Chapter 2 Performance Reflections

The four songs examined in Chapter 2—Boethius *metrum* "Tunc me discussa," eleventh-century *alba* of Fleury-sur-Loire, troubadour Guiraut de Bornelh's *alba* "Reis glorios," and troubadour Peire de Corbian's Marian hymn "Domna, dels angels regina"—evoke/invoke celestial bodies which emit a sonorous light, either resulting in or from en*light*enment. They not only call to the mind of the reader/listener a celestial presence, but also call out to the heavenly bodies themselves, which in turn resound vis-à-vis vibrant, sonorous light. In each instance, light aurally embodied in sound creates something akin to what we might perceive as a dramatic scene, and our "operatic reading" of the pieces treats them as such,[1] emphasizing the dawning of perceivable light and the transition from darkness to brightness and the correlative point of enlightenment illuminated within each scene. We do not mean "operatic" in the sense of vocal technique or timbral affect—though, at strategic moments, we sought a certain "brightness" of tone quality while performing the songs—nor do we intend to draw associations between expected/stereotypical operatic musical aesthetic and medieval song. Rather, the term, as Kay writes, "invites us to rethink textuality and the reading process each in relation to the other, sharing with 'reading with one's ears' an attention to sound but articulating it with other material features of manuscript pages and their potential for imaginary or actual performance."[2] In this chapter, an evocation of light emanating from celestial bodies is another "material feature" at hand, and our dramatic scenes, as it were, seek to create images in the mind of the listener as a result of this resounding light.

[1] For more on the concept of "operatic reading," see the Introduction to *Medieval Song*, and pp. 64 and 82 in Chapter 2.

[2] *Medieval Song*, 11.

"Tunc me discussa," Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, 1 m. 3

The Boethius figure who gives voice to "Tunc me discussa" gradually awakens and regains strength over the course of the song as his epiphanic encounter with Philosophy unfolds.[3] Our performance of the *metrum*, at first reflective, as if emerging little by little through a fog of clouds and shadows, highlights this gradual reawakening through both its pacing and the interpretive choices made while deciphering the adiastematic neume notation found in the mid-eleventh-century Cambridge Songs manuscript (CA Gg. V. 35). To the former point, the recording on this website allows space for contemplation and reconfiguration of the senses as the Latin meter dispels the shadows surrounding Boethius. Gradually growing in volume and intensity, befitting not only the text, but also the cosmological environment that contextualizes the scene,[4] "[t]he song leaps up in the prisoner as the inner light of reason quickens within him, takes up the singing of the light's source that illumines him, and is invigorated by it."[5] By the seventh line, when Boreas (the north wind) beats the night away and unlocks daylight, the performance reaches a strong dynamic level to highlight the almost violent depiction of illumination. And, in the ninth line, when Phoebus (the sun) vibrantly darts out to strike Boethius' awe-filled eyes with light, an audible *leaping out* of declamatory texture highlights the dramatic point of en*light*enment in the scene. Finally, a subtly-but-gradually brightening timbre is employed throughout as a further embodiment of Boethius' reinvigoration at the impact of Phoebus' *lumen*.

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[3] See Chapter 1 and the opening of Chapter 2, *Medieval Song*, 32-5 and 52-4, for detail.

[4] See *Medieval Song*, 53 and intermittent pages throughout the rest of the chapter for more on this cosmological environment through analysis of Martianus Capella's *Marriage of Mercury and Philology*, Fulgentius's *Mythologies*, and Macrobius's *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*.

[5] *Medieval Song*, 53.

To the latter point—enlightenment enhanced by interpretation of neume notation—I owe a debt of gratitude to Sam Barrett, whose seminal work on the Boethius *metra* alongside Benjamin Bagby and ensemble Sequentia provides a structural launching point for interpretation of the notation.[6] According to Barrett's performance edition of these Boethius *metra*, the neumes ascribed to the opening of "Tunc me discussa" imply a melodic contour similar to a psalm tone, and its overall profile coordinates with two roughly contemporary exempla: Tone 7 recorded for the Magnificat and Benedictus canticles in the Worcester Antiphoner (Worcester, Chapter Library, F. 160) and the Canticle of Azariah from the twelfth-century Bellelay Gradual (Porrentruy, Bibliothèque cantonale jurassienne 18).[7] My performance edition follows Barrett and Bagby, using the aforementioned solemn tone and canticle as models for reconstruction, with a few noteworthy alternate interpretations. First, I often treat the *pes* as implying stepwise motion instead of the interval of a third, promoting a fluid texture that creates an atmosphere of introspection and gradual reawakening. Second, I generally treat the *virga* as a note that moves away from the previous one and the syllabic *punctum* as one that stays the same as the one before it, regardless of height relation to the previous note. However, when the *punctum* is found within a ligature, I observe height relation. The only exception to this approach is found in the *punctum* above the syllable "te-" of "tenebrae," which I have interpreted as a descending pitch due to its relative low position in between the surrounding ligatures. Third, and most significantly, my reading of the neumes above "redit" shows an additional *virga*, so I do not treat this passage as an exact repetition of the notation above "discussa" as Barrett and Bagby do. This requires a shift

[6] See Sam Barrett, "Creative Practice and the Limits of Knowledge in Reconstructing Songs from Boethius' 'On the Consolation of Philosophy,'" *Journal of Musicology* 36, no. 3 (2019), 261-94; and the correlative website with performance edition, https://boethius.mus.cam.ac.uk/. We are further grateful to Dr. Barrett for his consultation and supportive commentary as we worked on this particular Boethius *metrum*.

