

## St Gall Level 1 Group 4-1

### Three-note Neums – Explanation

#### Transcript

A tree-note neum is a neum that sets a single syllable of text with a three-note figure of music.

There are four of these neums in simple, unaltered forms: the Scandicus, the Climacus, the Torculus, and the Porrectus.

#### The Scandicus

The Scandicus is a figure of three rising notes. It consists of two puncti and a virga, all in a diagonal line from lower left to upper right. With its first two notes as puncti and the last note as a visually longer note, that is, a virga, instead of a third punctum, the neum has a certain emphasis implied on the last note, or perhaps it might be better to say that the musical movement, or the impetus of the neum, is toward the last note.

The modern equivalent of the scandicus is any figure that represents three rising notes. It could like this, or this, or any of a number of similar configurations. The notes do not need to progress step-wise, as these examples do. The intervals between any two of the notes can vary widely.

Here is an example of a scandicus in the manuscript St. Gall 359, taken from the Tract *Sicut Cervus* from the Easter Vigil. The Scandicus is here, over the very first syllable *i*. Here is a modern transcription. The two neums above the scandicus, here circled in blue, belong to the previous syllable. The scribe had to write them here because there was not enough room on the parchment between the syllables of text.

You can hear this energy toward the last note of the neum in this recording.

(singing) *ita desíderat ánima mea...*

## The Climacus

Conversely, the climacus is a figure of three descending notes. It consists of a virga followed by two puncti, all in a diagonal line from upper left to lower right. Of course, the virga itself slants upward toward the right, as normal. It is just the overall direction of the three notes that slants downward and to the right.

Could we suggest that, because the first note is a virga and the other notes are puncti, that the first note takes on slightly more importance in the neum? Yes, we could. Just like the upper note of a clivis tends to take the weight of the neum, so too, the upper note of the climacus tends to take the weight of the neum. However, the difference between the notes is certainly subtle.

Its modern equivalent is any figure that represents three descending notes. Typically, the figure is a stemmed square note followed by two diamond-shaped notes. It could look like this, or this, or any of a number of similar configurations. The notes do not need to progress step-wise. The intervals between any two of the notes can vary widely. You can also see in the modern notation that, visually, the first note, with its stem, seems to take on a certain importance, or subtle weight.

Here is an example of a climacus at the end of the Communion chant, *Ecce virgo concípiet*. The manuscript is Einsiedeln 121. The Climacus is here, over the syllable *nu*, and here is a modern transcription.

(singing) *Emmánuhel*.

## The Torculus

The torculus looks like this. It consists of a lower note, represented by the downward stroke of the quill, followed by a higher note, represented by the upward stroke of the quill, followed by a lower note again, represented by the final downward stroke of the quill.

The Latin *torculus* is an adjective referring to the twisting action of a wine press. It is not hard to see how the neum, with its twisting configuration, got this name.

Here are some examples of the torculus in modern notation. The actual pitches of the torculus can vary widely, just as long as they create a pattern of a lower note, followed by a higher note, followed by a lower note.

I'll show you an example in a moment.

### **The Porrectus**

The porrectus, which looks like this, represents just the opposite motion of the torculus. It consists of a higher note, represented by the upward motion of the quill, followed by a lower note, represented by the lower motion of the quill, followed by a higher note, again, represented by the upward motion of the quill.

Here are some examples of the porrectus in modern notation. The actual pitches of the porrectus can vary widely, just as long as they create a pattern of a higher note, followed by a lower note, followed by a higher note.

In this example, taken from the manuscript Einsiedeln 121, we can see examples of both the torculus and the porrectus right next to each other. Here is the porrectus, over the syllable *ve*. It has a letter *L* above it, for *levate*, meaning “lift up,” most likely to remind the singer that the first note of this porrectus is a leap of a third from the last note of the previous neum, rather than just a step. There is a torculus immediately following this porrectus, here, over the syllable *ni*, and here is a modern transcription.

You can see, and hear, the high-low-high movement of the porrectus, and the low-high-low movement of the torculus.

(singing) ...*ad te vénio*...

### **Porrectus – Special Case**

Sometimes the last note of a porrectus will represent *not* a higher note, but a repeated note. So, its modern equivalent might look like this.

Here is an example of such an application of the porrectus, in the Gradual chant, *Laetatus sum*, as found in the manuscript St. Gall 359. The porrectus is here, over the first syllable of the word *dicta*, and here is a modern transcription.

(singing) ... *in his quae dicta sunt mi*...

In cases such as this, some people would say this is a clivis with a repetition of the last note. Regardless of the nomenclature, what is important to remember is that the porrectus could represent a high-low-high pattern, like this, or a high-low-repeat pattern, like this.