

A Different Sense of Time

Marcel Péres on Plainchant

Newspaper reports on the monks of Santo Domingo de Silos have called their best-selling CD "an album of 1,000-year-old Gregorian chant" or even "1,500-year-old chant." But both estimates make the same mistake: they assume that the chants on the CD are unaltered relics from the Middle Ages. If anything in music can be shown clearly, it's that the chanting of modern monks bears only a general resemblance to what was sung a thousand years ago. The very concept of an "original form" of the chants is problematic.

Not that people haven't tried to find original forms. It can be argued that today's historical-performance movement began (like written-down Western art music itself) with plainchant. Like the CD's target audience, the nineteenth-century religious "[sought refuge] from the unwonted strangeness of the present" in ancient church music.¹ Among them were a group of Benedictines at Solesmes near Le Mans, whose attempt to resurrect ancient plainchant proved momentous. Like today's early-music performers, they wanted to get back to the way it was—in this case to a body of chant that, according to tradition, had been whispered by the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, into the ear of Gregory I, the pope who reigned from 590 to 604. Today it appears that Gregory had "virtually nothing to do with either liturgy or chant."² The misattribution had several causes; for one thing, Gregory's sainted name lent authority to the Carolingian emperors as they replaced their subjects' many chant traditions with their single official one. They did this not only from political motives, however, but also because they believed their "Gregorian" chant to be the *authentic* early Roman one. They too wanted to get back to the way it was.

The Solesmes research into the so-called Gregorian repertory began in mid-century, and the monks eventually collected an enormous amount of original material. In 1903, after decades of internecine struggle, Pope Pius X threw his authority behind their project. Since then, the chant repertoire and style of singing developed by Solesmes has been canonized and used in most Catholic chant, including that of the monks of Silos.

But despite their stated goal, what the monks of Solesmes actually produced was very different from medieval Gregorian chant. Regarding singing style, for which evidence is scant, it seems that what they created reflects, as Joseph Kerman said, "the ideals of the Cecilian or Pre-Raphaelite movements more closely than anything that can conceivably be imagined from the ninth century."³ It seems a textbook example of Taruskin's idea, discussed in the introduction, that historical re-creations unconsciously reflect the re-creator's taste. In recent decades, many elements of the Solesmes method, having to do with details such as ornamentation but above all with rhythm (which Susan Hellauer will discuss), have been vigorously debated and revised. Some of the best work has come from within the walls of Solesmes itself. An obvious question is whether a century from now it will seem to reflect *our* era or an advance in historical accuracy (or, perhaps, both).

Nor were the actual chants canonized by Solesmes historically accurate. Solesmes, as we've said, made the crucial assumption that there had been a pristine repertory of chant centered in Rome at the time of Gregory I, and that the rest of Europe sang distorted variants of it. But David Hiley speaks for

1 Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 181.

2 See James McKinnon's "The Emergence of Gregorian Chant," in his *Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (London: Macmillan, 1990, and Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1991). This quote comes from earlier in his book, p. 19; the following discussion of the misattribution simplifies his explanation, which is given on pp. 115-17.

3 Kerman, "A Few Canonic Variations," reprinted in his *Write All This Down* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 47.

most scholars today when he comments, "It is not at all certain that an 'original' form of this type ever existed. ... The manuscript tradition is too variable for a single 'authentic' reading to be deduced even from a small group of the earliest sources."⁴

Since the Second Vatican Council in 1963, Gregorian chant has become a rarity in Catholic churches. As Mary Berry points out, this has proved a blessing in disguise for modern performers interested in re-investigating chant.⁵ It has encouraged them to pursue other approaches to Gregorian chant performance, and to explore the chant repertoires that were suppressed centuries ago in favor of the Gregorian. In these explorations, no one has been more adventurous than Marcel Péres. Péres has devoted his career to exploring such chant traditions as the Old Roman (which was sung in Rome, except perhaps for the Vatican, until the thirteenth century), the Beneventan (sung in southern Italy until the eleventh century), and the Mozarabic (forbidden in Spain at the end of the eleventh century, but still sung in some places until the fifteenth). Péres has also explored Ambrosian chant, which escaped suppression and was sung in Milan—though not necessarily in its original form—until our own time, and various Gregorian "dialects," such as the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century plainsong repertoires of Auxerre, Paris, and the Italian Franciscans.

In approaching lost repertoires, Péres has collaborated with distinguished modern representatives of non-Western chant traditions, especially the Greek Byzantine and the Syriac (Syria was the first Christian center outside Palestine). He argues that these repertoires have important links with Old Roman, Ambrosian, and Beneventan chant, and that his collaborations have solved otherwise impossible performance problems. This approach, not surprisingly, has been controversial and has often been criticized by scholars. But the musical results have been, it is generally agreed, mesmerizing.

Part of the mesmerism comes, I think, from Péres's choirboy background. He never forgets that chant was not music in the modern sense, but (since about the fourth century) the prayers of monks whose lives revolved, all day, every day, around the church liturgy. In this sense, the monks of Santo Domingo de Silos are authentic in a way that few non-monastic chant performers can be; as the interview makes clear, Péres takes this very seriously. He emphasized this music's unmechanized, unhurried sense of the unfolding of time, and the idea that the West's experience of time has changed over the millennium. Perhaps the older sense of time, he implies, is part of what appeals to us in this music. Just how different, we might ask, was that sense of time from ours?

