

The Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC)

announces a Lecture

by

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capturing sound, designing notation, writing music

Systems of musical notation invented in the early middle ages form a basis for later western notations: the line from these to the twenty-first century is unbroken (unlike the notations of Greek antiquity, or the more recent notations of other cultures), even if the needs of later periods were not at all like those experienced between 800 and 900. How the makers of those early notations heard articulated musical sound, into what separate elements they chose to break it down, and which of these elements were then recorded in writing are all questions of relevance to anyone interested in notations and in those ways in which makers of music communicate their ideas.

It was certainly in the hundred years between 800 and 900 that musical notation consisting of 'neumes' was first invented and then developed to an eventually quite complex system: the most refined notations (visible in writing of *circa* 900) can be described as written records of melodic rhetoric, reflecting typical Carolingian concerns with clarity of expression. The extent to which these notations had been rendered capable of carrying subtlety of meaning as well as calligraphically stylish has prompted me to consider how such ways of writing music had been achieved by 900.

Juxtaposition of those various types of musical notation which are visible by *circa* 900 allows examination of their graphic relations, of what is graphically similar or dissimilar, and their sharing of techniques for modifying basic signs. Using a strict methodology of comparison, it has been possible to work out stages of influence and exchange between these notations, allowing new perceptions of what came first and how it was then changed. And most of the conclusions have surprised me, since they were so unsuspected! This exploration of early neumatic notations has led to an explanation of how and why this variety of musical scripts was developed during the ninth century—a period which has hitherto remained rather obscure in histories of musical notation, despite its supreme interest.

Thursday, 21 May 2015 at 6 pm

Room 0001, CSMC