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GIVING VOICE TO GREGORIAN CHANT OR: COPING WITH MODERN ORTHODOXIES

by Katarina Livljanic

„Between a stream and its source, which has the purer water?"[1]

These words, attributed to Charlemagne – concerning the decadence of liturgical chant in the Carolingian empire and the necessity of returning to Roman models – come back almost in cycles, during the centuries of what we call Gregorian chant. Uttered by differet personalities, in periods stretched between the 9th and 21st centuries, these words often describe very different realities and witness to a lingering existence of conflicts around that mysterious ideal: the *authenticity* of liturgical chant performance.

Linked to its almost continuous use in liturgy, plainchant doesn't have the privileged (or maybe the unfortunate) fate to be considered only as „medieval music" and does not necessarily obey the esthetic canons of the „early music" world. The almost complete disappearance of Gregorian chant from the liturgy after the Second Vatican Council (1962–65), transformed it into an antiquarian object and opened the door for specialized performers to include it in their historical investigations and concert repertoires. Torn among professional singers, clergymen, musicologists and liturgists, plainchant continuously encourages very different approaches to its performance. Unfortunately, the plurality of performance styles doesn't always reflect a plurality and tolerance of ideas. Often convinced to be bearers of the unique *Truth*, the actors of these „esthetic wars" around Gregorian chant sometimes still secretly cherish an atavistic belief in its „Romanity", or simply in the supremacy of one style above the others.

„Chant wars"

Numerous encounters with scholars and performers, and my own position which includes both performance and reasearch in the domain of plainchant, have inspired me to rethink some of those never-ending questions concerning not so much the plainchant itself, but more our view of it. Instead of trying in vain to answer some of the central questions in chant research, I am rather interested in describing modern chant performances as reflected in the mirror of these questions. In the period preceding the Basel conference in November 2002, I was actively involved in the preparation of a research and concert programme „Chant Wars".[2] The work on „Chant Wars" aroused numerous

[1] According to John the Deacon, *Vita Gregorii*, in: J. Migne (ed.), *Patrologia latina*, Paris 1892, vol. 75, col. 90–91.

[2] This programme was created in 2003 as a coproduction by the ensembles *Sequentia* (directed by Benjamin Bagby) and *Dialogos* (directed by myself).

questions concerning that first Carolingian „globalization" of liturgical song and its repercussions in the sound universe of chant traditions in 9th century Europe. In the process of choosing the repertoire, reading scholarly literature and listening to various existing chant performances recorded in different periods during the 20th century,[3] it became more and more obvious that the „chant wars" or, to put it less theatrically, conflicts of ideas concerning the genesis and performance of plainchant, were not only a Carolingian, but also at least a 19th and 20th century reality, and that they will probably continue as long as chant performance itself.

The theme of our programme was the legendary 9th century confrontation between the Carolingian cantors and the local musical traditions which they sought to replace by their own repertoires and vocal styles. The use of two separate vocal ensembles made it possible to explore the vocal and performative elements of this confrontation, so that today's listeners could be able to hear the astonishing diversity of chant styles of medieval Europe, at a time when chant traditions were competing for ascendancy in the young empire of Pippin, Charlemagne and their successors.

The imperial reform of the liturgy and its musical structures arrived in the different regions of the Carolingian empire almost as a „cultural revolution", finding in many places an established local liturgy with which it had to contend.[4] In the name of Roman authority, used by Charlemagne in a political goal of unification, many local liturgical and musical traditions were suppressed. Of the local musical traditions which survived this confrontation, each has been preserved in a different way: some survived until our time (Ambrosian chant in Milan); some survived for several centuries before being completely eradicated (Beneventan chant in Southern Italy); and some were merged with layers of other traditions in building the complex, hybrid repertory which we commonly call „Gregorian chant". Texts written in the Carolingian period by such personalities as John the Deacon[5] or Notker of St. Gall[6] often mention differences among these regional traditions. But, do they only refer to the differences between melodies? These are sometimes visible only on our comparative tables in a musicological analysis, but they can remain hidden if we receive them in oral transmission. For Charlemagne's contemporaries, maybe the word *difference* meant rather a diversity in performance styles,

[3] See an overview of different performance traditions in J.F. Weber: „The phonograph as witness to performance practice of chant", *Cantus planus* IV, Pécs 1990, 607–614.

