Introduction

It is late on Wednesday 21 March[i] and I start the final rewrite of this book on the topic of the performance of late medieval plainchant.[ii] The book will narrate the findings of an artistic research project that has lasted for several years now, where the study of late medieval plainchant manuscripts and the practice of chant singing from these manuscripts cross-fade into what will remain central to the whole story presented: the daily artistic practice of a group of professional singers, at least one of whom[iii] has developed a deep practical as well as theoretical connection with the

i Throughout this book, personal testimonies about many different projects with my ensemble Psallentes serve as illustrations of the various stages of the artistic research. Although often identifiable through the introduction of dates, names, or places and the more frequent use of pronouns such as 'I' and 'we', these passages deliberately remain indistinguishable from other, more formal parts of the text. This creates an intermingling of personal, artistic and theoretical aspects that I consider to be at the heart of any artistic research project. More on this in Chapter Two.

ii The project started in the autumn of 2004, and has seen several attempts at writing since the very first day. Some of these attempts were rather experimental on the level of genre, set-up or even layout. In this final rewrite, I have returned to an annotated narrative of the simplest kind, the kind of writing one encounters in (not particularly academic) non-fictional writing.

iii That is myself — I can not account for the knowledge and know-how of my fellow singers, but I have no reason to worry about that.

chant of the late medieval period and the way this chant comes to us via (not always) beautiful and (always) intriguing manuscripts.[iv]

Just an hour or so ago, we were applauded[v], having sung the first in a series of seven concerts in The Netherlands with the programme *Tenebrae*[vi], featuring antiphons with their psalms, and Lamentations with their responsories taken from the so-called Dark Hours, the Matins of Holy Week. The concert series has been organized by the Dutch 'Organisatie Oude Muziek'[vii]. First venue: the magnificent castle *Huis Bergh* in 's-Heerenberg, in the east of The Netherlands, just a few hundred metres from the German border. The castle contains several interesting spaces for singing, but somewhat to our surprise, the concert organizers have placed us in a rather small hall, where the acoustics are unsurprisingly unhelpful, the air is dry, and the ceiling low. A small stage has been erected, and the whole of the space is surrounded by (replicas of) old Flemish tapestries.[viii] Equally to our surprise, the venue worked to the benefit of the

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iv The words 'plainchant' and 'chant' will be used interchangeably throughout this book. The terms 'plainsong' or 'Gregorian chant' could have been used as well, but I prefer 'plainchant' and 'chant' for three reasons. In English, the shortest name for the Latin monophonic church music is 'chant' (not 'song'); 'chant' and 'plainchant' have the advantage of being directly linked to the Latin term *cantus planus* (as opposed to *cantus mensurabilis*); and the word 'plainchant' is also nicely bilingual: it is the same word and spelling in English as it is in French. (See also Caldwell, 1992)

v When there is a 'we' in this book, it refers to the chant group Psallentes and myself as founder, artistic director and member of that group (unless specified otherwise).

vi The title is taken from one of the most famous responsories of Holy Week, *Tenebrae factae sunt [Darkness fell]*. The programme was recorded as *Tenebrae* in the winter of 2011, and was released as a cd in April 2013 (Le Bricoleur LBCD/04).

vii Or translated: 'Organization Early Music', with a concert series called 'Seizoen Oude Muziek' or 'Season Early Music'.

viii By coincidence, these seven tapestries from sixteenth-century Brussels make an appropriate background to the theme of our *Tenebrae*-concert. The originals have once been bought by the wealthy American philanthropist John D. Rockefeller Jr. and now never leave the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York — hence the exhibition with replicas, here at Castle Huis Bergh. The tapestries display the story of the capture, captivity and death of the mythical unicorn. In medieval times, the life and death of the unicorn came to symbolize the Passion and Resurrection of Christ, of which the *Tenebrae*-programme, using elements of the liturgy of Holy Week, is an evocation. As only a virgin could tame the unicorn, the myth became an allegory for Christ's relationship with the Virgin Mary. (Freeman, 1949)

performance. The intimate set-up of the programme itself seems to have been enhanced by the equally intimate and abundantly historical setting of the concert venue. We had to work hard for a good sound of togetherness, with people listening in close proximity to the singers, resulting in a performance with maybe more flesh and blood than one would expect from a concert presenting late medieval chant.

