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DICO VOBIS, QUIA ELIAS JAM VENIT, ET NON



(1906?) : : Birkle, Suitbertus : :
The Vatican plain chant; a practical manual for teacher and student

The
Vatican Plain Chant

A PRACTICAL MANUAL FOR
TEACHER AND STUDENT

From the German of the
REV. P. SUITBERTUS BIRKLE, O.S.B.
With the Author's Permission

Adapted and Edited by
A. L E M A I S T R E

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JOSEPH F. WAGNER

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INTRODUCTION.

The aim of this Plain Chant method is, in the first place, to enable the student to execute well and correctly a Plain Chant melody. To this end it must, above all things, teach him the fundamental principles of Plain Chant. It must enable him to read these venerable melodies, to sing them, to understand them, or, what is equivalent to this end, it must make him acquainted with the NOTATION, the INTERVALS, and the MUSICAL MODES.

Still, a Plain Chant method that would do all this would but take the student half way; it would only have accomplished half its task. While it might have taught him to sing a melody correctly, this would not be sufficient. The chorister who would rest there would, perhaps, sing his OFFERTORIUM or GRADUALE correctly, but he would still be far from a truly artistic rendering. For such rendering there is required more than the mere mechanical singing of a given melody; a beautiful, artistic chanting must, above all, take care that the pulsating life embodied in the melody receives expression. If the student wishes to learn the really beautiful, artistic chant, then he must search for the life and soul of the melody, so as to reproduce it by his execution of the same.

What, however, lends to Plain Chant melody, or, in general, to any musical composition, its soul, its life, its peculiar character? It is the form, the construction of its separate pieces, the manner of joining the separate parts. These, therefore, the singer must know to ascertain, if he wishes to accomplish

his task perfectly. A Plain Chant method, therefore, if it wishes to make of the student a perfect chanter, must show to him the manner in which the form of a Plain Chant melody may be analyzed, i. e., it must impart information on the construction of Plain Chant. Our METHOD, for this reason, offers, following the elementary instruction, an exhaustive chapter on the construction of Plain Chant melodies.

FIRST PART.

The Elements of Plain Chant.

CHAPTER I.—NOTATION.

The reading of Gregorian Chant requires a knowledge, if only a general one, of the following five points: the notes, the staff, the clef, accidentals, custos (guide).

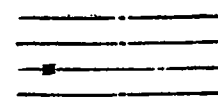
I. The Notes.

The signs which serve for the representation of a Plain Chant melody are numerous. Yet they all lead back to a fundamental note from which its different variations have proceeded, to the *quadrata*.

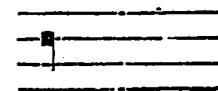
This note may appear either alone or in connection with others.

As a single note it has a twofold form—the *Punctum* and the *Virga*. The *Punctum* often takes the form of the *Diamond*.

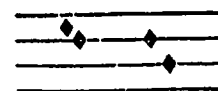
(a) *Punctum*:



(b) *Virga*:



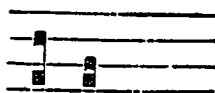
(c) *Diamond*:



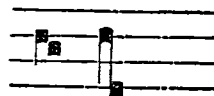
A combination of notes produces *Neums*, or groups of notes. The groups of notes have different names, according to the number of notes in a group, and according to the character of the combination.

1. GROUPS OF TWO NOTES are:

(a) The *Podatus*:



(b) The *Clivis*:



The *Podatus* is a combination of a lower and a higher note. The characteristic of this figure is that the lower note is always to be sounded first, for instance:

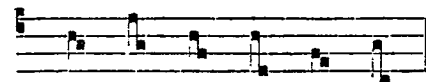


in modern notation: *

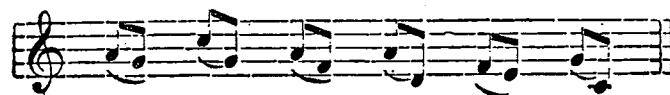


* In transcribing the Gregorian notes into modern notation we do not intend to give an equivalent of the Neums, as a perfectly true transcription is often impossible; we only add it to give to those to whom Gregorian notation is entirely foreign, an illustration as to how the Neums ought to be read.

