Singing Chant: Latin and English

The key to singing Gregorian chant lies in its source, the text. Essentially, it is the chanting of a text whose melody was created in an oral tradition. However, the oral memory of how this chant was sung has been lost for several centuries. Today, the interpretation must rely on the musical notation that was developed in the Middle Ages. This notation, especially that of Laon 239, the Cantatorium of St. Gall 359 and the Codex 121 of Einsiedeln, have given us a window that opens onto that interpretation. Therefore, the fundamental elements to be taken into account are the following:

1. the **word** as the primary source of the interpretation;

2. the **melody** as conditioned by the text and by the modal laws;

3. the **neume** design as the symbolic representation of the musical form received by the text. The musical gesture, frozen on parchment.
The four basic (authentic) Gregorian chant modes:

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<th>Mode</th>
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- **Protus (Dorian)** (Mode I & II)
- **Deuterus (Phrygian)** (Mode III & IV)
- **Tritus (Lydian)** (Mode V & VI)
- **Tetrardus (Mixolydian)** (Mode VII & VIII)

The letters in bold at the fifth above the Finals, indicate the Dominant of each of the authentic modes (I, III, V and VII).

The letters in bold italic at the third above the Finals, indicate the ancient Dominants of the Plagal modes (II, IV, VI and VIII). Modes IV and VIII have moved their Dominants to the **fourth** above their Finals as indicated by the plus sign (+).

The Hierarchy of the Scale Degrees:

their function

- **The declaration degree**

*The primary degree of the scale has the function of declamation, the proclamation.*

We call it the Dominant, the Tenor, that on which one sings out the word. This scale degree became of interest in chant studies only in the 20th century when scholars (cf. Charles Atkinson) reached a consensus that the Latin of chant used a stress accent!

- **The punctuation degree**

The second function of a scale degree is that of punctuation. When one arrives at the end of a word, an incise, or a phrase in the language, one usually lets the voice descend. The Gregorian composers respected this procedure. When one arrives at the end of a phrase one descends in pitch.

In a particular piece there can be a number of recitation pitches, a number of dominants of various kinds and a number punctuations. The same scale degree can at different times be either the dominant or a punctuation.
The Modes and the Melody

• The F and the C clefs always indicate structure pitches in every piece of chant.
• Along with the universal structure pitches F and C, each of the eight modes have their Final, their Dominant and the Cadential Third above that Final as their principal structure pitches. Word accents are built on them as well as climaxes.

• Gregorian pieces terminate with only four possible notes, the Finals of the pieces: D, E, F, or G.

Gregorian Chant is “Sung Speech”

Its Vertical Dimension

• 1. **The recitation pitch** (or “dominant”) corresponds to the optimum pitch level used by good speakers for the normal proclamation of a sense unit in a text.

• 2. **Intonation patterns** in chant correspond to the rising patterns used by speakers at the beginning of a sentence.

• 3. **Cadence patterns** in chant correspond to the dropping pitches used by speakers at the end of sentences and especially at the end of a major section of a text.

The Horizontal Dimension

• 1. The rhythm and tempo of a phrase in chant corresponds to the rhythmic flow of speech used by a good public reader.

• 2. **Pretonic** syllables tend to flow more or less rapidly toward the tonic accent of a word or a phrase (e.g.: a-nun-ti-á-vit).

• 3. The **Tonic** accent of a word or a phrase contains all the energy and momentum for all the syllables that follow it (e.g.: Dó-mi-nus).

• 4. **Post-Tonic** syllables are carried by the energy of the preceding Tonic accent syllable (e.g.: Dó-mí-nus).

• 5. **Final** syllables dissipate the remaining energy from the Tonic accent and bring the forward momentum to a stop (e.g.: Dó-mi-nus). A common example of this phenomenon is that of letting a car coast to a stop at a stop sign.

