

# Example of term paper on the emergence of plainchant music

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## **Introduction**

The word music originates from the ancient Greek word muses that mean the nine goddesses of art and science. Music was formed long time ago when European musicians composed it for notation of rhythms. Music is an art that makes an organized sound effect through the elements of rhythm, pitch, and dynamics and is an expression of feeling and thought. Every culture past or present follows music. Since music is a part of all times and places in one or the other way, it is probable to be present before the dispersal of humans around the world. For hundreds of years, music continued to be an essential part of world's civilizations. During the middle Ages, in Europe, various social and religious developments took place, which were following the traditions of western music. Spanning nearly from 500-1400 AD music was widespread as a sacred music connected with the religion (Howard and Moretti, 2009).

Sacred music was getting huge popularity in the twelfth century and developing into polyphonic music named as organum. Organum was performed in Paris at Notre Dame. Secular music made a good place and flourished immensely by the French Trouveres and troubadours. Later on sacred and secular compositions in the western music by Guillaume de Machaut attracted many hearts. In the ancient times, the interest of people was growing towards music by getting ideas from stories in Bible, primitive cave drawings, and Egyptian hieroglyphs. Such interest led them to create instruments and different elements of music that people could enjoy. In the medieval times, music was as important and part of daily life as it is today for the people.

## Discussion

The one behind music is Pythagoras who thought to do experiments to check mathematical relationship of tones and acoustics. His study towards music as an art form proved to create Greek modes that were scales consisting of whole tones and half steps. The period between the pre dominance of Catholic Church and fall of the roman empire was considered as the time of dark ages when small kingdoms were developing all over the Europe (Robertson, 2002). After fighting and winning for the land each kingdom came under the control of a lord. That was the time when early Catholic leaders of Churches were able to practice their powers and through superstitious fear brought leaders of kingdoms and feudal lords under their power and command. The influential church made extreme use of their strength and power to dictate the development of arts and employed the musicians, artists, and scribes year after year. Catholic Church was also able to influence the western music, adopting its own structures. In order to serve the liturgy, church aligned the arts and same time paying musicians and dictating the work of music.

Music in church began with Gregorian chant when early Christian church adopted the religious chant of Jews and Byzantine and derived their music that way. The Greek model system and Jewish synogue introduced the plainsong or plainchant song described as a body of chants during the early centuries of Christianity in western church (Mavromatis, pp. 93-112.

Plainchant also known as plainsong is known as a body of chants that are used in the liturgies of the Catholic Church, commonly used in Lutheran and Anglican churches. Plainchant originated in the 3rd century A. D. The history

of western classical music starts from plainchant that is considered as the vocal religious practice of Roman Catholic Church. Throughout the medieval era, there was majority of liturgical music and that was only plainchant. Plainchant is a term and Gregorian is a label, indicating a single and sacred melody sung by a single person or by a choir. Plainchant has its own place in the history of music by labeled as an important chant composed by the early medieval saints. During the medieval period, which lasted from around 500-1450, church (a main patron of the arts) would regulate the music. As church had a heavy influence over music, it would create and develop music. Music was developing in church when it employed trained musicians through adopting financial means such as buying paper so that music could be written over it. The church, which was full of Christians having fear of God, devoted them to serve God and adopt the direction He ordered to pursue. With this sole purpose in minds, they kept developing music that could be used as worship. In order to make music with the sole purpose to worship God, medieval church followed specific rules as to what was suitable and permit able in chanting prayers. Chanting of this era was called plainchant and referred to as Gregorian chant as Pope Gregory was behind standardization of chant for the liturgy (Carey, pp. 443-455). According to the history, a dove whispered to Pope Gregory some standardized elements of plainchant in which without background or singers, monks would sing prayers in harmony. Pope Gregory I who reigned from 590-604 is believed to encourage the coding and consistent usage of Gregorian chant all over the western Catholic Church during the 6th century A. D. The enormous contribution of Pope is hardly recognized towards the body of music, but

Gregorian chant still connects with the actual part Pope played in chant. He regulated and dictated about right and wrong and what was allowed while singing. Though he did not invent Gregorian chant, which is a variety of plainsong but it is named after Pope Gregory. He proved as a legendary transcriber for the chants and dictated chants and melody that were one musical part without harmony. Additionally, there were no accompaniment and plainchant was sung as one voice.

After 890, the manuscripts of plainchant started to survive throughout Western Europe and moved towards modern era. Its rhythms got less varied and regular and there was huge creation of various types of plainchant. Plainchant sounded hollow and while singing it singers would follow all the guidelines given by church (Cox, pp. 67-94). The church music was sung in unison and varied a little within each region. From liturgical rites, plenty of new and different styles established. In addition to that, each rite had different uses such as Sarum chant, Roman chant, and Cistercian chant. Charlemagne installed the style in France by taking the support of advisors from Rome, introducing Frankish or Carolingian chant that is followed by Gregorian chant. During the medieval era, Para-liturgical music also took a place, which was also called monophonic non-liturgical music with themes written in Latin. It is also rumored that the rules followed in plainchant were sent from heaven but how far it is true is still unknown with certain evidences. During the middle Ages, music was just evolving by monastic communities who explored the rise and fall of melodic lines.