The *Clivis* is a descending sequence. The higher note, therefore, precedes the lower, e. g.,

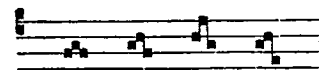


In modern notation:



2. GROUPS OF THREE NOTES are:

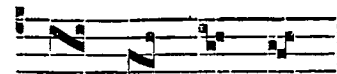
(a) The *Torculus*, a combination of three notes, of which the middle one is higher than the two others, e. g.,



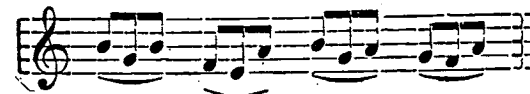
In modern notation:



(b) The *Porrectus*, a figure of three notes, of which the middle note is the lowest, e. g.,



In modern notation:



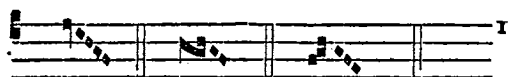
(c) The *Climacus*, an extended *clivis* or descending note figure of three notes, e. g.,



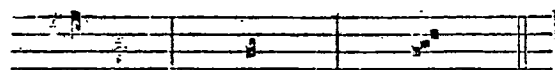
(d) The *Scandicus*, an enlargement of the *Po-datus*, an ascending note figure of three notes, as:



3. GROUPS OF MORE THAN THREE NOTES, though in theory they are classified by terms, are practically made up from the figures already mentioned. We consider it, therefore, unnecessary to speak further of such larger groups of notes. It may suffice to give a few examples:*



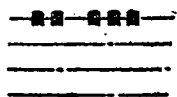
4. ORNAMENTAL NOTES, as used in the latest plain song books, may in a similar manner be traced to fundamental groups, as for instance:



Cephalicus Epiphonus Quilisma



The *Strophicus*:

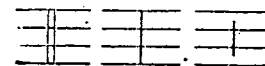


originally sung vibratim or tremolo; it is now usual to sustain the one same sound for the value of a group of the same number of notes.

* The practical rendition we will meet with later.

II. The Staff.

The staff of Plain Chant is distinguished from that of the modern note system by containing one line less. The melodies seldom exceed an octave. When a melody goes a third or more above or below the staff, leger lines are used. The PAUSES are indicated by double bars, bars and half bars in the staff.



It is obvious that the half bar indicates a short pause, the bar, however, a good one.

The double bar indicates the end of a melody. We shall see later of what great value the pauses are.

III. The Clefs.

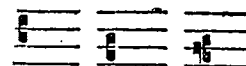
Two clefs are used in Gregorian Notation, the Do (C) clef



and the Fa (F) clef



The latter is distinguishable from the former by the little note placed before it.* It is to be observed that the clef of the Plain Chant Notation has the peculiarity of changing its position.



* The interval from clef line to the note immediately below is always a half tone. The other half tone is, in the C clef, from the upper Third to the Fourth, and in the F clef from the upper Fourth to the Fifth.

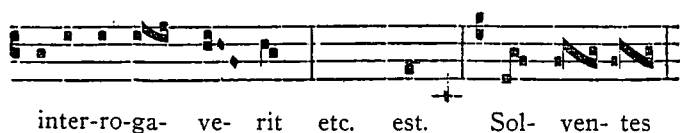
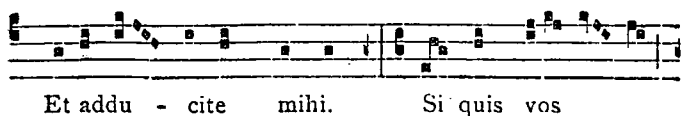
Exercises in reading of melodies in various clefs, from the Gradual, will quickly remove any difficulty in that regard.

IV. Custos (Guide.)

At the end of the staff line a small note is generally found indicating the first note of the following line. It is called *Custos* or *Guide*.

This guide is not sung—it is there only to inform the singer of the interval between the last and the first notes of successive lines.

The guide is also used in the middle of a line whenever the clef changes. An example is found in the Antiphon of the procession on Palm Sunday.



V. Accidentals.

As far as Accidentals are concerned, the Plain Chant is much simpler than our modern music. Above all it has no \sharp . The only Accidental admitted in Plain Chant is si (b) flat. In some Plain Chant books the \flat is repeated whenever the note is to be lowered; in others it retains its effect up to the next bar.

CHAPTER II.—THE INTERVALS.

After the student, as a result of the above explanations, has learned to read the Gregorian melodies, his next task is to learn to sing them, i. e., to find out the *Intervals* indicated by the notes. The following vocal exercises should enable him to do this:

1. Seconds.

a) do si la sol fa mi re do do re mi fa sol la si do
c b a g f e d c c d e f g a b c

b) < do < si < la < sol < fa < mi < re < do
a... a...

c) do > si > la > sol > fa > mi > re > do
a... a...

d) do > re > mi > fa > sol > la > si > do
a... a...

e) < do < si < la < sol < fa < mi < re < do
a... a...

f) do > si > la > sol > fa > mi > re > do
a... a...