But first, a word on tonight's programme. The Dark Hours of Holy Week — services that have been held in Christian churches from the earliest centuries on — are famous in their use of the Lamentations of Jeremiah[ix] as lessons during the nocturns of Matins. The Lamentations, although employing texts from the Old Testament that lament the desolation of Judah after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC, are being used here as, well, jeremiads on the approaching death of Jesus of Nazareth on Good Friday.

The Dutch theologian Marius van Leeuwen, in a concert introduction to be held at our Utrecht and Amsterdam performances later this week, points out that these Lamentations reflect general feelings such as despair and devastation, while the responsories answering these lessons focus on the more particular story-elements of the Passion of Christ. So whereas in many other situations it is the other way round, with the lessons presenting specific situations and the responsories zooming out to general feelings and to reflection — quite comparable to an aria in a Bach cantata in relation to the recitativo that introduces it — the Dark Hours use the connection lesson/responsory in a rather exceptional way.[x]

While tonight's programme is built on reciting psalms and Lamentations, the eighty minutes of singing are deliberately designed to be monotonous, even repetitive — I will call it 'restrained' later on. Against the

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ix Opening with the famous words *De Lamentatione Jeremiae prophetae [From the Lamentations of the Prophet Jeremiah]*. Music history holds a considerable amount of *Tenebrae*-settings, from the plainchant versions of the earliest centuries, through Lassus and Palestrina, Charpentier, Couperin and Fiocco (the Baroque genre of *Leçons de ténèbres*), to Krenek and Stravinsky (*Threni*).

x Unpublished introduction to the *Tenebrae*-programme, held on 23 March 2012 (Utrecht) and 25 March 2012 (Amsterdam). Personal communication May 2012. I thank Marius van Leeuwen for his beautiful introduction, and for sharing his thoughts with me.

canvas of that monotony, the melodious quality of antiphons, the intense but subdued recitation of the psalms, the mourning of the Lamentations and the New Testament story-lines of responsories can be painted in colourful qualities. Typical structure-elements present in more liturgically oriented Matins-performances (such as *versicula*, certain introductions or prayers) have intentionally been left out, again stressing the monotony, but also confirming that this is a concert or an evocation, not a reconstruction of liturgy. In that way, the focus is on the performance, and on singing from manuscripts.

Fribourg, Couvent des Cordeliers

Speaking of manuscripts. The Tenebrae-programme was created on the basis of the manuscript CH-Fco 2 from the Franciscan monastery of Fribourg/Freiburg in present-day Switzerland. It is a delightful antiphonary that possibly, or even probably, was made in the monastery itself towards the end of the thirteenth century. The monastery was erected in 1254, when the young Franciscan order (founded in 1209 by Francis of Assisi himself) was in full expansion.[xi] The manuscript was made after 1260, a fact that we know for certain because of the presence of certain liturgical texts that became official only through the General Chapter of the order in that year. And it is most certainly Franciscan, given the presence of offices for Francis of Assisi and Anthony of Padua.[xii]

The manuscript is relatively sober — which is not surprising, since it is Franciscan[xiii] — and has its notes on four red lines in a — what I would call — quick black square notation: slightly to the right tilted square notes, attached to each other according to their position within the

xi Estimates show that the Franciscan order had approximately 35,000 members by the end of the thirteenth century. (Merlo, 2009)

xii Information taken from the description of the Fribourg manuscript on the digital facsimile pages at www.e-codices.unifr.ch (last accessed December 2013).

xiii Chant specialist Michel Huglo (2011, p. 200): "In practice, few Franciscan liturgical books in the thirteenth century were provided with luxurious decorations, the use of gold being forbidden on account of the vow of poverty." For more on the evolution of the Franciscan liturgy see Van Dijk and Walker (1960), and Loewen (2013).

syllable or word. But the most interesting aspect of the manuscript is the relatively rare phenomenon of melodies being provided for the Lamentations.[xiv] And not to our surprise, these melodies immediately show how fixed the repertoire and its melodies could become in the history of plainchant: it hardly differs from examples of many earlier and later centuries.[xv]