Gregorian Chant

For modern listeners, plainchant is usually taken to mean what we now call Gregorian chant. You've been exploring other aspects that chant has taken.

In a general sense, Gregorian chant means the chant of the Church of Rome. But in different times, places, and ideological centers, the content of this repertoire changed. Today it means essentially the repertoire that was printed in 1908 in what we call the Vatican edition, the official publication of Gregorian chant by the monks of Solesmes. In this edition, they collated most of the surviving manuscript versions of a specific chant and, using statistical methods, abstracted something they called the "authentic" version of the Gregorian melody. But they were deriving a specific chant from chants composed in different parts of Europe and different eras, ranging from early Christianity through the nineteenth century.

So a specific chant in the Vatican edition might never have existed before Solesmes.

Right. If you want to reconstruct how it was in the Middle Ages, you have to consider many other

4 David Hiley, *Western Plainchant: A Handbook* (Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 628. McKinnon seems to disagree; see his "The Emergence of Gregorian Chant," pp. 111-17, where he speculates about the possibility of a stable core repertory dating from the time of Gregory the Second (pope from 715 to 731).

5 Mary Berry, "The Restoration of the Chant and Seventy-five Years of Recording," *Early Music* 7 (1979), pp. 197-217.

sources of information. Above all, you have to go back to the manuscripts themselves, because even the same melodies often vary greatly from one place to another. Also, in the Middle Ages each place had its own repertoire of polyphonic settings and tropes (poetic and musical comments on the canonical texts); in the Gregorian revival of the nineteenth century, they didn't want to deal with these important aspects of medieval music. Only polyphony in the style of Palestrina was held to express the "Catholic spirit in music."

Solesmes also canonized a specific style of singing, which we still hear today from most groups of monks.

Yes. Regarding Solesmes, we have to be precise about which aspect of this community we are talking about: the scholarly one, the liturgical one, or the aesthetic one.

First is the scholarly work they've done on collating manuscripts, which is very important; they were the first to publish a collection of manuscripts in facsimiles. Second is the liturgical aspect of their work, which has been focused on the idea that the Catholic Church must live in unity, having throughout the world the same liturgical practices, the restored Roman rite being the norm. So they wanted to get rid of the local traditions that still existed in the nineteenth century.

And third is the aesthetic side, whereby they developed a style that was just the opposite of the singing style of traditional church singers of the nineteenth century. These singers used to have a very strong and deep bass voice, and their chant was highly ornamented, just the contrary of what we're used to now. To Solesmes, that was an eighteenth-century tradition, and they could not imagine that that way of singing might have any links with medieval singing. We must be precise in noting that they were not at all interested in re-creating the medieval aesthetic; they wanted only to reconstruct a tradition they believed to be of the time of St. Gregory in the sixth century. The way of singing that the monks of Solesmes developed chiefly in the beginning of this century, then, was with a very high voice with an almost uncolored timbre and no ornamentation.

Their publication was not meant as a critical edition; it was a useful, practical book. It was to be used by an amateur parish choir, so they had to imagine a very simple method that would not require that the singer be able to read complex music. Dealing with theoreticians of the Middle Ages would have been too complicated. So they developed a method that most people could sing.

The Solesmes method of singing has been called "This very beautiful, very Romantic, and somehow very French tradition of singing [that] has never ceased to dominate our notion of Gregorian chant."⁶ Could you explain why it might be considered Romantic and French?

Romantic, because the aesthetic beginning of this restoration was linked with the Romantic idea of a mythic Middle Ages, the "age of faith" as they used to say. Musically speaking, most of the elements of nineteenth-century musical performance are found in the Solesmes performances: the legato phrasing, the lack of ornamentation.

As for it being French, that is simply because Solesmes is in France. But we must keep in mind that all regions and cathedrals in France used to have their own styles, which disappeared after the normalization that the Solesmes style created at the beginning of this century.

Indeed, I don't try to find *the* authentic way of performing Gregorian chant. I am much too aware of all the different styles that coexisted throughout the centuries. For each manuscript, period, or repertoire, I try to create a specific performance. But above all, I try to remain open-minded and to change my interpretation if a new aspect I was not aware of comes into consideration. Each of my records shows a different approach to chant.

6 Katherine Bergeron, "Chant, or the Politics of Inscription," in *Companion to Medieval and Renaissance Music*, ed. Tess Knighton and David Fallows (London: Orion, and New York: Schirmer, 1992), pp. 101-3. Mary Berry, "The Restoration of the Chant," describes Solesmes chant's "smooth expressive legato with its undoubted 'spiritual' quality . . . lilted accents, and the softening of the melodie peaks which gives the style its extraordinary elasticity."

Reconstructing Ancient Chant

There was a range of different chant repertoires and styles in Europe before Gregorian chant. Traces of some of them survive; and you've been the most active of anyone in resurrecting them for performance. How do you go about that?

I think the revival of ancient music is a sort of equation. On one side are the documents. On the other side is the performer, with his personality, voice, education, and skill in doing music and living with it. And then you have the understanding of the source. By that I mean all that the performer, and the scholars he refers to, have understood—not only of the music and its function, but also of the nature of the tools they are using today to re-create the past. That last aspect is why you most always work on the original notation, with good musicians who come from different worlds, and why you most have relations with researchers not only in your field but also in other subjects connected with yours.

