

INTRODUCTION

Why Propers

This book provides music for the propers of the Mass, which are integral to the structure of the liturgy and which have been sung since the earliest centuries. The entrance, offertory, and communion chants in this book are for use in the ordinary form of the Roman Rite. The translations of the antiphons found in this collection are from the Gregorian Missal as published by Solesmes, and the Psalms verses are taken from the Revised Grail Psalter. You can find these texts in Latin in their Gregorian musical setting in the *Graduale Romanum*.

How important are the propers in the ordinary form of the liturgy? In 1969, the Vatican's Consilium that released the new Mass in the ordinary form was asked a question about the old prohibition of singing of propers at Low Masses with hymns: The unambiguous answer came back: "That rule has been superseded. What must be sung is the Mass, its Ordinary and Proper, not 'something,' no matter how consistent, that is imposed on the Mass ... To continue to replace the texts of the Mass ... is to cheat the people."

This is why the General Instruction on the Roman Missal (GIRM) speaks of adding decorum to the processions (entrance, offertory, and communion) by singing the "chants proper to them" (44). "After the people have gathered, the Entrance chant begins" (47). "The procession bringing the gifts is accompanied by the Offertory chant, which continues at least until the gifts have been placed on the altar" (74). "While the priest is receiving the Sacrament, the Communion chant is begun" (87).

If we are to grant chant pride of place at Mass (41), the propers of the Mass clearly need greater attention. As Cardinal Ratzinger wrote in *The Spirit of Liturgy*, "the biblical and liturgical texts are

the normative words from which liturgical music has to take its bearings.” However, despite the frequent mention of Mass propers in many documents, there has been a surprising dearth of resources available to sing the propers in English, which is a step toward singing the Mass instead of just singing *at* Mass.

The *Simple English Propers* provides music for the full liturgical action of these processions for singers who have not previously sung Mass propers. They are designed to be used without accompaniment. They are flexible enough to be sung by a cantor alone or by a large choir that can sing in unison in two octaves or be divided into high voices and low voices. The people are free to join in but this is not necessary, for the propers of the Mass belong primarily to the choir.

The Structure

The singing structure is as follows. Begin with the antiphon (that’s the opening text and melody). A cantor intones the antiphon up to the asterisk (*) and then the rest of the choir or section continues. Antiphons without an asterisk are intended to be sung by a cantor alone the first time with the choir repeating the entire antiphon thereafter. If desired, antiphons with asterisks can also be sung in full by a cantor with the choir or section then repeating the entire antiphon. Then the first psalm verse is sung, which is followed by a repetition of the antiphon by the choir or section. Continue this alternation between the antiphon and psalm as needed to cover the liturgical action, and end with the antiphon. The “Glory be” on the entrance and communion, which may be sung as the final verse, is traditional but optional.

How to Sing the SEP

To best way to begin singing the *Single English Propers* is to first speak the text by itself. Chant is a solemn proclamation of a

liturgical text first, ennobled by song. But if the text is unclear or proclaimed in an overly affected way, it can become imbalanced and its presentation will elude its purpose. As the singers speak the text, they should be conscious of the words and syllables that receive emphasis. The same words and syllables should receive emphasis when sung. Remember that not all words and syllables are emphasized in speech and the same is true in chant. Each phrase should begin with a slight acceleration and crescendo and end with a natural relaxation and ritard, just as in speech.

The melodies in the *Simple English Propers* employ the Gregorian modes (modes are the medieval way of organizing scales). There are eight different modes in Gregorian chant. Each one has a special sound and mood. The SEP preserves the mode in which the Latin chants of the *Graduale Romanum* are composed. The antiphons in this collection have been based upon a total of 24 melodic formulas, or melodic models. There is a different formula for each mode in each type of chant, whether entrance, offertory, or communion. These formulas are specially adapted to the needs of each antiphon. No one melody is exactly the same, but after learning a few antiphons in the same formula, you will begin learning similar ones quickly and intuitively.

Modes sound different from modern scales. They are more nuanced, gradated, and interesting than our modern sense of major and minor. To understand the melody, look at the clef on the left side of each barline. The clef is the compass that allows you to know where the half steps and whole steps fall and, from there, to sing the melody. For this reason, the clef should be kept constantly in mind as you are singing. It is all you need to know the pitches of the melody.

There are two types of clefs: the C clef (or *Do* clef) and the F clef (or *Fa* clef). The C clef looks like a C and “clamps” the note for C or *Do* on the staff. The F clef is the other one that seems to have a

note in front of it (it looks something like a stylized F) and it marks the pitch F or *Fa*.



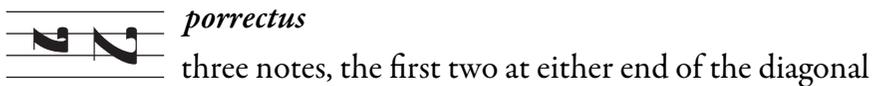
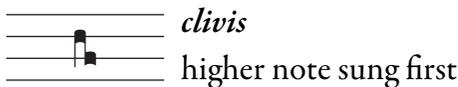
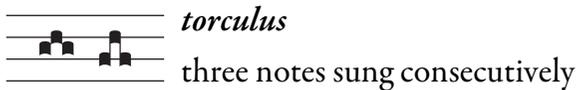
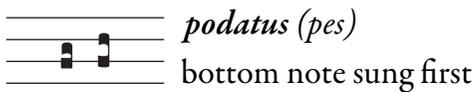
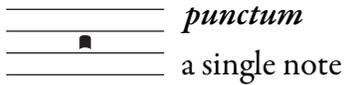
Just as with the C and F on the keys of a piano or in any scale, the distance of a half step separates that note marked by the clef from the space below (which is a B or an E, depending on the clef). The remainder of the scale follows from here just as on the piano. This can be easily played on the white keys of the piano. Or it can be sounded out using *Do Re Mi* syllables (most people know *Do Re Mi* from the movie “The Sound of Music”).

