

Plainsong Workshop

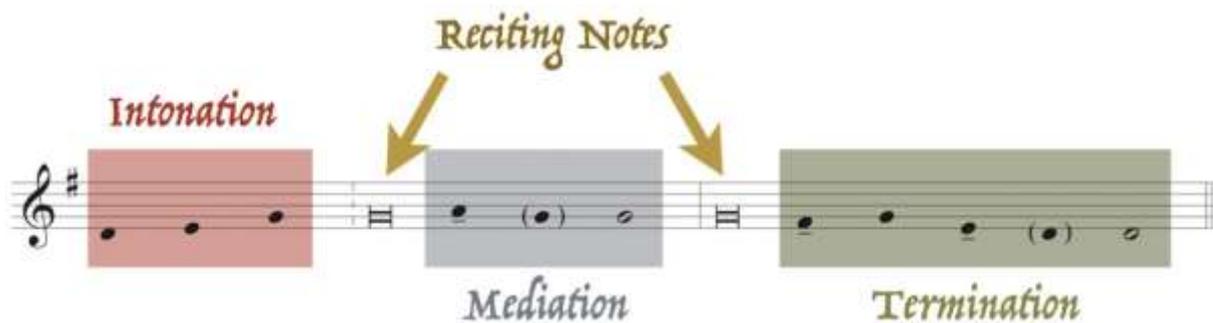
One of the most common forms of plainsong involves chanting to Gregorian tones (Gregorian chant). St James chants psalms at Evensong to these tones (albeit usually written out in full).

Chant tones

Plainsong chant consists of four elements:

- Intonation (usually only sung first time, by the cantor)
- Reciting note (on which the majority of the words are sung)
- Mediation (the tail of the first line/first half of verse)
- Reciting note (as before, but for the second line of text/second half of verse)
- Termination/Ending (the tail of the second line/second half of the verse)

Occasionally, not all notes of mediation or termination are required (if ending on a stressed syllable, for example). These are either shown in brackets (more common in modern notation) or as white notes (more common with neumes).



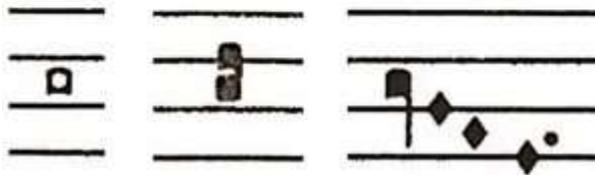
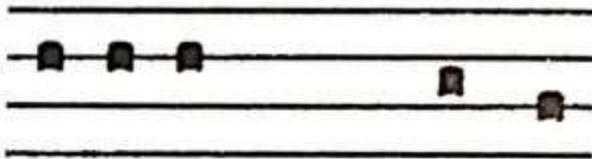
Tone VIII 1 with highlighted intonation, reciting notes, mediation, and termination/ending

The above is written in modern notation. Usually plainsong is written on a 4-line staff with either a C clef or an F clef (see later) and in 'square notes' called neumes.

Notes - neumes

Notes are indicated by neumes.

- Single neumes indicate one note per syllable.
- Single hollow neumes for extra syllables (I often tell you to ignore these when learning the chant, they are for when extra syllables are required – more info and examples below)
- Neumes bound together (ligatures) are used when multiple notes are sung to a single syllable of text.
- Perpendicular ligatures are sung ascending, that is, beginning on the lower note and rising to the upper note.
- Diagonal ligatures are sung descending.
- Neumes generally do not indicate length of note (rules for note lengths discussed later)



We tend to use a version of plainsong that is written out in long form with a neume per syllable.
<http://old.www.lithoi.org.uk/church/mop/mop.html>

The problem with this is the rather syllabic singing it generates rather than the steady speech rhythm flow it requires.

Clefs

Modern Clefs



Medieval Clef



The C and F clefs in plainsong indicate the relative placing of the semitone, not a specific pitch. The C clef is far more common. It shows that there is a semitone between the indicated pitch (nominally C) and the note below. There is also another semitone a fourth above and fifth below (rarely arises in chant tones, but important for freeform plainsong). This 'indicated pitch' will rarely practically be a 'C'. Because of the natural comfortable range of the human voice, the reciting note is usually between F-A (depending on the movement of the mediation/ending). The reciting note and the note indicated by the clef are often different.

Example:

Ps. 30 *Exaltabo te, Domine* VIII.1.

