

INVOCATION OF JOY, GLORY, AND GREATNESS

Jamila Javadova

Although born in Lebanon in 1955, Naji Hakim's establishment as a virtuoso performer and composer is closely associated with France and French traditions. Today, he is one of the most prodigiously talented figures on the international organ scene. Hakim is faithful to the ideas and philosophy of his French predecessors, particularly the teachings of legendary Jean Langlais (1907–91), whose contribution to Gregorian chant-based works in France is immense, and the great Olivier Messiaen, who admired Hakim's improvisations and whose personal wish was to see Hakim succeed him at La Trinité in Paris (1993).

In 2003, Naji Hakim wrote a composition entitled *Gregoriana*.¹ This work is based on Gregorian chant, which continues to have an enormous impact on the works of French composers, and for whom it has proved to be a vast source of inspiration and creativity for both improvisational as well as fixed works. At this point in music history the role of *Gregoriana* is particularly significant, as its style and genre continue a 150-year revival of chant in the French organ repertoire.

Hakim's *Gregoriana* displays most of the qualities of the composer's style and embraces techniques of late 20th-century chant-based works. The work was commissioned by Leo Abbott, music director and organist of the Cathedral of the Holy Cross in Boston, whose teachers have included Theodore Marier, Flor Peeters, Naji Hakim, and others. Leo Abbott was one of the first to graduate from the Boston Archdiocesan Choir School, studying under the renowned Gregorian-chant scholar, choirmaster, and teacher Theodore Marier. When Marier died (2001), ending a half century of distinguished service to the Catholic Church and leaving a valuable legacy in his many students and compositions, Leo Abbott commissioned *Gregoriana* in memory of his teacher, to whom he attributed an indefatigable musical spirit and enormous creative output.²

The entire composition of *Gregoriana* is derived from three different Gregorian-chant melodies: Psalm 70:8, *Repleatur os meum laude tua ut possim cantare gaudébunt lábia mea dum cantávero tibi* (Let my mouth be filled with your praise, that I may sing the glory; Thy greatness all the day long),³ from Theodore Marier's *Hymns, Psalms and Spiritual Canticles*;⁴ the Pentecost Alleluia, Psalm 104:30, *Emitte Spiritum tuum et creabuntur: et renovabis faciem terrae* (Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth),⁵ from the *Liber Usualis*;⁶ and *Cor arca legem continens, Non servitus veteris, Sed gratiae, sed veniae, Sed et misericordiae* (O Heart, Thou ark containing the Law, not of the old servitude, but grace, and indulgence, and also mercy), also from the *Liber Usualis*.⁷ (The origins of this final text are still being researched.⁸)

The *Repleatur os meum* is a melody that Leo Abbott and the other choirboys chanted on the day of Investiture, the day when choirboys are officially welcomed and vested with a surplice and a wooden cross.⁹ The chant is still used for this occasion at the Boston Archdiocesan Choir School. The Pentecost Alleluia was one of the favorite chants of Theodore Marier. *Cor arca legem* is a chant from the Feast of the Sacred Heart and it was used in this work because Dr. Marier's wife, Alice Marier, died on that feast day.¹⁰

The language of *Gregoriana* is modal, with a subtle hint of the tonal elements of major and minor systems, but this acts only as sonorous material employed amid modality. Therefore, there is an implicit ambiguity. It seems that Hakim does not consider any of them as an absolute system for his compositions, but rather brings together features of both systems into an original synthesis. The harmonic progressions in *Gregoriana* do not obey traditional principles of tertian harmonies but rather function mainly as color enrichment. The chordal accompaniment of the chant is full of chromatic alterations and includes a greater degree of dissonance. One of the more interesting harmonic features in the whole work is the permanent avoidance of tonal-arriving points. Only toward the end does the listener recognize G major as an expected ending point to the entire work.

The rhythmic movement of *Gregoriana* draws upon ideas of Gregorian chant. The rhythm is free, involves a multi-metric approach, and accommodates the rhythmic flexibility of plainsong. Hakim is not always concerned with preserving the original rhythm of each phrase of the chant. He creates a variety of rhythmic combinations

by using a considerable number of triplets, and frequently uses compound meters such as 7/8 or 10/8, which brings in much rhythmic freedom and reshapes the traditional chant settings into new creations whose originality is justified by the context of the composition.

