Cambridge Introductions to Music

Gregorian Chant

What is Gregorian chant, and where does it come from? What purpose does it serve, and how did it take on the form and features which make it instantly recognizable? Designed to guide students through this key topic, this introduction answers these questions and many more. David Hiley describes the church services in which chant is performed, takes the reader through the church year, explains what Latin texts were used, and, taking Worcester Cathedral as an example, describes the buildings in which chant was sung. The history of chant is traced from its beginnings in the early centuries of Christianity, through the Middle Ages, the revisions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the restoration in the nineteenth and twentieth. Using numerous music examples, the book shows how chants are made and how they were notated. An indispensable guide for all those interested in the fascinating world of Gregorian chant.

David Hiley is Professor in the Institute of Musicology at the University of Regensburg, Germany.

Cambridge Introductions to Music

Gregorian Chant

DAVID HILEY

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521690355

First published 2009

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data
Hiley, David.
Gregorian chant / David Hiley.
p. cm. – (Cambridge introductions to music)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-521-87020-7 (hardback)
1. Gregorian chants–History and criticism. I. Title. II. Series.
ML3082.H53 2009
782.32′22–dc22 2009035294

ISBN 978-0-521-87020-7 hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-69035-5 paperback

For Meg and Cathy

Contents

Illustrations

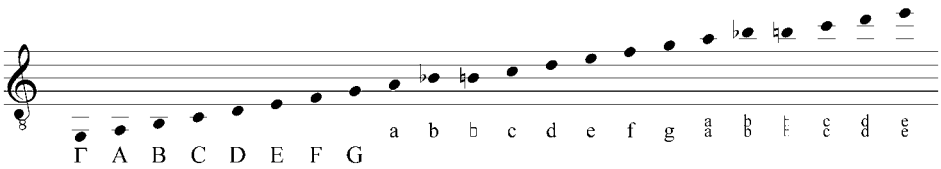
The author and publisher are grateful to be able to include the following illustrations.

Musical examples

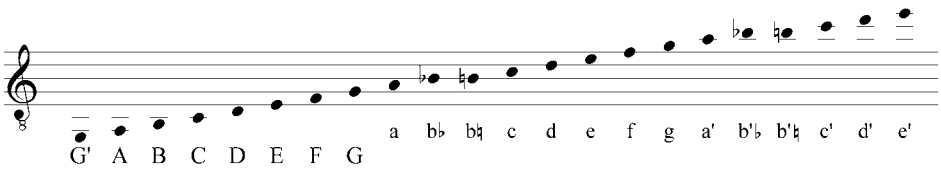
Note on the musical examples

Notes are named according to a modification of the Guidonian system, with capital letters for the lower octave, small ones for the upper octave:

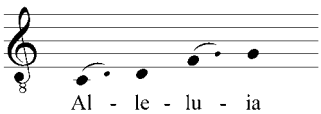
Guidonian:



In this book:



Notes are given in the main text in italic.
Liquescent notes are printed small and joined to the main note with a slur:



The note-groupings of the original manuscripts are reflected in the transcriptions, without the use of slurs.
Sign for *oriscus*: 𝆕
Sign for *quilisma*: 𝆔

Tables

Text boxes

Preface

This book tries to answer some of the questions which are often raised about Gregorian chant: what is it about and why is it the way it is? where does it come from, who composed it, and for whom? These are questions about its history, and the book is orientated towards historical matters. Thinking about the nature of Gregorian chant may nevertheless help explain why so many are interested in it and like to listen to it. For it may very well be that more people listen to Gregorian chant today, or have heard it at some time or other, in some form or other, than at any time in history. In sheer numbers, that is, not as a percentage of the population in lands with a Christian heritage. Every so often a recording of Gregorian chant climbs towards the top of the sales charts (as I write these words, the singing of the monks of the Cistercian Abbey of Heiligenkreuz in Austria is making the running). No beat, no harmony, such simple note patterns! Sung quietly, free from tension, it is far removed indeed from modern music of almost every kind, and a welcome respite from the haste and clamour of everyday life. Its 'other-worldly' character appeals to esoteric movements, and it has been thoroughly exploited in branches of the entertainment industry.

By contrast with this popularity of Gregorian chant outside the church, things are less happy in the original home of chant, the worship of the Christian church. Church attendance and the numbers of those entering holy orders fall. The changes brought about after the Second Vatican Council (1962–5) led to a drastic decline in the use of Latin, the language of Gregorian chant, in the services of the Roman Catholic Church. Those in the church who regard chant as a relic of the past, inappropriate for the modern church and best forgotten, are by no means few in number. Nevertheless, there are strong movements in many countries today to cultivate chant in church worship, and singing courses are popular. There seems little danger that chant will sink into oblivion.

As well as occupying these spaces in modern life, plainchant is of great interest to anyone with a feel for history. It is, after all, the earliest substantial (very substantial!) body of music preserved in written form. So it has a regular place in the syllabus of institutions of higher education, not least in inter-disciplinary courses in medieval studies.

