

Laon Level 1 Group 2-1

Repercussive Neums – Explanation

Transcript

From single-note neums, we move to multiple-note neums, that is, neums in which there is more than one note of music per syllable of text. These multiple-note neums fall into the four different categories that you see on the left menu of the main screen:

- Repercussive neums, in which the multiple notes are of the same pitch;
- Two-note neums;
- Three-note neums;
- and four or five-note neums.

We'll examine the repercussive neums first.

Sometimes a syllable of text is set to a neum with two, three or even more notes all on the same pitch, that is, a neum in which the same note is repeated or repercussed.

Sometimes in modern interpretations of chant these repeated-note figures are treated simply as a means of lengthening notes. However, as we will see in other videos, the early manuscripts had very specific techniques for indicating the lengthening of notes.

It is more accurate to interpret these neums as truly repeated or repercussed notes. We see a type of ornamentation similar to this as late as the Baroque era in what we call "goat trills."

Indeed, in 1565, shortly after the Council of Trent, the provincial Council of Milan, as it attempted to implement the mandates of Trent, forbade lascivious or profane music and the ornamentation of singing by these so-called "goat trills," or as the Council put it: a manner of

singing in which “the voices are more oppressed by the throat than expressed by the mouth.”

Of course, this raises the question as to why it is that goats are always so maligned, but we’ll tackle that another day.

We also believe that this kind of musical ornamentation is a remnant of Gallican chant, from which, what we call Gregorian chant developed when Gallican chant and old Roman chant were combined in a kind of hybridization in the late 8th century.

In Laon, there are several different neums that show this percussive ornamentation, but only three that do not have particular rhythmic implications: the distropha, the tristropha, and the extended stropha, and these occur only in very specific situations.

The Distropha

The distropha represents two notes of the same pitch. These notes are sung lightly.

Its modern equivalent is two square notes without stems. Sometimes in more recent editions of chant, the distropha is notated like this.

The Tristropha

By extension, the tristropha represents three notes of the same pitch. These notes are also sung lightly.

Its modern equivalent is three square notes without stems, or sometimes three notes that look like this.

The Extended Stropha

An extended strophæ is neum of more than three notes, all on the same pitch that are sung quickly or lightly. Its modern equivalent would also be several square notes without stems, or sometimes several notes that look like this.

However, in Laon the strophæ neums are normally notated in a way that shows a kind of lengthening of the last note. We will look at these strophæe in the next level.

The strophæ neums that I have shown you here, that is, without any lengthening of the last note, only occur in the context of larger, compound neums. They do not occur independently.

The next video will give you a few examples.