

THE SAYLOR FOUNDATION'S THE GREGORIAN CHANT

“DIES IRAE”

Introduction: “Dies Irae” is a thirteenth-century hymn written in the style of Gregorian chant. The “Dies Irae” Processional Manuscript, linked in this document, is *neume notation*, a system for writing down music that was developed by monks in the Western Church before 1000. The manuscript was created by a contemporary artist in the style of fifteenth-century manuscript illumination.

Instructions: Play the following musical example of “[Dies Irae](#)”* on YouTube. Write two or three sentences describing what you hear, observing features of the music sample’s melody and rhythm. Use vocabulary that you have learned in this course, and write your own reaction to the music. Then, answer the following questions to quiz yourself. After you have answered each question, check your response against the answer key at the end of the page.

1. Fill in the blank. The style of this musical example, the “Dies Irae” is clearly identifiable as Gregorian chant, because it is _____.

- A. Monophonic
- B. Polyphonic
- C. Melismatic

2. Which of the following is false about the Gregorian chant?

- A. It was composed by Pope Gregory.
- B. It was disseminated in written manuscripts that were restricted largely to members of the clergy.
- C. It remained in use by the Roman Catholic Church over the course of 15 centuries.

Next Steps: Now listen to the chant while trying to follow along with the notes in [this manuscript](#).* Try to follow the melody as you read the notes on the lines. Listen once again, first singing the melody on “la” and then singing the Latin texts along with the voices.



Optional/Advanced: If you read music: compare to modern notation: does it represent the pitches exactly? What about the rhythms?

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“THE GREGORIAN CHANT OF HILDEGARD VON BINGEN”

Instructions: Read this excerpt from [Hildegard von Bingen’s “Scivias,” writings on her visions](#),* published in Harper’s Magazine, and view the manuscript illumination by Hildegard, in the previous article and [here](#).* Why does Professor Wright describe Hildegard von Bingen, who lived and worked in the 12th century, as the first “Renaissance” person?

Listen to [this composition by Hildegard von Bingen](#).* Hildegard von Bingen’s “O vis aeternitatis” was performed by Sequentia featuring soprano Barbara Thornton.

Then, answer the following question:

3. What is the vocal style of the composition by Hildegard von Bingen?

- A. Syllabic
- B. Pneumatic
- C. Melismatic

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ANSWER KEY:

1. A, 2. A, 3. C

