

The Eight Gregorian Modes

a handy booklet by Jonathan M. Kadar-Kallen

Modes & Singing Chant

The Arabic numeral in front of the first staff of a chant tells what mode the piece is in. However, this information is useless to the singer, unless he knows something about the modes used in Gregorian chant. This booklet is therefore meant to help in acquiring at least a basic understanding of these.

Firstly, each mode has certain theoretical characteristics, which it is helpful to have committed to memory, namely :

The Final – or tonic : the note on which chants in that mode end

The Tenor – or dominant : the reciting note for the psalm tone of that mode ; this note is usually also prominent in the melodies of chants of that mode

The Ambitus – or compass : this is a generalization about the range of notes usually used in chants of that mode ; it is different from most people's conception of a musical "scale" in that the final/tonic is not necessarily the lowest note in the ambitus

Secondly, each mode has also aspects which are more easily found out through experience of singing a number of pieces :

Typical Melodic Formulas – many musical gestures occur more frequently within the context of a particular mode or group of modes

Affect – or mood : this seems to me a hard aspect to pin down, although it definitely is there ; although some books try to make generalizations about the affect of each mode, others avoid the subject

The Logic of the 8 Modes

In modern music, the scales used are typically the ones ending on Do (major) or La (minor). Chant on the other hand uses neither of these ; instead, its modes have as finals **Re, Mi, Fa, and Sol**. It is interesting to note that between these two systems, all the regular solfège notes are covered except for Ti. This is due to the fact that Ti is an unstable pitch, as it can be altered to Te.

At one time, there were considered to be only four modes, corresponding to the four finals mentioned above. These were called in **Latin** : Protus, Deuterus, Tritus, and Tetrardus ; or in **Greek** : Dorian, Phrygian, Lydian, and Mixolydian.

Later, each of these four modes was split into a pair of two separate but related modes. The modes of each pair still shared the same final, but were now differentiated by tenor and especially ambitus as well. Based on ambitus, a mode which uses the octave of notes starting on the final is known as an **Authentic** mode, whereas one which uses the octave of notes starting a fourth below the final is termed a **Plagal** mode. These modifiers are generally added to the Latin names : authentic protus, etc. ; however, in Greek although the authentic modes still go by their old names, the plagal modes add the prefix **hypo-** to signify that they use the lower range.

With this knowledge of the authentic and plagal versions of the original four modes, the eight modes used by Gregorian chant can now be understood : modes **1 & 2** are the authentic and plagal versions of protus ; **3 & 4** are deuterus, **5 & 6** are tritus, and **7 & 8** are tetrardus. As a rule, the tenors of the authentic modes are a **fifth** above the final ; however, due to the instability of Ti, the tenor of mode 3 has moved to Do. Once the tenor of each authentic mode is known, the tenor of each related plagal mode may be remembered as being a **third** lower ; however, again due to the instability of Ti, mode 8 actually has a tenor of Do.

On the opposing page are shown several tables summarizing the information that has been given so far. The remainder of the booklet then presents each mode individually, including also lists of representative pieces in each mode from all genres of Mass proper, as well as lists of pieces in each mode that can be found in well known ordinaries.

Summary Tables

(arranged by final)

Family Names :

Mode		Latin	Greek
1 & 2	Re	Protus	Dorian
3 & 4	Mi	Deuterus	Phrygian
5 & 6	Fa	Tritus	Lydian
7 & 8	Sol	Tetrardus	Mixolydian

***Authentic modes :** The octave of ambitus starts on the final

Mode		Ambitus	Tenor (a 5 th above the final)
1	Re	Re—Re	La
3	Mi	Mi—Mi	Fi > Do
5	Fa	Fa—Fa	Do
7	Sol	Sol—Sol	Re

****Plagal modes :** The ambitus starts a 4th below the final

Mode		Ambitus	Tenor (a 3 rd below the Auth. tenor)
2	Re	La—La	Fa
4	Mi	Ti—Ti	La
6	Fa	Do—Do	La
8	Sol	Re—Re	Fi > Do

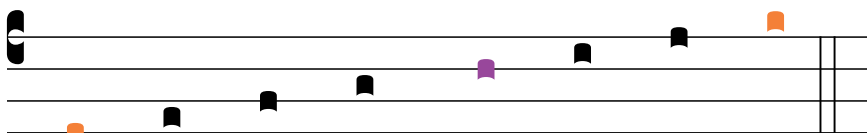
*Mode 1 is called Authentic Protus or Dorian, etc.