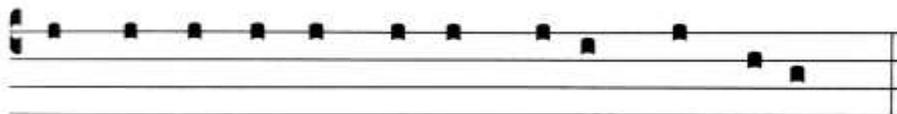
A musical staff with a C-clef on the second line. The notation consists of square notes on a four-line staff with a bar line. The notes are: G (line 1), A (line 2), B (line 3), C (line 4), D (line 5), E (line 6), F (line 7), G (line 8), A (line 9), B (line 10), C (line 11), D (line 12), E (line 13), F (line 14), G (line 15), A (line 16), B (line 17), C (line 18), D (line 19), E (line 20), F (line 21), G (line 22), A (line 23), B (line 24), C (line 25), D (line 26), E (line 27), F (line 28), G (line 29), A (line 30), B (line 31), C (line 32), D (line 33), E (line 34), F (line 35), G (line 36), A (line 37), B (line 38), C (line 39), D (line 40), E (line 41), F (line 42), G (line 43), A (line 44), B (line 45), C (line 46), D (line 47), E (line 48), F (line 49), G (line 50), A (line 51), B (line 52), C (line 53), D (line 54), E (line 55), F (line 56), G (line 57), A (line 58), B (line 59), C (line 60), D (line 61), E (line 62), F (line 63), G (line 64), A (line 65), B (line 66), C (line 67), D (line 68), E (line 69), F (line 70), G (line 71), A (line 72), B (line 73), C (line 74), D (line 75), E (line 76), F 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(line 1272), E (line 1273), F (line 1274), G (line 1275), A (line 1276), B (line 1277), C (line 1278), D (line 1279), E (line 1280), F (line 1281), G (line 1282), A (line 1283), B (line 1284), C (line 1285), D (line 1286), E (line 1287), F (line 1288), G (line 1289), A (line 1290), B (line 1291), C (line 1292), D (line 1293), E (line 1294), F (line 1295), G (line 1296), A (line 1297), B (line 1298), C (line 1299), D (line 1300), E (line 1301), F (line 1302), G (line 1303), A (line 1304), B (line 1305), C (line 1306), D (line 1307), E (line 1308), F (line 1309), G (line 1310), A (line 1311), B (line 1312), C (line 1313), D (line 1314), E (line 1315), F (line 1316), G (line 1317), A (line 1318), B (line 1319), C (line 1320), D (line 1321), E (line 1322), F (line 1323), G (line 1324), A (line 1325), B (line 1326), C (line 1327), D (line 1328), E (line 1329), F (line 1330), G (line 1331), A (line 1332), B (line 1333), C (line 1334), D (line 1335), E (line 1336), F (line 1337), G (line 1338), A (line 1339), B (line 1340), C (line 1341), D (line 1342), E (line 1343), F (line 1344), G (line 1345), A (line 1346), B (line 1347), C (line 1348), D (line 1349), E (line 1350), F (line 1351), G (line 1352), A (line 1353), B (line 1354), C (line 1355), D (line 1356), E (line 1357), F (line 1358), G (line 1359), A (line 1360), B (line 1361), C (line 1362), D (line 1363), E (line 1364), F (line 1365), G (line 1366), A (line 1367), B (line 1368), C (line 1369), D (line 1370), E (line 1371), F (line 1372), G (line 1373), A (line 1374), B (line 1375), C (line 1376), D (line 1377), E (line 1378), F (line 1379), G (line 1380), A (line 1381), B (line 1382), C (line 1383), D (line 1384), E (line 1385), F (line 1386), G (line 1387), A (line 1388), B (line 1389), C (line 1390), D (line 1391), E (line 1392), F (line 1393), G (line 1394), A (line 1395), B (line 1396), C (line 1397), D (line 1398), E (line 1399), F (line 1400), G (line 1401), A (line 1402), B (line 1403), C (line 1404), D (line 1405), E (line 1406), F (line 1407), G (line 1408), A (line 1409), B (line 1410), C (line 1411), D (line 1412), E (line 1413), F (line 1414), G (line 1415), A (line 1416), B (line 1417), C (line 1418), D (line 1419), E (line 1420), F (line 1421), G (line 1422), A (line 1423), B (line 1424), C (line 1425), D (line 1426), E (line 1427), F (line 1428), G (line 1429), A (line 1430

Cantor:



My soul doth magni- fy the Lord :

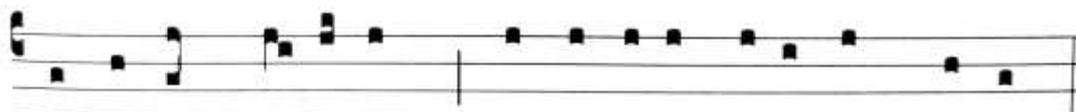
All:



and my spi-rit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

Cantor:

All:



For he hath re-garded : the lowliness of his hand-maiden.

Notes: vertical ligatures = sing the lower note first; horizontal/diagonal ligatures are descending. Stems to notes are historic (to save confusion with later development in white mensural notation – mostly they mean maintain normal note values). Ed will point out any unusual circumstances as they appear, but this is very unlikely with us

1. *O Sapientia**Cantor**All*

The image displays two musical staves. The top staff is a single-line notation for a cantor, featuring square neumes on a four-line staff. The lyrics 'O Wis - dom, which cam - est' are written below the notes. The bottom staff is a modern piano accompaniment in G major, with treble and bass clefs, showing the harmonic support for the cantor's part.

Notes: This is an F clef (modern notation pitches the clef on A); it is common for modern editions to divide long ligatures if words are immediately underlaid so meaning is obvious, as in 'wis(dom)'; shape of note from historical usage and does not alter length.

Originally neumes could be written long or short (long or breve), but these days it is rare to see note length indicated in the shape of the note; instead all notes are given as breves (short notes) and two breves next to each other indicate a lengthening of the value (see the second note in the modern notation above, corresponding to the second and third neume above it).

SOLFEGE

Hymn II

U T que- ant la- xis * reso-ná-re fibris mi- ra
ges-tó- rum fámu- li tu- ó-rum, sol- ve pollú- ti
lá- bi- i re- á-tum, sancte Io- án-nes.

Additional points:

- Notice clef here is F clef
- - over note indicates emphasis
- · next to note indicates lengthening (no specific value, but double usually works)
- Half bar line indicates breath (remember no breathing at commas)
- Double neumes of the same pitch and syllable indicate emphasis and lengthening (see Io-an-nes)

Because the clef can be thought of as indicating the tonic rather than a specific note/pitch, we could use solfege and describe it showing 'do'. Solfege is the system that names degrees of a scale rather than pitched notes – do re mi fa sol la te do. Solfege was named after this hymn as each quarter starts with a new note of the scale, with the syllable... Ut (do) re mi fa sol la (there is no te).