[4] It would be impossible to give here an extensive list of publications concerning the Carolingian reform of plainchant. Some of them will be mentioned in the course of this article, accompanying concrete questions, authors and citations. I cite here a more general book about the Carolingian culture with an excellent chapter dedicated to music: Susan K.Rankin, „Carolingian music", in: *Carolingian Culture: Emulation and innovation*, ed. Rosamund McKitterick, Cambridge 1993, 274–316.

[5] John the Deacon, *Vita Gregorii*, in: J. Migne (ed.), *Patrologia latina*, Paris 1892, vol. 75.

[6] *Notkeri Balbuli Gesta Karoli Magni Imperatoris*, ed. H.F. Haefele, *MGH, Scriptorem Rerum Germanicarum, Nova Series*, 12, Berlin 1959.

in the approach to the text articulation? Perhaps they refered to the variable numbers of singers involved in the performance in different regions, or to the pronunciation of Latin? In trying to find concrete vocal solutions to these dilemmas, one notices how delicate is the border between the *same, similar* and *different*, as mentioned by medieval authors. A chant melody can be perceived as *same* from place to place because of its melody, but also because of its text, its liturgical assignment, its sound, the vocal techinque of the performer, or its particular ornamentation style.

In the land of distorting mirrors

Medieval authors and manuscripts are mostly accesible to us through the glasses of modern scholars and through modern performances. However, in the labyrinths of today's chant performance, one immediately notices a number of received ideas concerning medieval liturgical song. Unfortunately, we inherited them from our not-so-distant ancestors. They are hidden behind the obsessive imperative of progressing in historical accuracy, which gives to performances the stamp of approval concerning their „seriousness", regardless of their basic musical or technical qualities (these can sometimes be extremely doubtful and would never be tolerated, for example, if applied to a performance of a string quartet). Chant is rarely considered as a serious vocal art worthy of highest standards of execution, but rather as a musical background, as a lifestyle, or as an object of musicological research. Consequently, chant performance criticism is often limited to recognizing the quantitative facts: how known/unknown is the performed repertory, which is the interpretative school to which the performers belong. More inherently musical parameters, vocal qualities, understanding of text and the fluidity of melodic line, rhetorical structure, presence of vocal mannerisms of various stylistic and geographical provenances, tuning – all these are very often left unconsidered.

Speaking of ancestors and of the generally accepted norms concerning the sound of Gregorian chant, I would like to recall some 19th and 20th century attitudes towards chant performance and their reflections in the present.

*

The world of specialized musicians interested in medieval plainchant performance is relatively small, and yet stylistically very diversified. On the other hand, the number of monastic communities which still practice chant in their daily liturgical life is quite large, and their singing generally serves as a reference for the sound of chant to a large audience, but also to a number of chant scholars and performers.

In a recent publication which includes a chapter about chant performance in the context of reconstructing a medieval, and not a modern liturgical performance, we find the following description:

> A monk once told me that in his monastery, every novice loses his voice within the first few months of singing the Divine Office. Only then does he learn to sing lightly and easily enough that his voice can sustain the extensive singing throughout the

> day. This suggests that the choral singing of chant might ideally be with a fairly light voice. Optimizing the head resonance is quite consistent with the slightly forward vowels the French use. The ethos of singing chant presents a challenge to a singer with modern training – it is communal and transcendendent, it does not cultivate individual characteristics but incorporates the voice into a collective sonority and expression. It does not draw attention to itself or even to the specific piece, but rather turns the piece itself to a transcendent purpose. I take this to be the paradigm.[7]

Many centuries earlier, this world of liturgical song we are so desperately trying to reconstruct, is described by Gregory of Tours as he mentiones the visit of king Guntram to Orleans on July 4th, 585:

