St Gall Level 1 Group 2-2
Repercussive Neums – Examples

Transcript

Let's take a look at a few examples of these neums in a manuscript. This is the Gradual chant, "Miserére mei Deus."

(singing) *Miserére mei Deus, miserere mei: quóniam in te confídunt ánima mea. Misit de cælo, et liberávit me: dedit in opprobrium conculcántes me.* (beginning repeated) *Miserére mei….*

On the left side of the screen we have the chant in modern notation as found in the Graduale Romanum. On the right side of the screen we have the chant as found in the manuscript St. Gall 359, also known as the Cantatorium. The Cantatorium, transcribed between 922 and 925, is a very small manuscript. It measures only about 11 inches high and 5 inches wide. It contains the chants of the Mass that would have been sung by a soloist, that is, the Cantor. Thus, the name Cantatorium.

Let's take a look at the second and third words: *mei Deus*. Here on the left in modern notation we see several groups of two repeated notes: here, here, and here. In the Cantatorium the first of these groups is notated with a bivirga, here. In this particular case the bivirga is altered a bit. It has small horizontal lines, or episemas, on the tops of the virgas. These imply a lengthening. They may be the scribe's way of simply reminding us that the bivirga indicates a lengthening or particular emphasis on these notes already, or he may want to signal a little extra lengthening or emphasis. We will look more specifically at the role of episemas in a later video.

The second and third instances of repeated-note figures are notated in the Cantatorium with distrophae, here and here. They demonstrate a clear contrast between how these notes are to be sung – lightly and with movement or quickly – and how the notes of the bivirga are to be sung – more deliberately, as the more deliberate strokes and even the episemas indicate.

If we go back to the left and down to the word *mea*, on the fourth line – near the end of the long melismatic notation, we see a grouping of three notes, here. Now on the right side of the screen, the notation for this word kind of slides up the manuscript. The scribe was trying to fit the long passage into a small space. This three-note grouping is here – notated as a trivirga, again with episemas.

Back on the left, there are several places with trigons – that is, three-note neums in which the second note repeats the first and the third note drops to a lower pitch. On the third line, here is one, where the last note drops a third. On the fourth line, here is one where the third note drops a fourth. And on the sixth line, here are two – here – and here - where in each one the third note drops a second.

On the right side of the screen, every one of these groupings is notated with the same figure, a trigon, on the third line here, on the fourth line here, and on the sixth line here, and here.

This is a good example showing the lack of pitch specificity in the Saint Gall notation. It's not so much a notation system in the way we think of notation today, that is, the recording of a piece created by a composer. It is more of a recording of an oral tradition: a simple reminder of melodies that already exist in the community. Everyone knows them, so a notation system with exact pitches is not really necessary.

Now before we conclude, let me show you a few more examples of altered versions of some of these neums. Now we will look at these altered versions more closely in a later video, but this chant gives us a good opportunity to see them and to prepare for what's coming in that later video. Here on the left, on the fourth and fifth lines we have two groupings of three notes where the first note is lower than the second note and the third note is a repeat of the second note. Here is one on the fourth line – lower first note, higher second note, repeated third note. Here is another on the fifth line – again, lower first note, higher second note, repeated third note.

If we go to the Cantatorium, we see the first neum represented on the fourth line - here – with a kind of tristropha in which the first stropha is lower. On the fifth line, the second neum is represented here – with another kind of tristropha in

which the first stropha is lower. However, the last stropha in this tristropha is also altered. It has an episema attached to it. The episema looks like a little tail off the bottom of the stropha.

Back on the left, at the end of the second line, here is a grouping of two notes. In the Cantatorium, at the end of the second line, this grouping is represented by a distropha in which the second note also has an episema. It's a little hard to see, but it is there.

Again, back on the left, on the second line, we have what might be described as a trigon with an added note: Two notes on the same pitch, a lower note, and then another, yet lower note. In the Cantatorium, on the second line, indeed, we see a kind of extended trigon, but the third and fourth notes are not puncti, or dots. They are tractuli. You might think of these as episemas on puncti – they give a subtle lengthening to the notes.

Finally, one last time on the left, on the fifth line, we have two trigons, one here that drops a third, and one here that drops a fourth. In the Cantatorium, on the fifth line, these are both notated with trigons, here, and here -- but each with a tractulus as the last note instead of the normal punctum or dot, again indicating a subtle lengthening.

Again, we will look at these variations more specifically in a later video. For now, I just want you to be aware that in addition to the normal figures, there are altered versions. The exercises for this unit focus only on the normal, unaltered forms of the neums.