Figure 1 shows a fragment of the first nocturn from the Matins of Maundy Thursday. At the top of the page we see the end of the antiphon *Zelus domus tuae [The zeal of thine House]*[xvi], with the psalm-incipit *Salvum me fac [Ps. 69 Save me, O God]* and its *differentia* (the termination of the psalm-tone). After three other antiphons with their psalm-indications (the third one lacking the musical incipit) and some rubrics with details on the pre-lesson dialogue *Jube, domne, benedicere [Father, your blessing, please]*, the Lamentations start with *Incipit Lamentatio [Here begins the Lamentation]*, the text of it exceptionally written in red. The Lamentation is not given in full — the function of the musical notation obviously being merely to indicate the melodic formula to which the Lamentation is to be sung. The lesson is cut short and a rubric *Et in fine lectionis dicitur [And at the end of the lesson say/sing]* is added to introduce the *Jerusalem, Jerusalem.* Finally, the responsory *In monte oliveti [At the Mount of Olives]* starts, showing a large letter I in the margin, to the far left hand side of the script, and typically extending beyond the usual two lines of text for capitals.

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xiv That the tone for the reciting of the lamentations is given, is exceptional, but not unique. Dutch musicologist Ike De Loos, in her 'Chant behind the dikes' online database devoted to manuscripts in the context of the medieval chant liturgy in the Low Countries, refers to eight sources known to her with Lamentation-tones from the Low Countries: D-X H 105, NL-Uu 419, B-LU 224-225, NL-Lu BPL 2777, NL-Hs 184 C 4, GB-Ob lat. lit. d 1, NL-Uc BMH 25, NL-Uc BMH 27. (utopia.ision.nl/users/ikedl/chant/ last accessed January 2014)

xv In this case, the melody of the Fribourg manuscript is very similar to the one we can find in 'modern' chant books. (Liber Usualis, 1920, p. 543)

xvi Translations between square brackets are generally taken from the revised English version of the Roman Breviary 1961. (Newton, 2012)

The development of a performance practice

However, let us now zoom out, away from today's concert at Castle *Huis Bergh*, and into the dissertation project at hand. This book is the written component of a doctoral research project concentrating on the development of a present-day performance practice of chant from the Late Middle Ages.[xvii] The book is aimed primarily at the professional musician seeking a deeper understanding of plainchant performance and related issues. Some research activities date back to the early 1990s. A firm interest in the performance of late medieval plainchant and in its sources dates from that time, resulting in the formation of my chant group Psallentes in 2000[xviii]. The foundation of the ensemble was encouraged by Dirk Snellings, then director of the polyphonic ensemble Capilla Flamenca, with both parties benefiting from a so-called contextual performance: presenting polyphony (in this case mainly from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries) in a musical environment that would have been considered natural or normal in its own time. Plainchant was the rule, polyphony the exception not only in monasteries and abbeys but also in collegiate churches[xix]. So, as polyphony in this period of history was very much based on and connected with plainchant, it is natural for modern performers to want to balance polyphony with chant, or vice versa. A cursory examination of recordings shows quite a respectable number of recordings, focusing on polyphony, that involve performance of plainchant as well.[xx] All the same, many of the

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xvii 'Late Middle Ages', with 'late medieval' as a shortcut, here to be understood as the period roughly between 1300 and 1500, although my interest in the history of the performance practice of plainchant, even within the context of this book, will prove to be broader than that.

xviii See Chapter Four (Exhibits) for a display of 17 Psallentes projects, of which the 2000 evocation of the baptism of Charles V in 1500 was the very first.

xix In relation to the situation in monasteries and abbeys, the singing of polyphony would have been less exceptional in cathedrals and collegiate churches, where paid professional singers were frequently employed. (Bouckaert & Schreurs, 1998)

xx To name but two examples, the recordings of Ensemble Organum, directed by Marcel Pérès, and the Gabrieli Consort & Players, directed by Paul McCreesh, are particularly noteworthy in this context. Projects by Capilla Flamenca and Psallentes will be discussed on various occasions in this book, particularly in Chapter Four.

recordings featuring polyphony do not choose contextual plainchant performance. It is hard to say whether this is simply because of a lack of interest in chant on the part of the ensembles involved, the difficulty of finding good chant sources compatible with the polyphony concerned (same period, same region etc.), or the uncertainty or reservation (justified or not) about the 'appropriate' performance practice of chant.

