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Stante pede

a workbook on medieval musical improvisation in double versicle form

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Foreword and introduction

The following text should serve as a practical workbook. Although I will present essential instrumental pieces from different medieval periods, as well as musical examples and reconstructions, this is not intended to be a compendium or collection of medieval music. My wish is to present readers with some new and perhaps unusual ideas, and to inspire them to experiment with different ways of playing medieval instrumental music.

Paris 13th century / In the shadow of Notre Dame, Grocheo and the mysterious “stantipes”

A very useful and interesting source containing some information on instrumental and vocal improvisation is **Johannes de Grocheo’s “De Musica”**¹. This originally untitled treatise written in Paris ca. 1275 describes both sacred and secular music practice and musical genres in that town from an empirical point of view. Grocheo’s unique descriptions of instrumental music will be of highest interest to us, although they are not undisputed.

I will present one reconstruction of a possible stantipes based on the 13th century cantus coronatus “Quant li rosignol joli”, a melodic contrafactum of the conductus of Philippe le Chancelier “Nitimur in vetitum”. It will also include some reflexions and examples dealing with the explicitly mentioned practice of attaching a pneuma as a postlude after the performance of an estampie. Grocheo gives eight examples in the “Octo toni”- system with the invitation to improve them regarding melodic beauty and also regarding the ambitus. He calls these postludes to the estampie “Neupmata” (sic).

Winchester 11th century / Echoes of Notker, an early minstrel tune in Old England

I would like to include into my considerations some of the assumed predecessors of the estampie by following the line of development from the textless sequence model (sequela) to the estampie. As I have worked on that hypothetically instrumental repertoire of Notkeriana quite a lot in the past I would like to present a new and lesser known but fascinating example from the Winchester tropers. It is discussed here as assumably one of the first written down minstrel tunes in Western history: “Tractus Iocularis” from the Winchester tropers of the 11th century.

Although we have a clear line of development of concrete models through five centuries from the early textless sequences (sequelae) of the 9th to lai, nota, to Grocheo’s special stantipes to the well known ductiae called Estampies Royales, Roiales, Reales and to the famous Northern Italian Istanpite of the 14th century it would not be enough just to transcribe and restore these historic documents and then just play these pieces as if they were works by a composer. May be they are not even musical works – in spite of their compository ingenuity - but examples of an organic and fluid process of eternal modal change.

Were the stantipedes readily composed pieces to be learned or were they examples of a formal genre in which the musicians improvised and organised their ex tempore versions of songs or of their very own melodic inventions? The treatises and the musical sources give us various answers into completely different directions. We must assume that both directions are right: The stantipedes were partly concrete pieces, and partly examples of an improvisation practice. So there must be some reason for this ambiguity of this important medieval genre. This ambiguity has always inspired me and has a lot to do with another kind of medieval didactics for learning music at cathedral schools.

¹ The treatise survives in two manuscript sources: H (codex Harley (BM) 281, fol 39r – 52r) and D (codex Darmstadt 2663, fol 56r-69r), now at: LoB and Darmstadt Hessische Landesbibliothek. My translations and considerations rely on an intensive consultation of both manuscripts which differ slightly. The facsimile of both ms was edited by E. Rohloff “Die Quellenhandschriften zum Musiktraktat des Johannes de Grocheo”, Leipzig 1967.

The musicians, the ioculatores were not just learning tunes but much more they had to interiorize archetypal phrases, develop special modal figures and then subsequently use them in the improvisation. That is most likely what Johannes de Grocheo meant with “componere ductiam et stantipedem” which will be explained in the following chapters. To understand the didactical ambiguity of the stantipes as a gateway to creativity will change the interpretation even of the very well known few Estampies and give the musicians new freedom to further develop the tunes according to the principles of the medieval sources.

Improvised thoughts about medieval improvisation.

For you to follow my process, I have to go back thirty years to a moment when, as a modern composer/flautist I discovered the medieval flute. This helped me to express the artistic search for what I call my “inner Anonymus”. I imagined myself as a kind of monk, or hermit whom nobody knows by name but who creates a lot of great music. Of course it seems to be a contradiction to emphasize the search for anonymous musical expressions instead of making yourself a name by using the same musical ideas. But this contradiction is very inspiring in the creative process of musical invention, which I regard as similar to meditation. It is about filtering out the unnecessary ego - aspects. Still today I can see that very often the best parts in music are created anonymously. In the following lines I will try to outline a way to incorporate own inventions in such a contemplative way, more concentrating on adding something meaningful to a collective corpus of music over many centuries instead of thriving for the individual creation of works – associated with the name of the musician.

My process of reflecting on and approaching medieval improvisation is all about contemplation on the one hand and ecstasy in sound on the other. Contemplation and ecstasy are the two main qualities of any medieval mystic art and even though they might seem contradictory to us now, in the medieval *Weltanschauung* they were closely linked. In my work I have found these two states to be strong inspirational tools for the reconstruction of medieval improvisation.

To follow in the footsteps of a medieval musician, to act as an anonymous improviser or composer of medieval music today firstly demands of us to familiarize ourselves with the matter. Not only the music itself but many other historical sources (pictures, diverse texts, surviving instruments) can help us on the way of understanding and performing this music. The next step then is then to bring all these found fragments of information together, and to improvise, to create in that style. Most medieval music is not ready to play. It needs our input to come back to life.

This presents us with an inescapable dilemma: as hard as we try to achieve the most authentic performance by researching and applying the findings to our musical practice, without our own personal creative input and own imaginative improvisations the old sounds would remain unheard. And, being 21st century musicians, our whole artistic approach probably paints a far clearer picture of our own time, dreams, desires, and visions than of the medieval era.

