

NOTRE DAME SCHOOL: ORGANUM

WHAT IS ORGANUM?

Organum (Greek: "organ, instrument, tool") is, in general, a plainchant melody with at least one added voice to enhance the harmony, developed in the Middle Ages. There are several mode and forms of the chant, depending on the way it is written. A supporting bass line (or bourdon) may be sung on the same text, the melody may be followed in parallel motion (parallel organum), or a combination of both of these techniques can be used. Organum was originally improvised: while one singer performed a notated melody (vox principalis, "Principal voice"), another singer, singing "by ear" provided the unnotated second melody (vox organalis, "Original voice"). Over time, composers began to write added parts that were not just simple transpositions, thus creating true polyphony. The debate about the beginnings of organum is unclear.

SOLID FOUNDATIONS

Several documents (treatises) were used to lay down the foundation for writing and performing organum. Both treatises discussed the rules for notation, modes, monophonic plainchant and polyphonic music. The first treatise was the *Musica enchiradis*, written around 895; its companion was the *Scolica enchiradis*.

WRITING ORGANUM

The earliest and simplest type of organum is now usually called parallel organum (in earlier treatises, terms such as *sinfonia* or *diaphonia* were used). This type of organum involved two musical voices: a Gregorian chant melody (vox principalis), and the same melody (vox organalis) transposed by a consonant interval, usually a perfect fifth or fourth. In these cases the composition often began and ended on a unison, the added voice keeping to the initial tone until the first part has reached a fifth or fourth, from where both voices proceeded in parallel harmony, with the reverse process at the end. In this way, the melody would be heard as the principal voice, with the vox organalis as an accompaniment or harmonic reinforcement.

TYPES OF MOTION

In organum, there are three main types of motion:

1. **Parallel or Oblique Motion:** Upper voice moves while the tenor holds one note
2. **Contrary Motion:** Voices move in similar direction
3. **Similar Motion:** Voices move in the same direction, but to different intervals

TYPES OF ORGANUM

FREE ORGANUM

Parallel organum is generally thought to be the successor to free organum. Free organum is generally credited to Guido d'Arezzo. The use of the three main types of motion led to progressively freer musical lines, an essential element of counterpoint. Another essential element of counterpoint is the use of more than one note of the organal voice against one note in the tenor. Free organum is a definite break with 'harmonically shadowing' chant as it places a new line in contrasting harmony with the chant in the lower voice. There are a number of manuscript fragments which exist which show the change in styles.

FLORID AND MELISMATIC ORGANUM

The basic principle of florid organum is that there are anywhere from two to six notes in the organal voice sung over a single sustained note in the tenor. Melismatic or florid organum is based on a plainchant melody that is sung in extended note-values in the lower voice, the length of which are determined by the length of the phrase in the organal part. The upper organal voice moves in extensive melismas on long protracted vowels. The chant thus transforms into a succession of long held notes according to the original melody and comes to be called "tenor" from the Latin *tenere* meaning "to hold." This newer style became known as "organum," "organum duplum," or "organum purum" and the older note-against-note style became known as discant.

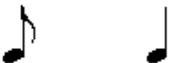
Saint Martial organum and Paris organum duplum follow from the same principle, but in a different form. This type of organum originated in the Saint Martial School, centered around the Abbey of Saint Martial. The later twelfth-century development was the Notre Dame School at Paris, which developed the rhythmic mode.

SUMMARY OF THE RHYTHMIC MODES

There are six basic rhythmic modes. Rhythmic modes are set patterns of long and short durations or rhythms. The rhythmic modes have a number of beat subdivisions divisible by 3. In modern music, these rhythms would be 3, 6, 9, etc. in terms of eighth note durations. These rhythmic modes are as follows (first in Middle Ages, then as modern notation):

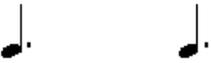
1. Long-short
2. Short-long
3. Long-short-short
4. Short-short-long
5. Long-long
6. Short-short-short

1. Quarter, eighth 

2. Eighth, quarter 

3. Dotted quarter, eighth, quarter 

4. Eighth, quarter, dotted quarter 

5. Dotted quarters 

6. Eighths 

NOTRE DAME SCHOOL: AN INTRODUCTION

Cultural and intellectual life flourished in Paris during the 12th century with the University of the Sorbonne having become a reputed institution that attracted many students, not all of them French. The construction of Notre Dame Cathedral on the Île de la Cité took place between 1163 and 1238 and this period coincides with the various phases of development of the Paris style of Organum. The Notre Dame School was an important part of the development of organum. The Cathedral of Notre Dame and the University of Paris served as the center of music composition and as a transmitter of musical theory in the Middle Ages. Leonin and Perotin were the two masters of organum in the Middle Ages. Their works involved the exploration and expansion of the rhythmic modes.

LEONIN

Leonin wrote organa dupla based on existing chants for the major liturgical ceremonies in the yearly cycle. This compilation not only uses the rhythmic modes as a creative principle, it expands the definition of the word “mode” to refer to the rhythmic modes, not just the use of modes over melody. Leonin’s compositions combine three different styles in the organaliter section which are alternated and linked according to the text, leaving the last part of the text to be sung choraliter in monophonic chant. The verse of the chant is worked out according to the same principles.

PEROTIN

Perotin’s accomplishments included further development and expansion of Leonin’s work. This work included writing a number of replacement clausulae from organa dupla by Leonin. He was the first composer to write three part Organum (Organum Triplum), where both organal voices are in discantus, as well as four-part organa (Organum Quadrupla). Perotin improved organum them by introducing different modes for the tenor and new melodic lines for the dupla, increasing the rhythmic organization and diversity of the section.

MOTELLUS

A further innovation was the motellus, in which the upper part of a discant section is supplied with a new text, so that when the tenor utters a single syllable of chant, the upper part will pronounce several syllables or words. As such it reminds of the prosulae that were composed, replacing a long melisma in a chant with new, additional words. This would have been the first instance of two different texts being sung in harmony. In turn, the motellus gave birth to the motet which is a poly-textual piece in discant.