

Composing out a chant: Chant framework as a model for middleground structure in Parisian two-part organa

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The pitch structure of the duplum voice of the held-note section of Parisian two-part organa has not been explained in detail, probably because it is easier to determine its pitches than its rhythm. This paper analyzes the pitch structure assuming it has three layers: background, middleground, and foreground structures. Although it is anachronistic to apply Schenkerian analysis to medieval music, some of its ideas, especially that of layers, could help us understand how Parisian two-part organa are composed.

Each Parisian two-part organum has a chant as its backbone, and it is comparable to *Ursatz* in a sense that the chant is the most basic core structure to be composed out. On the other hand, stereotypical figures such as a descent on a scale or a sequential repetition, seem to be an object of interest to medieval musicians and are therefore considered to be foreground incidents. Vatican Organum Treatise enumerates the patterns of melisma formation and some other music treatises mention these stereotypical figures.

Is it possible to find significant middleground structure between the two layers? The author points out that most of the melismas in the held-note section are composed with frameworks of the fourth and fifth comparable to the ambitus in the plainchant theory and proposes to call it a “chant framework model.” This does not seem to be a conscious step because no mention is found in contemporary treatises. Rather, the extensive experience of chant singing of the musicians who nurtured this repertory may have made them unconsciously adopt this compositional strategy. In addition, this phenomenon might reflect the particular resonance felt by the singers’ bodies, because the notes at both the ends of the framework correspond to overtones of the tenor notes.