To what extent can our personal perspective on the Middle Ages “inform” the music before the artistic reconnection to our musical past becomes distorted? Do we risk inventing our own favorite version of the Middle Ages by shaping it through our preferences?

As a spring and the sea, the Middle Ages and today are connected by a continuous stream; the stream of time flows in one direction in strict chronology, but it has a mysterious vibrating energy, sometimes sending out sudden bursts, able to span centuries in a short fraction of a second. In performance, these are the best moments in music for me, and especially in improvisation seems to me to be no higher goal than to aim for these electric moments of synchronicity.

In these moments the term “authentic” goes farther than what we call “historically authentic”, but reaches an “authenticity” beyond the limits of time. With improvisation in any style we always approach the inner mysterium of music. For medieval music, these transcendent energies are especially important because medieval music pulsated in a different way than modern music. It was deeply rooted in a cosmic world view which was more open to metaphysical powers emanating in the arts. And at the same time the music basically remained anonymous and avoided an individual claiming authorship. This is even true for much of the music with known composers like Hildegard von Bingen or Perotinus. The music of these authors doesn't strongly claim the individual authorship as a composer in the modern sense but the notion of the name hints much more to the leadership of the artistic and spiritual workshop of an important person, like an important abbess or a famous cantor. The musical production and composition itself could very well have been done by a team of creatives within the cloister's scriptorium or the cathedral school.

Before continuing it seems important to me also to reflect on the word “improvisation”, its meaning and connotations today. Although it is a word which can be understood by its Latin origins (*improvisus* – the unexpected, unforeseen), the term didn't have the same meaning in medieval times (*im – pro – videre*). A sometimes completely different modern meaning based on improvisation idioms from modern times - including Jazz, different variation styles, instrumental soli in Pop music and the non-idiomatic attempts of free improvisation seems to be problematic for our attempt to get closer to the medieval “ad libitum” aspects of musical performance practice. This modern meaning stands in a contrast to what I would like to write about: music performed “stante pede”, “ad hoc” but within the frame of a historically given “set up” of memorized and interiorized melodic phrases, ornaments, formal frames (for example the overall important double versicles of the Sequela to Estampie tradition) and various other elements which are mentioned and listed in this workbook. And additionally the term is problematic in a context where it is not clear whether the existing examples of Estampies need to be regarded as ready pieces or as didactical improvisation examples. For example: a trumpet solo of Miles Davis was never intended to become a didactical tool for Jazz students, but is now used as such in modern Jazz schools where the solo's transcription is a subject of analysis and practice, so it is now a didactical tool. In the medieval times all these aspects were treated differently. What seems to be ambiguous for us today could have been very clear for the medieval mind. Medieval improvisation as a momentary musical expression could be much better described and approached with the term “ex tempore”. Extemporizing means an action where the memorization and interiorizing of pre-existing music goes hand in hand with the imagination of something new, coming to the mind and fingers of the musician in the moment of performance, to be presented right on the spot. Music was in a constant flux. Normally there was no finished work. To find proof for that thesis just compare a bundle of famous conductus or sequences which have different documented versions. Very likely you will find changes between the versions which just can't be explained

just because of oral tradition's inaccuracy or writing mistakes. The changes also have to do with the unfinished state of the song. Improvisation and a musical "ex tempore"-mind can help us to step into that flexible modal flux of medieval music.

As I pointed out before, there seems to be great interest to discuss improvisational aspects in medieval performance practice in the communication process between musicians and audience and between teachers and students as well. In spite of the slightly problematic connotations of the modern word improvisation, I wouldn't like to exchange it here in this workbook. It is indeed a catchy word which would always need two or even three words to describe its exact medieval meaning.

We should also note the etymological kinship between the words 'trope' and 'trobar/trobador/troubadour/trouvere.' The verb 'trouver' means 'to find,' and common to all its derivatives is the idea of discovery and invention. These words make it clear that a concept of performance practice that does not include an improvisatory role for the modern performer must, of necessity, remain an empty ruin.



The lost link in a chain

The book contains a new reading of some newly translated excerpts of Grocheo's "De musica" of the 13th century, based on his explicit distinction between *ductia* and *stantipes*. In my own interpretation of his statements Grocheo describes a contemplative piece called "stantipes" (= estampie), very different from any dancelike tune. An attempt to reconstruct the lost form of a non rhythmic stantipes seems to be necessary. At least this attempt has been my personal artistic mission for the last 25 years. Of course I would like to convince you, the reader, to follow me in some of my thoughts and I hope that you may come to similar conclusions!

Grocheo describes two different styles of instrumental performance which he opposes to one another in several points - the *stantipes* and the *ductia*.

I present the original text in English translation:

(...) First the cantus coronatus has been discussed. Now it is time to actually deal with ductia and stantipes. A ductia is a tune without words with decently measured beats. I said 'without words' because it does not follow letters as it is free from letters and text, although it might also be performed with the human voice and be presented through figures. 'With decently measured beats' because these beats measure the ductia and the movement of the performers and they inspire the human senses to gracious movement according to the art which is called dancing, measuring its movement in ductiae and circle-dance-songs. (...)

(...)The stantipes is in fact a textless tune having a difficult concordance discernment and which is determined by puncta. I say 'difficult ... etc' because of the following: as it has this difficulty it focuses the souls of the performers and of the listeners on its context and it prevents the mind of the listeners and in many cases also the mind of the rich from bad thought. I say 'determined by puncta' as it is lacking the beats which are in ductia and can only be recognized by its distinctive use of puncta.(...) ²

The description of the *ductia* is rather straightforward and easy to understand: it is described as being textless but not exclusively instrumental, it can also be performed vocally, it is measured by beats, and Grocheo himself relates the beats' description *cum recta percussione* to dancing.

