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The Evolution of Organ Improvisation in the Context of Using Melodies Based on Modal Scales

Description of the Artistic Work

Doctoral dissertation prepared under the supervision of
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Statement of the Supervisor and Assistant Supervisor of the Doctoral Dissertation

I hereby declare that this dissertation has been prepared under my supervision and confirm that it meets the requirements for submission in doctoral proceedings.

Date 04.03.2026 **Supervisor's signature** Michał Martin

Author's Statement

Being aware of legal responsibility, I hereby declare that this doctoral dissertation entitled "The Evolution of Organ Improvisation in the Context of Using Melodies Based on Modal Scales" has been written independently by me under the supervision of my advisor and does not contain any content obtained in violation of applicable regulations.

I also declare that the submitted work has not previously been the subject of any procedures related to obtaining the degree of Doctor of Arts.

I declare that this version of the dissertation is identical to the attached electronic version.

I also declare that the artistic work constituting an integral part of the doctoral dissertation was carried out under the following circumstances:

- Date of performance/recording: 5 December 2025
- Place of performance/recording: Church of the Holy Family, 9/11 Rozwadowska Street, 03-628 Warsaw
- Performer: Patryk Podwojski
- Sound engineer: Tomasz Drążkowski

Date 04.03.2026 **Author's signature** Patryk Podwojski

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Chapter I – Introduction

Organ improvisation has played an important role in the liturgy of Christian churches from the Middle Ages to the present day. The techniques of improvisation evolved alongside the development of counterpoint, harmony, and melodic practice. Over the course of this process, a gradual shift occurred from simple structures, such as the organum technique, towards more complex contrapuntal textures. The practice of organ improvisation included the ornamentation and elaboration of melodies, and its form gradually reached a level comparable to the contemporary understanding of chant improvisation.

The principal component of the artistic work presented here is a recording of organ improvisations. The aim of this dissertation is to demonstrate the evolution of organ improvisation through an analysis of the author's artistic work in the context of the use of modal melodic sources. These improvisations do not merely reconstruct historical styles; rather, they form a conscious synthesis of tradition and the author's individual musical language. In this way, the continuity and transformation of musical traditions are demonstrated while simultaneously emphasising their significance both in the past and in contemporary organ performance practice. A detailed commentary accompanies the artistic work.

I.1 The Origins and Incorporation of Organ Music into the Liturgy

In the Western Church, the organ was officially accepted by Pope Vitalian in 666. However, the technical development of the instrument meant that it began to be constructed on a larger scale in churches only in the thirteenth century. Episcopal synods and the general councils of the late Middle Ages drew attention to the role of the organ in the liturgy, which contributed to its wider dissemination[1].

The two great traditions of the Church — Gregorian chant and organ music — developed simultaneously and also influenced one another. It is worth noting the origins of Gregorian chant itself. The emergence of Romano-Frankish chant (later referred to as Gregorian

[1] ks. M. Białkowski - O*rgany w chorale gregoriańskim*, w: *Musica in ecclesia. 10 lat Zakładu Muzyki Kościelnej Akademii Muzycznej im. I.J. Paderewskiego w Poznaniu*, red. T. Brodniewicz, H. Kostrzewska, Poznań 2008, p. 108.

chant) is dated to the turn of the seventh and eighth centuries[2]. Contrary to popular belief, the term "Gregorian chant" does not refer directly to the activity of Pope Gregory the Great (590–604), although he played an important role in the development of liturgical singing[3]. St Gregory gathered and organised earlier traditions of church music, such as Mass chants, antiphons, and responsories, which derived from the Old Roman repertoire — predating the formation of what is now known as Gregorian chant[4].

The earliest surviving references to improvisation date from the ninth century. In the *Musica enchiriadis* of an anonymous author, the concept of the art of improvisation appears in the context of polyphonic music[5]. Guido of Arezzo[6], meanwhile, as the first known author of a treatise addressing improvisation, introduced the concept of *copula*[7]. The term described a technique of combining voices in a more flexible and melodic manner than in parallel organum. In this sense, *copula* may be understood as an early manifestation of improvisatory contrapuntal practice. During the Renaissance, numerous forms related to improvisational practice emerged, including intonations, fantasies, toccatas, and variations[8].

One of the earliest functions linking Gregorian chant with the organ was the provision of the proper pitch to the cantors before the beginning of a piece. Improvisation had a practical application, for instance, in the creation of the aforementioned intonations. Their purpose was to establish the appropriate vocal register for the cantors[9].

I.2 Alternatim Practice and the Role of the Organ in Liturgical Music

The practice of *alternatim* — consisting in the alternating performance of liturgical chant by the choir and the organist — has roots much earlier than some studies suggest.

[2] M. Sławecki, *Liber Vigrensis: ad usum christefidelium*, w: Dom Pracy Twórczej, red. M. Sławecki, Wigry 2009, p. 157.
[3] Pontyfikat papieża św. Grzegorza Wielkiego przypadł od 590 roku do jego śmierci w 604 roku.
[4] M. Sławecki, *Magnificat w wybranych przykładach muzycznych*, Colloquia Litteraria UKSW 1/2015, p. 40.
[5] R. Perucki, *Improwizacja organowa*, Wydawnictwo Akademii Muzycznej im. St. Moniuszki w Gdańsku, Gdańsk 2015, p. 11.
[6] Guido z Arezzo (ok. 991-1033) was an Italian Benedictine monk and music theorist who revolutionized the teaching of liturgical chant. His most important work, *Micrologus*, contained groundbreaking ideas on the theory of melody, including the classification of chant into *cantus prosaicus* (analogous to prose) and *cantus metricus* (analogous to metrical poetry), which had significant importance for the development of medieval music. Guido is also credited with introducing the four-line staff and the system of solmization based on the syllables ut–re–mi–fa–sol–la, which greatly facilitated the learning of singing and contributed to the development of musical notation.
[7] R. Perucki, *Improwizacja organowa*, op. cit., p. 11.
[8] Ibidem., p. 12.
[9] ks. M. Białkowski, O*rgany w chorale gregoriańskim,* op. cit., p. 108.

Alternatim involving the organ already existed in the thirteenth century, representing a development of earlier vocal practices used in the Eastern Churches[10]. Rev. Piotr Wiśniewski, in his article *Praktyka Alternatim w rękopiśmiennym Cantionale z Jasnej Góry*, states:

> The alternating vocal-instrumental manner of performance was adopted from a purely vocal alternatim practice ("in turn," Lat. *alter ad alterum*). It originated in the Eastern Churches, where it referred to the performance of psalm verses, hymns, sequences, and responsorial chants by two choirs — or by a single choir divided into two parts — singing alternately. This manner of singing was adopted by the Catholic Church for the performance of Gregorian chant. A more elaborate form of singing by two alternating choirs accompanied by instruments was also known. In the late Middle Ages, the word *alternatim* referred to the alternating performance of two or more equal choirs during the liturgy, or to the alternation between monophonic and polyphonic sections. Before reaching its final form, this technique underwent an evolution through various stages[11].

In the literature one can find opinions that it is difficult to identify a clear moment of transition from vocal alternatim practice to instrumental alternatim[12]. The process occurred gradually and was in a certain sense connected with broader performance tendencies of the period. Susi Ferfoglia points out that musicians had long attempted to imitate the human voice through instrumental playing, often improvising on a given melody and enriching it with free counterpoint[13]. Numerous source descriptions confirm the use of improvised organ verses in dialogue with chant performance[14]. However, the sources do not always clearly distinguish whether they refer to the alternation between chant and organ or to instrumental accompaniment of vocal parts, as these terms were sometimes used interchangeably[15].

Alternatim practice experienced further dynamic development in the sixteenth century, particularly in the Mediterranean region. Within this technique, fragments of Gregorian chant were performed alternately by the choir and the organist, allowing a flexible interweaving of singing with instrumental improvisations or compositions. The technique was employed by composers such as Girolamo Frescobaldi (1583–1643), Costanzo Antegnati (1549–1624), Giovanni Battista Fasolo (1600–1664), Giovanni Salvatore (1611–1688), and Claudio Merulo (1533–1604) [16]. In alternatim practice, an important role was also played by seventeenth-century French composers, including Guillaume-Gabriel Nivers (1632–1714), Nicolas de Grigny (1672–1703), and François Couperin (1668–1733). In the Polish context, particular

[10] P. Wiśniewski, *Praktyka alternatim w rękopiśmiennym cantionale (r. 583) z Jasnej Góry*, Teologia i Człowiek, T. 39, no. 3, p. 128.
[11] Ibidem.
[12] Ibidem., p. 130.
[13] S. Ferfoglia, *Msza alternatim we włoskiej i francuskiej muzyce liturgicznej XVII wieku*, Kraków 2011, p. 10.
[14] P. Wiśniewski, *Praktyka alternatim*, op. cit., p. 130.
[15] S. Ferfoglia, *Msza alternatim*, op. cit., p. 27.
[16] ks. M. Białkowski, O*rgany w chorale gregoriańskim,* op. cit., p. 113.

attention should be given to the sixteenth-century organ tablature of Jan of Lublin, which constitutes one of the most important testimonies to the use of alternatim practice in the liturgy of that period.

In the *Caeremoniale Episcoporum* of Pope Clement VIII (1600), the moments at which the organ could be used were described in detail. Miłosz Aleksandrowicz, in his article *Organy w potrydenckiej liturgii na podstawie Caeremoniale Episcoporum (1600)*, writes:

> The *Caeremoniale Episcoporum* states that during the solemn Mass (*Missa solemnis*), the organ alternates with the choir in the Kyrie eleison and Gloria at the beginning of the liturgy, and later plays after the Epistle and during the Offertory. Subsequently, the organist performs alternatim the Sanctus, later playing "in a solemn and gentle manner" during the elevation of the Blessed Sacrament, then alternatim the Agnus Dei, followed by a verse before the Postcommunion prayer and finally at the end of the Mass. During the Credo the organ was required to remain silent, since — as stated by the authors of the document — it was performed by the choir "in the proper tone." During funeral Masses and services there was no place for organ music or polyphonic singing, as only liturgical monody was considered appropriate, resounding on ferial days during Advent and Lent. A valuable complement to these facts is Chapter VIII of Book II, concerning the solemn Mass celebrated by a bishop. The ceremony began with the bishop's entrance, during which there was time for organ playing until he reached the altar. The document does not specify the exact nature of this playing. Once the episcopal procession reached the altar and the clergy took their places, the organ fell silent and the choir began the Introit[17].

Similar regulations appear in the document of the Holy See *Caerimoniale Ordo Romanus ad usum Fratrum Ord. Min.* (1640), addressed to the Franciscan Order[18]. It indicates that in situations where the number of brothers was small, the Credo could be performed alternately by choir and organ. In such cases, however, the organ had to be accompanied by two cantors clearly reciting the parts not sung by the choir.

Alternatim practice on the one hand granted the organist freedom of improvisation, while on the other required adherence to specific rules. Scores often contained only incipits — initial phrases indicating the mode of the sung section. Such notation provided organists with considerable performance freedom while allowing them to demonstrate their improvisational skill.

In the previously mentioned article by Rev. Piotr Wiśniewski, an important conclusion appears:

> A large part of organ literature, at least until the end of the seventeenth century, was subordinated to liturgical function. Alternatim technique was the most important and oldest manner of using the organ. Organ music did not serve as accompaniment to Gregorian chant; rather, the organ performed specific verses in place of the choir. Thus, Gregorian chant — which had played a significant role in the liturgy

[17] M. Aleksandrowicz, *Organy w potrydenckiej liturgii na podstawie Caeremoniale Episcoporum (1600),* w: Studia Organologica, t. 3, red. M. Szymanowicz, Lublin 2009, p. 258-259.
[18] ks. M. Białkowski, O*rgany w chorale gregoriańskim,* op. cit., p. 114.

of the Catholic Church from the very beginning — became an unquestionable source of inspiration for organ liturgical music. By the late Middle Ages it served to interweave psalm verses, canticles, and the Mass Gloria with instrumental renditions of their melodies. In this way alternatim practice emerged, based on chant and freely improvising Gregorian motives. Its use in the liturgy also imposed specific technical and artistic demands on organists, as organ verses gradually assumed diverse forms, sometimes independent from the Gregorian model, yet remaining within a given mode or preparing the proper tone for the next sung section[19].

According to historical accounts, organ improvisations were not always performed according to established principles. There were cases in which organists did not observe the correct tone or melodic course of the *cantus firmus*. In response to such situations, Bernardino Bottazzi, in the preface *Alli benigni lettori* to his work *Choro et Organo, libro primo* published in Venice in 1614, noted that he decided to notate full organ parts in order to ensure the correct performance of alternatim practice[20].

Scores from this period are known in which only chant incipits were written down, leaving further musical elaboration to the organist. Intabulations — transcriptions of vocal works written in tablature notation — held an important place in the organ repertoire of the time. Equally significant were *preambula* or preludes, which organists improvised as introductions to vocal compositions[21]. Such an approach required performers to possess the ability to transform and develop musical material according to stylistic principles. Two principal techniques of improvisation may be mentioned: *intavolatura semplice* (a faithful transcription of the score without additional ornamentation) and *intavolatura diminuita* (in which individual voices undergo diminutions, filling longer note values with figurations and passages) [22].

The Reformation of the sixteenth century, although initiated on doctrinal grounds, also had a significant impact on the development of church music in Europe. It is worth noting that the practice of alternating chant and organ music did not disappear with the Reformation but also entered the newly shaped Lutheran liturgy. Dawid Ślusarczyk, in his article *Muzyka w luterańskim zborze w pierwszych wiekach reformacji*, writes:

In the sixteenth century the function of the instrument consisted in supporting (doubling) choir voices and providing the pitch for singers (so-called preluding). Organ accompaniment was often realised according to the medieval alternatim practice, consisting of alternating hymn stanzas performed by choir and organ. Solo instrumental pieces included intabulations — transcriptions of vocal compositions written in tablature notation — as well as *preambula* or preludes improvised before vocal works. The purpose of these short interpolations was to provide the proper pitch for singers and

[19] P. Wiśniewski, *Praktyka alternatim,* op. cit., pp. 131-132.
[20] ks. M. Białkowski, O*rgany w chorale gregoriańskim,* op. cit., p. 114.
[21] D. Ślusarczyk, *Muzyka w luterańskim zborze w pierwszych wiekach reformacji*, Pro Musica Sacra 11 (2013), p. 169.
[22] M. Schwenkreis, *Compendium Improvisation*, Basel 2018, p. 320.

instrumentalists. The importance of the organ in the liturgy increased in the mid-seventeenth century. A new style imported from southern Europe demanded ever greater technical and improvisational skill from musicians[23].

From its earliest beginnings, the Lutheran Church drew upon the rich heritage of earlier church music, including the repertoire of Gregorian chant. In several cases, reformers did not abandon existing melodies but provided them with new German texts or adapted them to new liturgical needs. An example of such an approach is the chorale *Komm, Gott Schöpfer, Heiliger Geist*, based on the Latin hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus*. Another important example of Gregorian melody adapted within the Lutheran tradition is the chorale *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland*, derived from the hymn *Veni Redemptor Gentium*. The Lutheran version, with text translated and adapted by Martin Luther, became one of the most frequently used Advent chorales of the Lutheran Church. The melody preserved many features of its Latin prototype but was reshaped towards greater rhythmic and metric regularity, facilitating congregational singing.

Through such adaptations, the Lutheran Church developed a rich chorale tradition which, on the one hand, was rooted in the long-standing heritage of Western church music, and on the other responded to the new liturgical and linguistic needs of Protestant communities. Melodies derived from the Gregorian repertoire became the basis for numerous musical settings, both vocal and instrumental — from simple harmonisations to complex chorale preludes in the works of Johann Sebastian Bach and his predecessors.

I.3 Historical Outline of Modal Systems

In the reflection of medieval theorists, the system of eight modes (church tones) gained particular importance, developing on the basis of the concept of the *octoechos*, rooted in the Eastern Christian tradition[24]. Research on the earliest chant repertory indicates that this system did not constitute an original compositional model according to which melodies were created. Rather, it emerged secondarily as a tool for organising and interpreting existing liturgical singing practice[25]. More important than the realisation of a specific scale was the recognition of the melodic direction and its tendency toward the *finalis*, which is well reflected in medieval

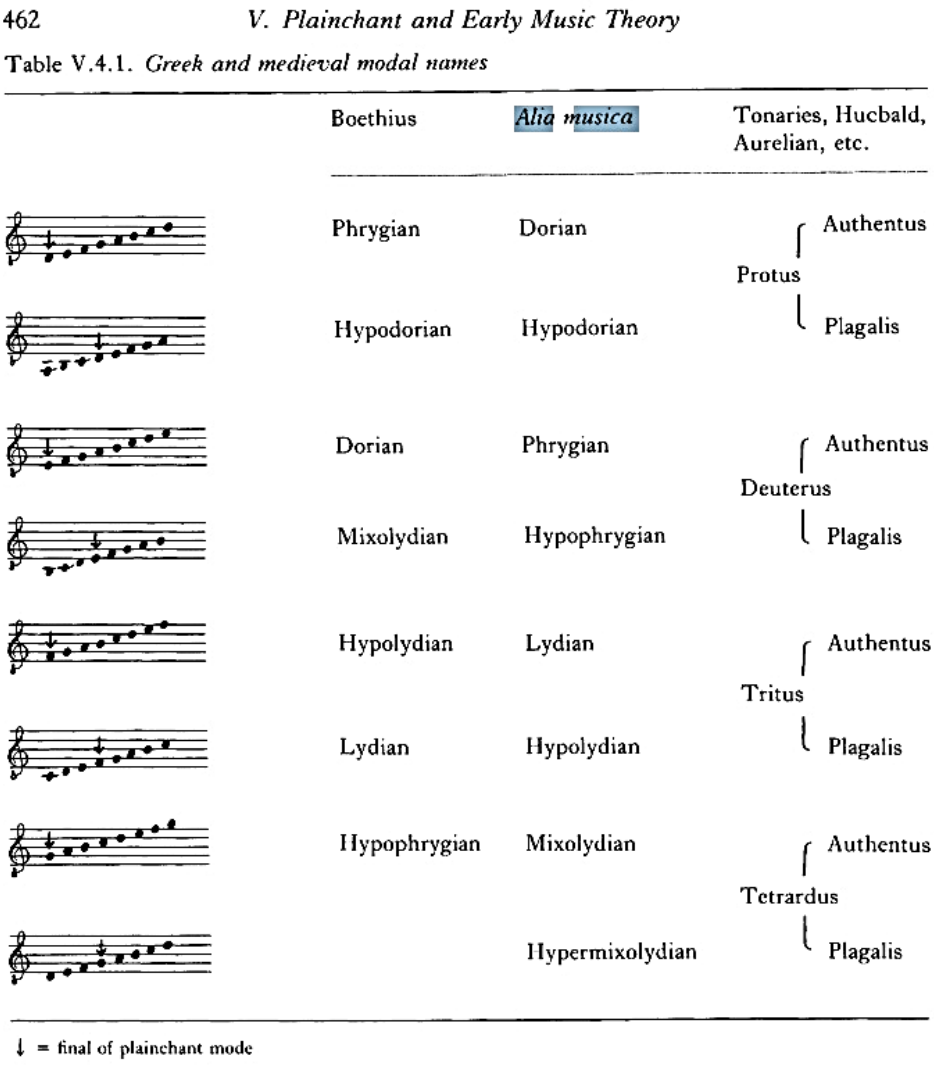
[23] D. Ślusarczyk, *Muzyka w luterańskim zborze*, op. cit., p. 169.
[24] S.S.R. Frøyshov, *The Early Development of the Liturgical Eight-Mode System in Jerusalem*, St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly 51, no. 2-3 (2007), pp. 139-140.
[25] F. McAlpine, *Beginnings and Endings: Defining the Mode in a Medieval Chant.* Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae, 45/1-2 (2004), pp. 165-166.

theoretical thought. An anonymous author of the tenth century wrote in the treatise *Dialogus de Musica*: “Tonus vel modus est regula, quae de omni cantu in fine diiudicat. Nam nisi scieris finem, non poteris cognoscere ubi incipi”, emphasising that the mode functioned more as a signpost guiding the melody toward its ending than as a closed scalar system[26].

