

Many consider Johann Sebastian Bach to be the father of Western classical music. However, as innovative and influential as he was, Bach would not have been able to achieve any of his greatness without previous centuries of musical innovation by a largely anonymous body of composers in the great schools and monasteries of Europe. These centuries belong to the medieval era. Most of the major musical developments that permitted Western baroque, classical and postclassical composition to flourish, occurred from the 9th to the 14th centuries, notably, the invention and development of musical notation and polyphony. Ensemble Scholastica presents a program that traces these early developments, specifically highlighting the revolutionary techniques medieval composers used to create polyphony.

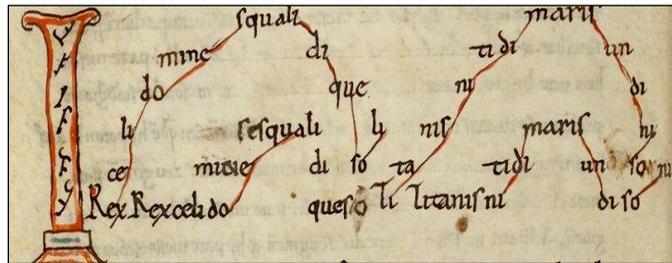
During the earliest period of the development of polyphony (9th-11th c.), the term *organum* began to be used to mean a polyphonic piece. An organum was created by adding a second line (the *organal* voice), to a pre-existing monophonic piece from the liturgical repertoire. During this early period, the practice of polyphony remained largely an oral tradition, since it was easy to create and learn polyphonic pieces by ear, without the need to notate them. As a result, from the period before the 12th century, there is very little surviving polyphonic music. However, a whole series of musical treatises describing and teaching the practice of polyphony did survive, and we can still learn from them to re-create and sing the earliest polyphony today. Ensemble Scholastica in fact feels that it is perfectly authentic to compose some of its own organal lines (following the appropriate medieval rules of composition) rather than be limited to the surviving repertoire. Some of the pieces in this program are thus new elaborations on old material, and will appear on Ensemble Scholastica's debut CD, ARS ELABORATIO, to be released in September 2016.

By definition, this is a vocal repertoire, since it served the purpose of setting texts — liturgical and para-liturgical texts, and eventually secular poetry. From the earliest styles of polyphony developed by monastics (who spent so much of their time contemplating and singing texts!) starting in the 9th century, to the great Notre-Dame School of the 12th and 13th centuries, Scholastica's eight female voices sing the invention of polyphony.

Rex caeli Domine

King of Heaven, Lord of the sounding sea, the shining Titan sun and the gloomy earth, receive the harmony of our prayer... King David's songs soothed Saul; these gifts came to him that he might check anger with pleasant melody...

One of the oldest surviving examples of polyphony. The first 2 lines appear in the 9th century *Musica Enchiriadis* ("Music Handbook") as an illustration of the rules for polyphonic composition, while the complete piece has survived elsewhere only in its original monophonic form. This earliest form of organum was created by adding a note-for-note second line, moving in parallel and oblique motion to the pre-existing monophonic piece.



Alleluia. Video celos apertos

I see heaven open and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

The *Winchester troper* is a rare pre-12th century source since it contains numerous polyphonic pieces. However, deciphering their notation has proven to be challenging, since the manuscript notates only the organal voice of a piece (it was assumed that singers knew the original piece), and the type of notation used does not indicate the melody with absolute precision. Several musicologists have published modern transcriptions of the *Winchester troper* repertoire, but these must be thought of as possible solutions; the performer, given that he or she understands the style, can choose to reinterpret the notation...

Annua gaudia

Fitting sounds of joy, O James, must be raised to you yearly. Sweet sounds of music fit for your feast must sound out.

The *Codex Calixtinus* was commissioned by Pope Calixtus II in the early 12th century for the benefit of French pilgrims to Santiago de Compostela. This large manuscript contains several books on the miracles attributed to, and the liturgy for, Saint James, as well as a pilgrim's travel guide to the road to Santiago, and finally a book with songs to the

Saint, many of which are polyphonic. These *organa* (plural of organum) are composed in the new 12th century style, where voices move in contrary rather than parallel motion, and where one voice may have more notes than the other on some syllables.

Claris vocibus

Sing the holy, melodious sound with bright voices, you glorious crowd; let the mind sing harmoniously with the voice, and the spirit concordant with the words... To the original single voice of this 11th century Marian sequence that proclaims the power of music, we added a second voice following the rules of polyphonic composition as it was practiced during the 11th and 12th centuries at the great co-ed abbey of St. Martial de Limoges, a time and place of great cultural flourishing and advancement in the art of elaboration.

Iubilans concrepa

Choristers, make a jubilant noise! Sing the lofty repeated melodies which harmony adorns abundantly...

Though it survived as a monophonic piece (which we sing first), this 12th century sequence implores the singer to create polyphony, which is why we added an organal voice in the St-Martial style. The monks of St-Martial may also have been experimenting with rhythm. We know that over the course of the 12th century, measured rhythm (as opposed to the free rhythm of earlier organum) became more and more important, and while it was a defining feature of 13th century polyphony, during the 12th century, alternating free and rhythmic passages became more and more common. Our version of "Iubilans concrepa" tries to highlight this development.