> When the meal was more than half-way over, the King ordered me to tell my deacon to sing. This was the man who had chanted the Responsorium at Mass the previous day. While he was singing, Guntram gave me a second commission. I was to be responsible personally for seeing that each of the other bishops present should in turn provide a deacon from his own church to sing before the King. I communicated this order to the bishops. Each of the deacons chosen chanted the Responsorium to the best of his ability, with the King listening.[8]

In the centuries between a testimony provided by Gregory the Great, mentioning in 595 ecclesiastical promotions among the clergy based on the beautiful voices of deacons who were „charming the believers by their singing",[9] and a recent article describing vocal style in Solesmes,[10] a long transformation had taken place in plainchant reception.

One of the key thoughts in this strange confrontation of ideas seem to be expressed by Isidore of Seville (7th century) in his *De ecclesiasticis officiis*. He describes the voice of a *psalmista*, mentioning that it needs to be „appropriate to the holy religion".[11] Among numerous writings about cantors' voices in the

[7] William Mahrt, „Chant", in: *Performer's guide to medieval music*, ed. by Ross Duffin, Bloomington 2000, 16–17.

[8] According to *Historiarum libri decem*, ed. B. Krusch and W. Levinson, *MGH, Scriptores rerum merovingicarum*, vol. 1, pars 1, 1962, VIII,3. English edition: Gregory of Tours, *The history of the Franks*, (translated by Lewis Thorpe), London 1974, 435–436.

[9] *Decretum ad clerum in basilica beati Petri apostoli*, Ep. 5, 57, cf. *MGH Epistolae 1*, ed. P. Ewald and L. Hartmann, 2nd ed. 1957, 363.

[10] Cf. Marie-Aude Roux, „A Solesmes, les chantres su silence", *Le Monde*, 26 december 2002. In this article, the author is presenting the organist of Solesmes with the following words: „Musicien et mélomane passionné, le Père Hala possède une basse capable de chanter des airs d'opéra, ou des chœurs russes orthodoxes, pas de se joindre aux voix solesmiennes, réputées pour leur pureté d'intonation et leur vocalisation aiguë. ‚Comme je ne peux pas chanter, je joue de l'orgue', conclut-il".
The cantor in the abbey, Michael Bozell is presented in the following way: „Pas besoin de posséder une belle voix pour être chantre: il y a celles que l'on suit et celles qui font le lien avec les autres – le Père Bozell appartient à la seconde catégorie."

[11] *De ecclesiasticis officiis*, II, 12, in: *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 83, col. 792.

Middle Ages,[12] there is also the 8th century bishop Chrodegang of Metz. In his *Regula canonicorum* he describes the ideal image of a Carolingian cantor: his main duty is not to wither the gift received from god, but to embellish it by humility, sobriety and chastity. According to Chrodegang, the cantor should be distinguished and illustrious thanks to his voice and his art.[13]

But what exactly do these images mean? What did they mean for Isidore, for the Carolingians, for the 19th century monks at Solesmes in the period of chant restoration, and what do words such as *distinguished, illustrious, humility, sobriety* and *chastity* mean for our voices today?

19th century „chant wars"

In the forest of different approaches to chant performance, one of the most influential and omnipresent models was certainly established by the Solesmes Benedictine abbey, reconstituted in 1833 by Dom Prosper Guéranger. But before discussing the issues of performance as formulated in that French Benedictine abbey, it is necessary to make a clear distinction between Solesmes chant research and chant performance. The musicological achievements of the Solesmes monks count among the most important monuments of chant research since the 19th century, and without their publications and scholars the current state of our knowledge about chant would be very different and incomparably weaker.[14] Along with the research, the daily practice of chant in the liturgy was restored in the 19th century.[15]

The decades between the publication of Félix Danjou's *De l'état et de l'avenir du chant ecclésiastique en France* (Paris 1844) and the *Liber gradualis* (Tournai 1883) prepared by Dom Joseph Pothier marked a significant period of chant reform.[16] In the period 1860–65 Guéranger called Dom Jausion from Solesmes to work on the restoration of the chant melodies. Reacting against orchestral masses and romantic oratorios, the 19th-century reformers cultivated a projection on a historical image of an „original" Gregorian chant, coming from the source. Very revealing technical terms were used by liturgical commentators

[12] See a compilation of medieval sources in Timothy McGee, *The sound of medieval song. Ornamentation and vocal style according to the treatises*, Oxford 1998. About the role of cantor in medieval monasteries see also M.E. Fassler: „The office of the cantor in early western monastic rules and customaries: a preliminary investigation", *Early Music History* 5 (1985) 29–51.

[13] *Patrologia latina*, vol. 89, col. 1079.

[14] Let me mention here the most essential among Solesmes collections, such as *Paléographie Musicale, Études grégoriennes, Revue du chant grégorien*, along with many other studies published worldwide by current or former monks of Solesmes.

[15] About Solesmes restoration of plainchant in the 19th century, see the book by K. Bergeron: *Decadent Enchantments: the Revival of Gregorian Chant at Solesmes*, Berkeley, 1997.

[16] John A. Emerson/Jane Bellingham/David Hiley, „Plainchant", *The New Grove Dictionary of Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed 25 august 2003), http://www.grovemusic.com. This article offers a useful and concise overview of the plainchant 19th and 20th century reforms.

of that period: „decadent" as opposed to „authentic" chant melodies or chant performance; and „restoration", used to describe efforts to restore plainchant to its place in the liturgy.[17] This enthusiasm for a medieval musical past paralleled an enthusiasm for the restoration of Romanesque and Gothic churches,[18] an idea which coincides with Viollet le Duc's wave of architectural restorations throughout France. His neo-Gothic and neo-Romanesque artworks basically explored the same ideas as the monks of Solesmes in their sound-images. The principles of this modern reinvention of medieval chant could be summed up in this statement by Dom Guéranger: „If in certain cases we are right to believe that we possess a Gregorian melody in its pureness in the case of a particular chant piece, it is because the copies from various distant churches are concordant."[19] The idea of determining and publishing the „archetype", which actually never existed as a written medieval manuscript, was their goal.

In that period of neo-Romanesque churches, of saints' statues with rosy cheeks made of coloured plaster in the workshops around St Sulpice in Paris, a new frame was made for liturgical music. It had to answer the same demands: it had to be sweet, unintruding, hiding any individualism behind the group. The Marian cult and apparitions of the Virgin become extremely popular, feminine congregations were flourishing: this „feminisation" of devotional practices also influenced the sound ideals of 19th century Catholics.[20] The answer to the institution of the village cantor of the *ancien régime*[21] was the new choral sound of a community as in Solesmes.

Turning towards different roots

During the decades of 20th century chant research, scholars specialized in musical paleography and its links to interpretation considered some types of early neumatic notation as rhythmically more precise. They gave a privileged role to the earliest neumes of the Saint Gall and Metz[22] families. Since the same text can reveal different truths to different readers, this knowledge cannot be reduced to a set of tables and recipes for a precise performance of each neume. The discipline known as Gregorian semiology brought a new, enriching perspective to the understanding of the earliest neumes. However, the several performance schools engendered by Gregorian semiology bear witness that

[17] See for example: Michel Couturier, *Décadence et restauration de la musique religieuse*, Paris 1862; Anselm Schubiger, *Die Restauration des Kirchengesangs und der Kirchenmusik durch das künftige allgemeine Concilium*, Zürich1869.

[18] Joseph Dyer, „Roman catholic church music", *The New Grove Dictionary of Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed 25 august 2003),http://www.grovemusic.com.

[19] Dom Prosper Guéranger, *Institutions liturgiques*, vol. 1, Paris 1840, 306.

[20] A brief ovierview of this phenomenon is provided in: Patrick Cabanel-Michel Cassan, *Les catholiques français du XVIe au XXe siècle*, Paris 1997, 63–88.

[21] Cf. Jacques Cheyronnaud, „Petite histoire de lutrins", in: *Les voix du plain-chant*, Desclée de Brouwer 2001, 144.

[22] Here I particularly refer to Dom Eugène Cardine's research and his *Semiologia Gregoriana*, Rome 1968.

each of them represents just one possible point of view, an interpretation of an interpretation.[23]

Performances inspired by Dom Eugène Cardine's studies take into account all the subtleties provided by Saint Gall manuscripts with their rich indications for rhythm and neume grouping. Still, besides the importance of careful references to rhythmical nuances in the neumatic script, there are many other levels one may also need to consider when incarnating these signs into sound. There is the text, the rhetorical function of each piece with its profile crystallized over centuries of oral transmission, there is its modal identity, ornamental richness, the architectural space in which it should be performed and understood. All these elements influence decisions about performance. Yet we will never be able to know precisely which was the meaning of terms such as *long* and *short*, *fast* and *slow* for Saint Gall cantors and scribes, how these values relate to each other, and how flexible they were in their symbiosis with the text of a piece. Medieval chant didn't survive only through the mirror of Saint Gall neumes and if we want to perform chant repertory from other sources we shouldn't be trapped by a St. Gall miopia or apply parameters from one notation to another. The ultimate help and guide in the performance of neumes seems to be the text of the song we are singing, the sense of the story we are telling. Only in connection with the text, and with the modal structure of a concrete chant melody, can neumes reveal their inner logic.

This same problem becomes much more complex when we study Roman chant or many other medieval Latin chant repertories of various local European traditions.[24] Their neumatic script doesn't transmit the same types of rhythmical nuances (or rather the same information we tend to consider as precise rythmical nuances) as the neumes from St Gall. Should we then say:

[23] It is paradigmatical to compare different chant performances which all take as inspiration E. Cardine's research and believe in their accurate following of the principles of Gregorian semiology. If we listen to chant performances advised by such scholars as Godehard Joppich (ensemble „Singphoniker") and Marie Noël Colette (ensembles „Gilles Binchois", directed by Dominique Vellard, and „Discantus", directed by Brigitte Lesne) in the last decades of the 20th century, we will be astonished by differences in their approach to the rhythm and articulation of chant melodies.
In spite of his highly systematic, grammar-like approach to the interpretation of neumes, E. Cardine himself summarizes in a revealing way this probleme in his late text „Sémiologie et interprétation", in: *Ut mens concordet voci. Festschrift Eugène Cardine*, St Ottilien 1980, 31: „Nous convenons volontiers que les indications fournies par la sémiologie sont élastiques. Le ‚dosage' des valeurs des notes, en plus ou en moins, ne saurait être déterminé avec précision; il apparaît même parfois ‚ad libitum' ... Mais quels que soient les enrichissements de la sémiologie les connaissances acquises en ce domaine ne conduisent pas ‚ipso facto' à une bonne exécution; car elles consistent principalement, et même presque uniquement en *données solfégiques*, qui devront nécessairement être vivifiées par *l'interprétation*."

[24] See in that context the following article: Marie-Noël Colette: „Grégorien et vieux-romain: deux méthodes différentes de collectage de mélodies traditionelles?", in: *Laborare fratres in unum. Festschrift László Dobszay zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Janka Szendrei and David Hiley, Hildesheim 1995, 37–52.

„As we do not know how to interprete the rhythm of this type of notation, it is impossible to sing this repertory today"? But, do we really know how to interpret the rhythm of St Gall neumes? It would be very dangerous to apply the presumed knowledge (or the assumptions of interpretation) of one notation to the other types. The sentence one can often hear nowadays concerning chant performance is: „Because of the research done in the field of Gregorian semiology, we can now come closer to knowing how chant was interpreted in 10th century St Gall." But who are „we"? And how many different varieties of „us" can be tolerated?