Let us continue with that last statement for a moment: the uncertainty about the chant performance practice. A sobering and at the same time stimulating — maybe even in some ways reassuring — thought for a researcher and performer of late medieval chant is the fact that no contemporary treatise, nor any study ever since, nor any recording ever made or concert sung provides the definitive answer to the question of how to perform chant from late medieval sources.

This book can be read as a report of the search for some (suggestions for) answers to this basic issue. As will be shown, the quest was not simply — or even at all — about *reconstructing* the performance practice of the plainchant of a bygone era, however detailed and painstakingly profound that research may be, but had more to do with the *development*, the *construction*, the *creation*, the *invention* of a present-day performance practice of late medieval plainchant, based on genuine practice-as-research. An image will appear of the performer as an intermediary, a mediator between the music's past and present.

Portraying the flux

Some parts of this book were written immediately after returning from Cuenca, on Easter Saturday 2010. The Spanish city, famous for its 'hanging houses' and the 'pointed hood' processions during the Semana Santa, had invited my ensemble Psallentes to perform three *Tenebrae*-concerts, in co-operation with the young Spanish ensemble Forma Antiqva, during the annual *Semana de Musica Religiosa*. Throughout this week of intense work in Cuenca, and during several hours of rehearsal every day, musical concepts were discussed and experimented with, were negotiated verbally or tacitly with fellow musicians; each day had a different dress rehearsal

and concert; and — not irrelevant to mention — my spare time was spent either reading Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things*[xxi] and/or listening to Pat Metheny's *The Way Up*[xxii].

This book focuses on sometimes very specific aspects of the performance of late medieval plainchant. The added personal storytelling draws a picture of research-acts as ingrained characteristics of the everyday activities of a musician. These activities are always influencing (and influenced by) the broad context in which an artist-researcher operates. This approach aims at portraying the flux between the musician-researcher's devoted pragmatism on the one hand and his/her often chaotic self-awareness on the other.

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xxi In a very indirect way, this project is highly influenced by Foucault's 1966 book. Not only has Foucault inspired Norwegian art researcher Aslaug Nyrnes' proposal of an artistic research method which I have used as a guideline in my own research endeavours (Nyrnes (2006), more on this in Chapter Two), Foucault's scrutinizing of the levels of acceptance of different research discourses and his archaeology of the structures of thought has helped me realize how my book could contribute to the discussions on the method(s) of artistic research — this exciting young field of research where so many strong opinions compete. In a more direct way, Foucault's detailed analysis of Velázquez painting *Las Meninas*, a 6000-word description and discussion of the painting, a self-reflexive meditation on the nature of representation — see also Gresle (2006), has led me to an almost poetic meditation on the day-to-day actions, feelings, opportunities and frustrations of our Cuenca concert-tour 2010 (see Appendix Eight — Deleted Scene — Cuenca Impressions).

xxii *The Way Up*, a 2005 Pat Metheny Group project, is an impressive 68 minute-long piece. For a performer of late medieval chant and for musicians in general, *The Way Up* has at least two inspirational functions: the dramaturgically very balanced structure of the piece, and the highly developed and artistic vision of 'totality'. This may sound a bit structuralistic, and maybe it is, but there is more to it than that: to my mind, Metheny's music has the power to enter a realm of (using the words of Attali) 'fantastic insecurity' — a place where, according to Dutch music philosopher Marcel Cobussen, music and spirituality might meet: "To ruminate how spirituality sets itself to work in or through music might open another space where music can dwell, develop, and be received. Dwelling in this space that is both created by and allowing of reflection becomes simultaneously the act of transforming it, adding on, replacing, altering, transgressing the already existing limits: never fully defined but always in the process of being defined." (Cobussen, 2008, p. 26) Cobussen's description fits Metheny's music well, I think, and more importantly in this context: the description can function as a basic rule for the development of a present-day performance practice of plainchant — full of 'fantastic insecurities' as it is.