In Ensemble Organum, we use singers who come from all parts of the musical landscape: from folk music, liturgical music, early music, opera, and so on. Others are instrumentalists who come to me to learn to sing. For me the important thing is to work with musicians who can add something to what I think I've figured out. I try to be aware of my limits.

How about musicology: how do you use that?

I work from time to time with musicologists on certain specific subjects, but also with historians, philologists, liturgists, and ethnomusicologists. Since 1984, I have managed a center for the research and interpretation of medieval music at the Fondation Royaumont, near Paris. We work on research programs that may last one year or many. The role of Ensemble Organum is to make known the musical result of this research. We publish books, organize symposiums, and make instruments. We also invite a group for residence at Royaumont each year; they may also be musicologists or historians or instrument builders. We offer them the opportunity and the tools to study a specific problem. In this way, we try to be in touch with most of today's leading personalities in the study of medieval civilization.

For instance, we are engaged now in a three-year study of how aesthetics changed in relation to changes in political power, in different cathedrals in Europe. We aim to figure out how an aesthetic gained coherence in coordination with all the aspects that made up the life of the cathedral—the economy, patronage, architecture, painting, sculpture, music—that is, all the fields that work towards the celebration of the liturgy.

In the project, we are studying four cathedrals. In three of them they had a complete change of repertory at specific dates, while in the fourth, Sens, they were still singing from thirteenth-century books as late as the eighteenth century. Throughout the centuries, they wanted to keep the Carolingian traditions, because the Archbishop of Sens received his title of "Primat de Gaule et de Germanie" from Charlemagne. This shows us one of the problems often met in the history of music: how to appreciate the continuity of a tradition in one place while other musical events, sometimes very different, occur elsewhere. We tend to think, for instance, that at the time when Machaut composed his Mass everybody knew the work, and that everybody was doing music that way. In history it's been realized for several decades that this is nonsense, but in musicology you still find this way of thinking. The popularizing history of music tends to be much too factual.⁷ And we lose what is, to my mind, one of the most important things we must be aware of, which is the persistence in some places of some practices in music. When you realize that in Sens Baroque music was coexisting with some forms of medieval

⁷ On this point, see Reinhard Strohm, "Centre and Periphery," in *Companion to Medieval and Renaissance Music*, pp. 55-59, or in his *The Rise of European Music* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 62-105. Machaut's *Messe de Notre Dame*, from c. 1360, is the earliest surviving cyclic setting of the Ordinary of the Mass to show "conception as a unit." As Philip T. Jackson writes, "In one of the ironies of music history, there is no evidence that Machaut's unparalleled work had any direct influence on future developments" (*Companion*, 120).

music, it changes your conception of periods in music history.

I have the same kind of question regarding the changing of notation in the thirteenth century from neumes to square notation.⁸ When they made this change, did they also change, in every place, the way they sang? A lot of scholars think so, but I am not so sure.

Rome is another good example of an aesthetic shift, when the Old Roman chant was forsaken and supplanted by the Gregorian at the end of the thirteenth century. One thing I have been wondering about for years, but have not been able to come up with an answer to, is this: When Rome changed from the Old Roman to the Gregorian chant, was there a change in their voice production and in the style of the music itself? The liturgy changed, but I'm not able, even after ten years of singing Old Roman chant, to define the difference in aesthetic between Old Roman and Gregorian chant, because some Gregorian chants can be understood in a certain way, in which the notation refers to certain ornamentation formulas very similar to Old Roman chant.

David Hiley notes that "the main difference between the Gregorian and the Old Roman chant concerns surface detail: Old Roman is more ornate,"⁹ much more ornamented. He adds, "In many places the two versions [of a chant] are almost identical [in Gregorian and Old Roman chant] and there is evidently a close relationship between them." Scholars have argued over what this might mean.¹⁰ What is your opinion on how the two repertoires may have interacted?

At first glance, the Old Roman chant seems to be more ornamented. But in the Gregorian neumatic notations, a lot of the signs can be performed as ornaments or even formulas.

So the traditional Solesmes concept of Gregorian chant underestimated how ornamented its early form was?

Yes. The paradox is that it's easier to know how to perform the Old Roman than the Gregorian chant. I have the impression that in most of the pieces (some are very different), we have in the manuscript of Old Roman chant a sort of recording of what a skillful and creative singer could do when performing what we call Gregorian chant. That is to say that in the Old Roman chant the ornaments and cadential formulas had been written down, but we have very few examples of notated ornaments in Gregorian chant.

The only thing we are sure of is that every important place had its own tradition. An example can help us to understand this. At the beginning of the twelfth century, the first Cistercians from Burgundy were sent to learn the Roman tradition from the singers of Metz. In music, as in all aspects of monastic life, the Cistercians wanted to go back to the original traditions, and for music this meant Rome. But the two Cistercians sent to Metz were shocked by what they heard there. They could not believe that it was the

⁸ From the ninth century to the twelfth, the term "neume" referred not to a form of notation, but to "a sounding melody, or phrase, in particular one which has no words" (Hiley, *Western Plainchant*, p. 345). Nevertheless, today the term has gained currency as a label for the kind of notation used from the ninth century to the thirteenth. Neumes did not record either pitch or rhythm precisely; their function was to indicate a melody's direction and contour, as well as certain nuances of performance. This partly reflected the orality of the tradition—the notation aided people who had already learned the repertory—and also the concept of the music, where "melodie identity meant identity of contour, not a literal identity of notes" (D. Fenwick Wilson, *Music of the Middle Ages* [New York: Schirmer, 1990], p. 25). This is true of main modal traditions elsewhere in the world. Square notation, developed in the second half of the thirteenth century, used a four-line staff indicating the height of each pitch with square note heads (originally developed by Guido of Arezzo in the eleventh century); the notation gave some rhythmic indications as well.