The modes were divided into four principal (authentic) and four corresponding plagal forms. Each was defined primarily by the *finalis* and the *repercussa* — a frequently recurring tone used for psalm recitation[27]. Chant modes are not identical with the later theoretical concept of modal scales. The system of eight modes should therefore be understood primarily as a means of recognising relationships between the beginning, course, and conclusion of a melody rather than as a normative compositional framework.

In the present dissertation, the term “modal scales” refers instead to a later musical tradition in which elements of the medieval modal system were gradually transformed into more stabilised melodic and harmonic structures. In this perspective, modality is not a closed scalar system but a way of directing a melody toward the *finalis*. Understood in this manner, it became one of the points of reference for the organ improvisations presented in this work.

[26] Ibidem, p. 177.
[27] F. Wesołowski, *Zasady muzyki*, PWM, Kraków 1986, p. 142.



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Table V.4.1. *Greek and medieval modal names*

	Boethius	*Alia musica*	Tonaries, Hucbald, Aurelian, etc.
	Phrygian	Dorian	Protus: Authentus
	Hypodorian	Hypodorian	Protus: Plagalis
	Dorian	Phrygian	Deuterus: Authentus
	Mixolydian	Hypophrygian	Deuterus: Plagalis
	Hypolydian	Lydian	Tritus: Authentus
	Lydian	Hypolydian	Tritus: Plagalis
	Hypophrygian	Mixolydian	Tetrardus: Authentus
		Hypermixolydian	Tetrardus: Plagalis

↓ = final of plainchant mode

Figure 1 - Table of the eight modal scales [28]

In the sixteenth century, through the work of Heinrich Glareanus and his treatise *Dodecachordon* (1547), the system of modal scales was expanded to include two additional modes — the Aeolian and the Ionian — together with their plagal counterparts. In total, twelve modal scales were thus distinguished.

Toward the end of the sixteenth century, the modal method of organising music gradually gave way to a new concept that relied far more on harmonic relationships than on melodic structure. This process was significantly accelerated by the development of basso continuo practice. As Manfred Bukofzer observes:

[28] D. Hiley, *Western Plainchant: A Handbook*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1993, p. 462.

Undoubtedly, the most significant harmonic innovation of the Baroque was the very concept of functional major–minor harmony, which emerged gradually in Italian music of the middle Baroque and reached full development in the works of Provenzale and Corelli at the beginning of the late Baroque. The transition from modal tonality to the major–minor system brought about a crisis in musical thought, manifested, for example, in the harmonic experiments of the first half of the seventeenth century. Thoroughbass proved to be a highly convenient medium for such experimentation, as it was equally suited to contrapuntal and chordal music[29].

Bukofzer also notes: "The contrast between major and minor, considered by Glarean and Zarlino, gained greater significance only in Baroque music"[30]. The functional interpretation of harmonic relations reached its culmination in the theory of Jean-Philippe Rameau, who reduced the harmonic system to three fundamental functions — tonic, dominant, and subdominant — although, "in formulating his system, Rameau did not avoid certain inconsistencies, which suggest that he continued to think in terms of basso continuo" [31].

I.4 The Role of Modal Scales in Musical Composition and Improvisation

Modal scales constituted an important body of musical material used in both vocal and instrumental composition from the Middle Ages through the Renaissance. They shaped melodic character, voice leading, cadential patterns, and sonorities. Their structure defined typical pitch relationships that gave music a particular expressive quality and organised its sonic design. In the Renaissance, modal scales, through the work of composers such as Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina, began to be employed within increasingly complex polyphonic textures. The harmonic dimension of modality in Renaissance vocal music differs fundamentally from the modern understanding of tonal harmony. The sonic layer resulted primarily from counterpoint and from the succession of pitches belonging to particular modal systems rather than from a hierarchy of harmonic functions. In the works of composers of the period, characteristic relationships between voices can be observed, including modal cadences and principles governing the treatment of consonance and dissonance, which shaped musical material into structurally coherent forms. These techniques, originally conceived for vocal music, were gradually adapted to instrumental practice as well.

When accompanying or improvising within the framework of *alternatim* practice, the organist took into account the modal character of chant melodies. This required knowledge of

[29] M. Bukofzer, *Od Monteverdiego do Bacha,* Polskie Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa 1970, p. 521.
[30] Ibidem, p. 522.
[31] Ibidem, p. 523-524.

the modes (church tones) and their characteristics, allowing stylistic coherence to be maintained with the vocal part.

In her article *Guillaume-Gabriel Nivers i jego chorał*, Susi Ferfoglia emphasises that G. G. Nivers attributed to individual modes the capacity to express various "affections" contained within liturgical texts[32]. Nivers observed that the choice of appropriate church tones could highlight the emotional character of the text and thus its spiritual message. The use of terms such as "noble," "joyful," "solemn," or "sad" indicates an intention to translate liturgical content into a musical language capable of affecting listeners emotionally[33]. Modal affects constitute a rich source of inspiration for the contemporary organ improviser. The Dorian mode reflects an elevated character, while the Phrygian mode suggests a more mysterious atmosphere. The emotional significance of particular modal scales is also emphasised by Girolamo Diruta in his treatise *Il Transilvano*, where he presents characteristics of individual modes in the context of their application in organ music[34]. Knowledge of modal affects thus becomes a valuable musical tool.

The works of certain composers at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries reveal renewed interest in modality. In the music of composers such as Jehan Alain, Maurice Duruflé, Charles Tournemire, and Jean Langlais, so-called neomodality plays an important role. The term refers to a conscious engagement with earlier church modes (e.g. Dorian, Phrygian, Mixolydian, Lydian) within a new twentieth-century harmonic and stylistic context. Neomodality is not directly connected with the major–minor system; rather, it represents an alternative musical language drawing upon modal sources. This language becomes a point of departure for the creation of expanded tonal structures that combine historical traditions with modern harmonic and textural means. A particularly distinctive approach to modality can be found in the work of Olivier Messiaen, who developed an original system of seven scales — the so-called "modes of limited transposition." Although these extend beyond traditional modality, they are based on a similar principle of employing fixed intervallic patterns as the foundation of musical language.

[32] S. Ferfoglia, *Guillaume-Gabriel Nivers i jego chorał*, Pro Musica Sacra vol. 10*,* Uniwersytet Papieski Jana Pawła II w Krakowie*,* Kraków 2012, p. 63.
[33] Ibidem.
[34] G. Diruta, *Il Transilvano - Discorso sopra il concertar li registri dell organo* from 1609.

Maurice Duruflé, in his composition *Prélude, Adagio et Choral varié sur le thème du "Veni Creator"*, draws upon a monodic hymn which, throughout the course of the work, is developed in various ways. Among these are the exceptionally rich harmonic layer accompanying the melody, as well as the wide palette of instrumental colours that the composer specifies in detail within the score. Jehan Alain, in turn, in works such as *Litanies* and *Variations sur un thème de Clément Jannequin*, employed modal resources to shape musical tension and to express a sense of mystical intensity. In the works of twentieth-century composers, modality did not function merely as a historical reference; rather, it became a source of inspiration for the search for individual means of expression. It is also worth noting Marcel Dupré's treatise *Cours Complet d'Improvisation à l'Orgue*, in which one chapter presents a methodology for creating organ accompaniment to monophonic, non-mensural chant melodies[35].

In the Polish context, a significant example of a profound understanding of organ improvisation is provided by Feliks Nowowiejski. This outstanding Polish organist and improviser, in his article *Improwizacja na organach* (1927), recalls the influence of his musical education in Regensburg[36]. Józef Renner, Nowowiejski's teacher, referred in conversation with his student to his own predecessor Józef Hanisch, who excelled in improvising on Gregorian themes and was renowned for his exceptional artistry[37]. During his studies in Regensburg, Nowowiejski explored the essence of improvisation from both a formal and artistic perspective. In his memoirs he also drew attention to the Paris Conservatoire, where the art of improvisation occupied a central place in the training of organists. In the aforementioned article, Nowowiejski lamented the lack of understanding for the art of improvisation in Poland[38].

[35] M. Dupré, *Manuel d'Accompagnement du Plain Chant Grégorien*, Leduc AL 19 520.
[36] F. Nowowiejski, *Improwizacja na organach*, w: Muzyka Kościelna 1927 no. 4, p. 77.
[37] Ibidem.
[38] Ibidem, p. 78.

Chapter II - Performance Aspects of the Artistic Work

II.1 Description of the Instrument and Recording Venue

Recording of the artistic work was carried out on 5 December 2025, at the Church of the Holy Family in Warsaw-Zacisze, located at Rozwadowska Street 9/11.

The church is characterised by acoustics with moderate reverberation, which supports the clarity of polyphonic textures and articulation while preserving the fullness of sound in larger registration plans. Such conditions are favourable both for improvisation in historical styles and for more contemporary forms of musical expression.

The recording was carried out on an organ built by Zych Zakłady Organowe from Wołomin. Construction began in 2021 and was completed in 2022. The instrument's specification refers to the French tradition of organ building, particularly to French symphonic organ design. The organ has 35 stops, of which 30 are real ranks. Extensions and transmissions of existing stops were introduced and are presented in the table below. The instrument is also equipped with additional sound possibilities, including tubular bells, plate bells, and effects such as timpani and *rossignol*. The architectural design of the organ was adapted to the interior architecture of the church, forming an integrated whole with the stained-glass window located in the central part of the gallery. The organ is equipped with slider windchests with proportional electro-magnetic action. The choice of this type of action was determined by structural limitations resulting from the stained-glass window situated in the central part of the gallery. A mechanical-action version of the project would have required an instrument with fewer stops. The proportional electro-magnetic action enables more precise control of the dynamic attack of the sound than a standard electro-magnetic action. This is the second instrument in Poland to employ this type of action; the first was built in 2021 by the same company in the Church of the Presentation of the Lord in Warsaw.