**Mode 2 is called Plagal Protus or Hypodorian, etc.

Mode 1

Latin : Authentic Protus

Greek : Dorian



Re Mi Fa Sol La Ti Do Re

Final : Re

Tenor : La

Ambitus : Re – Re

Representative Pieces

Introits : Gaudeamus omnes, Rorate caeli, Gaudete

Graduals : Universi, Ecce quam bonum, Sciant gentes

Tracts : x

Alleluias : Laetatus sum, Ego sum pastor, Virgo Dei Genitrix

Sequences : Victimae paschali, Veni Sancte Spiritus, Dies irae

Offertories : Jubilate Deo universa, Super flumina, Ascendit Deus

Communions : Amen dico vobis, Dominus dabit, Beata viscera

From the Ordinary :

Credo IV

Mass IX (Cum júbilo) : Kyrie

Mass XI (Orbis factor) : Kyrie, Agnus Dei

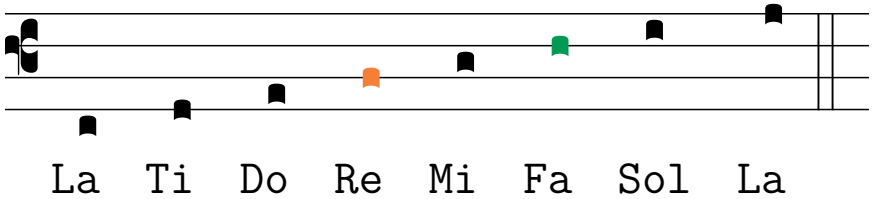
Mass XVII (In dom. Advent. et Quad.) : Kyrie A

Notes :

Mode 2

Latin : Plagal Protus

Greek : Hypodorian



Final : Re

Tenor : Fa

Ambitus : La - La

Representative Pieces

Introsits : Dominus dixit, Salve Sancta Parens, Cibavit eos

Graduals : Requiem, Haec dies, Angelis suis

Tracts : Qui habitat, Deus Deus meus, Domine non secundum

Alleluias : Dies sanctificatus, Veni Sancte Spiritus, In exitu Israëli

Sequences : Stabat Mater

Offertories : Ad te Domine, Laudate Dominum, Vir erat

Communions : Jerusalem surge, Dominus Jesus, Vovete

From the Ordinary :

Credo : x

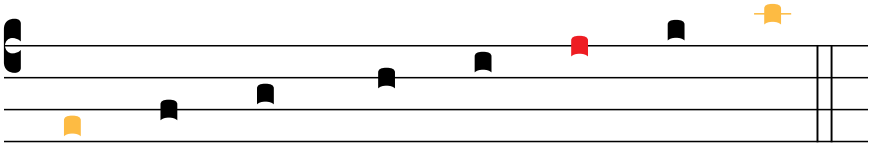
Mass XI (Orbis factor) : Gloria, Sanctus

Notes :

Mode 3

Latin : Authentic Deuterus

Greek : Phrygian



Mi Fa Sol La Ti Do Re Mi

Final : Mi

Tenor : Do

Ambitus : Mi – Mi

Representative Pieces

Introsits : Dignus est Agnus, In nomine Jesu, Deus Israël

Graduals : Adjutor in opportunitatibus, Exsurge Domine,

Tracts : x [Eripe me Domine

Alleluias : Domine Deus salutis, Veni Domine, In te Domine

Sequences : x [Cum esset desponsata

Offertories : Deus tu convertens, Benedictus sit,

Communions : Qui meditabitur, Scapulis suis, Gustate et videte

From the Ordinary :