The passage introducing us to the *stantipes* on the other hand is less self-evident. First of all it is also a textless genre, but it is "non-percussive", lacking the rhythmic quality. This seems to be a factor to distinguish *stantipes* from *ductia*, and perhaps oppose the two. The aspect in which the *stantipes* is more "difficult" is in the comprehension of its *concordantiae*, in its

² (...) de cantu coronato prius dictum est. De ductia igitur et stantipede nunc est dicendum. Est autem ductia sonus illitteratus, cum decenti percussione mensuratus. Dico autem illitteratus, quia, licet in voce humana fieri possit et per figuras repraesentari, non tamen per litteras scribi potest, quia littera et dictamine caret. Sed cum recta percussione, eo quod ictus eam mensurant et motum facientis et excitant animum hominis ad ornate movendum secundum artem, quam ballare vocant, et eius motum mensurant in ductiis et choreis.

(...) Stantipes vero est sonus illitteratus, habens difficilem concordantiarum discretionem, per puncta determinatus. Dico autem habens difficilem et cetera. Propter enim eius difficultatem facit animum facientis [53] circa eam stare et etiam animum advertentis et multoties animos divitum a prava cogitatione devertit. Dico etiam per puncta determinatus, eo quod percussione, quae est in ductia, caret et solum punctorum distinctione cognoscitur.

discernment of various intervals probably for the endings in the double versicle form. So each punctum starts with something new but has the same endings in apertum and clausum. In Grocheo's terminology *concordantia* refers to a musical interval that is sounded successively, as opposed to the simultaneous *consonantia*. This is still rather unclear, but that the *concordantiae* are governed by *puncta* gives us an idea of what Grocheo might have meant. It seems that the *stantipes* had a highly complex formal structure, distinguishing it further from the *ductia*. Perhaps following this structure could be seen as a concrete exercise in contemplation for the medieval listener.

To summarize my personal resummée of reading the original lines above: I am convinced that Grocheo's *stantipes* is a piece of a free flowing nature which lacks a clear rhythmic structure. In my opinion it was melodically complex within the frame of the double versicle tradition of sequence, lai and planctus and was intended for contemplation rather than dancing. And: it is lost.

At this point I would like to briefly reflect on the meaning of the term "*stantipes*". The two latin words "*stare*" and "*pes*" literally mean "to stand/to be still" and "foot", in the context of what we have just seen about the nature of *ductia* and *stantipes* it is an easy assumption to make that the term refers to the actual foot which is not dancing or tapping the beat, but "standing still", but there is another way to look at the term. My personal interpretation is that *stantipes* is derived from the Latin expression "*stante pede*" which means "be ready", "ready to jump off", "ready to move directly". You have to already be on your feet to make a quick move, you have to be prepared! And I like to think that the term *stantipes* hints at a spontaneous aspect of the genre, to be performed right on the spot, or expressed in modern words: to be improvised.

From time to time medieval manuscripts need to be revisited with curiosity for new answers. And my curiosity led me to the following question: Do we find the Grocheo's description of *stantipes* reflected in medieval instrumental music which has come down to us in notated sources?

Among the earliest surviving examples of instrumental compositions we know are the French "*Estampies Royales/Roiales/Reales*", and the "*Dansse Real*" found in the "*Chansonner du Roi*"³, and some scholars have related them to the *stantipes* - not only because of their textless nature, but also because of a suspected etymological relationship between the two terms. But what do these *estampies* actually have in common with the description of the *stantipes*, and what distinguishes them from it?

The French *estampies* are written in early Franconian mensural notation, from which it is clear that they are rhythmical pieces (but not necessarily dances except for the *Dansse real*).

They also do not present a complex form as described by Grocheo. On the contrary they have a simple structure which is easy to follow just by listening: each section, or *punctum* begins with new musical material and is closed by a refrain that returns at the end of each *punctum*. The refrain has an "open" ending (*overt* or *ouvert*) leading to a repetition of the *punctum* and going into the refrain, now with a "closed" ending (*clos*). The resulting form (Ia Ib, IIa IIb, etc.) seems far from the complex, contemplative structure Grocheo describes.

³ (Paris BN 844)

Taking this into consideration, we should acknowledge that these Northern French *estampies royales* should in fact be classified as *ductiae*, according to Grocheo's terminology.

The *stantipes* must have been something different altogether! But in the surviving repertoire of notated instrumental music not a single example matching its description survives, and we must consider it a lost art form. But for certain aspects we may look to other repertoires. Contrary to the simple form of the *estampies royales* we can consider ourselves lucky to have medieval examples of instrumental music with complex structures of repetition in the slightly later Italian *istampitte* of the fourteenth century.

These virtuosic pieces can help us to trace back to something like the differentiated form described by Grocheo. In these miraculous instrumental monodies we find a fully developed repertoire of highly differentiated complicated forms with some of highest artistic value. For me personally the two most interesting forms in that repertoire are the "labyrinthic" form, jumping back to different points of the piece, and the "accumulative *saltarello*" form, adding more and more motifs to a constantly growing phrase. Unfortunately, we do not have medieval descriptions or names for these forms. The labyrinthic form has a masterful example in the *istampitta* "*Chominciamento di gioia*", which presents the listener with continuous shifts of the melodic lines between recurring phrases and new melodic material presented in a surprising manner. I will use this structure in my reconstruction of *stantipes*.

