

St Gall Level 1 Group 5-1

Four- and Five-note Neums – Explanation

Once we pass the level of three-note neums, all of the larger neums are simply compounds of two or more smaller neums.

In this unit, I will give you just a few of the more common of the many possible combinations.

Remember, we define a neum as a group of notes that sets a single syllable of text.

For example, we have already seen the three-note scandicus. Well, the scandicus can actually have any number of notes, as long as there are at least three.

QUIZ: Why is that? Because if a neum has only two ascending notes it is called a _____.

Here, for example, is a four-note scandicus. No matter how many notes a neum has, if it is a group of at least three ascending notes, it is a scandicus.

Here are some examples of this longer scandicus in modern notation. Remember, the interval between any two of the notes can vary, so the actual number of possibilities is extensive.

Conversely, the climacus can actually have any number of notes, as long as there are at least three.

QUIZ: Why? Because if it is a neum with only 2 descending notes it is called a _____.

For example, here is a four-note climacus. No matter how many notes a neum has, if it is a group of at least three notes in descending order, it is a climacus.

Here are some examples of this longer climacus in modern notation.

Now remember, the interval between any two of the notes can vary, so the actual number of possibilities is extensive.

What if we were to take a scandicus, that is, a series of ascending notes, and combine it with a podatus, two descending notes? It would look like this.

If the scandicus reverses direction and descends for only one note, it is called a scandicus flexus. In Latin, the word, *flexus* is literally “a turning point,” with an implied meaning that the turning is downward. For example, a *genu flexum* is a knee that is bend (implicitly to the ground). We can see that the scandicus rises, and, then at the top, it turns downward for one note.

The modern equivalent could look like this, or this, or this, or any of a number of variations on this pattern of at least three rising notes that are followed by a single lower note.

If we were to combine a scandicus with a climacus, we would get this, a scandicus subbipunctis, literally, a “scandicus with two puncti underneath.”

Of course, the scandicus subbipunctis could have more than three ascending notes and then descend for two notes, like this.

Its modern equivalent could look like this, or this, or any of a number of variations on this pattern of at least three rising notes in ascending order that are followed by two lower notes in descending order.

Now that you see how this works, if we were to combine a pes with a climacus, what do you think it would be called?

QUIZ: A pes combined with a climacus would be called a _____.

A pes combined with a climacus would be called a pes subbipunctis, literally, a “pes with two puncti underneath.”

However, this could also be seen as a modified torculus, Here is the low note, high note, and low note pattern of the torculus, followed by another low note. So the same neum could also be called a Torculus Subpunctis, literally, “a torculus with a punctum underneath.”

The modern equivalent could look like this, or this, or this, or this, or any of a number of variations on this pattern of a lower note, followed by a higher note, followed by two lower notes.

Suppose we took a torculus and combined it with a single higher note, like this.

This we call a torculus resupinus. The Latin term *resupinus* means “lying on one’s back.” Think of the cognate “supine.” I am not sure whether this term is applied here because this combination of notes is structurally the same this way, or reversed, that is, flipped on its back, or simply because the last note flips up in the opposite direction.

In any case, just as the term *flexus* is applied to a neum in which the last note turns down, so, too, the term *resupinus* is applied to a neum in which the last note turns up.

And, here are a few examples of how the torculus resupinus can be notated with modern neums.

Take a look at the neum on the screen. Then take the quiz.

QUIZ: What would you call the neum on the screen?

It is a porrectus flexus. Here is the high note- low note – high note pattern of the porrectus, and then it turns down, or flexes, for another low note.

Here are just a couple of examples of the many ways the porrectus flexus can be notated with modern neums:

Take a look at this neum. Then take the quiz.

QUIZ: What would you call the neum on the screen?

It is a porrectus subbipunctis. Here is the high note- low note – high note pattern of the porrectus, and then it turns down for two lower notes in descending order.

Here are a couple of examples of the ways the porrectus subbipunctis flexus could be notated with modern neums: