

## 1. GREGORIAN CHANT.

Gregorian chant - also called plainchant- is the official chant of the Roman Catholic Church. Its origin has reached our days from the songs of the first Christians, who had musical traditions of Jewish origin, called psalmodies. These psalmodies were sung in the Jewish synagogues. The early Christians sang them because they had been Jews before they had turned to Christianity. With the spread of Christendom the songs were modified and spread through the West and Central Europe.

The chant that today we call Gregorian was developed between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> century. Each area of Christianity had its own style of singing, thus, in Spain was called Mozarabic chant, in Rome Roman chant and in France Gallican chant. There were, moreover, more styles, such as the Ambrosian chant.

Gregorian chant uses texts from the Gospels. Their main function is the prayer. Since its beginnings, Christian music was basically a sung prayer where text and the music were very closely related.

It was Pope Saint Gregory I (6<sup>th</sup> -7<sup>th</sup> century), dubbed the Great, who was in charge of compiling the different songs that existed, like antiphons, hymns and psalms, of some of the churches of the West. In order to collect, study and disseminate the early songs of the first Christians, Gregory I created a singing school called Schola Cantorum.

The primitive chants were lost with the passage of time, but later, other chants were found or composed. Many of them were compiled by Charlemagne in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. These and later chants form what is now known today as Gregorian chant.

These music works are most of them anonymous. They are sung according to the the liturgical offices, which are: the Mass and the Canonical Hours.

The names of the music notes (c, d, e, f, etc.) were invented at this time. These names come from the first syllable of each verse of a hymn to Saint John the Baptist.

Medieval musical writing was a bit different from actual notation. It is called neumatic writing and has different characteristics. The music of this period is based on scales called modes.

## 2. MUSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF GREGORIAN CHANT.

Among the most important musical characteristics there can be highlighted these ones:

1. The melodies are in Latin and usually have few jumps between notes.
2. Text and music are closely related.
3. The rhythm is free, which means, it has no metre like 2/4, 3/4 etc.
4. The chant is monodic (a single voice or melodic line), which means that all the monks sing in unison the same melody.
5. Is sung "a capella" (without instruments).
6. Its writing is done in neumes or music signs.
7. It is based on scales called "modes": Ionic mode, Doric mode, Phrygian mode, etc.

## 3. READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS.

1. What is the official chant of the Catholic Church called?
2. What is the origin of the Gregorian chant?
3. At what time does Gregorian chanting take place?
4. What Pope was important for the development of Gregorian chant?
5. What school did Pope Gregory I create and what was its use?
6. What happened to the primitive chants?
7. Name the two religious offices.
8. Name 4 characteristics of Gregorian chant.
9. What does "monodic" and "a capella" mean?
10. What is a Gregorian mode? Name 2 modes.