Leo Treitler gave an excellent insight into this phenomenon in his text: „The politics of reception: Tailoring the present as fulfilment of a desired past".[25] In observing the language used by scholars who studied Gregorian and Old-Roman chant, Treitler notices a strong „Us and the Other" syndrome which applies to Roman chant, putting it in a category of *Otherness* when compared to Gregorian chant. But, since the *Other* actually helps us to define who *We* are, by saying that the *Other* is everything that *We* are not, it is obvious that the idea of the *Other* changes just as the subject speaking about it changes. It reminds me of those kitschy little barometers in shape of a small house: a lady would come out one door to announce sunny weather, a gentleman would come out through another door before the rain. The same problem occurs for those two characters as for our chant research: The two characters will never meet, because the encounter between them would immediately negate their *raison d'être*. From the 19th century image of *Us* as bourgeois urban society, to the late 20th century when *We* became more politically correct and world-music oriented, the sound of plainchant as the source of Western music was shifting just as our image of ourselves was changing; from a soft, choral collective sound towards chant inspired by traditional music, by improvisational techniques, often performed by women's ensembles.

In the later decades of the 20th century, one of the attempts to fill the gap between us and the medieval cantors was the appeal to ethnomusicology and to traditional music.[26] The opening of new perspectives which consider Gregorian chant as a musical corpus in whose (not only) early history oral transmission had an essential role, represented an immense liberation and a

[25] Leo Treitler, *With voice and pen, coming to know medieval song and how it was made*, Oxford 2003, 211–229.

[26] An important landmark in the study of medieval plainchant in the perspective of oral tradition was certainly the article by Leo Treitler: „Homer and Gregory: The transmission of epic poetry and plainchant", *Musical Quarterly* 60 (1974), 333–372, recently republished in his book *With voice and pen, coming to know medieval song and how it was made*, Oxford 2003. See also: Peter Jeffery, *Re-envisioning past musical cultures: Ethnomusicology in the study of Gregorian chant*, Chicago Studies in Ethnomusicology, Chicago 1992; Marie-Noël Colette, „Des modes archaïques dans les musiques de tradition orale", *Études grégoriennes* 27 (1999) 165–184.

chance to see aspects of chant composition, transmission and performance in a different light. These scholarly initiatives encouraged a current in chant performance in the 1980's and 90's. As an inspiration for the learning and transmission of chant melodies, these ideas provided significant support to performers. However, values from the world of traditional singers cannot always resonate easily with the modern world of „ready to use" scores, limited rehearsal time and instant access to the music traditions of the whole world. Characterized by processes of slow transmission over long periods of time, these values are often reduced to banal imitations of vocal mannerisms in the performance of certain types of neumes; or they simply give an unusual, vaguely exotic colour to the sound of chant. There is a weak point in this approach to chant: how do we chose *which* traditional singers to take as our models? From *which* country, tradition or type of repertoire?[27] For instance, the fashion of introducing non-Western chant elements into our sound models is a dubious procedure:[28] By including the sounds of such practices, we may unknowingly import modern (e.g. neo-Byzantine, Coptic) characteristics of traditions which have themselves undergone changes, often through contact with other musical cultures. It is an intrusion, just like many other fashionable elements that invade chant performances: costumes, processions, bells, certain types of ornaments, drones, as if deeply in performers' minds there were a latent *horror vacui*, or a fear that this music is, after all, boring to the audience, and that it is absolutely necessary to add something external to it. The existence of these various waves in reconstruction of medieval chant would be *a priori* nothing negative (in context of each particular personal taste) as long as performers would be honest enough to recognize them as a hypothesis of our generation in solving the problem of historical distance between us and the Middle Ages. Instead, sermons about authenticity and, in some cases, superficial research are covering the performers' lack of self-confidence, knowledge and serious study of the repertoire.

[27] A deeply inspiring experience in thinking about this problem was my encounter with the traditional singers from Stari Grad and Vrbanj on the Island of Hvar in Croatia. These highly virtuoso traditional singers of Glagolitic tradition come from two neighbouring villages. Their vocal styles (audible on a CD „Za krizem", edited by record comapny *Arcana*, 2002) witness an extremely striking difference, typical also for other villages on the same island. The process of transmission of melodies from father to son demonstrates a very minute accuracy about every detail characteristic for the text articulation, tuning, ornementation. If I were to reconstruct a medieval glagolitic singing from the island of Hvar, which of the villages would I take as a model, if I would dispose for my work only of a written document coming from one main parish church on the island?