Although these Italian pieces are geographically and temporally removed from Grocheo, and he could not have known them, it is my belief that at their core these are the descendents of the *stantipes* and that understanding them provides an opportunity to understand more about the *stantipes* itself.

Before returning to the *istampitte* I would like to introduce a highly interesting performance aspect, nearly overlooked in our time: the *neupma*.

Johannes de Grocheo "De Musica":

Original text in English translation:

But the neupma is a kind of cauda or ending phrase which follows the antiphon, like an ending phrase is played after the cantus coronatus or after the stantipes by the fiddle, which the fiddlers call "modus". This chant is defined in its diversity by the system of octo toni.

There are such as the first tonus, like "Primum quaerite regnum dei" with its neupma which is expressed through / or which consists of:

re-ut-fa-sol-la-sol-la-sol-fa-mi-fa-sol-mi-sol-la-sol-mi-fa-mi-mi-re;

the second like "O sapienta" and its neupma:

mi-fa-mi-re-ut-re-mi-fa-re-mi-fa-mi-re-ut-re-mi-fa-re;

the third like "Tertia dies est..." and the neupma:

mi-re-sol-la-re-mi-fa-sol-fa-mi-fa-mi-re-ut-re-ut-ut-sol-fa-la-re-mi-fa-mi-ut-sol-fa-sol-la-sol-la-sol-fa-mi;

the fourth, like "Quarta vigilia venit ad eos" and the neupma:

mi-fa-sol-sol-fa-mi-fa-sol-fa-fa-re-ut-re-fa-sol-la-sol-sol-fa-mi;

the fifth, like "Quinque prudentes virgines" and the neupma:

re-fa-sol-la-sol-fa-mi-re-re-mi-fa-sol-sol-fa-mi-re-mi-re-mi-re-re-ut;

the sixth, like "Sexta hora sedit super puteum" and the neupma:

fa-mi-fa-re-ut-fa-sol-la-sol-la-sol-sol-fa;

the seventh like “Septem sunt spiritus ante thronum dei” and the neupma:

ut-re-fa-sol-la-sol-fa-mi-re-re-mi-fa-sol-fa-mi-mi-re-mi-re-re-ut;

and the eighth, like “Octo sunt beatitudines”, whose neupma is described through:

ut-re-fa-sol-fa-mi-fa-re-ut-sol-fa-la-re-fa-fa-mi-re-mi-re-re-ut.

4

This set of melismatic cauda melodies, one for each mode, is reminiscent of the “*Octo toni*” mentioned by Grocheo. These were verses with melodies, tracing back to old Byzantine sources, which were designed as mnemonic devices to help students learn the modes.

Grocheo also quotes some of the “*Octo toni*” memorisation verses but he uses different melodic notes, much simpler and less interesting.

Apart from giving us the information that such a formula should follow a *stantipes* as a kind of postlude, Grocheo adds a remarkable comment which to me is even more important and fascinating:

*(...) And although these are the neupmata in most cases, eventually more subtle and beautiful ones could be created, with regard to the range of all the “toni” (...)*⁵

This short but explicit invitation to an improvisatory variation or extension of these simple *neupmata* could completely change the picture regarding a contemplative form of *stantipes* improvisation. If we need a concrete invitation regarding ornamentation, enhancement, melodic improvement or extension and variation in the context of instrumental improvisation, directly from a medieval source: here it is! So we should follow Grocheo’s advice and spend some effort on playing modal postludes after *stantipes* and after the *cantus*

⁴ Est autem neupma quasi cauda vel exitus sequens ad antiphonam, quemadmodum in viella post cantum coronatum vel stantipedem exitus, quem modum viellatores appellant.

Cantus autem iste secundum octo tonos diversificatur.

Et sunt primi toni, ut Primum quaerite regnum dei cum suo neupmate, quod designatur per

re-ut-fa-sol-la-sol-la-sol-fa-mi-fa-sol-mi-sol-la-sol-mi-fa-mi-mi-re;

secundi vero, ut O sapientia et eius neupma

mi-fa-mi-re-ut-re-mi-fa-re-mi-fa-mi-re-ut-re-mi-fa-re;

tertii, ut Tertia dies est, quod haec facta sunt, neupma

mi-re-sol-la-re-mi-fa-sol-fa-mi-fa-mi-re-ut-re-ut-ut-sol-fa-la-re-mi-fa-mi-ut-sol-fa-sol-la-sol-la-sol-fa-mi;

quarti, ut Quarta vigilia venit ad eos, neupma

mi-fa-sol-sol-fa-mi-fa-sol-fa-fa-re-ut-re-fa-sol-la-sol-sol-fa-mi;

quinti, ut Quinque prudentes virgines, neupma

re-fa-sol-la-sol-fa-mi-re-re-mi-fa-sol-sol-fa-mi-re-mi-re-mi-re-re-ut;

sexti, ut Sexta hora sedit super puteum, neupma

fa-mi-fa-re-ut-fa-sol-la-sol-la-sol-sol-fa;

septimi, ut Septem sunt spiritus ante thronum dei, neupma

ut-re-fa-sol-la-sol-fa-mi-re-re-mi-fa-sol-fa-mi-mi-re-mi-re-re-ut;

et octavi, ut Octo sunt beatitudines, cuius neupma describitur per

ut-re-fa-sol-fa-mi-fa-re-ut-sol-fa-la-re-fa-fa-mi-re-mi-re-re-ut.

