

Florid Organum and Melismatic Organum: Their Compositional Strategies and Relationships to Theoretical Writings

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Aquitanian Polyphony is supposedly the earliest musical repertory of florid organum. So-called *organum per se* portions of Parisian two-part organa are called melismatic organum. In both cases, little information on how these melismas are constructed is found in contemporary treatises. Although the Vatican organum treatise seems to try to explain concrete methods of melisma formation, the explanation is made by only musical examples, not verbally. This case testifies to the lack of development in verbal explanation of how florid or melismatic organum is composed. Then is it possible to know the compositional strategies from extant musical repertories? To answer this question, I analyzed pieces from the Aquitanian repertory and the Parisian *Magnus liber organi*.

In the case of florid organum, the basic rule of construction seems to be an intervallic progression, consisting of mainly contrary motion and sometimes parallel motion, mostly using consonances. This does not perfectly agree with what is discussed in contemporary treatises, though this discrepancy is fairly understandable considering the shift in voice-leading principles. Common building blocks to form melismas are used but their frequencies are different from piece to piece, maybe reflecting the heterogeneity of this repertory.

In the case of melismatic organum, however, this theory does not seem applicable. Though it is possible to find in Notre-Dame pieces the common building blocks to form melismas used in Aquitanian polyphony, the principle of composition seems radically different from the Aquitanian principle. The predominance of consonances is still felt but the distance from one tenor note to another is stretched so far that the voice leading between them becomes almost meaningless. Instead organal-voice melismas seem to be composed based on a tetrachord chosen for each tenor note. Theoretical procedures of intervallic progression seem not to play a significant role in melismatic organum sections of this music.