In the western world, music and thus plainchant was monophonic.

Monophonic music meant that a single melody would be followed with no

vocal accompaniment as opposed to polyphony. Eight Greek modes were followed that would classify hundreds of melodies, sounding diverse from major and minor scales (Vanscheeuwijck, pp. 7). Gregorian chant follows Latin Liturgical text. It was during this time when concept of mode was produced to categorize plainchant. The melodies in it were free from any tempo, wandering melodically. These chant proved an attraction throughout Europe in which various lines were developing according to diversified sects and regions. When the knowledge of the ancient Greek system was lost, plainchant acted as the revival of musical notation. Plainchant served as from modern system as it represented four lines to the staff neumes as system of shapes. In the church plainchant was practiced by nuns, monks, clerics without any back of professional singers with limited pitch range and using a composition of single melody without any accompaniment. In Divine offices and even in celebrations of death and life of Jesus Christ plainchant was sung largely. However, monophonic texture was considered tame and ideas were taken from other ancient religions.

Talking about plainchant music one knows about the church music used in the Middle Ages, providing the back for Christian worship. Until the 9th century, plainchant remained the elite and exclusive music of church, having its own place of honor. It cultivated new music and served as a foundation for building and reviving different music (Mengozi, 2010). After 9th century, polyphony made its appearance and reached a culminating point where plainchant seemed completely lost. As time passed, music started to get dull. Church approved music with single melody, without harmony in just one musical part was getting less popular. There was a dire need to bring some

change and moving away from single note with long and free flowing rhythms. People wanted full melody and thus direction was moving towards two melodic lines. In addition to that, people desired to sing chants with parallel intervals. Around 900 there got some changes when simple harmony was permitted with two vocal parts. The major reason behind the permission was that prayers with a single part made monks boring towards singing and secondly they would not follow and sing in tune together. Organum was the name given to two-part melody. For mid medieval music, the contribution of nun named as Hildegard Von Bingen got very famous when she wrote about 70 works of plainchant.

Continued with that, during 11th century, polyphony developed through the evolvement of plainsong into organum. A new vocal style Polyphony introduced by Leonin of Notre Dame cathedral from France took the support of his student Perotin, composed the very first polyphonic church music along with the guidelines (Oleg, pp. 30-50). They developed rhythmic notation with additional vocal parts to make music extremely interesting. Later on various sacred songs such as motets also got very popular with varying texts and multiple vocal parts. In the following centuries, plainchant, which was a music that church took as its very own music began to be ignored. Various notions by the theorists were introduced and divided into two things the tone system and eight modes theory. Gregorian melodies seemed unfit with the theoretic system and mode theory, plenty of theorists declared them to be wrong and brought amendments. Due to these reasons, the 14th century forward witnessed growing interest towards polyphony when forms of the neums were disregarded and shortenings of melismata

were highly practiced (Williams, 2010). However, the medieval version of plainchant was not based upon accurate rhythms. It was in 1400 century when middle ages became distant and over from the church musicians. Until the 16th century, similar trend went on with no changes in musical expressions. The composers would set up sacred text polyphonically. At last, a revival came to restore the glory of plainchant and bring it back to its position. Various attempts were taken well intentionally to restore church music used in worship. Until 1700 century, music was completely over by the people and seemed hardly interested in sounds and music explanations. However, throughout the 16th and 17th centuries persistent struggles continued and various changes inaugurated in the history of plainchant. During the 18th century, in the year 1888 Plainsong and Medieval music society established to help promote the music. The basic reason behind its development was to promote the study and performance medieval polyphony and liturgical chant. Later on, the 19th century witnessed a boom in music developments when musical and religious groups associated with each other to encourage the plainchant. In the 19th century, plainsong was significantly revived as many efforts were being put to restore the old performance style of plainchant collections and correct notations. Until 19th century, operatic style was so much in limelight (Maiello, pp. 71-108). However, Roman church brought some movements in music, returned to the roots of church music, and came back over to Gregorian chant to appreciate its beauty. It took a whole century to return to the traditional chant of church, which included the large variety of forms with diverse purposes of pieces. In addition to that, Cecilian movement established by the monks of



Abbey of Solesmes in France to restructure and reform the body of plainchant so that it could be used in church for worship.

## **Conclusion**

Plainchant a large body of traditional ritual melody of western music was again a chant that was suitable for religious prayers and thus there was a revival of religious life once again. The art of music elaborated and the full effect of music by various contributors emerged in the western world.

Religion was once more practiced even in music too while praying. In the following centuries, there was extensive use and perfected rendering of Gregorian chant that raised such a high rank of religious music. Therefore, the dignity and respect of Divine worship was enhanced and got superior. It became a conventional wisdom that Gregorian chant as plainchant increases the development of beta waves in brain and helps to restore the ability of humans to lead a strong and religious life. Therefore, it was reputed as tranquilizing music. Music is likely to be 5000 years old, invented in Africa and then moved over to become a fundamental part of human life. In every culture, region, period, and place the music is differently adopted meaning that the ideas and emotions of music are influenced by the experience, cultural aspects, social and economic organization, and access to technology. Music evolved and became essential part of worship in church, sung according to demands and needs of worship.

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