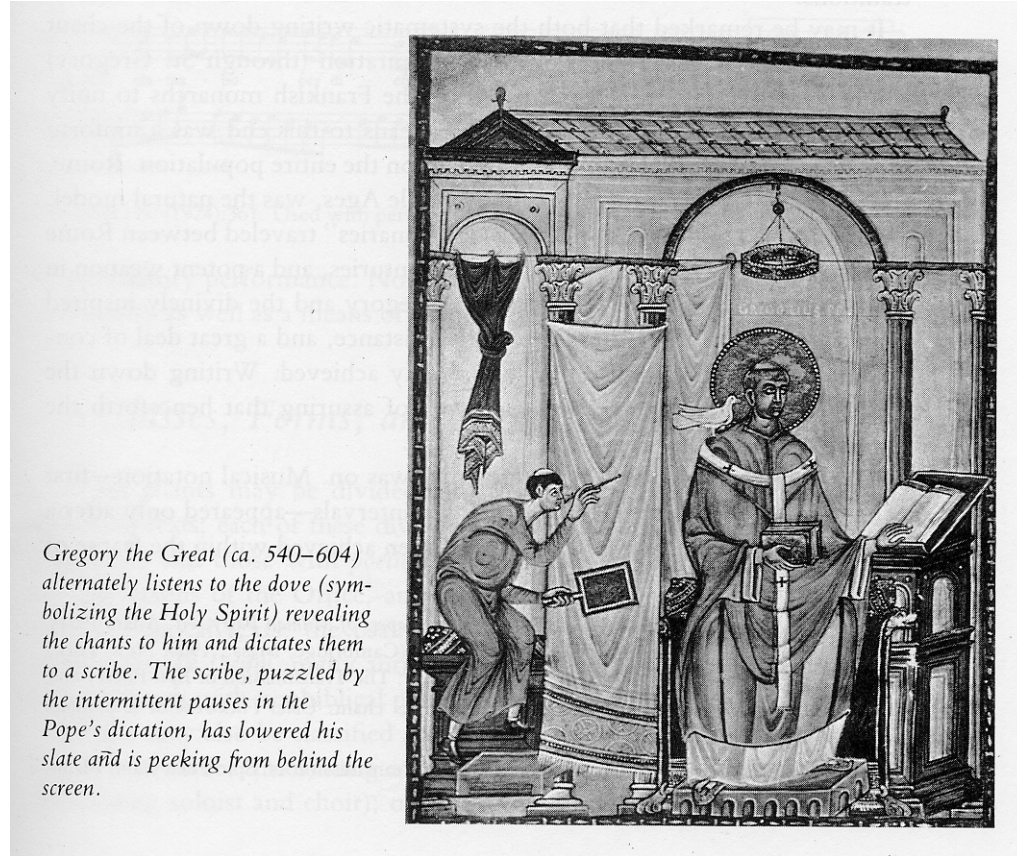


Class 1: The Middle Ages (around 300 A.D. - 1400 A.D.)

Gregorian Chant

Named after Pope Gregory



Gregorian chant is *monophonic* (only one melodic line at a time.)

In an effort to standardize and coordinate the music of all the monasteries in Europe, chants were written down in a strange-looking notation. Each complicated stroke of the pen is called a "neume."

Ant.
1.

S Al-ve, * Re-gí- na, máter mi-se-ricórdi- ae :
 Ví- ta, dulcé- do, et spes nóstra, sál-ve. Ad te
 clamá-mus, éxsu-les, fí-li- i Hévae. Ad te suspi-rá-
 mus, geméntes et flén-tes in hac lacrimá-rum vátte.
 E- ia ergo, Advocá- ta nóstra, fillos tú- os mi-se-ri-
 córdes ócu-los ad nos convér-te. Et Jésum, benedí-
 ctum frúctum véntris tú- i, nó-bis post hoc exsíl-í- um
 os-ténde. O clé-mens : O pí- a : O dúlcis
 * Vírgo Ma-rí- a.

The Antiphon to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Salve Regina mater misericordiae (Hail, Queen, mother of mercy) as notated in a modern book of the most frequently used chant of the Mass and Offices, the Liber usualis.

Here is a transcription of the same melody in modern notation.