The Last note of a Neume regains full Syllabic Value

• When there are two or more notes on a single syllable, they move rapidly to the final note over that syllable, which regains full syllabic value.
• When the horizontal episema (→) is used within a group of two or more notes, it restores that note to its syllabic value.
• When the notes are at the **unison**, practice repeating the vowel sound for each note.
• Draw the neume designs given over each syllable as you sing the word **Deus**:

Last note is not at the unison

• When the notes are **not** at the unison, practice smoothly joining the vowel sound of each note to the next note over that syllable.
• Draw the neume designs given over each syllable as you sing the word **Deus**:

Syllabic value: changing volume

• Practice smoothly joining the vowel sound of each note to the next note over that syllable while changing the volume of your voice as you sing the words:

Syllabic Value:

Although each syllable of the word **benesonantibus** has only a single square note, each syllable has a different value and function in the word:
As Dom Daniel Saulnier states: “… the romano-frankish chant shows an entirely new concern for the construction of phrases: the melodic curve in the form of an arch, a … concern [that] becomes a canon of composition for the ‘gregorian’. The same holds true for the treatment of words. In the case of both the phrase and the word, the Latin accent is handled in the composition by a melodic elevation. Grammar has regained all its perogatives over the music and finds itself elevated as the custos recte loquendi (the guardian of right speech).”

**GREGORIAN CHANT IS SUNG SPEECH**

Declamation of a Text

Using a single reciting tone (G):

in modern notation:
A Simple Cantillation


A Modern setting in English

HOLY, HOLY
Based on Sanctus XVIII)

Ho-ly, Ho-ly, Ho-ly Lord, God of hosts; heaven and earth are full of your glo-ry.
Ho-san-na in the high-est.
Bless-ed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Ho-san-na in the high-est.

Text: ICEL
Music: Columba Kelly, © Saint Meinrad Archabbey, 2009

From Simple Declamation to Psalmody
The original declamation used only about three to four different pitches, much as Rex Harrison used in his role in the musical *My Fair Lady*. It produced a short rise in pitch for word accents and a drop from the reciting tone to usually a whole step below. The *Agnus Dei* is an example of this. The next step was to create simple melodic patterns around the principle word accents of a phrase. The next stage was to create easily memorized patterns for these phrases: the psalm tones!

An Easter Responsory

![Musical notation for an Easter Responsory](image)

**Responsorial Psalmody**

*An English Language Setting*

![Musical notation for an English Language Setting](image)
A Psalm Tone Pattern used for an Ambrosian Hymn

Here, the word stresses are alternated with a weak syllable to form a metric hymn tune:

1. Eternal glory of the saints,
2. Help us but newly up from sleep
3. The risen morning star shines forth
4. Dwell in our hearts, drive sin away;
5. Immortal Father, Holy God,

1. Mankind’s release and blessed hope,
2. To recollect still dormant minds,
3. Proclaims arrival of the day;
4. Unto life’s end preserve us pure.
5. Christ, Son of God, Emmanuel,

1. Bright image of the unseen God,
2. And fervent in the praise of God,
3. The darkness of night disappears
4. Root us in faith; keep bright our hope,
5. Consoling Spirit, Font of Truth,

1. Pure offspring of a Virgin chaste
2. Return him thanks for truth and love.
3. O holy Light, enlighten us!
4. Let charity grow stronger still.
5. Indwell us while your praise we tell. Amen.

Text: Aeterna Caeli gloria, 6c, tr. St. Charles Priory (Prince of Peace Abbey), 1969
Tune: Plainsong, Mode 6 Use: Morning, Ordinary Time
A Psalm Tone setting of the Gloria
(Mass XV)
An Adaptation in English
(Cf. Gloria XV)

The singing of chant is that of an “intelligent declamation, with the rhythm of speech, and well-phrased …” (The Solesmes Method, since 1983).
Psalm Tones Set Moods

Mode 1: (Ps.144/145: 10-11) solemnity

All your creatures shall thank you, O Lord, and your friends shall repeat their blessing. They shall speak of the glory of your reign and declare your might, O God.

Mode 2: (Ps.129/130: 3-4) reverence and awe

If you, O Lord, should mark our guilt, Lord, who would survive? But with you is found forgiveness; for this we revere you.

Mode 3: (Ps.129/130:1-2) intense feeling, either sadness or joy

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord, Lord, hear my voice! O let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleading.