⁹ Hiley, *Western Plainchant*, p. 532.

¹⁰ Scholars have contended that this could mean that the Roman style, in the two centuries before it was finally written down, grew more elaborate compared to the forms in use when Pepin, the father of Charlemagne, had the pope send Romans to teach their form of chant to the Franks (thus creating Gregorian chant); or that the Franks didn't understand elaborate music, so they simplified what they learned from Rome. There is also evidence that the Gregorian chant had influenced the Old Roman by the time the latter was written down. See Hiley, pp. 561–62, for a summary of scholarly arguments. Pères argues for another interpretation.

true tradition which shows that chant singing in Burgundy was very different.

Now, their mission to Metz had been instigated by their abbot, Étienne Harding. Harding knew the Roman tradition because he had made a pilgrimage to Rome in his youth. Even if on paper the Gregorian version from Metz looks different from the Old Roman chant, it is interesting to notice that they sounded much the same, at least in the mind of Harding. So he decided, against most of his monks, to follow the Metz model. It was only after his death that the Cistercians made their reform of chant. The story reminds us that notation, even when we believe it's precise, conveys only part of the musical event. It never tells you the sound of the voices. By this I refer not only to the voice production, but also to the value of the intervals, and especially to musical practices that include the way of doing ornaments. Two melodies with different notes can be perceived as the same if they are sung with the same vocal style, and two melodies written with exactly the same notes can, if they are sung in different styles, be perceived as different.

Old Italian Chant and Non-Western Traditions

I'd like to ask you about your work in reconstructing Old Italian chant.

I started to study the Old Roman chant in 1984. When reading this music, I realized I was missing something. I couldn't understand the aesthetic of this repertoire. You can't catch it with a standard modern Western approach; you need something else. Most of the scholars who described the Old Roman chant talked about tedious, boring, unimaginative music, chiefly because it contains a lot of apparently repetitive formulas. It uses a different logic from the Gregorian one, and some musicologists, who didn't understand the way it works, concluded it was a decadent system.

I noticed that this repertoire preserved until the thirteenth century some pieces in Greek. To try to understand what was going on in this music, I thought it would be interesting to work with a Greek singer and a Greek musicologist. So I contacted Lycourgos Angelopoulos; it was really intuition, because I had heard him in concert in Barcelona a few years before, and I had a sense that he was living a lot of the things I was trying to understand—it was everyday to him. I asked him if he could be interested in working with me on the Old Roman repertoire. He told me, "I know nothing about Gregorian chant; I cannot be useful to you." I said, "That's exactly why I wanted to get in touch with you, because you don't have preconceptions. You'll come to Old Roman chant like a virgin but with all your own background."

And it was a revelation, maybe the biggest of my life. After three or four difficult days, he was able to get into the music; he brought a different mentality to dealing with the modes, the rhythms, the intervals, and so on.

You argue for a strong Byzantine influence in Old Italian chant. But David Hiley, after reviewing the evidence, argues that the "overwhelming impression is that Roman chant developed largely independently from Greek models, " and that "Byzantine musical influence can be seen to reduce itself largely to a number of individual instances." (He saw more examples of Byzantine borrowings in Milanese and Beneventan chant.)¹¹ How would you respond?

First of all, we must consider the words we are using to talk of the past. In your question you use the words "Byzantium," "influence," and "Italian." From the beginning you assume that Byzantium and Italy had two distinct cultures and that the first influenced the second. But let us consider the facts from the beginning. From the second century B.C., the Roman and Greek cultures not only had relations, but very quickly the Greek model and its opening on Eastern cultures became the reference for Rome. And when

¹¹ Hiley, *Western Plainchant*, p. 527. Leo Treitler rejects the connection of Old Roman and Byzantine chant too, in that the oldest records of Byzantine chant were written down in the twelfth century and bear no resemblance to Old Roman chant. As for *modern* Byzantine chant, he says it originated in 1300, when the Old Roman chant repertory was no longer sung, and he adds that it has since been influenced by centuries of Turkish occupation. See "Remembering 'Early Music,'" in *Thesis 8* (Fall 1994), pp. 32-33.

we go to the first centuries of the Christian era, it's impossible to locate the boundary between the Roman and Greek liturgical cultures. The Roman liturgy was exclusively in the Greek language until the fourth century, and it retained a lot of Greek until the ninth century. Even in a twelfth-century manuscript of Old Roman chant you find seven Alleluias with Greek verses.¹²

In the mind of Boethius, the sixth-century Roman philosopher and theoretician of music, there is no distinction between Roman and Greek music. For him, it's very clear that the theory of music is Greek. This conception will stay the norm among most of the medieval theorists; even if some authors are very far from the Greek original, they will go on using Greek terms in order to look educated. This community of culture is obvious not only in music but in many other fields.