II.2 Organ Specification

In the upper part of the table are the organ stops located on the left side of the player. In the lower part of the table are the couplers and additional devices located on the right side of the player.

Pédale	Grand Orgue - I manuał	Positif - II manuał	Récit expressif - III manuał
1. Montre 16’[1]	8. Montre 16’	18. Montre 8’	26. Bourdon 16’
2. Soubasse 16’	9. Montre 8’	19. Bourdon 8’	27. Flûte traversiere 8’
3. Montre 8’[2]	10. Gambe 8’	20. Prestant 4’	28. Cor de nuit 8’
4. Flûte 8’[3]	11. Flûte harmonique 8’	21. Flûte à cheminée 4’	29. Gambe 8’
5. Quintbasse 10 $^{2}/_{3}$’[4]	12. Prestant 4’	22. Nasard 2 $^{2}/_{3}$’	30. Voix céleste 8’
6. Bombarde 16’	13. Flûte 4’	23. Piccolo 2’	31. Flûte octaviante 4’
7. Trompette 8’[5]	14. Doublette 2’	24. Tierce 1 $^{3}/_{5}$’	32. Octavin 2’
	15. Fourniture IV	25. Cromorne 8’	33. Fourniture III
	16. Cornet V		34. Trompette harmonique 8’
	17. Trompette 8’		35. Hautbois 8’
60. Cloches	50. Cloches	41. Cloches	36. Cloches
61. Carillons	51. Carillons	42. Carillons	37. Carillons
62. I/P	52. I/I 16’	43. Tremblant	38. Tremblant
63. I/P 4′	53. I/I 4’	44. II/II 16′	39. III/III 16′
64. II/P	54. II/I	45. II/II 4′	40. III/III 4′
65. II/P 4′	55. II/I 16′	46. III/II	
66. III/P	56. II/I 4′	47. III/II 16′	
67. III/P 4′	57. III/I	48. III/II 4′	
	58. III/I 16′	49. Inversion II/I	
	59. III/I 4′		

[1]) transmission from the *Grand Orgue* division

[2]) extension of the *Montre 16′* stop

[3]) extension of the *Soubasse 16′* stop

[4]) extension of the *Montre 16′* stop (transposed a perfect fifth above the fundamental pitch)

[5]) extension of the *Bombarde 16'* stop

Additional information:

• Manual compass: C–c4; pedal compass: C–g1

• Carillons (tubular bells – 25 notes)

• Cloches (plate bells, available from every division, 30 notes)

• Setzer system, Tutti, crescendo pedal

• Expression pedal controlling the *Récit expressif* swell box

• Reed stop cancel (toe piston labelled *Anches*)

• The instrument is equipped with a total of 100 control switches (including 90 hand-operated and 10 foot-operated)

II.3 Sound Aesthetics and Registration Compromises

In the recorded artistic work, the author drew upon various historical styles and musical forms. Although some of the improvisations referred to specific sound models — such as the French or German Baroque — these pieces were not intended as attempts at a faithful reconstruction of the style of any particular composer. Rather, the aim was to capture characteristic elements of the musical language associated with composers of a given historical period or aesthetic current, and then to develop them creatively through the author's individual artistic means while preserving stylistic features.

The principal objective was the elaboration of selected melodies, interpreted by the author through a modal perspective. Each improvisation assumed a different approach to texture, voice leading, registration, and form. A particular performance challenge lay in adapting the instrument's registration to the desired sound aesthetic associated with each stylistic reference.

The greatest difficulty in terms of registration involved adapting an instrument whose design refers to French symphonic organ building to the sound aesthetics of earlier periods, such as the German Baroque or the French Classical tradition. The organ of the Church of the Holy Family in Warsaw offers a rich palette of colours; however, its tonal character is strongly shaped by nineteenth-century French influences. For this reason, the author adopted a creative and flexible approach to registration planning, seeking combinations of stops that — although not entirely identical to historical models — conveyed their stylistic character. Particularly

demanding were contrapuntal settings with the *cantus firmus* carried in different voices, which required skilful use of the instrument's full range of stops and careful balancing of dynamic proportions between the manuals and the pedal.

In those improvisations in which the author moved away from historical references and presented themes within original musical concepts and forms, registration became primarily a means of artistic expression and a field for sonic exploration. Although the author drew inspiration from the sound world of the twentieth-century French organ school, it was not treated as a model to be imitated but rather as a point of reference. In the neomodal improvisations, registration was guided above all by expressive aims — such as tension, surprise, mysticism, or cantabile character. Such an approach allowed for a fuller presentation of the instrument's possibilities and highlighted the author's individual musical language.

Chapter III - Description of the Artistic Work

III.1 Introduction

The artistic work discussed here comprises more than 60 minutes of music in the form of recorded organ improvisations. The common elements of all pieces are melodies derived from Gregorian chant, their transformations within the Lutheran tradition, and Polish traditional song. The recording as a whole was intended to demonstrate the creative potential of melodies whose material the author perceived through the prism of modal scales, treating them as a tool for locating a tonal centre and for further developing the improvisational process.

The recorded improvisations are divided into four cycles and two autonomous forms. The cycles include:

• Chorale variations inspired by the works of German organists of the first half of the seventeenth century, based on the song *Hejnał wszyscy zaśpiewajmy*

• Chorale settings in the style of the German Baroque at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, based on the melody *Komm, Gott Schöpfer, Heiliger Geist*

• A suite in the French Baroque style based on the chorale *Nun komm der Heiden Heiland*

• Chorale variations on the antiphon *Ave Maris Stella*, employing neomodal resources and the author's individual musical language

The whole is complemented by two autonomous improvisations inspired by Gregorian chant:

• *Arabesque* in a Romantic style on the theme of *Salve Regina*

• *Meditation* on *Tantum ergo Sacramentum*, employing neomodal resources and the author's musical language

The artistic work intentionally refers to historical musical styles. The purpose of these references was to demonstrate the potential inherent in integrating stylistic idioms with the practice of organ improvisation. The entire recording represents an attempt to view these sources through the lens of contemporary performance reflection. The author draws attention to an essential dimension of improvisation as an art that for centuries remained a living practice, particularly within the liturgies of the Roman Catholic and Lutheran Churches. The work also carries a pedagogical dimension — it contributes to the discussion on the need to develop organ improvisation practice in Poland, where it still awaits wider recognition as an artistic tool both in the concert space and within liturgical practice.

Improvisation is a form of composition whose moment of creation coincides with the moment of performance. The improviser becomes both composer and performer of the work. When composing a piece, a composer usually has time to reflect, notate musical ideas, and make corrections within the work. The improviser may consider the form and establish its main assumptions; however, due to the nature of improvisation, there is no opportunity to revise what has already emerged during performance. Only a fraction of a second passes between the improviser's musical thought and its realisation, making this art ephemeral and inseparable from the moment of execution. A certain degree of imperfection is inevitably embedded in its nature. This reality leads to situations in which the improviser must respond creatively to unintended events. The readiness to react to such moments may become an inspiration for shaping a new musical direction that retrospectively justifies an unforeseen occurrence. This often involves creating an illusion that a given situation was intentional — although such a response is not always possible.

The presented realisation reflects the current stage of the author's artistic development. The art of improvisation requires constant cultivation of musical imagination and the deepening of technical skills on many levels. The author continues intensive work on aspects such as refining musical language, shaping form, developing the ability to move freely between different stylistic idioms, and cultivating an individual aesthetic. The recordings presented here should therefore be understood not only as a completed work, but also as an expression of an ongoing creative process and of the present state of the author's artistic personality and craft — dynamic, self-aware, and open to further evolution.

III.2 Chorale Variations on the polish Hymn *Hejnał wszyscy zaśpiewajmy*

The first improvisation forms a cycle of chorale variations conceived within the aesthetic of the early German Baroque. It refers to the works of German composers of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, including Michael Praetorius and Samuel Scheidt. Characteristic features of this style include the use of chorale material for contrapuntal development, the application of augmentation and diminution, and the presentation of the *cantus firmus* in various voices. The author's intention was to approach, as closely as possible, the sonic idiom associated with instruments built by organ makers such as Hans Scherer and Friedrich Stellwagen.

The hymn *Hejnał wszyscy zaśpiewajmy* is a Polish Advent (*rorate*) church song whose origins date back to the sixteenth century[39]. The author of the improvisation employed the melody as published in *Śpiewnik kościelny* by Rev. Jan Siedlecki[40]. An analysis of the melodic material reveals features corresponding to the Dorian mode, indicated, for example, by the presence of the pitch B-natural within the D–Dorian framework.



Figure 2- Hejnał wszyscy zaśpiewajmy[41]

The recording of the chorale variations opens with a four-part harmonisation of the hymn conceived in the spirit of the so-called *Kantionalsatz*, *nota contra notam* texture with the melody carried in the upper voice (soprano). This style, characteristic among others of Lutheran liturgical music of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, achieved its mature form through the work of Lucas Osiander the Elder (1534–1604). In his collection *Fünffzig geistliche Lieder und Psalmen*, published in 1586, he employed a harmonisation of chorales that was innovative for its time, placing the melody in the soprano while the remaining voices accompanied it in a vertical chordal texture[42]. This represented a departure from earlier practice, in

[39] ks. dr W. Kałamarz, *Zarys dziejów jednogłosowej polskiej pieśni kościelnej*, https://spiewniksiedleckiego.pl/wp-content/uploads/Zarys-dziejow-piesni.pdf, p. 6 (accessed: 10.12.2025 r.).
[40] ks. J. Siedlecki - *Śpiewnik Kościelny* - wydanie XLI, red. ks. Wojciech Kałamarz CM, ks. Andrzej Ziółkowski CM, Kraków 2015, p. 46.
[41] Ibidem.
[42] M. Bukofzer, *Od Monteverdiego do Bacha,* op. cit., pp. 118-119.

which the chorale melody (often Gregorian) was typically placed in the tenor and surrounded by contrapuntal elaboration. The use of such a texture — with the melody in the upper voice — in congregational accompaniment enabled the assembled faithful to follow the chorale more easily and to participate in communal singing.