Obstacles and opportunities — Challenges

Today's chant singer researching a performance practice for late medieval chant is faced with many challenges. These include questions concerning language and vocal techniques, such as the possible pronunciations of Latin, use of voice and pitch; performance practice issues such as rhythm, metre, tempo and phrasing; contextual considerations such as the composition of the ensemble, the place and time of performance; and repertoire matters, such as the transmission of the old repertoire and the making of new repertoire, regional differences within the repertoire itself, the use of simple polyphony, and the interaction of chant and polyphony.

It is a frighteningly complex field of investigation — even without considering the many aspects of theology, liturgiology, archiveology, palaeography and codicology involved. Some work has been done already (see Chapter One), although the vast majority of that work concerns the repertoire found in the oldest manuscripts. This reflects the initial objective of many chant scholars from the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century to restore plainchant to its supposed original state, after long centuries of so-called mutilation.

Take any late nineteenth-century or early twentieth-century 'guide to singing Gregorian chant' and you will find words such as 'decline', 'decadence' and 'mutilation' mentioned when chant after the twelfth century is described. We may turn, as a quite randomly selected sample, to Lucien David's *Méthode Pratique de Chant Grégorien* (Lyon, 1919). This Benedictine monk is a child of his time, dividing the history of chant in five periods:

1) Période de formation (I^er^-VII^e^ siècles)	*[Formation]*
2) Période de diffusion (VII^e^-XII^e^ siècles)	*[Diffusion]*
3) Période de déclin (XII^e^-XV^e^ siècles)	*[Decline]*
4) Période de décadence (XVI^e^-XIX^e^ siècles)	*[Decadence]*
5) Période de restauration (XIX^e^-XX^e^ siècles)	*[Restoration]*

The periods marked as 'decline' and 'decadence' comprise no less than eight centuries. Even the music of Hildegard of Bingen is considered as

showing *les germes de décadence [the seeds of decadence]*:

> *La recherche de l'effet, de l'art pour l'art, que l'on peut déjà constater dans les oeuvres d'une sainte comme Hildegarde (1098-1179), se donne de plus en plus carrière.*
>
> *[The use of effects, of l'art pour l'art, already on display in the works of a saint like Hildegard (1098-1179), gains ground more and more.]*[xxiii]

Decades of statements similar to these have strengthened the belief that the chant of the Later Middle Ages was indeed mutilated, decadent, worthless, something to be looked down on, and at best to be restored. The positive side of this view is of course that it initiated and encouraged research into the oldest repertoire — the flip side being that later repertoire was totally discarded, considered unsuitable for liturgical purposes and not studied at all. David, writing on the period of decadence, concludes as follows:

> *Le plain-chant, ou ce qu'on appelait ainsi, n'ayant plus aucun intérêt artistique ou religieux, fut souvent supplanté par de la musique, généralement plus intéressante au point de vue de l'art, mais au moins aussi déplorable au point de vue de la prière.*
>
> *[The plainchant, or what was given that name, which had lost its artistic and religious interest, was often replaced by music generally more interesting on an artistic level, but equally unsuitable as prayer.]*

Until just a couple of decades ago, relatively few scholars were attracted to the chant of later periods, and even then often primarily taking a special interest in it because of its related polyphony. This statement is illustrated by the fact that even in Thomas Forrest Kelly's acknowledged *Plainsong in the age of polyphony* (1992) — to be considered as a major landmark in the

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xxiii (David, 1919, p. 2)

study of the performance practice of late medieval chant — little practical or concrete performance information can be found. Apart from the contributions of musicologists Richard Sherr[xxiv] and John Caldwell[xxv] (both interested in the interaction between plainchant and polyphony and its implications for chant performance), the essays in Kelly's book do not represent research into concrete performance practice questions such as tempo and rhythm.[xxvi]

Moreover, even this late twentieth-century book still carries the statement that "it is generally agreed that [in the plainchant repertoire,] anything that occurred after about the eleventh or twelfth century, be it in melodic contour or rhythmic performance, is a hopeless corruption".[xxvii] I am not sure whether Richard Sherr actually subscribes to that view or merely repeats it as a general assumption — rather than an agreement — in order to highlight the importance — which is not insignificant — of his own contribution looking at aspects of rhythm in late chant. Sherr's statement provoked David Hiley, author of one of the most thorough and comprehensive works on plainchant, to rebuke in a fierce manner:

> *This is patently untrue and, I would have thought, something of an insult to at least one other contributor to the volume. I am surprised that the editor, himself a distinguished chant scholar, let it pass. The life's work of Bruno Stäblein, for example, a scholar with intimate knowledge of hundreds of late medieval chant sources, stands as a refutation of such an accusation. Although many students of polyphony may be unconscious of the world beyond the* Liber Usualis, *chant scholars are well aware of the harvest waiting to be gathered in. That the reapers are few is not their fault.*[xxviii]

Looking for more specific performance practice considerations, we may want to turn to Mary Berry's dissertation *The Performance of Plainsong in the*

xxiv (Sherr, 1992)

xxv (Caldwell, 1992)

xxvi See Chapter Two — Research.

xxvii (Kelly, 1992, p. 178)

xxviii (Hiley, 1993a, p. 417)

Later Middle Ages and the Sixteenth Century.[xxix] Her research is of some importance to performers, her main concern throughout being problems of rhythm. The chief sources from which she draws are manuscript and early printed service-books, as well as the writings of theorists. Her conclusions aid and refine our understanding of later plainchant, with a complex picture emerging which in itself is important: there were more ways than one of performing chant.[xxx]

Exactly this can turn the many challenges and obstacles faced when performing into opportunities, for "trying to find ways of answering questions not answered by hard evidence is", to quote Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, "endlessly fascinating, a battle of wits between the lack of evidence and one's own ingenuity". The performer will have to fill in the blanks with his or her own ideas, colours and textures, and may even be tempted to draw outside the lines, countering any practical or historical constraints in a creative way.[xxxi]

Artistic practice as research tool

In my approach to the issue of the performance of late medieval chant presented here, two paths have been followed. On the one hand, there was a simple desire to gain substantial theoretical and practical knowledge about historical aspects of the performance practice of plainchant, and how this practice has or has not found its way into the manuscripts. On the other, the concern was to become more aware of the way in which chant in general, and particularly the chant of the fifteenth century can be approached by today's voices, in present-day settings, and how it can find its way to the hearts, ears and minds of today's public.[xxxii]

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xxix Mary Berry, or Sister Thomas More (1917-2008) was a keen promotor of plainchant, especially when used in its liturgical context. She was one of the first scholars to dig deeper into the performance practice of late medieval plainchant and its sources.

xxx (Berry, 1968, p. 8)

xxxi (Leech-Wilkinson, 2002, p. 2)

xxxii The duality expressed in this paragraph finds an echo in the sentence "Music historians try to find out what happened in the past, performers try to make something happen now." (Sherman, 1997, p. 3)

Dealing with practice-as-research, the double status of researcher *and/as* performer (or vice versa) is a major factor in the whole process, influencing the theoretical and practical knowledge as well as the development towards an 'expert habitus' — celebrating the embodied know-how or tacit knowledge of the artist.[xxxiii]

There certainly are quite a few traditional musicological aspects in what is presented here. In fact, when starting this doctoral project in 2004, I *expected* to do a lot of more or less traditional musicological work, later often evolving into a certain *reluctance* to do musicological work.[xxxiv] The most typical part of this endeavour is that the questions start from an *artistic* viewpoint, and that the aim is to use the artistic practice itself as a research tool. This may sound good, but is it possible? We will focus on the issue in Chapter Two.

The resulting boundary-blurring activities have come together in three specific ambitions. Firstly, to consider if and how the way in which neume notation[xxxv] as used in late medieval chant manuscripts provides clues to performance practice. Secondly, to see and experience in a more general way how the manuscripts themselves can suggest answers to our performance-related questions, how certain features of these manuscripts can lead us singers to surprising or unexpected sounds and perspectives, how our present-day training in chant or in the performance of chant can alter our understanding of the different historical sources — in other

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xxxiii (Coessens, Douglas, and Crispin (2009), drawing on Bourdieu) The issue of the 'tacit knowledge' will return in Chapter Two — Research. (See also Borgdorff, 2012)

xxxiv I am fully aware of the potentially controversial dimension of this statement. It is, however, quite simple: in my opinion, artistic research should start and end with activities typical to a professional artistic environment. In that way, the (in the first paragraph of this introduction) already mentioned daily artistic practice remains the alpha and the omega of a kind of research that is largely conducted in the studio (or on stage), away from the desk. More on this in Chapter Two.