Structurally, *Gregoriana* consists of two major sections and a Coda. The overall form is shown in the following diagram.

Section I Section II Coda
A – B – A1 C1 – D – C2; C3; C4; C5; C6

Mm. 1–31; 32–46; 47–77; 78–103; 104–18; 119–26; 127–49; 150–65; 166–97; 198–219; 220–37

As the diagram shows, variation is the main principle employed for elaborating upon chant melodies and creating the overall form in *Gregoriana*. The composer creates variations based on plainsong and also repeats previously stated materials, contributing to the cyclical connections and overall unity of the work. For Hakim, variation is not only a structural form but also a technique of expression. By transposing whole sections of a single chant and creating textural variety, he entirely changes the character of the music. For example, the melody of *Repleatur os meum* first presented in Section I is restated three times, twice in the company of arpeggio figuration and once as a solo line with a chordal accompaniment. Section II is almost entirely composed of variations on the Pentecost Alleluia, presented in ever-changing shapes and textures. This results in a unified composition with cyclic devices.

Section I

The first section is in three parts and derives its material from the *Repleatur os meum* chant. It begins with a 31-measure "A" part in arpeggiated melodic figures of 16ths organized in different combinations, in groups of five, six, and seven. These harp-like figures are little exclamations, moving only in an ascending direction and symbolizing the text's invocation of glory, joy, and greatness. It is characterized by open spacing, producing a thin and transparent sound with an overall impressionistic sonority. There is a constant repetition within each measure of the section based on these melodic fragments, which contributes a certain static element to the piece. Hakim uses a dynamic contrast in these repetitions, moving them from manual to manual and creating an echo effect from mezzo-piano to piano and then to pianissimo. This effect is achieved via the manual contrast from Great to Positif to Récit. Soft registration on flute stops deepens the effect as arpeggio figures disappear like smoke. Through close analysis, one can see that the top voice of the figures carries the melody of the Gregorian chant *Repleatur os meum*. The flexibility of shifting from triple to duple meter allows Hakim to motivically shape the melody of the chant by placing pulses within a certain group. With the exception of a few notes, all four phrases of the chant are stated on the upper line of the melody. At mm. 21–25, there is an insertion with no direct relation to the chant melody, blending very naturally and beautifully to the whole idea. (Ex. 1)

However, as aforementioned, the musical language of *Gregoriana* is obscure and rather complex. Along with the implications of G major, such as in measures 2, 4, 6, 10, and others, the material of the bottom line reveals the use of another mode, suggesting a connection to Messiaen's modes of limited transposition. The systematization of scale type, found in the bottom line of the melody in Section I, results in a juxtaposition of a symmetrical tone order of three semitones and one whole tone.

Thus: B C C# D E F F# G A
 1/2t 1/2t 1/2t 1t 1/2t 1/2t 1/2t 1t

The tone order is very close to Messiaen's seventh mode of limited transposition, which he called "charm of impossibilities."¹¹

The middle part, "B" of Section I, consists of a *Cantabile* texture wisely in contrast with part "A." Here, for the first time, the chant *Repleatur os meum* is fully introduced. The main melody is presented with a cornet solo on the Great, with 8' foundation stops

carrying a harmonic accompaniment. Explanation of chords in the accompaniment, from a standpoint of tertian harmony, proves challenging. Chords are never resolved and are frequently ornamented by additional non-harmonic tones. They are enriched with dissonances and appoggiaturas. These chords can be explained only as “color chords” in search of unusual sonorities. The motif of a descending fourth in the pedal, (mm. 34, 37, 42), is significant. This figure reappears more intensely at the later stages of *Gregoriana*, particularly in Variations “C4” and “C5” in Section II. Metric freedom continues to be a dominant principal. Multi-meter accommodates the rhythmic flexibility of the plainsong. (Ex. 2)

Part “A1” is an exact repetition of part “A,” with an equal number of measures (31). However, at this point the arpeggiated melodies are transposed a half-tone higher. Measure 76, which corresponds with measure 30 in part “A,” contains a pedal entrance on G \flat . This pedal point lasts two measures (mm. 30–31) and announces a transition period from Section I to the beginning of Section II (*Molto Stringendo*). The relation of G \flat to the following notes D in the manual at m. 78, and later in the pedal at m. 79, is peculiar and results in a diminished-fourth interval.