⁵ Et quamquam ista sint neupmata ut plurimum, possent tamen forte subtiliora et pulchriora fieri, etiam inspiciendo ad latitudinem cuiuslibet toni.

coronatus, expanding on the *neupmata* or *octo toni* formulae. This advice leads us to a path of new creative possibilities.

To attempt a reconstruction of the lost art of *stantipes*, I used one of the two melodies⁶ which Grocheo had mentioned at an earlier point in his treatise as an outstanding example of “crowned song”, *cantus coronatus*⁷: “*Quant li roussignol*”. Grocheo notes the song as of high worth and being closely related musically to the improvised instrumental form of the *stantipes*.

It is well preserved in more than one version in original manuscripts, and is among the most famous contrafacta used in the 13th century in Northern France.

To approximate the complex, differentiated form of the *stantipes*, I allowed myself to use the aforementioned “*Chominciamento di Gioia*” as a model for the labyrinthic form.

Stantipes super cantilenam “Quant li roussignol”

(Anonymous, contrafactum “*Nitimur in vetitum*” by Phillippe Le Chancelier)

I would like to attempt a reconstruction, or rather deconstruction using an Italian istampita as my formal basis. Elements that would probably be foreign to the earlier *stantipes* are first of all the measured rhythmical quality of the istampita, as well as the frequent use of accidentals, extreme shifts of mode, and register.

For this experimental reconstruction we first take a look at the fascinating labyrinthical form of the much later istampita “*Chominciamento di Gioia*” from the collection of Northern Italian instrumental pieces of the 14th century in the London British Library, LoB add 29987.

Special signs indicate returning points. When the same sign appears again in one of the following lines it indicates “jump to the previously marked returning point”. This system of extra jumps between the lines intentionally confuses the overall very clear and easy picture of double versicles with identical pair of endings aperto (ouvert) and chiuso (clos). This creative confusion through the labyrinthical form is the desired effect of that improvisation style. In my point of view it can be referred to Grocheo’s description of the *stantipes*, which should keep the mind from bad thoughts through the contemplative concentration on following the form.

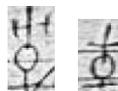
⁶ the other is “*Ausi come l’unicorne sui*”

⁷ more commonly referred to as *monophonic conductus*

Here are the signs in the istampita "Chominciamento di Gioia" which indicate how to jump between lines:



Cross & ring / appears 3 times.



The first sign is indicating a referential point to return to. The second and third sign are indicating jumps back to the first sign.

Because we are in a double versicle form all these jumps happen twice, first leading to aperto (apertum), then leading to chiusso (clausum).



Cross & double-ring / appears 2 times.



The first sign is indicating a referential point to return to. The second sign is indicating a jump back to the first sign. Because we are in a double versicle form the jump happens twice, first leading to aperto (apertum), then to chiusso (clausum).



Finger/ appears 2 times.



The first sign is indicating a referential point to return to. The second sign is indicating a jump back to the first sign. Because we are in a double versicle form the jump happens twice, first leading to aperto (apertum), then to chiusso (clausum).

The form of Chominciamento di Gioia as a model for a stantipes with 5 puncti:



Signs: returning point cross & ring: /-----/

Signs: returning point cross & double ring: /-----/

Punctum 1 _____ aperto

Punctum 1 (repetition) _____ chiuso



Signs: jumping point cross & ring /

Punctum 2 _____/

Punctum 2 (repetition) _____/



Signs: jumping point cross & ring: /

Punctum 3 _____/

Punctum 3 (repetition) _____/



Signs: returning point finger: /-----/

Signs: jumping point cross & double ring /

Punctum 4 _____/

Punctum 4 (repetition) _____/



Signs: jumping point finger: /

Punctum 5 _____/

Punctum 5 (repetition) _____/

Some notes about Notae

The early goliard's tune at Winchester:

“Tractus iocularis”

(Anonymus, 11.th century)

During the search for the instrumental practice of the Middle Ages one can clearly see that there is an interesting line of development from the early medieval textless sequences in 9th century St Gall with its typical double versicle form in which melodic phrases are repeated to new text lines, to the much later *lais* and *estampies* up to the 14th century with the same form of echo-like repetition. The textless tune of a sequence in its notated form in neums is called a “sequela”. Starting in Carolingian times the poets of sequences used preexisting melodies of an outstanding quality and beauty for their chantlike but mostly syllabic pieces and adapted them for the intended use.

These tunes are most certainly echoing a secular melodic tradition of a much earlier time. And very likely they were also performed instrumentally as some sources give the melodies subtitles with instrument names like “Cithara”, “Fistula”, “Symphonia” etc. or other enigmatic titles like “Puella turbata” (the troubled girl) or *Occidentana*.

There are many discoveries to be made especially in regard to the textless *sequelae*. The echoes of Notker Balbulus from 9th century St. Gall and his Byzantine inspirations are to be heard throughout the whole Middle Ages, spanning many hundreds of years, and are certainly of high importance for the development of the art of medieval instrumental improvisation.

Around 200 years after Notker and as part of the flourishing production of sequences throughout the whole Frankish empire many enigmatic titles appeared in manuscripts at various places from East to West. In the Winchester tropers we can find subtitles for *sequelae* like “Berta vetula” (the old Berta), “Bucca eccelsa” (the exalted Bucca), “Vaga varia” (the vaganta in coloured clothes) among others. All of these titles had nothing to do with the content of the eventually used sacred sequence text. A unique melody of exactly a 1000 years ago with its mysterious title “Tractus Iocularis” (the case of the minstrel) placed above the sequence “Consona caterva” in the Winchester Tropers and scribbled down in early neums might very well be the first written minstrel tune in history.