The reasons why so many are interested in, or listen to chant, outside its original context are certainly important, but they should be the subject of a different book. This one concentrates on the time when chant was created. For it is a fact that nowadays we do not compose chant, just as we do not build medieval cathedrals. In the Middle Ages singing chant dominated the lives of very many men and women, including many of the leaders of medieval society. To understand chant we need not only to look at it note by note but also to think about the circumstances in which it was made and performed. We need to get a sense of the purpose and shape of the religious services, of the places of worship, and of how medieval men and women might have thought about chant.

There are plenty of musical examples in this book, and it is my earnest hope that readers will take the time to sing them through, at least in their minds, or even pick them out on a musical instrument. Then they can test their reactions against my descriptions. Some, however, may well wish to keep to the more general information and pass over the discussion of particular pieces of chant, which are accordingly set off in appearance.

I have written about the music fully aware of the well-known problem that music is something which happens in time. Looking at a string of marks on a page in musical examples is very far removed from experiencing chant in a medieval church service. But that is what I would wish readers to try and imagine, in their mind's ear and eye. Hence the decision to relate some of what is explained to a specific church, Worcester Cathedral, and to transcribe most of the musical examples from Worcester manuscripts.

My view of chant is naturally shaped by my own experience of it, the way I have come to know it, what I have read and learned, what I should like to believe about it. The experience of others is inevitably different. But that is the chance any writer on things of the past has to take. Faced with the miraculous beauty of the music and the sheer size of the achievement – nothing less than creating Latin chant to be sung most of the day (and part of the night) throughout one's whole life – it seems well worth taking that chance. For the ultimate point is not to describe the patterns made by those marks on the page but to understand and appreciate the creative achievement of which men and women are capable. I am also convinced that music is such a complex phenomenon, and our powers of appreciating it so infinitely various, that the distance in time between then and now is relatively insignificant, and no more of a hindrance for chant than it is for any great music of the past.

As its place in the series of Cambridge Introductions suggests, this book is not intended to be as comprehensive as some previous reference books on chant. In keeping with this, the 'Further Reading' paragraphs and Bibliography are mostly restricted to publications basic to the study of chant, although some citations will take readers into more specialized research.

The book is also different in character from another one with a similar title, Richard Crocker's *An Introduction to Gregorian Chant* of 2000. This is the right place to acknowledge a debt to Richard Crocker. Helping his volume in the New Oxford History of Music towards publication in 1989 was one of the most valuable formative experiences of my early career. That we write quite differently about chant would have become clear when my own *Western Plainchant: A Handbook* appeared in 1993. Now history has repeated itself, once again in the shape of two very different books.

I am grateful to Vicki Cooper of Cambridge University Press for commissioning this book, and both to her and to Rebecca Jones, Rosina Di Marzo and Ann Lewis for their expert help in guiding it into print. Special thanks go to Nicolas Bell of the British Library, Christopher Guy of Worcester Cathedral, Ute Engel and Jill Atherton for their help and generosity over the illustrations. My wife Ann saved me from many egregious errors and persuaded me to smarten up many points of presentation.

As a music historian I have learned most of all from what has been written by the glorious company of chant scholars, past and present, not least those of the Research Group 'Cantus Planus' of the International Musicological Society, whose meetings over more than two decades have been such pleasant and profitable occasions. If their words and ideas appear to have fallen on stony ground here, I beg their forgiveness. Teaching for ten years at Royal Holloway College, University of London, and for over twenty at Regensburg University, has certainly benefitted me as much as my students. I hope future students will find something in these pages to spur their imagination. In a similar way, I am sure I have learned more from my daughters than they have from me (though not about Gregorian chant) and so this book is dedicated affectionately to them.

Note on front cover illustration

London, British Library, Cotton MS Caligula A.xiv, from fol. 26r: The Annunciation to Joachim

The first part of the manuscript Caligula A.xiv is an eleventh-century troper probably made in Winchester for Worcester. In this illustration an angel announces to Joachim that his wife Ann will bear a child. This will be a daughter, Mary, mother of Christ. The illustration appears amid the trope verses to chants for Mass on the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 8 September. Joachim is depicted as a herdsman with a flock of animals. The story of Joachim and Ann is not biblical but is related in the Greek Protevangelium of James, then in the Latin apocryphal gospel of Pseudo-Matthew. Like all the pictures in MS Caligula A.xiv, this one is framed by Latin verses in Leonine hexameters (that is, with internal rhyme, so named after Leoninus, *optimus organista* of Notre-Dame in Paris *c.*1200):

> *Credidit angelico* *Ioiachim per nuntia verbo*
> *credens foecundam* *conceptu germinis Annam*
> *Christum glorificat* *inopi qui semper habundat*
> [Joachim believed the angelic word through the (divine) message, believing Ann to be fertile by the conception of an child. He glorifies Christ, who is always generous to one in need.]

(Translation based on that by Elizabeth C. Teviotdale, 'The Cotton Troper (London, British Library, Cotton MS Caligula A.xiv, ff. 1–36): A Study of an Illustrated English Troper of the Eleventh Century,' Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1991, p. 309.)