At the ends of phrases — for instance in bars two, four, and six — cadences concluding with a major chord were employed. This solution refers to the use of the Picardy third, consisting in raising the third degree of the final tonic chord within a minor context. Such a technique was widely used in Renaissance and early Baroque music[43]. In the present work, this device served not only as a stylistic reference to the period but also as a means of achieving clearly articulated phrase endings.

The registration used in the harmonisation of the hymn:
Pédale**:** *Soubasse 16'*, *Montre 8'*, ***Grand Orgue*****:** *Montre 8'*, *Prestant 4'*, *Doublette 2'*, ***Couplers:*** *I/P*

Variation I

The first variation is conceived in the form of a *bicinium*. The piece is based on a two-voice texture in which each voice fulfils a distinct function. The right hand carries the contrapuntal line, characterised by flexible rhythm and fluid melodic motion, while the left hand presents the *cantus firmus* in augmentation. The chosen registration was intended to ensure clarity and contrast between the voices. The right-hand part, using *Flûte 4'* from the *Grand Orgue*, gives the sound a light character and supports clear articulation. For a more distinct differentiation of the sonic layers, the *cantus firmus* is presented using *Prestant 4'* from the *Positif*. The entire passage is performed in the small octave register, creating the impression of an eight-foot foundation. This solution proved beneficial for the dynamic balance. The texture supports not only the clarity of both voices but also highlights their contrasting functions: narrative and ornamental in the contrapuntal line, and structural and thematic in the *cantus firmus*.

[43] R. Parncutt, *The Tonic as Triad: Key Profiles and the Perception of Tonal Hierarchy*, Music Perception 28, no. 4 (2011), p. 344.

Variation II

The second variation is conceived *manualiter*, without the use of the pedal, with the *cantus firmus* placed in the alto — that is, in the middle voice. After a contrapuntal two-voice introduction, the chorale theme is introduced. The theme is played by the thumb of the right hand, while the remaining fingers of the same hand realise the upper voice and the left hand carries the lowest voice. Such an arrangement requires precision and finger independence, as the thematic voice is positioned between two freely moving contrapuntal lines.

The registration in this variation is based on the *Positif* division. The following stops are employed: *Bourdon 8′* and *Flûte à cheminée 4′*. This combination provides a subtle, warm flute-like sonority, with a clearly audible foundation from the *Bourdon* and a light, transparent colour contributed by the *Flûte à cheminée*. The choice of stops allows for a highly transparent texture while emphasising the middle voice without allowing it to dominate the remaining layers.

Variation III

The third variation takes the form of a short prelude featuring diminutions in the soprano voice. Its structure is based on the presentation of the hymn theme, built from three successive two-bar segments. Each thematic fragment is preceded by an introduction of three-voice counterpoint, realised on the first manual and pedal, followed by the presentation of the ornamented melody in the upper voice. The soprano part is performed by the right hand, employing diminutions, ornaments, and passing tones.

The registration was chosen as follows: the solo voice is played by the right hand on the second manual, combining stops from the *Positif* division — *Montre 8′* and *Prestant 4′* — together with *Fourniture III* from the *Récit expressif*. The accompanying inner voices are played by the left hand on the first manual, also using *Montre 8′* and *Prestant 4′* from the *Positif*, with the II/I coupler engaged. The pedal part is based on *Soubasse 16′* and *Montre 8′*, providing a solid harmonic foundation. This configuration allows the soprano line to remain clearly audible, enriched by the bright sonority of the *Fourniture* mixture, while maintaining a stable and balanced accompaniment. The choice of stops was guided by the need to achieve a clear distinction between the solo line and the accompaniment without compromising the dynamic clarity between the different sonic layers.

Vartiation IV

The fourth variation takes the form of a trio with the *cantus firmus* placed in the alto voice. The variation is set in a 6/8 metre, which lends the music a pulsating, dance-like character and allows the instrumental idiom to develop through rhythmic diminutions. After a contrapuntal introduction, carried out in two voices in the outer parts (between the right and left hands), the hymn theme is introduced in the middle voice — the alto. The *cantus firmus* is presented in augmentation, in which each quarter note corresponds to six eighth notes of rhythmic elaboration in 6/8 metre. This procedure creates a natural contrast between the stable, vertical line of the theme and the lively texture of the remaining voices.

The registration was chosen so as to emphasise the functions of the individual voices while ensuring their clarity. The *cantus firmus*, played in the pedal using *Prestant 4′* from the *Grand Orgue*, gains a clearly defined tonal contour. The right hand (upper voice) employs stops from the *Positif*: *Bourdon 8′*, *Flûte à cheminée 4′*, and *Piccolo 2′*, creating a bright and varied flute colour. The left hand (lowest voice) is played on the *Récit expressif*, using a combination of *Flûte traversière 8′* and *Flûte octaviante 4′*. The overall registration was conceived with the aim of maintaining dynamic balance and tonal separation, allowing the thematic line in the alto to stand out clearly against the two contrapuntal voices.

Vartiation V

The fifth variation also adopts a dance-like character in 6/8 metre, with a clearly articulated rhythmic pulse. Its principal formal and textural feature is the use of diminutions in the bass voice, combined with the presentation of the hymn theme in augmentation in the soprano. The variation opens with a monophonic introduction in the lowest voice (left hand). Characteristic rhythmic figures are employed here, which, together with the phrasing, establish the planned character of the improvisation from the very beginning. The right hand then introduces a harmonised version of the theme, presented in the upper voice in extended note values. Each quarter note corresponds to a full bar in 6/8 metre. Throughout the variation, the left hand maintains a motoric bass motion built from diminutions, shaping the bass line through rhythmic figurations. This arrangement — with an active bass and a static, augmented soprano — creates a clear and logical balance between rhythm and melody.

The registration was chosen with regard to textural clarity and the differentiation of sonic layers. The right hand uses stops from the *Grand Orgue*: *Montre 8′* and *Doublette 2′*, producing a bright and articulate sound. The left hand, played on the *Positif*, employs *Bourdon 8′*, *Prestant 4′*, and *Cromorne 8′*, providing a distinct tonal contrast.

Vartiation VI

The sixth variation is based on the exposition of the *cantus firmus* in the tenor, developed within a contrapuntal texture incorporating elements of imitation. The variation opens with an introduction in which the theme — comprising the first two bars of the hymn — is presented on the first manual of the *Grand Orgue*, accompanied by a contrapuntal bass voice in the pedal. A third voice then enters, imitating the theme at the interval of a fifth, followed by a further exposition of the theme at the unison — this time in the lowest voice (performed in the pedal) — with a two-voice contrapuntal accompaniment in the manual. After the exposition, the principal structural moment of the variation appears: the presentation of the *cantus firmus* in the tenor, entrusted to the left hand. The theme is elaborated through diminutions, passing tones, and a clearly articulated dotted rhythm, giving it a fanfare-like character.

The registration was selected to ensure both polyphonic clarity and distinct tonal layering. The tenor voice in the left hand is highlighted on the *Récit expressif* using *Trompette harmonique 8′*, emphasising its thematic function. The right hand employs stops from the *Grand Orgue*: *Montre 8′*, *Prestant 4′*, and *Doublette 2′*, creating a bright and transparent texture. In the pedal, the combination of *Montre 16′*, *Montre 8′*, and *Flûte 8′* provides a firm tonal foundation.

Vartiation VII

The seventh variation is conceived *manualiter*, employing a three-voice polyphonic texture. The principal structural element is the *cantus firmus* in augmentation, placed in the upper voice. The middle and lowest voices are driven by a motoric rhythmic motion, increasing the activity and expressive vitality of the contrapuntal texture. The soprano functions as a stable axis, while the remaining two voices generate momentum and directional flow.

The registration in this variation is limited to the manual stops of the *Positif*: *Montre 8′*, *Prestant 4′*, and *Piccolo 2′*, together with the II/II 4′ coupler, ensuring a clear projection of the theme in the upper register. The use of the II/II 4′ super-octave coupling was intended to achieve an additional one-foot colour. In the absence of such a stop, the desired result was obtained through super-octave coupling. The chosen registration not only enhanced polyphonic clarity but also maintained a balanced relationship between the sonic layers, allowing the thematic line to coexist organically with the contrapuntal background rather than dominating it.

Vartiation VIII

In the final variation of the cycle, imitative techniques are employed with the *cantus firmus* placed in the bass voice. The structure of the variation is based on dividing the hymn theme into three distinct phrases, each comprising two bars. Each phrase is developed through imitation, drawing on motives extracted from fragments of the theme. The structure introduces each thematic phrase successively from the upper voices downward: first at the unison (soprano), then at the interval of a fifth (alto), followed by a third entry again at the unison (tenor). After each imitative exposition, the thematic material — the two-bar segment subjected to imitation — is presented in the bass voice.

The registration was designed to achieve contrapuntal clarity and dynamic contrast between the layers. In the manuals, the following stops are used: *Grand Orgue*: *Montre 8′*, *Doublette 2′*; *Positif*: *Montre 8′*, *Prestant 4′*; *Récit expressif*: *Fourniture III*. A series of couplers — I/I 4′, II/I, III/I, and I/P — integrates the tonal spectrum between manuals and pedal. In the pedal division, *Soubasse 16′*, *Flûte 8′*, and *Bombarde 16′* are employed, allowing for a clear projection of the theme. This configuration was intended to approach the sonic idiom of *organo pleno*.