Although the prose text of “Consona caterva” contains one of the first mentionings of the polyphonic organum technique nothing hints to the case of a Ioculator, only the melody. Here is a shortened translation of the sung text:

Sweet sounds and harmonies praise the holy concert of poetry. The voice which is called “organum” resounds in soft modulations. In brightly shining praise it greets the exalted king, the hymnic voice calls out: Salve, potentate!

*Be blessed, may your power be everlasting and unspeakable. Your mildness hears the tears from the prayers, when your mercy is washing away our crime.*⁸

⁸ Text transcription by Norbert Rodenkirchen: “Consona, caterva, plaudente sacri concentus camoena.

Modulis dulcibus arguta vocis organa declarans. Praepollentem regem in clara laude salutans.

Hymnifera voce inquiens, salve, maiestas. Excelsa, quae creata omnia per diutina regis saecla.

Maneat benedicta ac semper ineffabilis virtus tua. Et leniter lambens fidei vestigia sacrata,

Lacrimarum fuis precibus clementia exora. Quo crimina abstergat clemens tua.”

From the Winchester tropers: the piece is documented as a *sequela* named “Tractus iocularis” in Bodley 775 fol. 128r and as a *sequela* named “Tractus” (...) in *Corpus Christi* 473, fol. 87r. It is documented as the only existing prose version: “Consona caterva plaudente”, Bodley 775, fol. 173r, *Corpus Christi* 473, fol. 131r.

So here we find the same phenomenon as we have already found in Carolingian times: the text, a church hymn named “Consona caterva” doesn’t relate to the melody title “Tractus iocularis”, (the case of the minstrel). This is an indication that the melody had a previous existence of its own. It was popular and well known and thus could be quoted with its title to make it clear that the sequence “Consona ...” had to be sung by using this tune.

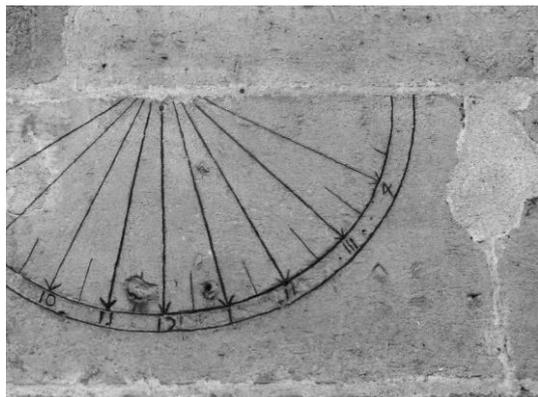
There are two other special pieces which need to be mentioned in this context. Apart from the many sequences there are only two existing examples of so-called “Notae/Notulae” in the 13th century. Nota or Notula (which means: little Nota) might have been a term for a song sung on a preexisting estampie – tune. In “La note Martinet” we have to rely on the text structure of the anonymous song version “J’ai prouvé et trouvé” to find out the rhythmical and metrical balance of the piece. The same method is needed to find the metrics for the only other existing example of a survived nota in musical notation: the so-called notula “De juer et de baler”, which is documented in the “Ludus super Anticlaudianum” in a Latin contrafactum titled “Olim in harmonia”. Both nota – tunes are in fact estampies and they are documented with a clearly readable melody in the manuscripts. The metric structure of the texts tell us about the stresses and releases of the melody even when we just play it instrumentally. On my website you will find two audio/video links with further information on these two pieces.

But if we are dealing with pieces using textless notations we are in a dilemma: what is the metric structure? It is indeed a big problem and very important to find out. With the Chansonnier du Roi textless pieces it could be easily solved through an early form of the Franconian mensural notation from which more or less clear rhythms could be transcribed, a very useful novum in the 13th century, originally developed for polyphonic music of the Notre dame period. And the later LoB add 29987 Istampite are also presented textless in a further developed method of mensural notation. Mensural notation was capable of presenting the basic metric structures and rhythmic values without vocal texts as models.

But for slightly earlier pieces in estampie character it is more difficult to find the exact accentuation and metric structure because notation was not capable of documenting metric structures and rhythmic values independently from the text of chants and songs. So we need these texts for their metric formulae, not necessarily for their content. Only from the text we can find a possible metric structure and consequently find a rhythmic form of the melody.

Let us now go back to the 11th century minstrel’s tune “Tractus iocularis”, documented in the Winchester tropers. The melody only appears in 3 forms: first as a textless melisma (a sequela) called “Tractus iocularis”, separately written down together with other sequelae. If we only had these neums without words we neither would know the shape of the melody nor would we know what are the basic notes and the basic metric context. Luckily these early sequelae are also documented in the full form called prosa as a sequence called “Consona caterva” with words and the neums above the words and additionally with a melismatic textless version at the side of the prose version of “Consona caterva” which matches fully with the sequela “Tractus iocularis” (or just “Tractus” in another manuscript of the same repertoire). By counting syllables and comparing numbers between the prose and the melismatic sequela version it is possible to get a pretty clear picture of the original sequence. Very often sequences also have later versions from later centuries in readable notation on staff lines to compare with the earlier ones. In the case of “Tractus iocularis” unfortunately there is no such later version of the underlying sequence “Consona caterva”. But fortunately enough the documented 3 versions in 2 different manuscripts of the 11th century are providing enough clear information to reconstruct the shape of the melody. So “Tractus iocularis” is like a treasure found on a remote island, one of the early examples of medieval instrumental performance, presumably one of the earliest estampies We should

remind ourselves that there was no proper way to notate music without text. So the melismatic notation of the textless sequela was just a practical solution, taking signs for multiple notes to draw the outline of a melody. That melismatic notation method for a sequela served as a convincing way to provide the information about the direction of the distinctive melody (up and down etc.) whereas the prose version provided the information about the metric structure through the text. At least from today's perspective it is very helpful to have the different versions (prose with text, sequela and glossa without text but in melismatic notation) to compare.



