

## EXPLANATION 1.8 : THE 13<sup>th</sup> CENTURY: THE MEDIEVAL MOTET

### 1. BEFORE THE MEDIEVAL MOTET: ORGANUM AND CONDUCTUS

The organum was a melody to which other melodies were added, that is, a polyphonic work. Sometimes they coincided note against note in the voices, but sometimes this did not happen and for each note of the bottom melody (called tenor) some notes of the top melody coincided but not all of them. Thus, little by little, the technique of composition was perfected since works were composed for three or four voices and not always all the voices sounded good with the tenor, or even between them.

The organa (organum in plural) and medieval conductus were polyphonic works of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century. Both are similar, but the difference is that in the conductus the tenor voice was not a known Gregorian chant as in the organum, but a new melody.

### 2. FIRST MANIFESTATIONS OF MEDIEVAL MOTETS

When a new musical form, called motet, appeared towards the 13<sup>th</sup> century, it caused that both the organum and the conductus were no longer of interest to be composed. The organum stopped towards the year 1225 and the second definitively ended in the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

The medieval motet arises with Leonin because he added sections of discantus to the organa. That is, he introduced polyphonic pieces to the organums. These sections or pieces were called clausulae, in Latin. As they were very successful, composers (Perotin and others), composed hundreds of clausulae that were inserted in the works as it suited them. These sections had no text, they were just melismas.

Subsequently, new texts were inserted into the melismas of the organum. These added texts are called tropes. The tropes were embellishments of the words in the text of the tenor voice (the lower voice), something like a commentary or an explanation of the texts of what the tenor sang. For example, in the Kyrie the text is always "Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy," while the trope says:

*O Lord, creator of all things, the most benevolent God: have mercy on us.  
To you, Christ, King of Kings, we pray and rejoice together: have mercy.  
Praise, strength, peace and power are always given to Him infinitely: have mercy  
etc.*

The motet will predominate completely during 50 years reaching a great variety of styles in several languages. Many motets are preserved in 4 main codexes: codex Bamberg in Berlin, codex Montpellier (H196) in France, codex Las Huelgas in Burgos and codex Madrid 20486 in Madrid. The paths of religious and secular music come together in this period (13<sup>th</sup> century) due to motets, because sacred and secular polyphony is composed with them.

### 3. COMPREHENSION TEXT QUESTIONS

1. **What types of polyphony were there before motets and how did they differ?**
2. **Why, and towards which dates, organa and conductus were extinguished?**
3. **What did Leonin do in the organa? What name did their musical novelties have?**
4. **What was inserted into the melismas of the organum?**
5. **What were the tropes? Put an example of a trope invented in a common phrase.**
6. **How many years did medieval motets predominate?**
7. **Name the 2 Spanish codexes and the place where they are kept.**
8. **Why do the paths of sacred and secular music come together in the 13<sup>th</sup> century?**