Credo : x

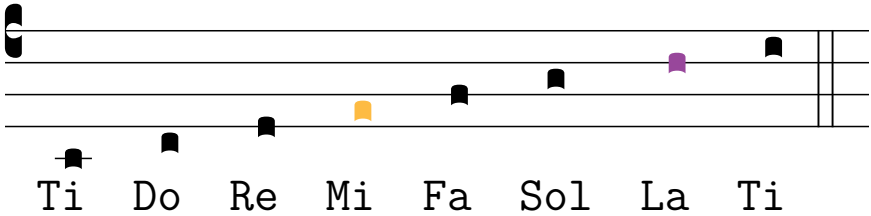
Mass II (Fons bonitatis) : Kyrie

Notes :

Mode 4

Latin : Plagal Deuterus

Greek : Hypophrygian



Final : Mi

Tenor : La

Ambitus : Ti – Ti

Representative Pieces

Introsits : Judica me, Nos autem, Resurrexi

Graduals : Benedicta et venerabilis, Tenuisti manum

Tracts : x

Alleluias : Excita Domine, Post partum, Oportebat

Sequences : x

Offertories : Laetentur caeli, Tui sunt caeli, Confirma hoc Deus

Communions : Benedicimus Deum, Acceptabis, Memento verbi

From the Ordinary :

Credo I, II, V, and VI

Mass I (Lux et origo) : Gloria, Sanctus, Agnus

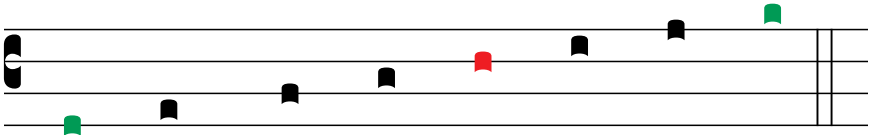
Mass XVIII (in feriis Adv. et Quad.) : Kyrie

Notes :

Mode 5

Latin : Authentic Tritus

Greek : Lydian



Fa Sol La Ti Do Re Mi Fa

Final : Fa

Tenor : Do

Ambitus : Fa – Fa

Representative Pieces

Introits : Laetare Jerusalem, Circumdede runt me, Ecce Deus

Graduals : Christus factus est, Viderunt omnes, Misit Dominus

Traçts : x

Alleluias : Assumpta est

Sequences : x

Offertories : Populum humilem, Sanctificavit, Reges Tharsis

Communions : Tu manda sti

From the Ordinary :

Credo III

Mass VIII (De Angelis) : Kyrie, Gloria

Mass IX (Cum jubilo) : Sanctus, Agnus

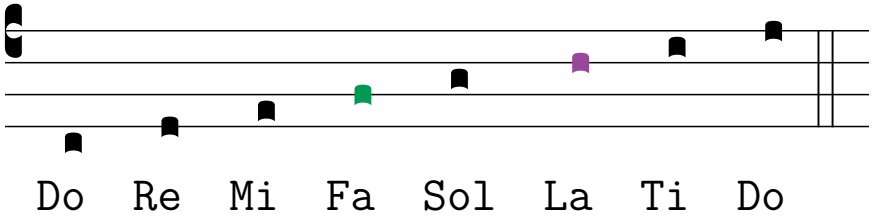
Mass XVII (In dom. Advent. et Quad.) : Sanctus, Agnus

Notes :

Mode 6

Latin : Plagal Tritus

Greek : Hypolydian



Final : Fa

Tenor : La

Ambitus : Do – Do

Representative Pieces

Introsits : Quasimodo, Requiem, Omnes gentes

Graduals : x

Traçts : x

Alleluias : Domine in virtute

Sequences : x

Offertories : x

[In splendoribus

Communions : Dicit Dominus, Honora Dominum,

From the Ordinary :