III.3 Chorale Settings on the Chorale *Komm, Gott Schöpfer, Heiliger Geist*

The second improvisation takes the form of a cycle of chorale settings inspired by the works of German organists at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries — with Johann Sebastian Bach at the forefront. This style is characterised, among other features, by the rich use of chorale material in contrapuntal and harmonic elaborations, the application of augmentation and diminution, and the presentation of the *cantus firmus* in various configurations.



Figure 3 - Komm, Gott Schöpfer, Heiliger Geist melodic version from 1524[44].

The improvisations are based on the melody of the chorale *Komm, Gott Schöpfer, Heiliger Geist*, which originated from the Gregorian hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus*. The Latin prototype, attributed to Hrabanus Maurus, dates back to the ninth century[45]. In the Lutheran tradition, the melody was rhythmically and metrically regularised. In this form it was published in the collection *Erfurt Enchiridion* (1524), co-edited by Martin Luther[46]. The melody from this source is presented below.

This chorale belongs to one of the most important hymns associated with the Feast of Pentecost and has served as inspiration for numerous composers. In his treatise *Die Kunst des reinen Satzes in der Musik* (1776), Johann Philipp Kirnberger provides several examples of harmonisations of melodies interpreted within a modal framework. As an illustration of a harmonisation associated with the Mixolydian context, he refers to Johann Sebastian Bach's

[44] J. Zahn, *Die Melodien der deutschen evangelischen Kirchenlieder - erster Band,* wyd. Bertelsmann, Gütersloh 1889, p. 80.
[45] ks. Jan Siedlecki, *Śpiewnik Kościelny* **-** wydanie XLI, red. ks. Wojciech Kałamarz CM, ks. Andrzej Ziółkowski CM, Kraków 2015, p. 1059.
[46] *Erfurt Enchiridion*, https://deutschestextarchiv.de/book/view/luther_enchiridion_1524?p=39 (accessed: 12.12.2025).

setting *Komm, Gott Schöpfer, Heiliger Geist* (BWV 370)[47]. Of particular significance is also the chorale prelude *Komm, Gott Schöpfer, Heiliger Geist* (BWV 667), in which Bach reveals the harmonic and contrapuntal potential inherent in this chorale. It should be noted that Bach employed a slightly modified melodic version compared to the 1524 source. In the adapted melody, for instance, a passing tone appears in bar five, and a chromatic alteration from C to C♯ occurs in bar six.



Figure 4 - J.S. Bach - *Komm, Gott Schöpfer, Heiliger Geist,* BWV 370[48]

The practice of chromatic alteration indirectly refers to the idea of *musica ficta* — a medieval and Renaissance principle involving the introduction of pitches outside the basic scale in order to refine the sonority, avoid undesirable intervals, or facilitate smooth cadential motion towards a secondary degree[49]. Particular attention is drawn to the chromatic modification of the original melodic form — the change from C to C♯ in bar six. In this way, Bach clearly introduces a leading tone, enabling a cadence towards the secondary key of D minor. Retaining the pitch C would have prevented the use of the dominant as a major chord.

In Bach's harmonisation, a consistent cadential direction can be observed, especially at phrase endings marked with fermatas. The harmonic treatment reflects a Mixolydian context, as indicated by the presence of F♮ in bars one and seven. Despite the modal character of the melody, Bach tonicises individual phrases through cadences that momentarily suggest the tonal

[47] J.P. Kirnberger, *Die Kunst des reinen Satzes in der Musik,* https://s9.imslp.org/files/imglnks/usimg/f/f5/IMSLP273913-PMLP444958-diekunstdesreine02kirn_1.pdf, p. 63, (accessed:15.12.2025).
[48] *371 vierstimmige Choralgesänge von Johann Sebastian Bach* - wydanie czwarte, wyd. Leipzig Breitkopf & Härtel, Leipzig ca. 1870, p. 84.
[49] Dr R. W. Duffin, *Un notated accidentals (Musica Ficta),* Case Western Unversity, https://casfaculty.case.edu/ross-duffin/muhi-3441-multimedia/muhi-3441-medren-accidentals/un-notated-accidentals-a-k-a-musica-ficta/ (accessed: 15.12.2025).

areas of C major, G major, D minor, and again G major. These compositional procedures became an important source of inspiration, whose further development is reflected in the improvised setting.

Within this cycle of improvisations, the author aimed to achieve a registration concept that would approximate the tonal idiom of Baroque organs associated with the time of J. S. Bach. The selection of stops and manual couplers was guided by the intention of evoking the sonic characteristics of instruments used in eighteenth-century performance practice. Of particular relevance are the instruments of Tobias Heinrich Trost and Zacharias Hildebrandt — both highly regarded by Bach and representing a refined level of craftsmanship and tonal aesthetics. As reference points, one may consider Trost's organ in Altenburg and Hildebrandt's organ in Naumburg. However, since the instrument used for the recording draws on the tradition of French symphonic organ building, certain compromises were necessary. These concerned, among other aspects, the choice of stops and the balance between manual divisions. The adopted solutions were intended to ensure clarity and coherence of texture in each improvisation.

Chorale Harmonisation

The cycle opens with a harmonisation of the chorale melody. As in the harmonisation that began the previous cycle, the author refers here to the *Kantionalsatz* technique. The cycle is based on the melodic version used by J. S. Bach, presented in the preceding description and musical example.

The following registration was used in the harmonisation: *Pédale*: *Soubasse 16'*, *Montre 8'*; *Grand Orgue*: *Montre 8'*, *Prestant 4'*, *Doublette 2'*; Couplers: I/P.

Setting I

The essence of the first chorale prelude lies in placing the theme *Komm, Gott Schöpfer, Heiliger Geist* in the upper voice in augmentation, accompanied by contrapuntal voices performed within the same manual and pedal division. The improvisation is based on a four-voice texture, with clearly directed motion in the inner voices. The augmentation of the melody allowed for an expansion of the contrapuntal and harmonic process. The author introduced

passing tones in the soprano as well as a single chromatic alteration from C to C♯. The use of passing tones served to increase contrapuntal and harmonic possibilities, particularly in melodic gestures moving within the interval of a third.

The chorale was shaped in such a way as to articulate clear cadences at the end of each of the four phrases. Momentary modulatory shifts to related tonal areas were also employed. These procedures constitute a direct reference to techniques associated with J. S. Bach.

In the pedal division, the following stops were used: *Soubasse 16′*, *Montre 8′*, and *Flûte 8′*. The manual part collectively employs stops from the *Positif*: *Montre 8′*, *Prestant 4′*, and from the *Récit expressif*: *Fourniture III*, through the coupler III/II.

Setting II

This improvisation takes the form of a chorale prelude in which the *cantus firmus* appears in the upper voice as an ornamented melodic line. After a brief introduction performed on the accompanying manual together with the pedal, the chorale theme is introduced in the soprano. The melody is ornamented with passing tones and embellishments, including trills, giving the solo line a distinctly vocal character. In addition, the theme is presented in augmentation. This procedure naturally allows several successive harmonies to unfold over a single thematic pitch, thereby enriching the harmonic dimension of the improvisation. The registration was chosen to create a clear contrast between the solo voice and the accompaniment.

The following registration was used: solo (*Positif*): *Bourdon 8′*, *Flûte à cheminée 4′*, *Nasard 2 2/3′*, *Tierce 1 3/5′*; accompaniment (*Récit expressif*): *Flûte traversière 8′*, *Cor de nuit 8′*, *Flûte octaviante 4′*; *Pédale*: *Soubasse 16′*, *Flûte 8′*.

Setting III

The improvisation takes the form of a trio in which the *cantus firmus* is placed in the middle voice (alto) and presented in augmentation. The texture is based on a three-voice layout, in which the outer voices fulfil a contrapuntal function with an expanded rhythmic-motivic layer. The improvisation begins with the presentation of a characteristic principal motif in the upper voice, which is then imitated at the interval of a fifth in the lower voice. This initial

contrapuntal dialogue assumes the character of a bicinium, preparing the listener for the exposition of the chorale theme.

The theme is performed on the pedal keyboard using four-foot stops, thus placing it in the alto register. The melody is shaped in four sections corresponding to the phrasing and breathing points found in the melodic version employed by J. S. Bach. Each subsequent section is preceded by a short interlude in the form of a bicinium, preparing the next stage of the thematic presentation.

The registration of the individual divisions was selected to ensure clarity and contrast between the voices: *Grand Orgue*: *Prestant 4'*, *Flûte 4' — cantus firmus* in the pedal using the I/P coupler; *Positif*: *Bourdon 8'*, *Nasard 2 2/3' —* right hand; *Récit expressif*: *Bourdon 16'*, *Flûte traversière 8'*, *Cor de nuit 8'*, *Flûte octaviante 4' —* left hand.

Setting IV

The fourth improvisation takes the form of an arioso, in which the *cantus firmus* appears in augmentation in the tenor voice. The character of this improvisation differs markedly from the others both in mood and in the harmonic means employed. The textural inspiration was drawn from J. S. Bach's chorale prelude BWV 731, *Erbarm dich mein, o Herre Gott*. As in the original, repeated chordal structures are used here as an accompaniment. The accompaniment, played in the right hand and pedal, forms a continuous pulsating texture supporting the melody throughout the improvisation.

The introduction consists of a prelude in G minor, differing from the principal tonality of the chorale. This intentional tonal shift serves to introduce a rhetorically distinct expressive character within the cycle. After the accompanying texture is established, the theme is presented prominently in the tenor register. Despite the change of key, the melody retains its essential contour, although the author introduces several alterations to selected pitches. These interventions reinforce the rhetorical character of the improvisation. The effect is further intensified through the use of seemingly unexpected harmonic means, including secondary dominants and deceptive cadential resolutions. The improvisation concludes with a Picardy third, whose sudden brightening completes the emotional trajectory of the form.

The registration was conceived with a subtle oboe-solo colour: *Récit expressif* (tenor melody): *Flûte traversière 8'*, *Hautbois 8'*; *Grand Orgue* (accompaniment): *Gambe 8'*, *Flûte harmonique 8'*, *Flûte 4'*; *Pédale*: *Soubasse 16'*, *Flûte 8'*,

coupler I/P. The chosen combination of stops and their proportional balance allows the tenor melodic line to emerge clearly while preserving an appropriate volume and character of the accompaniment.