EXAMPLE 2.1 Antiphon: *Salve Regina*

MODE 1

Sal - ve* Re - gi - na, ma - ter mi - se - ri - cor - di - ae:
Vi - ta, dul - ce - do, et spes nos - tra, sal - ve.
Ad te cla - ma - mus, ex - su - les, fi - li - i He - vae.
Ad te sus - pi - ra - mus, ge - men - tes et flen - tes in hac
la - cri - ma - rum val - le. E - ia er - go, Ad - vo - ca - ta
no - stra, il - los tu - os mi - se - ri - cor - des o - cu - los
ad nos con - ver - te. Et Je - sum, be - ne - di - ctum fructum ven -
tris tu - i, no - bis post hoc ex - si - li - um os - ten - de.
O cle - mens: O pi - a:
O dul - cis *Vir - go Ma - ri - a.

Hail, O Queen, Mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness and our hope! To thee we cry, banished children of Eve; to thee we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this vale of tears. Turn then, our Advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us; and after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.

🎧 Listening to the Purcell Consort of Voices sing "Salve regina, mater misericordiae" (off of *Early Music and Poetry - The Middle Ages to the Renaissance* [Countdown Media])

Mass

Gregorian chant was used to present the *Mass*, a fixed ritual in which daily texts alternate with fixed sections (with familiar names such as the Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, etc.) Often the daily texts were presented by one person, and the fixed sections were sung by a group. The entire service was sung, in Latin.

🎧 Listening to the Kyrie eleison and then a bit of the "Collect" from the Mass for Septuagesima Sunday, *Norton Anthology of Western Music* 4th ed.

(The text of the Kyrie simply means "Lord have mercy" and "Christ have mercy.")

Secular Music

We know that secular music existed in the Middle Ages, because there are accounts of different instruments that were played and the activities they were involved in. However, this music was, for the most part, not written down, and so we don't know what most of it sounded like.

🎧 Listening to the *Istampita Palamento*, a dance piece that was written down somewhere in the 13th or 14th century. From *Norton Anthology of Western Music* 4th ed.

Also, in the royal court there was an important tradition of *troubadours* who would perform poems and songs, mostly about love and longing.

🎧 Listening to Nigel Rogers sing Bernart de Ventadorn, "Can vei la lauzera mover," from around 1150 AD. In *Norton Anthology of Western Music* 4th ed.

In comparing these secular pieces to the sacred ones you notice that there is a much stronger sense of rhythm.

The Notre Dame School, 13th Century

Léonin (ca. 1159-1201)

Pérotin (ca. 1170-1236)

In the later middle ages there were some experiments with combining two lines of chant into a primitive kind of *polyphony*. (Polyphony, music with more than one part, is the opposite of monophony. Polyphony from the Middle Ages in particular is called *organum*.)

The "Notre Dame School" was a community of musicians in and around the Cathedral of Paris, Notre Dame, who began to create music in which one or more parts is added to a chant melody. In general, the chant melody tends to slow down to a crawl, and the added parts swirl around it in a more active rhythm.

Motets

The Notre Dame composers generally created *motets*, which are stand-alone polyphonic vocal pieces with at least one part sung in Latin. (I say "stand-alone" to differentiate them from part of a mass, like a Kyrie. These could be performed on a variety of occasions, not always in church but also sometimes at the social functions of the nobility.) Usually one part presents a chant melody at a slower speed than the others.

🎧 Listening to The Hilliard Ensemble perform Pérotin's "Viderunt omnes" from *Pérotin* [ECM New Series].

Guillaume de Machaut (ca. 1300-1377)

Machaut is generally considered to be the most advanced and ambitious composer of the Medieval period. His works abound with clever devices. His most famous achievement is the *Mass of Notre Dame*, a polyphonic setting of the fixed parts of the mass (the Kyrie, Gloria, etc.) which is all based on a single musical idea.

🎧 We'll look at and listen to a piece called "Ma fin est mon commencement" ("My beginning is my end") which is played on recorders (by Trio Subtilior) rather than sung. (From *Machaut: Trio Subtilior* [La ma de Guido]) This was a common practice both back in Machaut's day and in contemporary performance - it is also possible to divvy up parts between a mix of instruments and voices.

This piece is what it known as a "crab canon" - the second line is the same as the top line, running in reverse, so that the second line ends the way the first began, and vice-versa.

Also, in the music you can see some sharps that seem to be floating above the notes. These sharps are not in the original music. Composers often left these accidentals out, expecting the performers to hear what's going on and put them in, a practice known as *musica ficta* ("feigned" music.) It is the modern editor's job to decide how *ficta* would have been applied and stick the extra accidentals in there. Not everybody agrees on how it worked!

Recommended Artists

If you would like to hear more of this kind of music, I would strongly recommend the all-female a cappella group Anonymous 4 as well as the Hilliard Ensemble.