

The Notre Dame Singer

Part I.

Albertus can hardly believe his luck! After only three years of studying music at Notre Dame, Master Leoninus has selected him to perform the duplum at this weekend's Easter Sunday Mass. Though he has performed the duplum during the Sunday mass during recent weeks, the idea of him to singing duplum at the high mass, in front of a full congregation of nobility, dignitaries, and pilgrims is just too wondrous to comprehend! Excitedly Albertus makes his way to the scriptorium to start his preparations. Once there, however, Albertus' joy turns to instant concern. The only music for Easter Sunday that he can find is old plainchant.

Questions

1. What are the causes of the Albertus' worry?
2. What steps might he take to remedy the situation?

Part II.

Hurrying back to the choir loft, Albertus breathes a sigh of relief. Master Leoninus has not yet left for the day. As he relates the problem at hand to Master Leoninus, Albertus is astonished to see his teacher start to smile. This is not at all the response that he had expected.

Master Leoninus: “Why, that’s not a problem at all, in fact, I’d call it a stroke of good luck!”

Albertus: “Good luck?!?! How so?”

Master Leoninus: “Well, now you won’t only have the honor of performing as the soloist for the Mass, you’ll also have the privilege of composing the notes you’ll be singing. I can think of no higher honor than using your creativity and skill to honor God at this weekend’s Mass!”

Albertus: “What, me? Compose the polyphony? And perform my composition in front of all of the people who will be attending Mass? I don’t think I am able. Actually, I know I am not. I don’t even know where to begin!”

Master Leoninus, turning to walk away: “Oh, but I think you do! As for where to begin, you can always consider the polyphony that you have sung recently. Or, better yet, why don’t you consult the Gregorian Chant Mass for Christmas Day? Though it may be a sin of pride to admit it, I’m quite fond of the organum I wrote for its Gradual, the “Viderunt Omnes” and I’m certain that you can find my manuscript for it in the scriptorium somewhere....”

Questions:

1. What are your initial thoughts and questions about Albertus’ quandary?
2. If you were Albertus, what steps would you take next?

Optional Questions (if further clarification or assistance is needed with Stage 1):

1. Why does Master Leoninus direct Albertus to the Gregorian Chant Mass for Christmas day as well as to his organum manuscript of the “Viderunt Omnes”?
2. What should Albertus do with these scores?

Part III.

After much time looking over the scores that Master Leoninus recommended, Albertus has resigned himself to the fact that there is simply no way around it. He must compose the music he is to perform. Well, he thinks to himself, I guess there's no better place to start than at the beginning! With a deep sigh, he settles into his chair and shifts through the plainchant manuscript in front of him. Then, finding a blank page of parchment, Albertus dips his quill in the inkwell, and begins to notate.

Questions:

1. How does Albertus know where to start?
2. If Albertus is to proceed systematically, through the mass, with which chant does Albertus begin his work on? Which word of text is the first word for which he will compose organum?
3. How does Albertus know to which chants he can compose organum? Who gets to sing his newly composed organal line?
4. How does he know which parts of these chants can be sung polyphonically, and which must remain monophonic?
5. When and where will Albertus be permitted to use rhythmic modes? Why?
6. As a team, develop a set of "rules" for composing organum that Albertus can refer to as he composes.

Part IV.

Taking pity on poor Albertus who is making headway, but slowly, your team has decided to assist him in his composition. Working together, select one chant from the Mass for Easter for which you will compose organum. Then, following the rules for composing organum that you established in Part III, compose the duplum that Albertus will perform. Be sure that your composition not only follows the structural rules for composing organum, but that it adheres to the medieval style aesthetics that we have been discussing in class in its use of consonance, dissonance, intervallic movement, and closure.

Rules for Submission:

1. Each team will submit one complete score (written in modern notation!) for the chant that it has selected.
2. Your final composition should reflect the rules of organum in its inclusion of monophony, polyphony, and rhythmic modes, as well as the medieval elements of style.

A Note for Instructors & Facilitators

Each student should be provided with complete scores for the Easter Mass Proper and Ordinary at the start of this problem. In addition, they should have ready access to their scores and recordings for the Mass for Christmas Day and Leoninus's organum as provided in the *Norton Anthology of Music* throughout the course of the problem.

Problem Objectives:

- To review the structure of the Gregorian chant mass, early notation, and when the choir and soloists sing
- To reinforce the concept that organum originated as simply another trope, while having students discover (through comparison) the rules for when and where organum was permitted within the chant repertoire
- To review early medieval style aesthetics as they pertain to consonance, dissonance, intervallic movement, and closure

The first three parts of this problem can be completed in a little over one class period. Students should be given ample class time to complete their compositions. As a result, I would recommend a minimum of 2 ½ - 3 classes for this problem.