After the Gothic domination, Byzantium reconquered Italy in 533, and its domination, although merely symbolic from the eighth century on, lasted until Charlemagne's coronation as Western Emperor. During the seventh and eighth centuries, fourteen popes were Greek, most of them from Sicily, where there was a very strong Greek community from antiquity until the thirteenth century. Also, the iconoclastic persecution in Byzantium in 726 sent many of the Greek religious to Italy. Let us keep in mind also that the Emperor of Byzantium had the title of Roman Emperor.

Once this has been settled, it's possible to observe how with time the Italian and Greek churches and chants evolved in different ways. Western, Eastern, and Greek aesthetics must not be considered homogenous blocks. The different styles found between and within the three Italian repertoires show us that important diversities existed.

To come back to our subject, which is musical performance, we are in the same situation as a linguist who tries to find the sound of medieval Latin by studying today's Romance languages. Of course, for centuries there have been differences between all these languages and the original Latin. But some words have not changed, such as *sol* for "sun" in Spanish, *stella* for "star" in Italian. We could find thousand of examples like them. In music it's the same process.

You find in the Italian repertoires-the Roman, the Milanese, and the Beneventan- some formulas or ornaments that are still living in Byzantine, Syriac, or Coptic pieces. The process in experimentation is not to imitate the models slavishly but to use their information to figure out the dynamism of these dead musics. The common roots of Eastern and Western chant should be studied, but not in order to prove anything.

One repertoire you've recorded did survive in a living form until our time: the Milanese "Ambrosian" chant. But in your CD notes you point out that it was much influenced over the centuries by Gregorian chant, and that origina/ly it had been sung, according to Ambrose, "in the manner of the East." You worked on that, too, with Eastern collaborators.

Yes, there we went further in our experiments. The Milanese liturgy had roots in the Antiochan [Syrian Christian] liturgy, and at different times in its early history Milan had been in relation with Syria and even had Syriac bishops. We tried, as a working hypothesis, to distinguish traces of Syriac chant in the Milanese repertoire. I worked not only with the same Greek singer, but also with experts in Syriac chant, with the Lebanese singer/musicologist, Sister Marie Keyrouz, and with the Lebanese musicologist Elie Kesruani. They opened another field that I had not imagined at all, because Marie Keyrouz had another approach to music, to modality, and to the value of intervals. From the beginning, she told me something very important: "This music [Milanese chant] is a music of intervals." That means you really have to be aware of the value of each interval, because it's what creates the mode; the ornamentation is there to throw the intervals into relief. This was something quite new to me. Western musicians, when

¹² See Hiley, p. 538.

singing monady, are too little aware of the quality of intervals-but that is what produces the real character or mood of the mode.

Could you give an example?

In the offertory of the Milanese Christmas mass, *Ecce apertum est*, there's a mode that alternates Bb, low B□, and high B□. When this formula reaches its highest point on a low B□, the A is sharpened. When the formula reaches its top on the C, the B□ is high. So you can imagine the complexity of the music. In each formula, you must always discern which note exercises a power of attraction that redefines the value of the intervals of the scale.

And regarding the role of ornamentation she mentioned?

Marie Keyrouz is very sophisticated in the art of ornamentation. This is something we have lost in the West. Even in Baroque music, most singers don't have enough imagination to go very far in ornamentation. Some jazz players do it, and some Baroque players, like Jordi Savall, have a freedom in ornamentation and a quality of nuance that you don't find in many singers. Singers like Marie Keyrouz have this knowledge. I think what will be really important in early music in the next few years will be the progress of singers in the art of ornamentation. In old traditions that's what made the quality of a musician: someone was a distinguished musician because he had his own way of ornamenting.

Ornamentation has been one of the hallmarks of your work, but in some repertory it has been controversial; for example, some argued that there was no evidence for what you did in your reconstruction of the Gradual of Eleanor of Brittany. How would you respond to such critics?

That they should improve their knowledge of the thirteenth century. In fact, it's from that century that we have the first precise description of ornamentation, with the treatise of Jerome of Moravia, a Dominican friar. I have managed to do two books on him.¹³ As I said, ornamentation is the big lacuna in the early-music revival. Now it's accepted for seventeenth- and eighteenth-century music, but not yet for Renaissance and medieval music. I feel like saying to those who believe people started to add ornaments on New Year's Eve of 1600: Wake up!

One other interesting area you've explored is the use of microtones-tones that fall between the usual twelve pitches used in the modern Western scale. You say microtones were used in early chant traditions?

There are two approaches to this problem: the manuscripts, and the oral traditions that still exist. From the written documents, we know that microtones were known, because a lot of theoreticians talked about them, and we have at least three manuscripts that refer more or less explicitly to some microtone practices. To my knowledge, the first mention of microtones in Western writings, after Boethius, are in Remigius of Auxerre (d. c. 900), a Frankish theorist. In one of his texts he uses a Greek musical vocabulary, meaning that at this time the Greek vocabulary was in use among educated musicians. He uses this vocabulary to talk about quarter tones and thirds of tones: so such intervals were known, though we don't know how they occurred in the music. After that, the next book to give us this information more precisely is the Montpellier Treatise [copied c. 1100]. In this manuscript you have a dual notation: one form uses neumes, and one uses letters of the alphabet from A to P to cover a two-octave range. In this notation you have two ways of signifying the quarter tone. The two other manuscripts I referred to—a twelfth-century antiphony from Utrecht and another one from Cluny—have the same kind of chromaticism, often at the same places. But as they are just neumatic manuscripts, they use different neumes' shapes to express these variations.