Setting V

The final improvisation takes the form of an *organo pleno* prelude with the *cantus firmus* placed in the bass. The improvisation functions as the musical culmination of the entire cycle, employing an expanded texture and the full sonority of the instrument. The piece begins with a ritornello — an introductory manual passage presenting a characteristic melodic motif. Initially, the motif appears in the upper voice in the key of G major, followed by a response in the lower voice at the interval of a fifth. Subsequent sections of the introduction develop through sequences derived from the ritornello material, preparing the entrances of the chorale in the lowest voice (performed on the pedal keyboard).

The thematic presentation unfolds in four sections corresponding to the melodic phrasing. Each chorale segment is accompanied by three contrapuntal voices performed on the manuals. After each phrase, a brief reminiscence of the ritornello motif serves as a connective passage between the sections.

The registration was conceived with the aim of achieving an *organo pleno* sonority: *Pédale*: *Soubasse 16′*, *Flûte 8′*, *Bombarde 16′*; *Grand Orgue*: *Montre 16′*, *Montre 8′*, *Prestant 4′*, *Doublette 2′*; *Positif*: *Montre 8′*, *Prestant 4′*; *Récit expressif*: *Fourniture III*; Couplers: I/I 4′, II/I, III/I, III/I 4′, I/P.

III.4 Suite in the Style of the French Baroque on the Chorale *Nun komm der Heiden Heiland*

The melody of the chorale *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland* originates from the Latin Advent hymn *Veni Redemptor Gentium*, traditionally attributed to St Ambrose (4th century). The melody itself emerged in the twelfth century[50]. This hymn was one of the most important chants of the Advent liturgy in the Roman Catholic Church.

[50] *Śpiewnik ewangelicki* - wydanie III, wyd. Augustiana, red. ks. Jerzy Below, Magdalena Legendź, Joanna Śliwka, Bielsko Biała 2019, p. 63.

Within the Lutheran tradition, it was translated and adapted by Martin Luther, who provided a new textual form and adjusted the melody to the German language[51]. The resulting version preserves many melodic features of its Gregorian prototype; however, Luther introduced a more regularised rhythmic structure, placing the melody within a metrical framework. In this form, the chorale was published in the *Erfurt Enchiridion* in 1524.

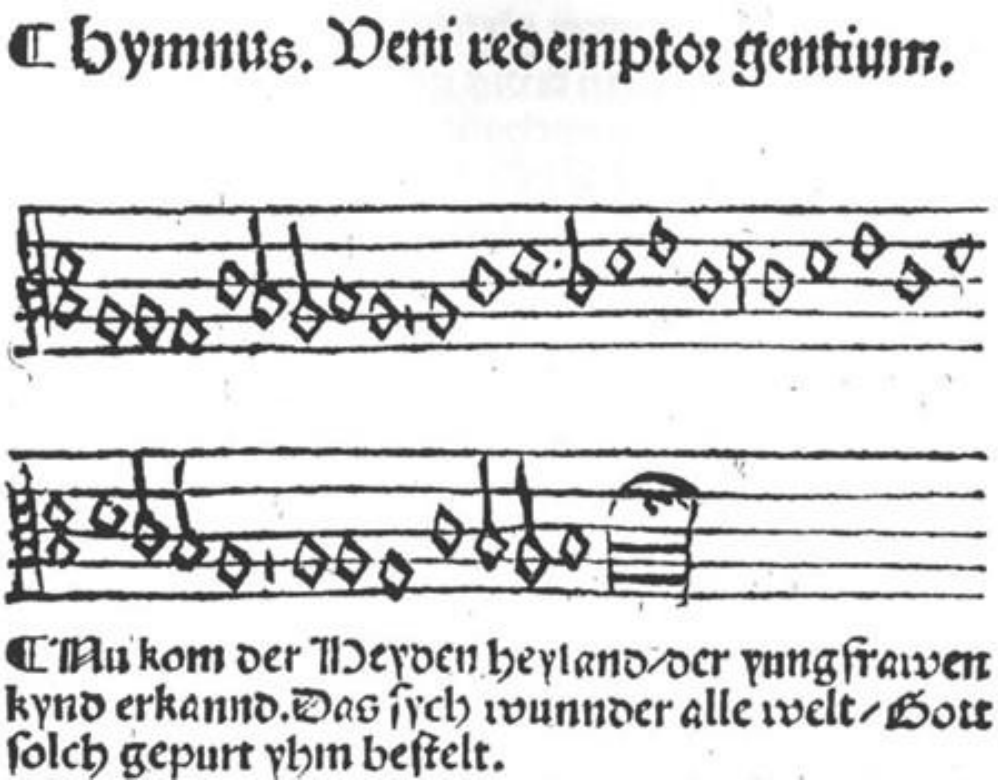


Figure 5 - Nun komm der Heiden Heiland (Erfurt Enchiridion from 1524)[52].

It is worth noting that the melody of the Lutheran chorale *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland* may be interpreted from the perspective of two different modal contexts — Aeolian or Dorian. In its melodic course, the sixth scale degree does not appear, which leaves a certain degree of interpretative flexibility to the performer. This feature may serve as an inspiring starting point for the improvised treatment of the melody.

The presented cycle of improvisations is conceived in the style of the French Baroque. The suite form refers to examples by composers such as Nicolas de Grigny, François Couperin, and Jean-Adam Guilain. In the works of French Baroque organists, cycles based on a single

[51] Ibidem.
[52] *Erfurt Enchiridion*, www.deutschestextarchiv.de/book/view/luther_enchiridion_1524/?p=35&hl=Nu (accessed: 12.12.2025r.).

chorale melody occupied an important place. Among the best-known examples is Nicolas de Grigny's *Veni Creator Spiritus* suite from the *Livre d'orgue*. Composers also frequently elaborated other Gregorian melodies, such as *Pange lingua*, *Ave maris stella*, or *Te Deum*.
In this cycle, the author undertakes a creative reinterpretation of this model, combining melodic material derived from Gregorian chant with the forms and sonorities of the French Baroque. The individual movements of the suite refer both to the formal structures of the period and to historical registration techniques. The cycle is based on the melodic version employed by J. S. Bach.



Figure 6 - J.S. Bach*, Nun komm, der Heiden, Heiland,* BWV 36[53]

In this cycle of improvisations, the author sought to evoke the tonal idiom of classical French organs of the "Golden Age". The model was provided by instruments built by masters such as Pierre Thierry, Alexandre Thierry, and François-Henri Clicquot. The instrument used for the recording does not directly correspond to these historical models, but rather reflects the later tradition of French symphonic organ building. Through carefully considered compromises in the choice of stops and couplers, the author aimed to approximate the characteristic sonority of classical French organs.

Chorale harmonisation

The recording opens with a presentation of the chorale melody in the form of a harmonisation in the spirit of *Kantionalsatz*. As in the previous two cycles, the melody is placed in the soprano and treated within a four-part *nota contra notam* texture. The endings of the four phrases are clearly articulated through cadences. It should be noted that placing a harmonised chorale at the beginning of the suite does not directly correspond to historical

[53] *371 vierstimmige Choralgesänge von Johann Sebastian Bach* - wydanie czwarte, wyd. Leipzig Breitkopf & Härtel, Leipzig ca. 1870, p. 13.

practice; its inclusion serves primarily to introduce the theme, thereby facilitating the listener's perception of the subsequent musical development.

The following registration was used in the harmonisation: *Pédale*: *Soubasse 16'*, *Montre 8'*; *Grand Orgue*: *Montre 8'*, *Prestant 4'*, *Doublette 2'*; Couplers: I/P.

I. Plein chant

The first movement of the suite refers to the *plein chant*, one of the most characteristic forms of the French Baroque. This type of composition has its origins in sixteenth-century musical practice[54]. The *plein chant* was based on the principles of the *plein jeu*, but in addition to the manual part it also incorporated a pedal line. In French Baroque tradition, the Gregorian *cantus firmus* was typically placed in the tenor register, carried by the pedal and performed using a *Trompette 8'*[55].

The manual introduction of the improvisation begins with a *Petit plein jeu*, followed by a change of registration leading to a majestic *Grand plein jeu*. The entire introduction establishes characteristic musical material inspired by the style of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French composers.

In the literature of French Baroque organ music, the presentation of the *cantus firmus* in the form of a *plein chant* is usually preceded by a brief introduction intended to establish the tonal centre and prepare the thematic entry. In the present improvisation, the author deliberately departs from these traditional proportions, choosing instead to expand the introductory section preceding the theme. This decision serves to highlight the richness of harmonic combinations characteristic of the period, particularly prepared dissonances resolving smoothly into consonance. The extended introduction functions not only as a formal preface but also as an element of musical narration, shaping the tension and structure of the entire improvisation and guiding the listener into the intended stylistic space. After the development of the *plein jeu*, the full phrase of the chorale is presented in the tenor register, carried in the pedal part.

The registration for the *Petit plein jeu* was as follows: *Grand Orgue*: *Prestant 4'*, *Doublette 2'*, *Fourniture IV*; *Positif*: *Montre 8'*, *Bourdon 8'*, *Prestant 4'*; Couplers: II/I.

[54] R. Eberlein, *Historia Organów*, wydwanictwo Astraia, Kraków 2024, p. 208.
[55] J. Laukvik, *Orgelschule zur historischen Aufführungspraxis. Grundzüge des Orgelspiels unter Berücksichtigung zeitgenössicher Quellen in 3 Teilen, t. 1. Barock und Klassik*, Carus-Verlag, Stuttgart 2006, p. 163.

This was followed by a change of registration to achieve the *Grand plein jeu*. The following stops were added: *Grand Orgue*: *Montre 16′*, *Montre 8′*; *Positif*: *Piccolo 2′*; Couplers: I/I 4′, II/I 4′.