[7] https://boethius.mus.cam.ac.uk/files/boethius_cambridge_songs_performing_edition_opt.pdf, 26.

downward of *tessitura* for this passage in order to accommodate the heightened *virga* at the top of the melismatic figure to avoid an excessively high note that, to my ears, does not sound pleasing or appropriate. Consequently, the *tessitura* of this passage remains closer to that of the correlative passage found in the Canticle of Azaria, Porrentruy 18, which lends credence to the interpretation and again enhances the inward character of the *metrum*. Lastly, in lines 3, 5, 7, and 9, I shape the melodic contour of the second through fourth words more closely after the solemn Tone 7 in Worcester 160, introducing the pitch “e” after the high “f” in order to accommodate the extra syllables in those lines. To my ears, and in terms of "story-telling," this allows the melodic contour to gradually brighten in tandem with Boethius' progressive en*light*enment.

It is important to note that, when reconstructing a piece with neume notation that only suggests melodic contour and does not prescribe specific pitch, there is no alternative but to allow interpretive subjectivity to inform one’s decisions. The choices presented here are neither better nor worse than those settled on by Barrett and Bagby, nor are they more or less correct. Interpretation of the notation has room for multiple possibilities, and it is largely up to the interpreting performer and/or scholar to make choices based on a well-informed perspective in combination with personal taste. My reconstruction of this song simply offers a slightly more reflective approach as an alternative to its predecessor, but continues in the vein of dramatic/rhetorical interpretation based on contemporary models established by Barrett, Bagby, and ensemble Sequentia.

Two dawn songs: the *alba* of Fleury-sur-Loire, "Phebi claro nondum orto iubare," and troubadour *alba*, "Reis glorios verays lums e clardatz" by Guiraut de Bornelh (fl. 1140-1200)

The analysis in Chapter 2 of the Fleury-sur-Loire *alba*, "Phebi claro nondum orto iubare" reveals "repeated interplay between light and voice,"[8] as calls from a lookout (*spiculator*) and a herald (*preco*) who both act as human proxies/surrogates for Aurora announce the impending arrival of the sun in stanzas 1 and 2. Kay's analysis of stanza 3 clarifies the *alba's* "cosmological references [thereby showing that] by ascribing life and breath to heavenly bodies, [the *alba*] in fact introduces a third articulation of light with voice."[9] The entire celestial realm and its constellations—Aurora, the Great Bear (Arcturus), the Seven Oxen (Septentrio)—along with Aurora's surrogates, sing as if giving voice to the dawn itself, ushering in the illumination of the sun. Our performance reconstruction incorporates multiple voices to bring the unfolding drama to life, interpolating instrumental accompaniment throughout and polyphonic organum in the third stanza to sonically animate this menagerie of terrestrial and celestial bodies, wind/breath/voice, and light.

With its repeated refrain in early Occitan as opposed to the surrounding Latin verses, the Fleury *alba* conjoins voice and light into the vernacular.[10] "Light and/as word should bring understanding to those it addresses—unless they are irredeemably plunged in darkness…The singing voice in the alba is a response to and request for illumination, and a warning against ignoring it, in both its literal and spiritual senses."[11] As in the Boethius *metrum* above, the interpretive decisions required to reconstruct the musical notation that accompanies the Fleury *alba* underscore, in our performance, the dichotomy between light and darkness. The heightened

[8] *Medieval Song*, 58.
[9] Ibid.
[10] *Medieval Song*, 82.
[11] *Medieval Song*, 77.

diastematic neume notation found above the text in the manuscript gives an impression of melodic contour but does not prescribe exact pitch.[12] My interpretation of the notation hinges not only on the relative height of each marking above the text, but also on the horizontal dash with no vertical stroke that is consistently found in the lowest position above the text. I have taken this low horizontal dash as an indication of the lowest note (in the modern transcription here, the pitch "c"), setting up a C-E axis throughout. To my knowledge, there is no way to know if that is the intended function of the marking, nor whether or not the relative height of any marking is consistent from one line to the next (or one syllable to the next, for that matter.) In any case, establishing this circular C-E axis in verse lines where the open cadences on the pitch "e" propel the singer into the subsequent line creates an unsettling effect that opens space for musical light and shade to come in and out, as if the dawn flickers into brightness at the break of day. Assuming the low horizontal dash as the lowest note and that relative neume height indicates pitch somewhat consistently, the refrain lines rise a considerable distance above their lowest point on the word "sol" ("sun"), intensifying the impending illumination the sun will bring. Interestingly, the final refrain line (15), appears with only half as many syllables/neumes as the previous two iterations, causing a tonal shift at the end of the song and, in this interpretation, reinforcing the sun's authority by cadencing on the pitch "f" for the first-and-only time in the three stanzas and emphasizing this final point of sonic en*light*enment.

To enhance the multisensory experience evoked above, our recording of this *alba* is presented here with original artwork by Benjamin Thorpe. Drawing inspiration from medieval astronomical and cosmological imagery, Thorpe visually represents the celestial resounding of

[12] For more on the notation, see John Haines, *Medieval Song in Romance Languages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 203-7. Again, we are grateful to Sam Barrett for his supportive consultation on this reconstruction.

dawn in a painting inspired by Kay's close readings from this chapter and by the reconstructed audio performance by Concordian Dawn.

The Fleury *alba* music-video is joined together here with a video recording of one of the most frequently performed and well-known medieval songs, the *alba* "Reis glorios, verays lums e clardatz" by twelfth-century troubadour Giraut de Bornelh. When contemplating the notion of producing yet another audio recording of this piece—one which has already benefitted from numerous high-quality audio productions—the thought was rather unappealing and did not seem like a worthy contribution to the field. Yet, the close reading given to it in Chapter 2 is so fundamental to the overall trajectory of the chapter and book that it seemed insufficient to neglect it. So, we decided to produce a video recording that presents the song as if it were a sung dramatic monologue in an effort not only to contribute a fresh perspective in performance,[13] but also to physically/visually embody a process of illumination through singing and acting, as well as to intensify its moment of enlightenment—the dramatic unit beginning in line 29 when the lyric "eu" realizes, despite his best efforts, that all hope for the culmination of his desired companionship is lost. Our combined video of both dawn songs "is designed to bring out the similarities and differences between them. The voices of the former emanate from a windswept, animal-inhabited cosmos, while the singer of the latter, placed in an earthly setting, appeals alternately to God and his companion, his dramatic intensity ranging between religious devotion, urgent solicitude, and ultimate exasperation."[14] The lyric "eu" sings *to* the light/God, sings *about* the light/dawn, and begs *for* the light/enlightenment. Our recording is offered in an effort to bring to the fore all three elements of this luminary soundscape in visual performance.

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[13] My sincere gratitude goes to director A. Scott Parry for consultation and coaching on this scene.
[14] *Medieval Song*, 77.

"Domna, dels angels regina" by Peire de Corbian (1205-72)

Like the previously discussed dawn songs, Peire de Corbian's Marian hymn, "Domna, dels angels regina," conjures celestial imagery to, again, combine voice and light in vernacular word. All three songs share "an ambition, rooted in the study of the arts, to unite understanding of cosmology with vernacular eloquence,"[15] and Corbian's hymn serves as a skillful reworking of Latin hymn traditions in an invocation to Mary, mother of God asking for protection, vision, and security. Contextualized by Corbian's own *Thezaur*, which "elaborates a courtly conception of song that rests on the double foundations of Christian belief and curricular knowledge in which rhetoric, astronomy, and literary studies predominate," the lyric "eu" of the Marian hymn "bathes in blend of sublime grace and academic competence."[16] Our performance of "Domna, dels angels regina" is motivated by the light of the stars in combination with a graceful, learned repose.

As no musical notation exists for this hymn text, we created a new contrafact by borrowing the melody of Guiraut Riquier's "Karitatz et amors e fes," which itself shares musical material with Bernart de Ventadorn's "Can vei la lauzeta mover." The texts of both these musical models decry deceit, the Riquier particularly so, claiming that the whole world is overtaken by it. Strikingly, the opening lines of "Karitatz" call on the very essence of Christianity—charity ("karitatz"), love ("amors"), faith ("fes"), justice ("drechura"), uprightness ("lialtatz"), discernment ("chauzimens"), piety ("pietatz"), knowledge ("conoyssensa"), and mercy ("merces")—as a means to denounce the state of the world, claiming that these defining characteristics "are all almost laid low, because the world is overtaken by deceit to such an

[15] *Medieval Song*, 54.
[16] *Medieval Song*, 82-3.

extent that most people practice it openly and scarcely anyone, small or great, can refuse it."[17] Similarly, the opening two stanzas of "Domna, dels angels regina" call on Mary, who from a Christian perspective bore salvation into the world, in a plea for vision and security through life's tempests. What Riquier laments, Corbian has the wisdom to rise above through vision (i.e. enlightenment), faith, and expertise.

[17] "…son ab pauc del tot abatut, / quar le muns es perpres d'enjan, / tant que·l pus l'obran a saubut, / qu'a penas n'esdic pauc ni gran." Translation by Sarah Kay, Occitan edited by Monica Langobardi in *L'octau vers d'en Gr. Riquier, l'an MCCLXXVI, en jenier.*