



Western Music for DUMMIES

part 1

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I was going to call this article Composing for Dummies, but found that title was already taken. In fact, those of you who diligently worked your way through my article on music theory in last year’s publication may be interested to know that Music Theory for Dummies is available to download free online; not only that volume, but also Music Composition for Dummies. Dummies? Perhaps you don’t feel like working your way through 363 pages published and written by Americans? And perhaps, like me, your list of ‘ten composers you should know about’ includes more than one born before 1874 and certainly does not include six American composers, and a seventh who lived there for over thirty years. After a few pages, you might tire of translating measures to bars, and, well, you get the point.

Music is bigger than even the good ol’ US of A and it continues to reinvent itself. Following the history of music and musicians over the centuries is fascinating; there’s something for everyone. You like murder and intrigue? Gesualdo, Vivier & Leclair. You like strange and tragic deaths? Lully, Webern & Granados. Assassination? Stradella. Affairs of the heart? Take your pick! Unrequited love, madness, cycling accidents, interesting diseases, hunting, shooting, politics, self-mutilation, emigration, sport, blood poisoning, umbrella collections, priests? Never mind Salieri, it was pork chops that did for Mozart! Let’s face it, composers are the most amazing characters.

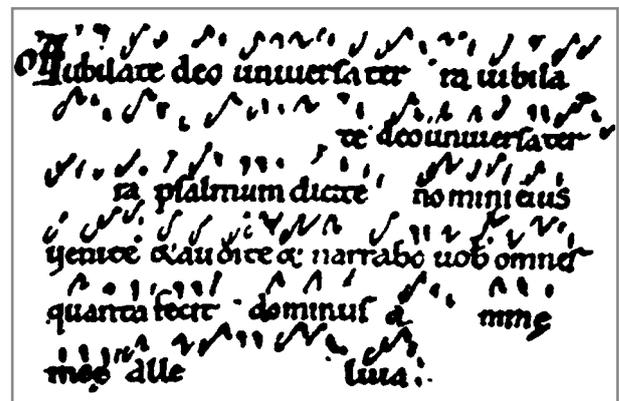
As music has continued to evolve, so has the way we write, copy and publish music. Until the 11th century, there was great confusion in the teaching and performance of liturgical melodies, so the first entry in my list of important musical figures is Guido d’Arezzo. This Benedictine monk developed, or at least brought together, a way of writing down these melodies so that they could be performed in the same way wherever they were used. In

previous years, melodies could be memorised and perpetuated through oral means. But, the increasing number of feasts and the expanding liturgy increased the number of melodies so they could no longer be memorised without some more sophisticated means. Therefore...

‘The absence of this (sophisticated) means, the frequent carelessness of copyists, the temperament and even caprice of singers, and the great variety of conditions under which they were propagated and performed, caused the melodies to undergo numerous changes.’

The way we write music today can be traced back to this time. The importance of this discovery was noted by Pope John XIX (d.1032).

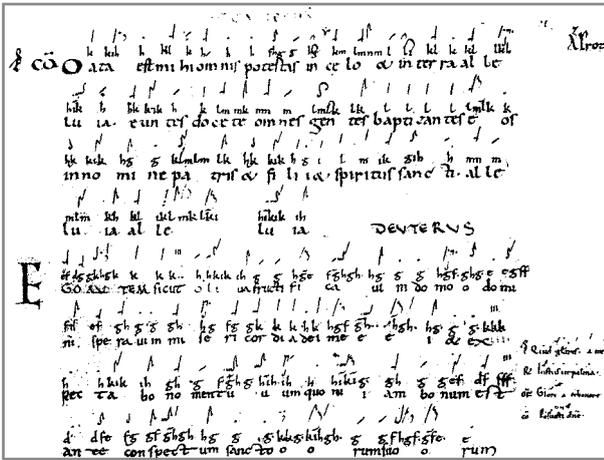
‘Pope John was overjoyed at the ease with which he was enabled to decipher and learn the melodies without the aid of a master.’



So what did it look like before and after? Here is Jubilate Deo using some early neumes.

Most basic notation before Guido could only specify the number of notes and whether they moved up or down. There was no way to indicate exact pitch, any rhythm, or even the starting note.

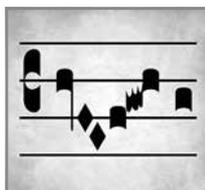
Some people had already used letters, even from the 6th century. In the following example, you can see neumes with letters but they didn't stop with G; this goes up to N! (They used A to O; J didn't exist until much later).



In this last example, we can clearly see the line, printed originally in red, that was used as a guide for the pitch.

Eventually a line was added, as shown below; then two.