Alleluia. Adducentur regi virgines

Between the mid-12th and the late 13th centuries, the Notre-Dame school in Paris was responsible for some of the most important developments in polyphonic composition and musical notation. During the first half of this period, the polyphonic form of choice was the double organum, which involved the holding of each note of a plainchant while a soloist improvised a much more florid line above. Passages with free rhythm were alternated with rhythmic passages. Motets, with newly composed texts, could be inserted as elaborations on a melismatic section (ie, where many notes are sung on one syllable) of the original chant. This Alleluia was sung for the feasts of several female saints, including Saint Scholastica. We have created an elaborated version of this Alleluia in the Notre-Dame style described here, which includes a short motet setting a prayer to our ensemble's patroness.

Alleluia. Inter natos

Of all the children born to a woman, none has risen so high as John the Baptist...

One of the greatest achievements at Notre-Dame was the invention of the first system for notating rhythm, and this allowed its students and masters (only two of whom we know by name: Léonin and Pérotin) to compose increasingly complex organa. By the 13th century, organum was being composed for 3 and even 4 voices; here, we substitute the original rhythmic passage on the word *mulierum* (woman) with a newly composed 4-voice section. The use of rhythm also gave rise to a new musical form called the *motet*. The defining feature of the Notre-Dame motet is text (the term in fact comes from the French *mot* = word). The texts of the Notre-Dame organa were very drawn out, so the first composers of motets simply added new poetic texts to the top lines of rhythmic passages. At first these texts were of course in Latin, commentary on the original text (as here with "Clamans in deserto", a text on St. John the Baptist's famous cry in the desert, sung towards the end of the organum), but the motet quickly became an independent form, to be sung on its own, and since students will be students, it was not long before they began composing motet texts of a very secular nature in French.

Quant vient en mai / Ne sai que je die / IOHANNE

The concept of ownership with regard to a musical (or any other) idea was utterly foreign to medievals. This anonymous piece uses exactly the same music as the "Clamans in deserto" motet, but replaces the Latin text with a moralistic one in French (...*courtliness has been overcome by hypocrisy and avarice...*). To this was added a third line with a simultaneously sung text on love of a "pastoral" nature (*As I was out riding, I met a shepherdess who appeared to be crying... "I know that Robin loves another: I saw him take her deep into the forest to play..."*).

Haec dies

This is the day of the Lord; let us spend it in exultation and joy...

With 3 voices and measured rhythm throughout (aside from a few monophonic sections), this piece represents the summit of Notre-Dame organum composition. The section on the words *In seculum* can be found in many different versions in several manuscripts. We chose a so-called "hoquet" (= hiccup) *In seculum*, for its bouncing of the melody back and forth between the 2 upper voices.

Je n'amerai / In seculum / Sire Dieus / IN SECULUM

Likely inspired by the *In seculum* that we inserted in the previous piece, the composer(s) of this motet, using the same original chant melody on the words *In seculum* in the bottom voice, plays even more with the hoquet and adds two different courtly love poems in French.

Benedicamus Domino. Tu lux refulge sensibus

Benedicamus Domino, followed by the congregational response *Deo gratias*, was, and still commonly is, the liturgical dismissal at the end of a service. Out of this short ritual phrase, medieval composers created much longer and more elaborate works that included poetry from a variety of sources and on a variety of topics; here the text is excerpted from an Ambrosian hymn.

Velox impulit / Hic leta canit / Vestiunt silve / MULIERUM

To the long melisma on the word *mulierum* ("woman") from the *Alleluia*. *Inter natos* above, we added 3 new voices, setting one of our favourite medieval poems, an anonymous 10th century ode to birds and their songs.

*The sadness of the wood is bright with young green sprays,
the apple trees are laden, in their nests high overhead wood pigeons croon...*

*The nightingale sings happy in the leaves,
pouring out on the winds far carrying her solemn melody;
the sudden hawk quavers in the high air...*

*Swift darting swallows utter their low cry;
the jackdaw jargons, and clear cries the quail;
and so in every spot some bird is singing a summer song.*



Program notes: Rebecca Bain



Ensemble Scholastica is a female vocal ensemble based in Montréal, the only one that specializes in the performance of medieval plainchant and polyphony (circa 800-1300). Yes, we study and sing from medieval manuscripts, but not only in the name of "authenticity". We wish to share with listeners the true beauty and intricacy of medieval music, in particular

medieval liturgical traditions, the very roots of Western music. Our audiences thereby have the chance to experience the remarkable joy and complexity of medieval spirituality and culture.

Our ensemble is comprised of a selection of talented and dedicated vocalists (some of whom also play medieval instruments) from Montréal's thriving early music community. We have been directed by leading medieval music specialist Rebecca Bain since 2012.

www.ensemblescholastica.ca

The Birth of Polyphony

June 18, 2016, Église St-Laurent



PROGRAM

Rex caeli Domine Sequence, *Musica Enchiriadis*, 9th c.

Alleluia. Video celos Parallel organum, *Winchester Troper*, early 11th c.

Annua gaudia Organum, *Codex Calixtinus*, 12th c.

Claris vocibus inclita Sequence, 11th c.

Iubilans concrepa Sequence, 12th c.

Alleluia. Adducentur Double organum and motet

Alleluia. Inter natos Double organum and motet, late 12th c.

Quant vient en mai / Ne sai que je die / IOANNE Triple motet, early 13th c.

Haec dies Triple organum, early 13th c.

Je n'amerai / Sire Dieus / IN SECULUM Quadruple motet with hoquet, 13th c.

Benedicamus Domino. Tu lux refulge Organum

Velox impulit / Hic leta canit / Vestiunt silve / MULIERUM Quadruple motet



Rebecca Bain Cynthia Gates
Anne Sophie da Silva Carole Le Dez
Elizabeth Ekholm Micheline Racicot
Jody Freeman Angèle Trudeau