[28] In relation to this subject, consult the chapter „A different sense of time. Marcel Pérès on plainchant" in the book by Bernard D. Sherman, *Inside early music. Conversations with performers*, Oxford 1997, 25–42.

The North and the South syndrome

When medieval authors speak about regional differences in matters of liturgical chant performance, they sometimes use very extreme terms.[29] John the Deacon, a 9th century Montecassino monk, expresses from his point of view the eternal North-South problem: „Alpine bodies do not properly make the sweetness of the melody they have adopted resound, since in their voices they make high-sounding noises like thunder. Because the barbarian fierceness, belonging to a drinker's throat, emits rough hard voices when it attempts to produce a soft tone with inflections and repetitions, and does so with a kind of natural roar of the voice, sounding confused, as if you were to throw carts down steps. And so, through bewildering and terrible bawling, it rather disturbs the listeners' minds, which it ought to please [...]."[30]

An eleventh-century witness, Adémar de Chabannes, describes French singers in the following way: „The Franks could not perfectly express the tremulous or the sinuous notes, or the notes that are to be elided or separated, breaking the notes in the throat, with a natural barbaric voice, rather than expressing them."[31]

In our quest for the „authentic" way to perform medieval plainchant, maybe we should actually rather ask ourselves: what do we really want to accomplish when we give voice to plainchant today? Do we really want to make it sound as it had sounded in a medieval liturgy? But then, in which country, and in which century? Do we search to perform it in the manner the theorists wished it to sound? Or in the manner they were criticizing their contemporaries for singing it the way they did?[32] Frankish „drinkers' throats" in the end were some of those who transmitted Gregorian chant over centuries, and they are among our models. So we have at least several, if not thousands, of different vocal images that we could follow, but we cannot know if we would actually *like* one of them particuarly if we were miraculously given to hear them. Our

[29] See: Susan Rankin, „Ways of telling stories", in: *Essays on medieval music in honor of David G. Hughes*, ed. Graeme M. Boone, Cambridge MA 1995, 371–394; Kenneth Levy, „A new look at the old Roman chant", *Early Music History* 19 (2000) 81–104; vol. 20 (2001) 173–197.

[30] John the Deacon, *Vita Gregorii*, in: J. Migne (ed.), *Patrologia latina*, Paris 1892, vol. 75, col. 90–91. English translation from Susan Rankin, „Ways of telling stories", in: *Essays on medieval music in honor of David G. Hughes*, ed. Graeme M. Boone, Cambridge MA 1995, 372.

[31] *Chronicon*, II, 8, from: Jules Chavanon (ed.), Adémar de Chabannes: *Chronique*, Paris 1897, 81. English translation from James Grier, „Adémar de Chabannes, Carolingian musical practices, and *Nota Romana*", *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 56 (2003) 48.

[32] As an interpolation of a similar problem into a more familiar situation, let me make a banal example: Imagine one of your worst voice students becoming an important factor in transmitting your own vocal style, and then later being criticized by a critic in an influential early music magazine with whom you never got along very well: if that information becomes, centuries later, a source for the reconstruction of your own singing style, what could you imagine as a result?

obsession with historical accuracy, seen in this light, seems self-important and almost ludicrous.[33]

Once, when singing a Gregorian offertory for a small audience of German chant scholars, I received the comment that it was „viel zu mediterran". When I performed the same piece in France, it was perceived as „trop expressif", and in Spain as „muy austero". The belief in a unique, Roman, origin of Gregorian chant, which was put in question in the domain of research during the 20th century – ironically, after the discovery of Old Roman manuscripts[34] – still seems to wait for a serious transformation in the world of performance. We admit the existence of a plurality of local chant traditions in the Middle Ages. We somehow still cannot accept that they can also sound differently, or that they sounded (and still sound) differently to different listeners; and finally, that our visions of them can sound even more differently.