Section II

Section II, mm. 78–219, consists of six variations on a Pentecost Alleluia. Multiple repetitions of the pitch D in the first two measures (78–79) create a dramatic crescendo, beginning the first variation on the Alleluia. Then intensely rhythmic variations follow, representing the dance of the mortals on Earth to the eternal joy of the glorified bodies in Heaven.¹² The dance-like scherzo variation “C1” lasts 24 measures and is equally divided into three internal parts with frequent metrical changes. The main motif of this variation is derived from the *jubilus*, the melisma sung to the final vowel of Alleluia. The rhythmic and gestures approach to the chant is apparent. Three internal parts of variation “C1” are placed a fifth apart from each other. Thus, the first occurrence, at m. 80, begins on D, the second, m. 88 on A, and the third, m. 96 on E. The use of an accented minor second interval in the initial phrase “settles” a fourth lower and thus adds intensity into the *jubilus* motif. On a strong and weak beat relationship, this gesture acts as a solution to resolve the tension of the minor second interval. (Ex. 3)

A *Cantabile* episode (mm.104–18) that contrasts with the scherzo, labeled “D,” appears after variation “C1” via a one-measure transitional triplet motif (m.103). Anticipating the entire “*Cantabile*” based on the hymn *Cor arca legem*, for the Feast of the Sacred Heart, this motif is synchronized with the word *Cor* (heart) and has a slight modification of the chant melody with an additional chromatic tone on D \sharp . Appearing at the center of the musical fresco, the *Cantabile* throws a glance toward the Beloved, so to speak.¹³ The main melody here is accompanied by arpeggios in 16th notes, and sweetly registered for Bourdon 8' and Nasard 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ '. The beginning motif of the “D” episode at this time associates with the word *arca*, followed by a complete presentation of the chant in a poetic and lyrical manner meant to symbolize the image of Alice Marier. (Ex. 4)

The variation “C2” begins at m.119, bringing back the motivic presentation of the variation “C1,” framing *Cor arca legem* and thus creating a three-part form. Measures 127–28 mark the transition toward variation “C3.” For the first time, the entire opening phrase of the *Alleluia* chant is presented in a slightly modified version. The variation ends with a *fortissimo* cadential passage at mm. 141–47 with elements of a “plagal” cadence in G major; the major chords on G and C are juxtaposed, contributing brilliance and grandeur to the passage.

At m. 148, the C-major triad marks the shift toward variation “C4,” conceived as a march. This time Hakim uses a four-part harmonization principal, where motifs from the chant appear on the top and bottom melody lines in the manual part. The descending fourth in the pedal of the internal “B” of Section I reappears here, as a C–G ostinato in eighths, according the music a machine-like character and at the same time continuing the bass line of the “plagal” cadence of the previous variation.

Variation “C5,” which begins in m.167, is similar in character to variation “C4” and shifts the main motif a minor third up. The pedal brings up the fourth motif, E \flat to B \flat , which is now presented in quarter-note values, a rhythmic augmentation of the previous eighths from variation “C4.” At m. 197, the music abruptly moves away from the mood of variation “C5” and into that of variation “C6,” which is nearly identical to variation “C3.” The main difference is in the final cadential passage: after several attempts at using a “plagal” cadence, the section resorts to an “authentic” one, emphasizing the note D as the dominant of G major (mm. 218–19).

Example 1

Moderato 12/8

The score for Example 1 consists of five systems of piano accompaniment. Each system has a treble and bass clef. The music features arpeggiated figures in the right hand and a descending fourth motif in the left hand. Dynamics include *pp* and *f*. The tempo is Moderato 12/8.

Example 2

Cantabile 12/8

F. H. French from F. R.P.
G. Gervais solo

The score for Example 2 consists of five systems of piano accompaniment. Each system has a treble and bass clef. The music features a lyrical melody in the right hand and arpeggiated accompaniment in the left hand. Dynamics include *pp* and *f*. The tempo is Cantabile 12/8.

