

**NOVA ORGANI HARMONIA** (NOH) is a 3,000 page collection of Gregorian chant organ accompaniments for the entire *Kyriale*, *Graduale*, and much of the *Antiphonale*. Based on the *Editio Vaticana*, and using a “pure” modal harmony first codified by Jacques-Nicolas Lemmens (†1881), the NOH was composed by the Lemmens Institute (Leuven, Belgium) during the 1940’s. Msgr. Jules Van Nuffel was assisted in this project by Flor Peeters, Msgr. Jules Vyverman, Marinus de Jong, Gustaaf Nees, H. Durieux, and E. de Laet. Reproduced below is Van Nuffel’s brief explanation of the theoretical framework behind the NOH. Flor Peeters later published a much more detailed theoretical work on the modal system of Gregorian accompaniment employed by the NOH composers, and this treatise underwent multiple editions in various languages. In 2008, Corpus Christi Watershed made the entire *Nova Organi Harmonia* (as well as Peeter’s treatise) available for free and instant download. For details, please visit: [ccwatershed.org](http://ccwatershed.org)

The NOH does not use the Solesmes rhythmic markings. It follows the “Pure Vaticana” rhythm. Details on how to apply this method are provided in Volume II. To use the Solesmes rhythm, simply mark the “long notes” (*moræ vocis*) with a pink or yellow highlighter.

## NOVA ORGANI HARMONIA AD GRADUALE

(Originally published in Volume V • English translation courtesy of D. Cook)

Several years ago, in order to realize a project of personal interest as well as to fulfill frequent requests from various circles, we considered one day developing and publishing a new accompaniment for Gregorian chants.

Conscious of the enormous labor that a work of such scope would require, and knowing on what slippery terrain we would engage ourselves, we decided to postpone execution until, after careful consideration and much deliberation, we could formulate a precise and definitive plan that would fully satisfy all of our collaborators.

This preliminary cooperation proved fruitful, and the *Nova Organi Harmonia* could be justly considered the work of the entire Lemmens institute. Surpassing the means of one or two people, the project in question was produced through the close collaboration of the director and the professors of the Institute, with such success that the organ accompaniment of the entire Gradual – without excepting or omitting a single melody – could be sent to press after a relatively short period of time.

Although the parts of the work were harmonized by different individuals, giving each harmonization a unique color – which one cannot hold against us – the unity of style and conception is nonetheless guaranteed to assure a perfect homogeneity of the work as a whole.

We would like to emphasize that we did not intend in any way to challenge either the merit or historical impact of the *Organum Comitans* of our venerable predecessors,

Messieurs Alph. and Aloys DESMET and Monsieur Oscar DEPUYDT; we, more than any others, respect its importance, as it constituted, for the era in which it appeared – nearly thirty years ago – a pioneering work. The *Organum Comitans* rightly holds a place of honor in both the history of sacred music and of our institute.

Since then, we have had the privilege of closely studying the new Vatican Edition, so as to examine in depth the structure, spirit, and character of new Gregorian melodies both individually and in relation to the organ accompaniment which, in our opinion, fits very well. On the other hand, the musical art has evolved since then, producing certain advantages not denied by any contemporary musician and increasingly influencing all composition, including Gregorian harmony.

These favorable circumstances, including the exceptional experience in Gregorian art of the eminent professors of the Institute, increased our confidence in the likely success of our endeavor. Additionally, we could never have undertaken a task of such great scope and difficulty without the prospect of a satisfactory result nor without conviction in the usefulness of this work. In effect, so many musicians wanted to have a Gregorian accompaniment which, unlike the majority of similar works, offered both graceful harmonization and easy execution. We sought to produce a Gregorian accompaniment whose artistic value was not compromised by its ease of execution.

The *Nova Organi Harmonia* demanded of each of us an unusual commitment; we have dedicated to it the best of our energies. Would it be, therefore, presumptuous on our part to be satisfied with the result and to expect its welcome reception in the musical world?

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We have established the following two principles:

- (1) *The accompaniment must be as smooth as possible and must be suited to the specific character of the organ part.*
- (2) *It is necessary to adhere to the laws of archaic Gregorian style as well as those of oratorical rhythm.*

In examining and listening to similar works, we had noted several instances where the simultaneous motion of all the accompanying voices produced a disagreeable effect and made the organ part seem uneven and forced. A calm and steady organ part is necessary above all in the legato style. However, maintaining this style in the context of a flowing motion like that of Gregorian melody requires its consistent application to shared notes (*common tones*) in the accompanying voices and a smooth bass line. We have neglected nothing in getting to this point.