¹³ *Jérôme de Moravie, un théoricien de la musique dans La milieu intellectuel parisien du XIIe siècle* (Paris: Créaphis, 1992); and *Jérôme de Moravie, Traité sur la musique*, ed. Christian Meyer, trans. Esther Lachapelle, Guy Lobrichon and Marcel Péres (Paris: Créaphis, 1996).

Now, all this is useful information, but the problem is how to deal with it. For some examples we were able to find some correspondence with Byzantine or Arabic theory, but for some examples we were not. The latter cases may have involved things that had disappeared in Byzantine tradition, or that occurred in Latin music only.

Another practice you've taken from Greek tradition in singing Old Roman chant is the use of ison singing-the use of a vocal drone pedal point-which is first documented in Byzantine chant in the fifteenth century, but of course may be older. Many critics find it hypnotic, but nonetheless it is controversial; how would you respond to critics?

There is some evidence that this practice might come not from the Greek but from the Latin. As you said, the use of the *ison* seems to be known in the Byzantine tradition around the fifteenth century, but not in other Eastern churches. The first clear description I know of this technique, though, comes from a Western source, the *Micrologus* by Guido d' Arezzo in the eleventh century. For him it was a sort of organum.¹⁴ He teaches us that this practice was common in Rome. We know from the *Ordines Romani* that by the seventh and eighth centuries there were traditions of organum singing in the pontifical chapel.¹⁵ Later the anonymous author of the *Summa Musicae*,¹⁶ a treatise written around 1200, describes the sort of organum that consists of a drone. He calls this manner *diaphona basilica*: that's very interesting, because the term *basilica* in liturgical matters often refers to the Roman tradition. So in the thirteenth century there was still in the vocabulary of singers a word that seems to referred to the Roman Basilican tradition and that means a vocal drone. It is very possible that the Greeks borrowed this practice from the Italian singers. We find in some fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Greek sources, written in Byzantine notations, some instances of polyphony in this style with parallel fifths and contrary motion. In one manuscript a rubric says, "This is done in the Italian way." We know that from the thirteenth century the Italians, chiefly the Venetians, had a very strong influence in some regions like Crete and in Byzantium itself, where there existed a strong Latin government for almost seventy years. So there is a strong basis for this scenario.¹⁷

But, you know, above all it is important when you make a theory to experiment and see how it works. In this matter, the big question is, Why do we have so few recorded instances of drone singing? Was it so common that it was not necessary to talk about it? or maybe some people did not consider it a form of polyphony at all, as is the case today in Greece, so that maybe it was assimilated into monody. Or maybe it existed in only a few places. But musically speaking it works, and that helps us to better hear the modal structure of a piece.

Time and the Nature of Plainchant

Katherine Bergeron writes: "It may be well to ask from the start whether chant can properly be

14 "Organum" meant several things, but in this context it meant, in general, singing two or more related lines, as opposed to just the single line of plainchant. See Sarah Fuller, "Early Polyphony," in *New Oxford History of Music*, II, rev. ed., ed. R. Crocker and D. Hiley (Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 484 et passim.

Guido describes several organum practices, and he notes that practices varied from one locale to another. His text has been published in English translation in Warren Babb's *Hucbald, Guido, and John on Music* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978). The section suggesting what we call ison singing is on p. 80 (section 211).

15 The *Ordines Romani* were "Frankish reports of Roman practice." See Richard Crocker, "Liturgical Materials of Roman Chant," in *New Oxford History of Music*, II, rev. ed., p. 139.

16 *Summa Musicae*, ed. and trans. Christopher Page (Cambridge University Press, 1991). The description of *diaphona basilica* is on p. 124.

17 Pères recommends Michael Adamis, "Some Instances in the Byzantine Manuscripts Indicating a Relation to the Music of the West," in *Polyphonies de tradition orale: Histoire et traditions vivantes*, ed. Michel Huglo and Marcel Pères (Paris: Créaphis, 1993). On the other hand, Dimitri Conomos's "Experimental Polyphony in Late Byzantine Psalmody," in *Early Music History 2* (Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 1-16, suggests that ison was introduced into Greek singing several decades after any Italian influence-which was in any case quite "isolated"-had run its course.

considered 'music' at all. . . . [It had] an eminently practical purpose: to make ritual words audible, memorable, and powerful . . . in this sense a particular chant is hardly different from a spell or incantation, a set of specially pronounced words designed to bring about a certain magical result¹⁸. Could you comment on this, and on how that affected both the way chant was composed and sung in earlier centuries and the way you perform it?

The answer is very simple. To really restore these musics, and clarify their vocal aesthetics, it's better to reconstruct the liturgies they belonged to and to believe in what you are doing.

This is what I found, for example, when I started working with Lycourgos Angelopoulos. He has another way of approaching time. This is because he is a real church singer. He is used, for instance, to singing for liturgies that go all through the night. So he really has experience of the pace of the liturgy, and that's very important. The biggest criticism I would make of many reconstructions of medieval music is that, listening to them, I don't feel the atmosphere of the ancient liturgies. I think you must be able to visualize all the stages and the movements of the liturgy whose music you are singing. To know the Eastern liturgies can help us, since today the Catholic traditions are almost dead. I had a traditional Catholic education; and fortunately I work with Syriac and Byzantine church musicians.