The „central question" about the origin of Gregorian and Roman chant probably will never receive a complete and final answer, simply because there is a lack of information in resolving the dilemma between these two repertoires, similar to: „which came first, the chicken or the egg?" Yet, scholarly studies, using often highly hypothetical methods, are considered as relevant contributions to that question.[35] Recordings of the same repertory can receive the same respect in the scholarly community only when they become archival items, only after decades of their publication, when they start to have the value of a historical document of a performance practice. Curiously, only then do they become „authentic" witnesses of particular performance traditions. The recording made in 1904 of the last Vatican castrato Alessandro Moreschi and the singers of the Sistine Chapel[36] singing a few chant melodies is now considered as a historical curiosity and the object of scholarly analysis. Yet, if the same recording were made some years ago as an attempt at authentic chant reconstruction, it would have probably been considered as ugly, ridiculous and marginal. It is true, there exist a number of performers who „don't care" about the research, and there are also those whose entire working methods repose on the *truth* provided by, usually, one chosen scholar representing a caution of seriousness. However, between these two extremes, there is still a lot of space to explore.

[33] A recent book by John Butt, *Playing with history. The historical approach to musical performance*, Cambridge University Press 2002, discusses a similar phenomenon, mostly based on later, baroque and classical music repertoires, in the light of „early music" performance practice.

[34] See a concise synthesis of that process in Michel Huglo, „La recherche en musicologie médiévale au XXe siècle", *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 39 (1996) 72–75.

[35] See, among many authors, recently published studies: Philippe Bernard, *Du chant romain au chant grégorien (IVe-XIIIe siècle)*, Paris 1996; James McKinnon: *The Advent project: The later-seventh-century creation of the Roman mass proper*, Berkeley 2000; Kenneth Levy: *Gregorian chant and the Carolingians*. Princeton 1998; Kenneth Levy, „A new look at the Old Roman chant", *Early Music History* 19 (2000) 81–104; 20 (2001) 173–197.

[36] Issued by *Opal* in 1987.

Fashions change: we are flipping through the universe of musical traditions like through a catalogue. Some models become fashionable: music from Corsica, Bulgaria, Ireland, Syria. In a second stage we get used to them, and then they are forgotten. Life-style magazines announce this season a big return of the 80's. In this world of „retro-chic", maybe the next step will be the reconstruction of the 19th century reconstruction of Gregorian chant. Since cycles are becoming shorter and shorter, we may even be able to live to see our own performance credos reflected and reconstructed in the eyes of the next early-music-oriented generation of performers. But, since, our performances are recorded, our successors will have the advantage of achieving a total „second hand authenticity", just like Pierre Menard, a character in a story by J.L. Borges who decides to undertake an entirely useless project, which is to create a minute reconstruction of *Don Quixote*. He decides not to compose *another* Quixote, he wants to write *the* Quixote, not by copying Cervantes's text, but by reconstructing it, word for word:

> It is a revelation to compare the Don Quixote of Pierre Menard with that of Miguel de Cervantes. Cervantes, for example, wrote the following (Part I, chapter IX):
> [...] *truth, whose mother is history, rival of time, depository of deeds, witness of the past, exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counselor.*
> [...] Menard, on the other hand, writes:
> [...] *truth, whose mother is history, rival of time, depository of deeds, witness of the past, exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counselor.*[37]

Borges, as he talks about „the contrast of styles" in these two books, gives the most brilliant portrait of our attempt to reconstruct an accurate sound of medieval chant: „The archaic style of Menard – who is, in addition, not a native speaker of the language in which he writes – is somehow affected. Not so the style of his precursor, who employs the Spanish of his time with complete naturalness. [...] The Quixote, Menard remarked, was first and foremost a pleasant book; it is now an occasion for patriotic toasts, grammatical arrogance, obscene *de luxe* editions. Fame is a form – perhaps the worst form – of incomprehension".[38]

[37] J.L. Borges, „Pierre Menard, author of the Quixote", in: *Collected fictions* (translation by Andrew Hurley) New York 1998, 94.

[38] Ibid.