xxxv I use the term 'neume' in the customary way of designating a notational sign, often a single note or a small group of notes on a syllable or part of a syllable. In early medieval times, the term 'neuma' would have been used to refer rather to a melodic line. Because of this, David Hiley avoids the term when speaking of notation, preferring the use of 'sign' instead, something he has borrowed from Dom Eugène Cardine's *Sémiologie Grégorienne*. Cardine uses the French 'signe', but also 'signe neumatique'. (Cardine, 1970, p. 2; Hiley, 1993b, p. 346)

words: what these manuscripts make us do as present-day performers. And thirdly, exploring the potential of the human voice as a research tool in the development of a performance practice of late medieval plainchant.

Artistic validity and persuasiveness

Central to this research project are late fifteenth- and sixteenth- century chant manuscripts. One of the very first sources in this category that I have worked with as a performer is an antiphonary in two volumes, written by sub-prior Adrian Malins of the Saint Bavo Abbey in Ghent, in square notation (B-Gu 15)[xxxvi]. As a noteworthy feature, the musical script that Malins employed in this antiphonary has some features in common with the mensural notation known from polyphonic sources. Thin lines were added to the large black notes — to the left of the note when in an ascending movement, to the right of the note when descending. It is difficult to say whether this is just the elegant mannerism of a copyist in the habit of writing polyphonic music, or if this is really meant to be a rhythmical notation.

As a singer and leader of a plainchant ensemble, and continuing from a project I was involved in with Marcel Pérès[xxxvii], I chose the latter option as a working hypothesis (the manuscript being written in mensural notation) — at least with the intention of extensively investigating this possibility. Thanks to the upward-pointing lines on the left side of the note, this plainchant became a game of basically three lengths of notes: *longa*, *brevis* and *semibrevis*. For example: a normal *podatus* (two notes, the second one higher) would be performed as *brevis/longa*, as would a *clivis* (two notes, the second one lower). It was remarkable, during the experimentation and rehearsal, that we always fell back on a kind of *tempus imperfectum* (duple

xxxvi A chant manuscript in two almost identical volumes (one for each side of the choir) from 1471-1481. A detailed description of this manuscript is given in Appendix Four. My description of the source is also published separately in Long and Behrendt (2014, forthcoming).

xxxvii Marcel Pérès was guest conductor of Capilla Flamenca for a concert at the Flanders Festival in Ghent in 2000, with music for Saint Bavo taken from Ghent sources B-Gu 14 (which are graduales) and B-Gu 15 (the above mentioned antiphonaries).

time). Moreover, we had an almost irresistible inclination to manipulate the supposedly intended rhythmical value of the ligatures in order to maintain the *tactus* (beat) of the *imperfectum*. In other words: an interplay between long, short and shorter notes was possible and even exciting, but difficult to maintain without some 'artistic' adjustment.[xxxviii]

There is no evidence that the chant in this antiphonary was intended to be sung in a mensural way, but neither is there evidence to the contrary. By rehearsing this chant in as it were a rhythmical notation, experimenting with it and performing it, Psallentes arrived at a logical and consistent artistic concept, that could persuade and excite performers and listeners alike. This performance can lay claim to some validity: whether it has any *historical* validity is uncertain and may even be unlikely, but its artistic and musical validity is absolutely clear to us. What is emphasized here is that our performance practice should not (only) be judged or measured by its demonstrable historical validity (this may be difficult to assess by traditional methods of research alone), but (also) by its demonstrable *artistic* validity and persuasiveness.

A vast array of (im)possibilities

This book contains four chapters, starting from a quite broad outlook on late medieval chant, moving gradually towards specific performance questions, and finally focusing on chant's present-day artistic potential.