Credo : x

Mass VIII (De Angelis) : Sanctus, Agnus

Mass XVII (In dom. Advent. et Quad.) : Kyrie B

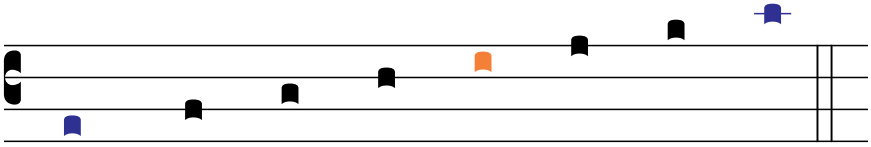
Requiem Mass : Kyrie

Notes :

Mode 7

Latin : Authentic Tetrardus

Greek : Mixolydian



Sol La Ti Do Re Mi Fa Sol

Final : Sol

Tenor : Re

Ambitus : Sol – Sol

Representative Pieces

Introsits : Puer natus est, Viri Galilaei, Populus Sion

Graduals : Laetatus sum, Liberaſti nos, Audi filia

Tracts : x

Alleluias : Multifarie olim, Caro mea, Pascha noſtrum

Sequences : Lauda Sion

Offertories : x

[Dicite pusillanimes

Communions : Factus est repente, Unus militum,

From the Ordinary :

Credo : x

Asperges me

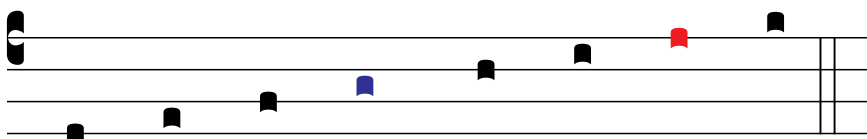
Mass IX (Cum jubilo) : Gloria

Notes :

Mode 8

Latin : Plagal Tetrardus

Greek : Hypomixolydian



Re Mi Fa Sol La Ti Do Re

Final : Sol

Tenor : Do

Ambitus : Re – Re

Representative Pieces

Introsits : Ad te levavi, Dum medium silentium, Spiritus Domini

Graduals : x

Tracts : Absolve, De profundis, Commoviſti

Alleluias : Oſtende nobis, Benedicta ſit, Confitemini Domino

Sequences : x

Offertories : Ave Maria, Immittet Angelus, Precatus eſt

Communions : Gloriosa, Reſponſum, Pater ſi non poteſt

From the Ordinary :

Credo : x

Vidi Aquam

Maſs I (Lux et origo) : Kyrie

Notes :

Exceptions and Caveats

The system of eight modes that is used today was devised as a method of classifying chants which were already in existence. In *Gregorian Chant : A Guide*, Dom. Saulnier points out that as a result of this, pieces with quite different melodic characteristics may now be found assigned to the same mode, whereas on the other hand, identical melodic patterns may appear in pieces assigned to quite different modes. In addition to such happenings, some easier to spot anomalies which occur not infrequently are :

No mode : Some chants such as responses, formulas for the orations and readings, and so forth are so short that no mode number is given to them.

Wrong Final : Contrary to what has been implied so far, chants do end on La, Ti, and Do. For some of these chants, it is obvious that they just don't end on the final of their mode ; however, with most the explanation is that their mode has actually been transposed to end on a new final. This works because of the mutability of Ti/Te. For example, a melody using Te in its usual position can be written a fifth up if Ti is used (like how in modern music the key a fifth up adds a sharp). On the other hand, a melody using Ti in its regular position can be duplicated a fifth down using Te (like how in modern music the key a fifth down adds a flat). The main advantage of such transpositions seems to be the ability to use the moveable note Ti/Te in different parts of the scale, or conversely to notate melodies which would require the use of unorthodox accidentals if written with any other final.

Inexact ambitus : Chants will exceed their mode's ambitus by one note quite frequently. However, some chants go so far as to use the combined ambitus of both the authentic and plagal modes, as if they were from one of the four original modes.

Tenor not prominent : Many reasons why this might happen may be seen above. Also, instances can be found where the most prominent note changes throughout the course of a chant ; some books see such happenings as *modulations from mode to mode*.