Over the years I have dedicated quite a lot of effort into creating instrumental adaptations of either textless sequelae or of other early pieces from the early sequence and lai tradition. One of my intentions was to show the assumed improvised predecessor – versions of the estampie before the 13th century during the long periods of orally transmitted instrumental performance / thus trying to reconstruct the lost art of medieval *ex tempore* playing. Another more practical intention was to create fitting pieces for the programs in which I was artistically involved as a flute player, mostly with earlier medieval repertoires also as an accompanist. As I mentioned before neither the accompaniments to monophonic songs were written down nor the instrumental pieces *per se*. The reconstruction needs a lot of personal involvement today.

It might be useful to listen to some of my sequela versions I played for *Sequentia*, *Dialogos* or with my own ensemble as well as in solo projects on CD or radio recordings.

Please visit my website www.norbertrodenkirchen.org for video/audio versions.

CD *Tibia ex tempore* – Medieval sketches

“*Salve porta perpetuae lucis fulgida*”

CD *Sequentia*, Lost songs of a Rhineland harper

“*Cigni*”

CD *Sequentia*, Fragments for the end of time

“*Gaude coelestis sponsa*” (“*Romana*”, “*Mater*”, “*Adducentur*”)

“*Occidentana*”

CD Norbert Rodenkirchen, *Medieval Echoes* (to be released in 2020)

“*Tractus iocularis*”

“*Symphonia*”

CD Sequentia, Boethius Metra

“Vaga”

“Stans a longe”

“Tuba”

Program Dialogos, Winchester Nexus (not yet on CD, but on radio recordings)

“Bucca excelsa”

“Ploratum”

“Berta vetula”

“Unus amor”

With the exception of the special but fascinating case of “Tractus iocularis” all these pieces have been documented in more than one manuscript over the centuries and luckily in some later diastematic versions as well. This allows us a clear melodic transcription.

Additionally I did a little experiment some years ago with the piece “Gaude coelestis sponsa” for the Sequentia CD and program “Fragments for the End of Time”. I didn't want to present one single sequela but a compound of related stem motives of this early sequela repertoire. I had always stumbled upon the similarity of some of the Notker phrases. and was originally searching for a kind of primal sequence which could be regarded as the spring source from which all other sequences would have developed. There is no such primal melody to be found but a few basic types which appear in the 9th century. Many phrases have a kind of archetypal quality with only slight variations and have been used over and over again – by Notker, Alkuin and all of the mainly anonymous musicians that followed.

So I created a flute piece by combining three sequelae “Romana”, “Mater” and “Adducentur” by giving “Adducentur” – also called “Gaude coelestis sponsa” – the prominent role of a stem sequence which appears at the end in its more or less pure form. “Adducentur” is by the way one of the best documented sequelae in original medieval notation, both diastematical and adiaastematical. This compendium of three similar melodies enabled me to extract various patterns of the common repertoire. The results inspired me to develop a style of flute playing by using modal “patterns” which I developed further in other pieces since then.

My personal pattern style is basically the use of ostinato figures, created out of the concrete modal material of the sequela, or of various similar sequelae. So the use of patterns is a creative tool to provide variation and hypnotizing trance effects to a performance. It can be added to musical interpretations of just the pure sequence melody or to ornamented versions of it, or to both. So it is a third element which is largely dependent on the performer’s own taste and style. And it is – of course like every art should be – partly subjective.

For me the personal artistic involvement today is also a “must”. It is necessary for a convincing approach to medieval music with respect to historical authenticity as regards the creative performer.



Melting the ice,

some practical advice towards an improvisation method in double versicles

Like I recommended before in the chapter about Grocheo's stantipes we should look at all examples of the development of the instrumental music in the Middle Ages as examples of frozen improvisations, or as didactical models to help us to make our own stantipedes (estampies). Before we can bring everything to melt and become fluid again we should first study closely the frozen bits, which are our manuscript excerpts, as they conserve some valuable information which we will definitely need, if we are not aiming for free improvisation or for modern medieval-style fantasy music

The modern concept of a musical composition as a coherent unit doesn't fit here. We should approach these pieces with an *ex tempore* – philosophy in mind. What is that?

Free melodic imagination connected to preexisting tunes or preexisting known modal patterns is the most natural way to play a musical instrument at any time and in any cultural context. It was most likely the driving force of medieval music making as well. This free playing must have always existed, as it can be observed in almost all traditional contexts of music making worldwide. I try to show in my practical work that there is no artistic discrepancy between this free pattern playing and the interpretation of a known tune. The medieval didactics lead us exactly into that direction by giving us pattern exercises but also pieces to learn and improvisation forms (stantipes) to try out. Of course the exact relationship of an extemporized performance today to a preexisting – memorized – tune will remain partly unclear. It cannot be measured or ultimately described because it is happening in the realms of artistic imagination. This was the case for the medieval ioculator and this is the case for us musicians today who try

to follow the steps of our creative ancestors. We reflect on the urgent question how much the medieval musicians did intuitively. We will never find out completely but nevertheless we'll have to try to act in the same way – partly intuitively and partly controlled and well researched – to perform this music properly with respect for both its historical meaning and hopefully also for its timeless meaning.