Chapter One (Challenges) considers various practical challenges a performer faces, contemplates everyday chant performance problems, and discusses some first-hand solutions to these problems — or at least methods of coping with these challenges and problems, even when some solutions will never present themselves no matter how thorough your research is. In this chapter, the use of the voice on the one hand and the connection with what is to be found in manuscripts on the other, is presented as the alpha and omega of the project. Before continuing into the more detailed report of an artistic research project, we need to estab-

xxxviii More on the different rhythmical possibilities of singing chant in Chapter Three — Morphology.

lish what 'artistic research' means in this context, and what procedures can be followed. This is Chapter Two (Research), which is devoted to the possibilities that musician's research and development offer to the understanding of bygone practices and the creation of new practices in chant performance, and music or art in general. Chapter Three (Morphology) first introduces the world of late medieval chant manuscripts and what they mean for a practice of plainchant performance. Although the chant contained in these manuscripts has long been considered decadent (see above), chant in late medieval centuries remained very much at the heart of liturgy, and many of the manuscripts bear witness to a vibrant plainchant performance practice. Then the chapter turns to the practical heart of the matter. Amidst all kinds of performance challenges, the rhythmical question is indubitably the most pertinent, strongly connected with the visual rapport we have with neumes. This question is also definitely unanswerable, except maybe via the statement that chant in the Late Middle Ages had many performance traditions (see Berry above). Therefore, this chapter ultimately revolves around the notion that plainchant performance practice then — just as it is now — was not only highly diverse, but also controversial. An image emerges of a chant score as a grid, a scheme, to which the present-day performer can relate in diverse ways.

Plainchant's big concert music potential is contemplated in Chapter Four (Exertions), where seventeen Psallentes projects from the past and the present are explored and explained. It is there, in these projects presented to the public, that, starting with people's need for reflection and contemplation, and adding people's tendency to enter that place where music and spirituality meet, the creation of a chant emerges that relates to many aspects of modern-day cultural life.

Cross-cut to Thursday 22 March, 7 pm. We have moved from the intimate setting of the castle 'salon' at 's-Heerenberg to the magnificent *Laurenskerk* in Rotterdam. In exactly one hour, we will sing the second of our seven-concert tour of The Netherlands. The *Laurenskerk* is the only remaining late-Gothic building from medieval Rotterdam, and it stands as a somewhat — not unpleasantly — anachronistic landmark between present-day

architectural structures. Much like a few other churches we have seen in The Netherlands (notably the *Pieterskerk* in Leiden), the church building today has outgrown its original liturgical function. Services can still take place, but it now is a multifunctional building where concerts, exhibitions, symposia and even fairs and parties are also on the agenda. Consider it a way of giving the building back to the people of Rotterdam, with in the back of our minds the fact that in medieval times — according to the church guide — people could buy Rotterdam citizenship by contributing 3000 bricks to the construction of the tower.

The contrast with the confined space at the castle in 's-Heerenberg could hardly be bigger. This is a cathedral-like environment, which means that while singing you feel rather alone in the space, having almost no grip on what the sound you make turns into. When we thought that after yesterday the hard work on getting to terms with acoustics was over, today at Rotterdam we will have to work even harder. Not only are these acoustics surprisingly unhelpful, but also the sheer size of the church is a serious challenge to the intimate setting of the *Tenebrae*-programme. The concert tonight will become an exercise in flexibility and creative adaptation to circumstances.

The engineer and the bricoleur

When all is said and done, the whole of this book is an attempt at portraying aspects of a chant performer's creative explorations, against a backdrop of developments in the world of artistic research. The image, inevitably incomplete, is that of the chant performer as something of an engineer and of a *bricoleur*. Lévi-Strauss describes how both the engineer and the bricoleur cross-examine their resources, and how both make a catalogue "of a previously determined set consisting of theoretical and practical knowledge, of technical means, which restrict the possible solutions".[xxxix] But the bricoleur, as a handy-man, performs his activities with anything at hand (materials, leftovers, certain tools etc.), so to speak

xxxix (Lévi-Strauss, 1962, p. 19)

from odds and ends, whereas the engineer often thinks about concepts and structures first, depending heavily on theory and calculation.

It could be argued that the musician's creativity, and even creativity in general, exists in a limited and limitless dialogue with oneself, with theoretical concepts and the (artistic) material.[xl] As a scientist and an artist, as an engineer and a bricoleur, as a creator and a destroyer, the performer-researcher chooses between a vast array of (im)possibilities — and that in itself is a constraint, often to the point of extending the limits of existing forms of expression.

xl This triangle (the personal story, the concepts and theories, and the artistic material), and the moving around between the three topoi of this triangle, is the basis of Nyrnes's proposal of a method of artistic research. More on this in Chapter Two.