Example 3

Musical score for Example 3, featuring Gregorian chant fragments in soprano, alto, and tenor parts with piano accompaniment. The score is in 4/4 time and includes dynamic markings such as *Andante* and *Allegro*.

Example 4

Musical score for Example 4, featuring Gregorian chant fragments in soprano, alto, and tenor parts with piano accompaniment. The score is in 4/4 time and includes dynamic markings such as *Andante* and *Allegro*.

Example 5

Musical score for Example 5, featuring Gregorian chant fragments in soprano, alto, and tenor parts with piano accompaniment. The score is in 4/4 time and includes dynamic markings such as *Andante* and *Allegro*.

Coda

The Coda (*Con fuoco*) (mm. 220–37) is a triumphal ending to the piece. It leans toward the dominant tone in the pedal, a trend that is counteracted by the non-harmonic embellishments in the upper parts. The most effective among these embellishments is the asymmetrical mode in the soprano, repeated three times in different ranges, from treble to bass. (Ex. 5)

The climax of the Coda (mm. 230–31) brings back the motifs from the *Repleatur os meum* chant borrowed from the Theodore Marier hymnal. Through this reprise, Hakim introduces symmetry between the first and last sections of *Gregoriana*, therefore shaping it in an arch-like format and effectively bringing it to its end. The final section of the work is written in the manner of early-20th-century French organ music, referencing with particular force the style of “Luttes” from *Trois Danses* (1937–39) by Jehan Alain. Once again, the tonal emphasis falls on D and its leading tone, C#. After two attempts, D successfully resolves into the tonic triad of G major.

Conclusion

The influence and impact of Gregorian chant melodies on the compositions and improvisations of French composers in the second half of the 20th century is enormous. The use of chant was, and continues to be, a feature that fascinated composers throughout their entire creative life. Their personal relationship with the source has instilled in these composers a keen understanding and love for chant’s inherent beauty, which they in turn have convincingly employed in their music. Gregorian melodies often carry a symbolic weight of their own, in that they transmit to the listeners the religious message coded into the words, therefore suggesting a program for an otherwise purely instrumental piece. Chant, its text, mode, and character contain programmatic connotations, helping to express emotions and convey religious meanings.

Naji Hakim’s *Gregoriana* represents an ideal example of late-20th-century chant-based works for the organ. Its form is simple and its ideas are clear, therefore gaining true depth of emotions. Both the concept of the composition and its aural realization remain profoundly touching to the religious listener.

During an interview in May of 1986 with author Kathleen Thomerson, Jean Langlais expressed unhappiness about the future of Gregorian chant in our culture. “Today people aren’t interested in that . . . Messiaen and I find it terrible and we are pessimistic.”¹⁴ Perhaps today, after hearing Naji Hakim’s *Gregoriana*, he could have reconsidered this thought. The fact that this challenging work reveals Hakim’s deep knowledge of Gregorian chant and retains a high appeal for present-day listeners of diverse backgrounds could prove Langlais wrong and contribute to further a revival of chant.

NOTES

1. Naji Hakim, *Gregoriana* (Paris: Alphonse Leduc, 2004).
2. Leo Abbott, online correspondence with the author, October 2005.
3. Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger, eds., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 708.
4. Theodore Marier, *Hymns, Psalms and Spiritual Canticles* (Belmont, Mass.: BACS Publishing Co., 1983), p. 554.
5. May and Metzger, p. 736.
6. *The Liber Usualis with Introduction and Rubrics in English* (Great Falls, Mont.: St. Bonaventure Publications, 1997), p. 879.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 967.
8. La Trobe University Library Medieval Database, www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/MMDB/Alist/Afile.c31.htm, Feb. 22, 2007.
9. Leo Abbott, online correspondence with the author, October 2005.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Olivier Messiaen, *The Technique of My Musical Language*, Vol. 1, trans. John Satterfield (Paris: Alphonse Leduc, 1956), p. 13.
12. Hakim, *Gregoriana*, Preface.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Kathleen Thomerson, *Jean Langlais: A Bio-Biography* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1998), p. 18.

Musical examples reprinted by permission of the publisher.