The melodic impetus of most *Sequelaes*, *Ductiae* and *Estampies* as we know them in their musical form is always a simple cell of tones, formally extended, modally enhanced, ornamented, sometimes rhythmified, stylistically depending on the medieval period. This could be the following order of steps in an improvisation method: first to learn the keynotes, then extend or vary it, find ornaments and fitting rhythmic gestures (dance – like or not). May be a part of such an improvisation method is for the first time documented in the textless pieces of the *Chansonnier du Roi* as a purely didactical source with respect for these enigmatic pieces. These anonymous *ductiae* called “*Estampies Royales/Roiales/Reales*” do not need to become extremely ornamented as they already are enhancements of a basic stem melody. Of course they can be extended by inventing new *puncta* and new phrases, especially where they are fragmented like in the “*Premier Estampie Royal*”, from which only parts of the last three *puncta* have survived. It is an excellent task to find the other *puncta* by painstakingly including the existing fragmented notes of that piece, even from the damaged part of the folio. It is also an excellent task to reconstruct the stem sequence of any chosen *estampie*, *ductia*, or of any *lai*-excerpt (even only one phrase) by trying to find the most basic form of the melody and then enhance this basic tune with all kinds of *passaggi* of slightly other fills and ornaments than the documented ones. This process will give us a lot of freedom to deal with these phrases in a historically correct but at the same time in a modern creative way. And it might open a door to improvisatory creativity, a gateway to the art of *ex tempore* – playing, which is such an essential discipline for our undertaking: the reconstruction of the lost art of medieval instrumental improvisation in double *versicle* form.

Some inspiring techniques of spontaneous melodic, rhythmical or timbral enhancements which could fit with the monophonic instrumental music of the 11th and 13th century are:

- all kinds of instrumental ornaments, also to be studied from traditional playing styles
- *melismae* in Gregorian chant
- anticipating binary ligatures – an often used kind of archaic diminution
- filling an interval with scale excerpts of the notes between two frame notes
- playing frame notes of an interval one after the other, like in a broken chord

Postludium

To find a convincing – if not outstanding – artistic expression in medieval music, a good balance between scientific research and individual performance aspects seems to be crucial, especially within the movement of “Historically informed performance practice” (HIP). The higher the niveau on both levels – *Scientia & Usus* – the more valuable, profound, and the more soulful the result will be for the listener.

In the context of HIP and within the field of medieval music dozens of very interesting approaches of applying new musicological research to approaches to performance already exist; tried by many outstanding artists and scholars over the course of many decades during the late 20th and beginning of the 21st century. Sometimes artists simply rely on previously published research and then find their own creative solutions to perform the music in their way.

Sometimes the *scientia/usus* approach is balanced out in collaborations between university scholars and artists.⁹

Sometimes the work is done by a new type of expert often to be found in Early Music: the artist and scholar in one person. It has a lot to do with the diverse interests and talents of all people involved in Early Music. An interesting and innovative scholar doesn't have to be a great musician or vice versa. But often there are fascinating talents to admire, with a high niveau on both sides: *scientia* and *usus*.

Later, when it comes to performance practice, the aim should be to reach a state of mind open to intuition and inspiration, and to step out of the rationalistic world of musicological research and try to integrate its findings into a more improvisatory style: an *extempore* approach. It is a challenge to use practice and exercise in order to bring conscious reflection into the subconscious regions of the musical imagination, where it can mingle with the unexpected and the marvellous wonders of creative mystery: art!

But it needs to be stated clearly that the possibilities of combining *scientia* and *usus* are not limited to the work of HIP over the last few decades. Some performance approaches might stand the test of time and serve as artistic models for future generations; but most of it - especially the creative parts - belong to the personal interpretation of the ensembles and artists and might serve best only as inspiration to find one's own, personal way of performing music. The possibilities for a convincing and fruitful integration of research into artistic interpretation are truly endless, and in my opinion this should be one of the main tasks of the artist. Sometimes I find it promising to combine even different methods - varying from each other - within one program. In my opinion "Arts practice as research" is not a "one way"-method but a rhizomatic context of practicing, researching, learning, teaching, inventing, reflecting, losing and finding in many different ways, back and forth, all related to each other. In other ways: it is the art of searching for one's very own expression and meaning within today's scene of medieval music performance.

Sheet music, stantipedes from different periods

(The sheet music is not available online. It is meant for workshop situations, and not for sale.)

- 1.) Stantipes super cantilenam "Quant li roussignol/Nitimur in vetitum", 13th century, reconstructed by N.R.
- 2.) "Tractus iocularis", 11th century, stem sequence reconstructed by N.R.
- 3.) La prime Estampie Royale, punctum I-IV, reconstructed by N.R.

⁹ Whenever in doubt about neumed manuscripts I couldn't resist writing to the late Alejandro Planchart and had wonderful email conversations with him over the years. A private consultation with Prof. Susan Rankin at Cambridge university who also regularly shares her groundbreaking research with performers was extremely important to me as well. Not to mention my 25 year long work with singer/scholar/teacher Benjamin Bagby, founder of Sequentia. With my dear colleague Katarina Livljanic, musicologist at the Sorbonne Paris, professor at Schola Cantorum Basiliensis and director of ensemble Dialogos I had countless inspiring working exchanges about topics of medieval musicology. And last but not least Dr Sam Barrett at Pembroke college provided regular and excellent advice and collaboration on questions of early repertoires i.e. in the context of Sequentia's Boethius project in close collaboration with Cambridge university, commissioned by Dr. Barrett. These are examples of exchange between research and arts practice, *scientia* and *usus*. Each approach and exchange was very different but highly inspiring, collegial and great.