For your concerts, you dress liturgically.

Only for our liturgical dramas. It is really necessary to play dramas because it's the best way to get into the spatial and temporal dimensions of these musics, as it's very rare to have the opportunity to perform them in true liturgies. It is also fundamental to get used to working with candlelight. That was a constituent part of the liturgy. With candles, you have lights around you, but large parts of the room are darkened. Today, due to electric light, people have lost the habit of living with the night. When people have lost the habit of living with the night, the night doesn't exist. To live surrounded by the night gives you another way of understanding the mentalities of the past. The candle is a living light as fragile and powerful as human life. It always reminds you that light is not to be taken for granted; you have to be conscious of it.

Contemporary Catholic clergy have lost the sense of light and sound. Even in Europe, where we have old churches planned according to the position of the sun, they use electric lights during the day. For today's Christians that's a secondary, even nonexistent matter, but in the tradition of the Church of all centuries it was a crucial point. It's a disaster that the Roman Church abandoned the liturgy in Latin, because all the people who were able to transmit the tradition are now very old, so we'll have a break in the transmission. But I think Latin could come back to the liturgy because young people have an attraction to plainchant ...

As the monks of Silos found out ...

Yes, and it's significant that the age range of the customers in Europe was 18-25, because these people did not grow up with the Latin liturgy and plainchant. That suggests that the Church made a mistake.

The earliest notation of plainchant had to do with the melodie gestures' motion, rather than with the exact pitches or rhythms:¹⁹ the time wasn't notated exactly. That was because of the oral nature of the tradition; but does it fit in with your view of liturgical time?

Yes, and that's why we're a little bit lost with these notations. Now we are used to a mathematical division of time, but we must remember that this has been true only since the end of the thirteenth century. Before that, people had no way to write these things down.

Is this why you've been opposed to singing Notre-Dame organum with strict proportional rhythm?²⁰

¹⁸ „Chant, or the Politics of Inscription," in Knighton and Fallows, *Companion*, p. 101.

¹⁹ See above, *fiat* 8.

²⁰ Organum at Notre Dame in the thirteenth century seems to have been sung using what

Yes! In the polyphony of the twelfth century, we know from the notation that this note is longer and that shorter, but not exactly *how much* longer one note is than another. We can get a sense of what this might mean from music we still have that reflects a mentality that treats time differently than we do in the West today. For example, in Corsican polyphonic singing they don't have a tempo with a beat, they just have the time of the chords, and when the energy of the chord starts to diffuse it changes. Time becomes a succession of focuses of energy each with a period in itself, and almost every chord has its own period. When you feel the end of the period of this chord you move; it's not something you can divide arithmetically, saying this chord is two times longer or three times longer than the last one.

So it seems that there are two ways of perceiving time-qualitative and quantitative. The quantitative manner began to be created during the end of the thirteenth century and developed in the later centuries. But the older way of thinking about music co-existed as well. It's funny, because the trend in all the spheres of social life and science of this time is to rationalize things. For example, the first mechanical clock was invented at the end of the thirteenth century.²¹

We did a symposium on this four years ago,²² in which we tried to figure out how in a place like Paris many thinkers in different fields intended to give a description of time and to find a tool to describe it. In that century many different authors proposed a system, but the systems don't all fit together. The most exciting of the treatises was that of Jerome of Moravia, who wanted to put in a book all the musical knowledge of his time. Writing of polyphony, he says, "Many different authors have their own way of describing the rhythm, and I think the best thing to do is to present all these treatises and let the reader make up his own mind." At this time, around 1265, they knew they were on the verge of reaching something, but it was only in the fourteenth century that a notational system would be standardized.²³

Even when this notational system was standardized after the fourteenth or fifteenth century, the old mentality continued to exist. Although the mechanical clock was invented at the end of the thirteenth century, it doesn't mean that a few years later there was a clock in every home. In the country today, farmers still have to live with the seasons; for them, in the winter and summer 8 o'clock doesn't mean the same thing.²⁴

Music is a tool that can help us to better understand history, how human beings used to be, used to live. It also can help us to increase our sensibility, our aesthetic sense. When we learn the ancient arts, we start to develop our sensibilities to be able to perceive more things in the reality of our human relationships and ways of living. Quality of life is one of the most important things we can learn from people of the past, because one thing we have to learn from the past until the nineteenth century is that people had a different quality of life-one that, at most social strata, had certain cultural advantages that we have lost, in spite of all the technical progress . . .

are called "rhythmic modes," codified around 1240, whereby notes had specific durations relative to each other. There were six rhythmic modes, all in triple meter; they were developed for singing polyphony, but their interpretation is not entirely clear. (Their application to monophony is much more troublesome still.) Hendrik van der Werf writes that a belief in the omnipresence of modal rhythm in Notre Dame polyphony "is now waning." He specifically notes that in polyphonic passages in "sustained pitch" style-as opposed to "pitch against pitch" style-the note lengths were probably not modal; his interpretation is congruent with Pères's (van der Werf, "Early Western Polyphony," in *Companion to Medieval and Renaissance Music*, p. 112).

²¹ See David Landes, *Revolution in Time* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1983), p. 53, though he considers references to clocks from before the fourteenth century a little uncertain.

²² Proceedings published in *La rationalisation du temps au XIIIe siècle* (Paris: Créaphis, 1995).

