

A Benedictine monk who made important contributions to the development of musical theory in the Middle Ages, Guido was probably born near Paris about 995 and received his education in the Benedictine abbey of St. Maur-des-Fossés. From there he went first to the abbey of Pomposa in northern Italy, and later to Arezzo. His reputation as a scholar in the field of musical theory brought Guido to Rome, where he convinced Pope John XIX of the excellence of the improvements that he had introduced into the teaching of music and singing. Guido became prior of the monastery at Avellano in 1029 and died about 1050.

Prologus antiphonarii sui

[ca. 1025]

IN OUR TIMES, of all men, singers are the most foolish. For in any art those things which we know of ourselves are much more numerous than those which we learn from a master. As soon as they have read the Psalter attentively, small boys know the meanings of all books. Rustics understand the science of agriculture at once, for he who knows how to prune one vineyard, to plant one tree, to load one ass, does not hesitate to do in all cases as he did in the one, if not even better. But marvelous singers, and singers' pupils, though they sing every day for a hundred years, will never sing one antiphon, not even a short one, of themselves, without a master, losing time enough in singing to have learned thoroughly both sacred and secular letters.

And what is the most dangerous thing of all, many clerics and monks of the religious order neglect the psalms, the sacred readings, the nocturnal vigils, and the other works of piety that arouse and lead us on to everlasting glory, while they apply themselves with unceasing and most foolish effort to the science of singing which they can never master.

Who does not also bewail this (which is at once a grave error and a dangerous discord in Holy Church), that when we celebrate the divine office we are often seen rather to strive among ourselves than to praise God, in short, that scarcely one agrees with another, neither the pupil with his master, nor the pupil with his fellow pupils? It is for this reason that the antiphoners are not one, nor yet a few, but rather as many as are the masters in the single churches; and that the antiphoner is now commonly said to be, not Gregory's, but Leo's, or Albert's, or someone's else. And since to learn one is most difficult, there can be no doubt that to learn many is impossible.

In which matter, since the masters change many things arbitrarily, little or no blame should attach to me if I depart from common use in scarcely more than a few respects in order that every chant may return uniformly to a common rule of art. And inasmuch as all these evils and many others have arisen from the fault of those who make antiphoners, I strongly urge and maintain that no one should henceforth presume to provide an antiphoner with neumes except he understand this business and know how to do it properly according to the rules here laid down. Otherwise, without having first been a disciple of truth, he will most certainly be a master of error.

It is in this way, then, that I have decided, with God's help, to write this antiphoner so that hereafter, by means of it, any intelligent and studious person may learn singing and so that, after he has thoroughly learned a part of it through a master, he will unhesitatingly understand the rest of it by himself without one. As to this, should anyone doubt that I am telling the truth, let him come, make a trial, and see what small boys can do under our direction, boys who until now have been beaten for their gross ignorance of the psalms and vulgar letters, who often do not know how to pronounce the words and syllables of the very antiphon which, without a master, they sing correctly by themselves, something which, with God's help, any intelligent and studious person will be able to do if he try to understand the intention with which we have arranged the neumes.

The sounds, then, are so arranged that each sound, however often it may be repeated in a melody, is found always in its own row. And in order that you may better distinguish these rows, lines are drawn close together, and some rows of sounds occur on the lines themselves, others in the

intervening intervals or spaces. Then the sounds on one line or in one space all sound alike. And in order that you may also understand to which lines or spaces each sound belongs, certain letters of the monochord are written at the beginning of the lines or spaces and the lines are also gone over in colors, thereby indicating that in the whole antiphoner and in every melody those lines or spaces which have one and the same letter or color, however many they may be, sound alike throughout, as though all were on one line. For just as the line indicates complete identity of sounds, so the letter or color indicates complete identity of lines, and hence of sounds also.

Then if you find the second row of sounds everywhere distinguished by such a letter or colored line, you will also know readily that this same identity of sounds and neumes runs through all the second rows. Understand the same of the third, fourth, and remaining rows, whether you count up or down. It is then most certainly true that all neumes or sounds similarly or dissimilarly formed on lines of the same letter or color sound alike throughout, the line being lettered or colored in the same way, and that on different lines or in different spaces even similarly formed neumes sound by no means alike. Hence, be the formation of the neumes as perfect as you please, without the addition of letters or colors it is altogether meaningless and worthless.

For we use two colors, namely yellow and red, and by means of them I teach you a rule that will enable you to know readily to what tone and to what letter of the monochord every neume and any sound belong, most useful if, as is very convenient, you make frequent use of the monochord and of the formulas of the tones.

Now, as I shall show fully later on, the letters of the monochord are seven. Wherever, then, you see the color yellow, there is the third letter, C, and wherever you see the color red, there is the sixth letter, F, whether these colors be on the lines or between them. Hence in the third row beneath the yellow is the first letter, A, belonging to the first and second tone; above this, next to the yellow, is the second letter, B, belonging to the third and fourth tone; then, on the yellow itself, is the third letter or sound, C, belonging to the fifth and sixth tone; immediately above the yellow and third below the red is the fourth letter, D, belonging to the first and second tone; nearest the red is the fifth letter, E, belonging to the third and fourth tone; on the red itself is the sixth letter, F, belonging to the fifth and sixth tone; next above the red is the seventh letter, G, belonging to the seventh and eighth tone; then, in the third row above the red, below the yellow, is repeated the first letter, a, belonging, as already explained, to the first and second tone; after this, differing in no respect from the foregoing, are repeated all the rest; all which things this diagram will teach you quite clearly.

VII I III V I III V VII I III V I III V VII I III V I
 r A B C D E F G a b c d e f g a b c d
 VIII II IV VI II IV VI VIII II IV VI II IV VI VIII II IV VI II

Although each letter or sound belongs always to two tones, the formulas of the second, fourth, sixth, and eighth tones agree much better and more frequently in the single neumes or sounds, for the formulas of the first, third, fifth, and seventh agree only when the melody, descending from above, concludes with a low note.

Know, finally, that if you would make progress with these notes, you must learn by heart a fair number of melodies so that through these single neumes, modes, or sounds you may acquire through memory an understanding of all, of whatever sort they may be. For it is indeed quite another thing to know something by heart than it is to sing something by heart, since only the wise can do the former while persons without foresight can often do the latter. As to the simple understanding of neumes, let these things suffice.

How sounds are liquescent; whether they should be sung as connected or as separate; which ones are retarded and tremulous, and which hastened; how a chant is divided by distinctions; whether the following or preceding sound be higher, lower, or equal sounding; by a simple discussion all this is shown in the shape of the neumes itself, if the neumes are, as they should be, carefully put together.