The beauty of the four-line staff (instead of the modern five line staff) is that it presents all you need for singing (the five-line staff is only essential for instruments). In addition, the *Do* doesn’t have to be fixed on C. It can be any pitch you choose, provided you preserve the relationships between the notes that follow. This allows for total flexibility, in effect permitting any chant to start on any pitch.

Most chants in this volume use a scale that falls mostly below the clef. This allows you to find the scale and the starting pitch by first sounding a *Do* or *Fa* and moving downward: *Do – Ti – La – Sol – Fa*, or *Fa – Mi – Re – Do*. If you are looking for a quick mental recall, think of “Joy to the World.” This tune begins with this descending scale exactly. This one simple step will orient you in where the half steps and whole steps are. (There is only one accidental in chant: the Bb or the *Té*.)

The notes and groups of notes (“neumes”) used in this book are few. The single square note (“punctum”) applies to word syllables and follow the pattern of speech. There are also groups of two different

notes stacked on one syllable (“podatus”). The lower note is sung first. If the notes go from higher to lower on a single syllable, they can be written as a “clivis.” There are also groups of three moving notes on one syllable (“torculus” and “porrectus”). The melodic shape of these notes follows the rising and falling direction of the notes (the “porrectus” is not slurred, despite its appearance).



Notes with a line over them (“episema”) receive a slight lengthening, and the dotted notes that occur at the ends of phrases are held slightly longer in order to help bring them to a natural conclusion.

There are five division markers that are used in chant notation and in the SEP. These look something like bar lines in modern music, but they serve a very different purpose. Their purpose is to help break up the text according to its grammatical structure and to provide breaks or pauses in the melody, just as it would be spoken.

The largest division mark is the double bar (‡) which is found only at the end of an antiphon or at a conclusive division of a chant. The

double bar indicates a complete stop in the music. If verses are sung after the double bar, a pause of a few seconds should be observed before proceeding on. The second division is the whole bar (⌌) which marks the end of complete phrases in a chant. The whole bar usually coincides with a period in the text, and a substantial rhetorical pause should be observed, just as in speech. The third division is the half bar (⌍) which breaks the text of a chant at intermediate pauses. The pause at the half bar is brief and shorter than a whole bar, and a breath should always be taken. The fourth division is the quarter bar (⌎) which is the equivalent of a musical comma. The quarter bar divides “sense units” in the text. Sometimes a breath is needed and sometimes not. A very brief pause should be taken at the quarter bar and the musical line should not be interrupted but carry on in a flowing manner. The final division is called the articulation mark (⌏) which is properly not really a division mark at all, but indicates a need for a very slight break in the sound; a “sliver of daylight”. The articulation mark is NOT A BREATH MARK, despite its appearance, and a breath should never be taken for it. All that is needed is a very quick and delicate break in the music, as we often break in a similar way in speech. If the articulation mark presents problems for beginning singers or choirs it may be better ignored.

How to Sing the Psalm Verses

The psalm tones are based on Gregorian tones and are crafted to work seamlessly with the English language. The Psalm tones are found at the end of each antiphon. The psalm text is “pointed” to permit the easy application of the tone.

The psalm tones consist of two musical lines, which are separated by a barline. The first part of the tone is sung to the first line of a psalm verse, which concludes with an asterisk. The second part of the tone is sung to the text that follows the asterisk. After both parts of the tone are sung the tone is repeated in this fashion as needed.

The beginning of a verse is sung on the white note, called the *reciting tone*. The italicized words or syllables at the end of a line of text coincide with the changing notes at the end of the tone, called the *termination*. The bold word or syllable indicates the final note of the line. If there are syllables that follow this final note, they are sung on this final pitch. (The exception is the Introit mode 1 tone, where the final syllable is sung on a descending 3-note figure which is broken up if any syllables follow the bold syllable.) When there are three lines of text, you will see the mark for the “flex” (†). Here the singer should not sing the termination, but just pause briefly on the reciting tone and then continue singing.

The chanting of the psalms is a simple but delicate art. The text is sung lightly, in the manner of good speech, with a slight emphasis on word accents, just as you would speak them. At the beginning of a line you should sing with a slight acceleration, and at the end of the tone the singing should relax and coast naturally to a rest. At the asterisk (*) there should be a short pause of one to two seconds. This keeps the psalm from being rushed, adds a moment of repose and reflection, and adds much beauty to the singing of the psalms.

Conclusion

If you are discouraged at first, stay at it. You will learn quickly. The more you sing, the more expressive and driven your chant will become. Each chant will begin to take on its own personality over time. As a final reminder, never forget the purpose to chant: to proclaim the liturgical text with beauty and nobility.

The *Simple English Propers* was composed and edited by Adam Bartlett under the guidance of Fr. Columba Kelly, OSB as well as the guidance of many in the sacred-music community, and was engraved by Steven van Roode. It benefited from comments by hundreds of dedicated people at the ChantCafe.com and the forum

at MusicaSacra.com, where this book was posted week by week in 2010 in a beta test that went live in parishes around the English-speaking world. The editions of music improved due to this “crowd sourcing” technique, and this led to a unique and tremendously successful experiment: the funding too was crowd sourced. The publishers are grateful to the many benefactors who contributed to make this edition possible.

Jeffrey Tucker
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