²³ Christopher Page's essay "Ars Nova and Algorism" in his *Discarding Images* (Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 112-39, relates the rise of measured music to scientific trends of the era, especially the wider adoption of Arabic numerals-but not to the clock. Page also discusses the issue of time and notation in his interview, and arrives at conclusions opposite to those of Pères regarding medieval polyphony.

²⁴ I am not convinced that clocks had much impact on the development of quantitative rhythm; see the Postscript to the Christopher Page interview, where I mention my reasons briefly. This is not to say that I think Pères is necessarily wrong about rhythm in Pérotin or in Corsican chant; but that the explanation for the change to more quantitative rhythms in music might lie elsewhere.

. . . sometimes because of it . . .

. . . yes, but we make poorer the quality of everyday life. For instance, in churches, even in Europe, they use microphones for the liturgy. That means we have lost a quality of hearing and of voice production. The same thing for lighting; I talked before about candles. If you light the church with candles, the mood you create-the quality of the space and time-is really something different and is worth the experiment. There is no reason to lose these things.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Marcel Péres has made a number of recordings for Harmonia Mundi, and even readers with little interest in plainchant might find them fascinating. The best starting points may be the discs that include non-Western singing, especially the one featuring Beneventan chant (HMC 901476) and the second of those featuring Old Roman chant (HMC 901382). Both feature Lycourgos Angelopoulos, with his extraordinary microtonal ornamentation and un-Western voice production; the results in both cases are hypnotic-a word many enthusiastic critics have applied to it. The same adjective is often applied to his recordings of other repertory discussed above-e.g., the Milanese chant CD (HMC 901295), which includes Marie Keyrouz.

It would be misleading to imply that the reviews have been unanimous in praising Péres's chant CDs. One persistent critic has been Jerome F. Weber, who thinks that many of the performance practices used have no scholarly basis; he often objects, for example, to the use of drones and of "Eastern" ornamentation. Reviewing a recent Péres CD of Mozarabic chant, Weber says that it sounds "less like any other recording of Mozarabic chant (few as they may be) and more like [Péres's] own recordings of Gregorian, Cistercian, Old Roman, Ambrosian, and Beneventan, and Neo-Gallican chants." (He says this same criticism applies to another wide-ranging director of plainchant, László Dobszay.)²⁵ Weber is, however, enthusiastic about Péres's recording of the Mass of Tournai (HMC 901 353), which he thinks is clearly the best realization of that manuscript.²⁶

From the chant recordings, one might turn to Péres's recordings of later repertoire. These bring up a theme that recurs often in the other medieval and Renaissance interviews in this book, and even in some of the Baroque ones - English versus Continental singing styles. Fabrice Fitch describes the difference well in his review of Péres's Ockeghem Requiem (HMC 901441): "The tenors' emphasis on chest-tone clearly differentiates them from their English counterparts. It is as though English ensembles match their lower voices to the high partials of the choirboy and the countertenor, whereas ensembles like Organum start from the basses' rich, deep low Cs and build upwards."²⁷ Despite reservations regarding a few pitch standards and tempos, Fitch is enthusiastic about this recording. Péres interpolates plainchant, treating the Requiem as the Mass for the dead it was meant to be, and while Fitch usually experiences' such interpolations "as so many distractions from the polyphony," here he finds them "literally awe-inspiring." He also calls Péres's recording of Josquin's *Missa Pange Lingua* (HMC 910239) "superb."

FOR FURTHER READING

Plainchant has inspired an extremely active and wide-ranging body of research over the last generation. To do justice to it all in one book would clearly be impossible; David Hiley has done the impossible in his *Western Plainchant: A Handbook* (Oxford University Press, 1993). This *magnum opus* is indispensable for anyone interested in chant.

I don't know of a better introduction to chant than James McKinnon's chapter, "The Emergence of Gregorian Chant in the Carolingian Era," and Hiley's "Plainchant Transfigured," both in McKinnon's

²⁵ Weber, *Fanfare* 19 (November/December 1995), p. 453. ²⁶ Personal communication, 1996.

²⁶ Personal communication, 1996.

²⁷ *Early Music* 22 (February 1994), p. 155.

Antiquity and the Middle Ages (London: Macmillan, and Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1991), the single best introduction to medieval music. For those wanting more musical detail than McKinnon aims to provide, David Fenwick Wilson's *Music of the Middle Ages* (New York: Schirmer, 1990) is excellent. All these books also discuss non-Gregorian chant; those seeking a more advanced discussion might try the *New Oxford History of Music, II*, rev. ed., ed. Richard Crocker and David Hiley (Oxford University Press, 1990), Part II.

Katherine Bergeron's essay on the nature of plainchant in *Companion to Medieval and Renaissance Music*, ed. Tess Knighton and David Fallows (London, Orion, and New York, Schirmer, 1992), quoted above, is a high point in a very stimulating book. Her essay on Péres and the Silos monks, "The Virtual Sacred" (*The New Republic*, 27 February 1995, pp. 29-34), has been controversial partly, I think, because it has been misread: her real subject is not early music, but what the chant phenomenon says about spiritual life in the 1990s.

David Landes's *Revolution in Time* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1983) is a first-rate history of the clock and its impact on Western civilization. Paul Fraisse's "Rhythm and Tempo" in Diana Deutsch's *The Psychology of Music* (New York: Academic Press, 1982) summarizes a wealth of research on time perception in music.