Mode 4: (Ps.118/119:97-98) reflective, meditative

Lord, how I love your law! It is ever in my mind. Your command make me wiser than my foes; for it is mine for-ever.
Mode 5: (Ps.95/96:11-12) joyful, happy

Let the heavens rejoice and earth be glad,
let the sea and all within it thunder praise,
let the land and all it bears rejoice,
all the trees of the wood shout for joy.

Mode 6: (Ps.115/116:12-13) calm, relaxed, contented

How can I re-pay the Lord
for his good-ness to me?
The cup of salvation I will raise:
I will call on the name of the Lord.

Mode 7: (Ps.148:1-2) joyful, triumphant

Praise the Lord from the heavens,
praise him in the heights.
Praise him, all his angels,
praise him, all his host.

Mode 8: (Ps.129/130:7-8) authoritative, a narrator’s voice

Because with the lord there is mercy
and fullness of redemption,
Israel indeed he will redeem
from all its iniquity.
From Psalmody to Antiphon
The 8th mode psalm becomes an antiphon

The 8th mode psalm tone is reworked into an A-B, statement and response, musical form by the use of the repeated final cadence. Each of these together form a three-part structure: “Oportet …” + “quia …” + “perierat …”, with the largest in the middle!

![Musical notation](image)

The singers knew the melody by heart and could concentrate on the meaning of the words and bring that meaning to life in the sound of the music.

![Musical notation](image)

The *Graduale Triplex* with its three different musical notations is a good illustration of Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle. The more we know about where a thing is, the less we know about its speed and momentum and vice versa! The square notation shows us
the exact pitches and the groupings of the pitches of the melody, but can tell almost nothing about the relative value and duration of each of the notes. The early neumes given above and below the staff, tell us much about the speed and relative value of each note, but very little about their actual pitches. By combining the two kinds of notation one can get a very good knowledge of both of these dimensions of the music.

An English Language Setting:

Christmas Midnight Mass: the Introit
Christmas Day Mass: the Introit
the structure pitches

Puer natus est (GT 47-48)

Domino Canticum novum: quia mirabilis fecit...
A Special Communion Antiphon

Each line ends in a different mode to produce a different mood and interpretation of the test. The ornaments work like the speech inflections of a good speaker:
The Structure Pitches in *Comedite*  
(A kind of Schenker analysis!)

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Comedite pingüia, et bibite mulsum,

et mittite partes eis qui non preparaverunt sibi:

sanc-tus enim dies domini est, no-li-te con-tri-sta-ri:

gaudi-um et-uis domini est for-ti-tu-do no-stra.

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An English Language Setting of *Comedite*

Oh come and eat rich foods and drink sweet wine,

and send a share to those who have prepared nothing for themselves.

For this day is sacred to the Lord our God, do not give way to sadness,

for the joy of the Lord is our strength.
Latin Communion Antiphon for Funerals

(Graduale Triplex, page 676)
(Liber Usualis, page 1815)

Verses from Psalm 129/130 are used between repetitions of the antiphon

An English adaptation

Mode 8

May eternal light shine upon them, O Lord, in the company of your saints for eternity, for you are full of goodness.

Text: ICEL
Music: Columba Kelly
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In paradisum (Latin & English)

N para-di-sum * dedú-cant te Ange-li: in tu-o
advéntu susci-pi-ant te Márt-y-res, et perdú-cant te in
sus-cí-pi-at, et cum Lá-za-ro quondam páupe-re aetér-
nam há-be-as réqui-em.

AY the an-gels take you in-to para-dise;
may the mar-tyrs come to wel-come you on your way,
and lead you in-to the ho-ly cit-y, Je-ru-sa-lem. May
the choir of an-gels wel-come you, and with La-za-rus
who once was poor, may you have ev-er-last-ing rest.
Bibliography and Web sites

Basic texts:
Graduale Triplex
Liber Cantualis


Recommended texts:


Web sites:

http://sacredmusicproject.com/
This site contains free downloadable chants in pdf format and instructions on singing chant by the monks of Solesmes:
Preface to the Liber Hymnarius, 1983
In the Beginning Was the Word (Dom Saulnier)
On the New Antiphonale Monasticum (Dom Saulnier)

http://stores.lulu.com/saintmeinradmusic
this site contains St. Meinrad chant in English

http://www.saintmeinradmusic.org/index.html
an alternate site for St. Meinrad music