To the two lines which were in use at the turn of the millennium, Guido added two more lines, providing four lines with three spaces, and it was then possible to write down all the melodies in use at that time. He only needed four lines due to the limited range of these chants and a clef was added to enable the exact pitch to be shown. In the following example, we have a C clef, so we can see that the melody begins on C and finishes on B:



As we saw above, some musicians had previously added letter names to specify the pitch. This new method combined the two and began to clarify the length of notes, too. This following chart shows the same melody written first in neumes, the added letter names, the notation developed (or at least collected and codified) by Guido d'Arezzo, and finally how it would look today.

NEUMES

LETTERS

fb f gd m efgd d gg hg hi h kk hg cf

NOTATION OF XIII CENTURY

MODERN NOTATION

But Guido didn't stop there. He used the chant, Ut Queant Laxis to give the notes names. You can see that the chant is in sections, each line beginning on a different note, one note higher than the previous one. This is written with an F clef, making the first note C.

*Ut queant laxis
resonare fibris,
Mira gestorum
famuli tuorum,
Solve polluti
labii reatum,
Sancte Iohannes.*

If you look carefully at the words and melody together, you can see that the first syllables spell: Ut, Re, Mi, Fa, Sol, La and (in this case) the notes are: C, D, E, F, G, A. So here we have the beginnings of our solfège. Whether Guido actually composed the music is immaterial; he named the notes. Eventually, Do replaced Ut, and Si was added as the seventh note (once it was permissible to use the tritone or Devil's interval!). In some countries, Ti

Ut Queant Laxis
Second Mode
Reading Chant

The syllables surrounded by rings were used by the monk Guido of Arezzo (+ 1050) to teach the scale. The melody is given in the original position.

O Saint John, loose the sinfulness of our polluted lips, that thy servants may be able to sing thy wondrous deeds with free voices.

(Nativity of St. John the Baptist)



replaced Si so that it was possible to use just the first letters (D, R, M, F, S, L, T). However, the scales that we all love to practise can be traced back to Guido d'Arezzo. Where would the Von Trapp family be without him?

The memorial stone on his place of birth in Monaco records this contribution.

Later, in English-speaking countries, the notes became A, B, C, D, E, F, and G. Italy and many other countries continue to use Do, Re, Mi etc. The Germans went their own way, allowing composers to use important motifs in their music: BACH, DSCH (Shostakovich) etc.

In other countries, especially Wales, the use of Sol-fa notation made sight-singing and singing in parts quite straightforward. This system continued the use of a moveable Do (Guido's Ut could be C, F or G), so that once you could sing the note names, it didn't matter how many sharps or flats there were. It even worked for minor keys, where instead of indicating Do, La was given.

The Eisteddfodau in Wales continued to publish

English	French	German	Italian	Spanish
A flat	la bémol	as	la bemolle	la bemol
A	la	A	la	la
A sharp	la dièse	ais	la diesis	la sostenido
B flat	si bémol	B	si bemolle	si bemol
B	si	H	si	si
C flat	do bémol	ces	do bemolle	do bemol
C	ut/do	C	do	do
C sharp	do dièse	cis	do diesis	do sostenido
D flat	ré bémol	des	re bemolle	re bemol
D	ré	D	re	re
D sharp	ré dièse	dis	re diesis	re sostenido
E flat	mi bémol	es	mi bemolle	mi bemol
E	mi	E	mi	mi
F	fa	F	fa	fa
F sharp	fa dièse	fis	fa diesis	fa sostenido
G flat	sol bémol	ges	sol bemolle	sol bemol
G	sol	G	sol	sol
G sharp	sol dièse	gis	sol diesis	sol sostenido

major choral works in Sol-fa, so that large choirs could perform even modern works like Tippett's *A Child of Our Time*. Choirs still use Sol-fa editions even today, although the practice is dying out. Choirs frequently began by learning the music by singing the note names, then adding the words later, once the pitches were certain. The Tremeirchion Bach Choir in North Wales, well – some of them – still use a Sol-fa edition in their annual performance of Bach's St. Matthew Passion.

When I first took part in this unique event, I noticed that you could always tell when the singers found their lines to be difficult as they stopped singing the words and sang the note names instead.

Even modern notation software will accept Sol-fa notation alongside all the other forms now being used, e.g. lute tablature, TAB. Thank you, Guido!

SALA IMPERIAL

(mgħammra b'arja kundizzjonata)

Ideali għal riċevimenti tal-Magħmudijiet, tal-Pracett, tal-Griżma, tal-Engagements u għal kull attività soċjali oħra.

Għal aktar informazzjoni avvicinaw lill-membri tal-Kumitat, jew ċemplu fuq in-numri tat-telefown:

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