Some changes of harmonies and certain chord placements on unaccented syllables or notes seemed not less disagreeable. The more attentive the vocal execution, the more such an arbitrary accompaniment gives an impression of unrest and destroys the rhythm, especially when the pedal sustains the accompaniment. This is why even the accompaniment of a simple psalm verse is a very delicate matter, as the changes in harmony must suit the proper rhythm of each verse. This explains why the complete harmonization of the verse and of the *Gloria Patri* has been joined to each *Introit*.

Based on these experiences, we have accepted on principle the rhythmic framework of the Gregorian melody as a guide for the placement of harmonies, passing tones, ornamentation, appoggiaturas, etc. We accepted the general rules of melodic execution as outlined in the Latin introduction of the Vatican Edition.

This understanding of harmonization provides dual support for the cantor(s) in the melody and rhythm; and since all Gregorian accompaniment serves principally as support for the cantors, we believe we have chosen the best model for harmonization.

We did not believe it necessary to emphasize each small rhythm because it would have seemed excessive; thus, our accompaniment has the requisite flexibility to suit the Gregorian performance adopted by the different schools.

This rhythmic and harmonic fusion of the vocal performance and the organ accompaniment constitutes one of the principle characteristics of our harmonization. To arrive at this point without creating unintentional complexity while maintaining an easy organ part, we drew upon the many resources in the arsenal of harmony and counterpoint. Throughout, however, we used harmonies appropriate to the ancient modes of Gregorian chant.

Our harmonization appears, therefore, like a well-tailored suit that fits the contours of Gregorian melody, no longer like a flowing jacket that hides the Gregorian form and blunts its contours.

To treat harmony and rhythm in this matter was a difficult matter. Facing numerous problems, large and small, that arose constantly, we understood that a flawless harmonization of Gregorian chant cannot be created by improvisation, no matter the competence and ability of the organist or harmonist.

Our accompaniment, of which we are confident, will be more perfectly understood when it is studied and analyzed:

***1st** according to its relationship to Gregorian melody and rhythm.*

***2nd** concerning its harmonic foundation.*

(1) according to its relationship to Gregorian melody and rhythm, noting:

(a) the general design of the melody

- (b) the manner in which the large *arsis* and *thesis* are complemented by a corresponding tension or a relaxation in the accompaniment
- (c) the exact placement of harmonies, and similarly the movement in the intermediate voices, notably the accented syllable and the first note of the groups
- (d) the special manner of treating the *pressus*, *quilisma*, *salicus*, *mora vocis*, etc.

(2) regarding the harmonic foundation, noting:

- (a) its wealth (richness), on the one hand;
- (b) its simplicity of execution, on the other hand.

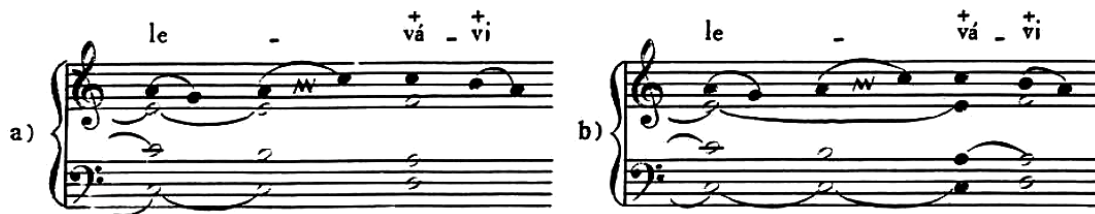
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**We call to the attention of plainsong singers in particular the resolution we provide for several typical formulas of Gregorian chant and the rhythmic advantages that result:**

(1) The accented syllable, articulated by a single note, is followed by a group of notes placed on the following syllable. Observe how we attempted to emphasize in a flexible way the accented syllable and at the same time the first note of a melodic group:



**Note:** When, for particular reasons, double accentuation is not possible without creating an unpleasant effect, we prefer, in principle, to emphasize the group and not the accented syllable. An exception could be made for groups of little melodic importance which one covers in emphasizing the accented syllable. The two following resolutions are thus admissible, though we give preference to the second:



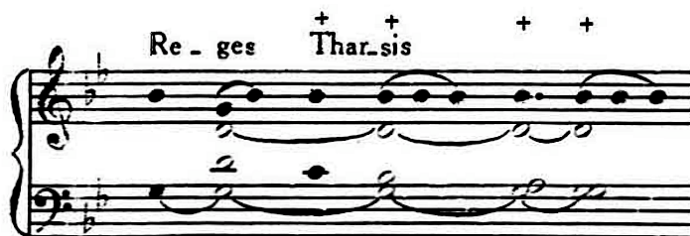
(2) The same syllable receives a *punctum* followed by a group. Consequently, it might be advantageous to place in the accompaniment two rhythmic nuances, the first on the *punctum*, the second on the group of notes that follows:



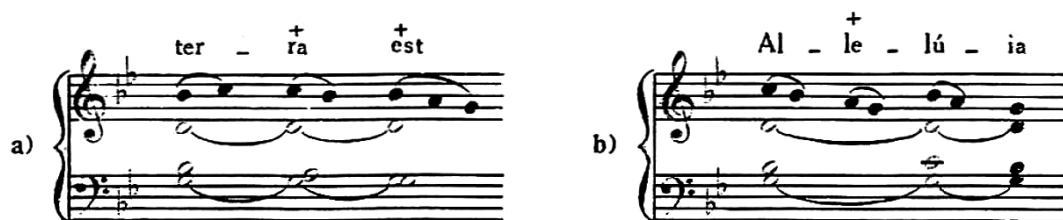
(3) For the same rhythmic motives, a *salicus* will be lightly emphasized on the first as well as the second note of the group, especially when the first note of the *salicus* is the same pitch as the preceding note:



(4) The succession of the *distrophæ*, *tristrophæ*, and *virgæ* is distinctly articulated by a light motion written in one of the accompanying voices, in accordance with the necessary echoes in the vocal execution:



(5) The harmonic support of the first note of a group, being of little melodic importance, can be emphasized in particular rhythmic motives. This is the case when the first note of the group is the same pitch as the last note of the preceding group or on the same plane as the preceding note. Otherwise, if it is a small passing group without melodic importance, it is sometimes preferable to not emphasize this group:



(6) The last note of a group extended by a *mora vocis* outside of the fundamental harmony of the group receives a discreet harmonic resolution:



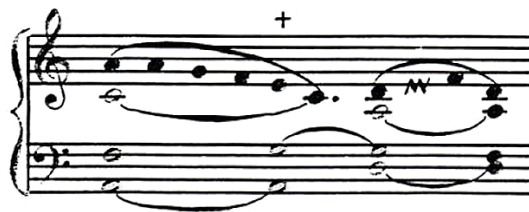
(7) In the passages sung *recto tono*, the succession of harmonies will be arranged according to the rhythm of the recitation of the text:



(8) The last note of a group, when it occupies the antepenultimate place before the shared note of the *pressus minor* is sometimes emphasized in the accompaniment; this note receives in addition a secondary accent in the vocal execution:



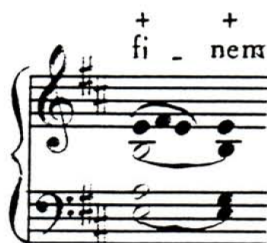
(9) We also sometimes emphasize the rhythmic-melodic division of a composite group when this is advantageous either for the harmony or the voice leading, or, above all, for practical execution:



(10) An isolated *punctum* sung at the same pitch as the preceding group, benefits from being set in relief against a light harmony:



(11) The last note of a final cadence sung on another syllable but on the same pitch as the preceding note, ordinarily requires a supporting harmony, preferably introduced by a ritardando:



We ask our readers to carefully examine similar examples that occur on nearly every page of our harmonization. Occurring in close relation with the complete melody and harmony, these demonstrate all our intentions more clearly. Organists who have an understanding of the flexibility of Gregorian rhythm will soon grasp – we hope – the range and subtleties of our harmonic and rhythmic solutions. They will develop a taste for it and will congratulate themselves for having understood these solutions, which are all the more beneficial for the vocal execution itself.

**We invite musicians to take into consideration, not only from a rhythmic standpoint, but also from a harmonic and polyphonic point of view:**

- (a) the movement of the lines reserved for the intermediary voices in polyphony, that of the tenor and especially that of the bass
- (b) the constant and varied use of shared notes in different voices



- (c) the pleasing use of pedal notes in the bass, tenor, and even alto
- (d) the frequent application of conjunct motion in the movement of voices
- (e) the richness of harmonic nuances obtained by minimal movement of voices
- (f) the rigorously modal character of the accompaniment

Numerous applications of these diverse devices appear in the body of this work, and we consider it superfluous to include them here.

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**In basing our work on the principles duly established, we did not believe it necessary to strictly adhere to those principles without permitting exceptions. Thus, for aesthetic reasons, we have not removed certain fifths and octaves, the elimination of which would have caused many discordant resolutions, nor have we absolutely condemned the free entrance and the resolution of certain dissonances. In the case of conflict between the rule and the aesthetic solution, we have always favored flexibility. This license will not disrupt the strictness nor the archaic and logical harmonization of the overall work.**

When the *Nova Organa Harmonia* is submitted to a detailed examination and to a comparative study, with greatest interest we will publish a practical manual of our Gregorian accompaniment.<sup>1</sup> It will be the methodological synthesis and will be useful to this work. It will facilitate the analysis not only of specific formulas, as we just did in the preface, but of a great number of varied examples, and it will not fail to point out, in justifying them, the accepted exceptional solutions.

–J. VAN NUFFEL

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<sup>1</sup> As mentioned above, Flor Peeters was chosen to complete this task, and his treatise underwent numerous editions.