Mi twice, it consists in the main of only five notes; yet this chant, which portrays the sufferings of Christ's

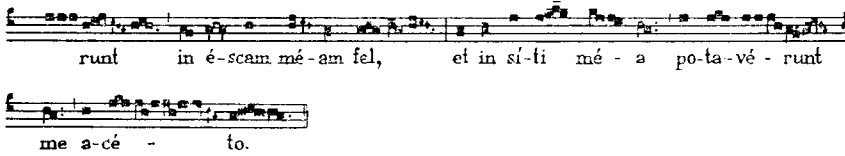
soul as prophesied by the Psalmist, is a song of such magnitude that each year, when the time draws near for it to be rendered on Palm Sunday, one wonders if the choir can possibly sing it. The words "I expected reproach and misery" express sorrow without relief. The cry seems like a universal expression of loneliness in suffering.

A glance at the Gregorian notation will show the Latin accent treated in every possible way, by a rhythm free and soaring. In the first word, it is on the weak penultimate syllable that the melody particularly rings out; "cor" is expressed by repercussions. The Gregorian notation pictures, as modern notation cannot, the almost infinite resources of rhythm and the different ways of expressing one tone. If we follow the melody closely to "non invéni", we shall see the use not only of stepwise progression, of occasional leaps, and of repetition, but also varied manipulations of thematic material, including chord lines; and here again free rhythm produces its subtle effect. On the first word of "et non fúit", we find 5-7-2; the next "et" has the same figure, but on 4-6-i; then, on "non", the figure is outlined on 6-i-3, but this time the rhythmic pattern is different, as a result of the repercussions on Do, and the figure embraces two *ictus* instead of one. These repercussions lead up to Mi, and the melody then comes down stepwise to "in-véni". Only freedom of rhythm could have created this phrase. The first "non", at "non fúit", goes up to Re, but this second "non" is made more poignant, as it goes up higher. High Mi is reached once more at "síti"—"in my thirst"—but it is the weak syllable that is given this cry, and not the accented "sí-", which even comes on the third pulse of a group. It is as if there were a wish not to draw attention, yet the anguish of thirst calls forth the short cry at the end of the word—it is the spirit, the soul, that speaks through Gregorian Chant.

Ex. 17



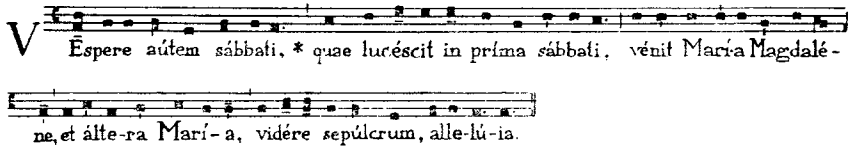
I M - propé - ri - um * exspectá - vit cor mé - um, et mi - sé - ri -
 am : et sustí - nu - i qui si - mul contrista - ré - tur, et non fú - it :
 coa - so - lan - tem me quae - sí - vi, et non in - vé - ni : et dedé -



*

The Antiphon, “Vésperæ autem”, which recalls the visit of the holy women to the sepulchre in the early dawn of Easter, conveys an atmosphere of mystery and very human expectancy. The opening words, as well as “*lucéscit*” and “*príma*”, are time words—they do not end on an *ictus* and therefore do not even have a rhythmic support. It is like whispering. Then comes recitation pure and simple through “*áltera María*”. “*Sepúlcrum*” is again a time word, avoiding any possibility of rhythmic stress; it goes on tip toe. The words tell us the fact; the melody, with its half lights, seems to point out to us the haunting power that the remembrance of sorrow has to stir to action.

Ex. 18



*

To try to present the essence of a great art in a few pages seems like temerity. I hope that the attempt has at least suggested the grandeur of the theme and that I have perhaps given an intimation that Gregorian Chant is a manifestation worthy of the reverent consideration of all musicians and of all lovers of the beautiful. The rhythm of Gregorian Chant alone is a life study. Dom Mocquereau wrote a monumental two-volume work on the subject—“*Le Nombre Musical*”—and a careful examination of it reveals an art in which movement has caught the faintest breath of sound and given it form and substance in myriad ways. It has had the power to carry, through the ages, the inspired prose and poetry of the great Christian drama—the Liturgy of the Catholic Church.