

tical point of view, having no wish to enter on a scientific discussion, I will describe a neum as a group of two, three or more notes, printed to form a single figure, and intended to be sung without a break. The following are the common and simplest neums:

the clivis	■	the torculus	■ ■
		the climacus	■ ■ ■
the podatus	■ ■ ■	the porrectus etc.	■ ■ ■ N

What is the function of the neum in the rhythmic synthesis? To answer this somewhat delicate question, we must first be quite clear about certain details involved.

First of all, is the neum constructed after the manner of an elementary rhythm (an élan followed by a coming to rest), having the ictus on the last note? Or is it, on the contrary, more like a compound beat (the coming to rest of one rhythm joined to the élan of the rhythm following), having the ictus consequently on its first note? It must necessarily be of one type or the other, but which?

Many modern "Methods" teach that the neum is a "rhythm," and then they add immediately that the rhythmic touch is on the first note—without realizing that here is a contradiction in terms. We must understand clearly, on the contrary, that *normally and usually*, the neum is constructed on the model of *compound time*, and that is why it has the ictus on its first note.

An example will make this perfectly clear. Here is the intonation of the Communion *Meménto verbi tui*, from the twentieth Sunday after Pentecost:



Me - mén - to

If you sing this word slowly, analysing the succession of rhythmic steps, you will notice that the podatus *sol-la*, on the syllable *mén*, is really composed of two parts. The first note, *sol*, is nothing but the coming to rest of the élan starting with the preceding *fa*. The second note, *la*, is the start of a new élan which comes to rest on the *la* of the last syllable. Thus we have two elementary rhythms. *Memé . . .* and *. . . énto*. It is impossible to sing it in any other way.

The podatus *sol-la* is not therefore a rhythm (i.e. a complete movement having its own beginning and end), but is an aggregate of two partial rhythms. It begins on a down-beat and ends

soaring upwards, and is therefore not conclusive but insistently requires a down-beat to follow it (the *la* of the syllable *to*). The rhythmic sequence alone brings about in practice the fusion of the two notes on *mén*, making them, as it were, depend on the *sol*. Evidently therefore, the podatus, in this case, is an element of compound time with its ictus on the first note. Looking at it from the purely rhythmic point of view, one might easily replace the two notes *sol-la* of the podatus by a double *sol*, that is, by a lengthened note, and the effect would be precisely the same. You will see, then, that the neum is nothing but the dividing up of a lengthened note, which is another reason for its normally carrying the ictus on its first note.

I say "normally" because there are exceptions to the rule, which I will now explain. Moderns readily believe that the neum was invented for the sole purpose of indicating, by its first note, the place of the rhythmic touch. In other words, according to them, our musical forefathers contrived to write their neums in such a way that the first note was always what I call the ictic note. This is a first principle among certain moderns, and it is the basis of their whole rhythmic construction.

Unfortunately for them, the reality is not quite so simple. The attentive and impartial study of mediaeval manuscripts forces us to admit that the neum is not *primarily* a sign in the rhythmic order, but is *chiefly an indication of melody*, showing the succession of high and low notes and their relation with one another. Rhythmic significance may be added, but it is not the primary reason for the neum.

It is well known that the stave, even the Gregorian stave of four lines, is of relatively recent invention. In former days there were no means of noting the exact place of each sound in the scale; all that was possible was to indicate the general line of the melody by a kind of primitive short-hand. The *virga*, which is a development of the acute accent of Latin grammarians, indicated notes which were relatively high, and the *punctum*, derived from the ancient Latin grave accent, indicated low notes. And we must not forget that these two signs, from which all the others evolved, gave no indication either of rhythm or intensity; they were purely melodic.

In spite of combining in various ways to form the neums we have already mentioned (clivis, podatus etc.), the *virga* and the *punctum* suffered no change of character or of signification; they remained chiefly signs indicating melody. The old manuscripts made use of signs and letters when a note or neum was to be lengthened, and since, as we have seen, well-defined length and weight involve the rhythmic repose, these signs and letters were truly rhythmic signs. Such indications of duration could be