The manual part was performed on the *Grand Orgue*. The chosen registration aimed to approximate as closely as possible the sonority of a traditional *Grand plein jeu* based on a 16′ foundation. Due to the typical French combination of *Fourniture* and *Cymbale* in the main division, the author employed *Fourniture IV* together with the I/I 4′ and II/I 4′ couplers from the *Positif*, in order to brighten the tonal colour and evoke the historical registration.

The *cantus firmus* was carried in the pedal on *Trompette 8′*, a stop traditionally characterised by a strong and prominent tone in French Baroque organs. On historical instruments this stop often blends effectively with the manual ensemble, sometimes reinforced by another reed such as a *Clairon 4′*. On the symphonic instrument of the Holy Family Church, however, certain registration compromises were necessary to achieve sufficient projection of the thematic line. Therefore, the pedal was additionally reinforced with the labial stops *Montre 8′* and *Flûte 8′*, and the thematic line was further strengthened by coupling *Trompette harmonique 8′* from the *Récit expressif* via III/P and III/P 4′. Only this configuration allowed for a balanced sonic texture while preserving clarity of the chorale theme in the tenor register. The inspiration for this compromise was drawn from a suggestion by John Laukvik in his pedagogical work *Orgelschule zur historischen Aufführungspraxis*[56].

II. Duo

The second movement of the suite takes the form of a *duo*, typical of French organ suites. The texture is based on a two-voice dialogue between the right and left hands. The registration was conceived in a contrasting manner, with a clear differentiation between the tonal layers of the two manuals: *Grand Orgue*: *Montre 8′*, *Prestant 4′*, *Cornet V*; *Positif*: *Bourdon 8′*, *Cromorne 8′*. The solution adopted on the *Grand Orgue* does not fully correspond to historical Baroque performance practice; however, it was intended to approximate the sonority of classical French organs of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The improvisation begins with the exposition of the principal motif in the right hand. Its construction was inspired by the first bar of the chorale, though deliberately modified by the author. A chromatic raising of the seventh degree was introduced, giving the motif a clearer

[56] Ibidem.

orientation towards the major–minor tonal system and thereby softening the unequivocal modal character of the original. It is worth noting that a similar modification was employed by J. S. Bach, for example in *Trio super: Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland*, BWV 660. The author further enriched the motif with passing tones, enhancing its fluidity and expressive quality.

After the initial presentation of the theme in the right hand, the left hand introduces the motif in imitation. The subsequent section unfolds as a free two-voice dialogue between the two lines, in which reminiscences of the principal motif appear throughout the texture. This structural approach recalls models found in the suites of L. N. Clérambault and N. de Grigny, where clarity of registration and a natural motivic logic play a central role.

III. Basse de Trompette

The third movement of the suite was improvised in the form of a *Basse de Trompette*, in which the solo voice is carried by the left hand in the bass register, using a combination of *Trompette 8′* from the *Grand Orgue* and *Trompette harmonique 8′* from the *Récit expressif*. The accompaniment is performed by the right hand on *Montre 8′* and *Prestant 4′* from the *Positif*, with the addition of the II/II 4′ coupler. This coupling serves to brighten the colour of the accompaniment, allowing for the desired balance between the right and left hands.

The movement opens on the *Positif* with a clearly defined rhythmic motif in the right hand, presented monophonically. The motif is based on repeated note values, a melodic–rhythmic gesture that refers to the characteristic articulation associated with trumpet playing, thereby foreshadowing the entrance of the principal bass voice. The opening of the chorale *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland* provided inspiration for the shape of this motif, although it was transformed, among other ways, through rhythmic modification.

After the initial exposition, a second voice enters at the interval of a fifth, developing material derived from the previously presented motif. This procedure enriches the texture and creates a logical introduction preparing the appearance of the main solo line. Subsequently, the left hand presents the solo bass on the *Grand Orgue*. Characteristic rhythmic sequences and figurations aim to imitate the idiomatic style of trumpet playing, both in terms of registration and articulation. Within this part, subtle and transformed references to the first bar of the chorale appear, lending thematic and rhetorical coherence to the whole. The movement maintains a decisive, energetic character and concludes with a major chord featuring a Picardy third.

IV. Récit de Nasard

The fourth movement of the suite takes the form of a *Récit de Nasard*, a genre typical of the French Baroque, in which the solo line is carried in the upper voice against a subtle accompaniment. Registration: *Positif*: *Bourdon 8'*, *Nasard 2 2/3'*; *Récit expressif*: *Cor de nuit 8'*; *Pédale*: *Flûte 8'*.

The movement begins with a two-voice introduction performed on the *Récit expressif*, intended to establish an atmosphere of calm and contemplation. The use of the *Cor de nuit 8'* aims to approximate the sonority of a *Bourdon 8'* typical of classical French organs. Since this stop is available on the instrument only within the *Positif* division, the performer considered this solution to be the most effective tonal compromise.

Following the introduction, the solo part appears on the *Positif*, evoking a prayerful, recitative-like character. The solo line is based on the chorale melody *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland* in augmentation, enriched with elaborate ornamentation. The author sought to employ embellishments characteristic of the French "Golden Age", including suspensions and passing tones. This movement also carries a symbolic dimension: the musical layer aims to allude to the coming of the Saviour, who, in theological understanding, arrived in humility and quietness, bringing peace to the world. The accompaniment, though discreet, plays a significant role in shaping harmonic tension and guiding the musical narrative. The movement concludes with a single tonic pitch in the pedal and a major chord with a Picardy third in the manuals.

V. Fugue grave

The fifth movement of the suite takes the form of a three-voice fugue, referring to the contrapuntal traditions of the French Baroque. The fugue is based on a subject derived from the first two bars of the chorale, presented here in a modified form. The author introduces a raised seventh degree, giving the subject a clearer orientation toward tonal organisation and bringing it closer to the major–minor idiom, thereby intensifying the harmonic tension.

The registration was as follows: *Grand Orgue*: *Montre 8'*, *Prestant 4'*, *Trompette 8'*. After the complete exposition of the subject in three voices, the composition develops through motivic work. The theme appears in various tonal areas, and its successive entries are placed within new harmonic contexts shaped by modulation and sequential procedures. The author employs ornamentation that lends the movement a lively character while maintaining the sense of gravity suggested by the title of the section.

VI. Fond d'orgue

The sixth movement of the suite is titled *Fond d'orgue*, referring to a characteristic type of sonority within the French Baroque tradition. The movement is performed entirely on the manuals. As a historical point of reference for the registration practice of this genre, one may recall the indications given by Gaspard Corrette in *Messe du 8e ton*[57]. The author deliberately adopts a registration that departs from this model, relying exclusively on 8′ principal stops: *Grand Orgue — Montre 8′* and *Positif — Montre 8′*, with the II/I coupler. The aim of this choice was to obtain a gentle, rounded tone corresponding to the contemplative character of the improvisation.

The chorale melody is interwoven into the texture, though presented in a less direct manner — the *cantus firmus* appears in the upper voice. While this approach is not typical of the classical French school, the author considers it an effective solution within the context of organ improvisation. The harmonic layer of this movement is considerably expanded; numerous suspensions, prepared dissonances, and their resolutions form the expressive and structural foundation of the improvisation. In this interpretation, the *Fond d'orgue* also evokes the expressive character of Italian *toccate per l'Elevazione*.

VII. Grand Jeu

The suite culminates in a *Grand jeu*, a form typical of French organ suites. A defining feature of this movement is its powerful sonority, built primarily on reed stops.

The registration was as follows: *Pédale*: *Flûte 8′*, *Bombarde 16′*, *Trompette 8′*; *Grand Orgue*: *Prestant 4′*, *Cornet V*, *Trompette 8′*; *Positif*: *Bourdon 8′*, *Prestant 4′*, *Nasard 2 2/3′*; *Récit expressif*: *Trompette harmonique 8′*, *Hautbois 8′*; Couplers: I/I 4′, II/I, III/I, III/I 16′, III/I 4′, I/P.

The use of these stops allowed for a solemn and massive sonority corresponding to the character of the movement. In traditional *Grand jeu* registration, reed stops — including 4′ reeds — play a crucial role. Since the instrument used for the recording does not possess an independent 4′ reed, the author employed super-octave couplers (such as I/I 4′ and III/I 4′) to approximate the historical idiom. Despite the limitations of the instrument's specification, this

[57] Gaspard Corrette in *Messe du 8e ton* recommends the use of the following stops: ***Grand Orgue*****:** *Bourdon 16'*, *Bourdon 8'*, *Prestant 4' and Montre 8*; ***Positif*****:** *Bourdon 8'*, *Prestant* 4' and coupling of both manuals.

configuration made it possible to achieve a full reed-based sound characteristic of French organ suites.

The form of this movement consists of three sections. The opening segment begins on the *Grand Orgue* with a characteristic motif of repeated notes in duple metre. This motif derives from a transformed version of the first bar of the chorale and is integrated into a flowing musical narrative, punctuated by clear cadences. The closing cadence of this section is marked by a deliberately subtle fermata, creating a musical caesura that allows for a change of registration and prepares the hands for continuation on two manuals.

The following section takes the form of a dialogue between the *Grand Orgue* and the *Récit expressif*. The decision to disengage the III/I 16′ coupler was intended to lighten the heavy 16′ sonority and allow for a solo passage on the *Grand Orgue*. The use of the *Récit expressif* enabled an echo effect while simultaneously serving as accompaniment to the *Grand Orgue*. The dialogue begins with a triplet-based motif derived from the third bar of the chorale, played in the right hand on the *Grand Orgue* and accompanied by the left hand on the *Récit expressif*. The roles are then reversed: the right hand moves to the *Récit expressif*, while the left hand takes over on the *Grand Orgue*. Subsequent passages continue this dialogue between the two manual parts. The final portion of the middle section features a pronounced echo effect executed by both hands between the *Grand Orgue* and the *Récit expressif*. A descending progression in echo form leads to a cadence on the *Grand Orgue*, and this musical idea is presented twice.

The concluding section, marked by a *grave* character, serves as the culmination of the entire suite and returns to the majestic sonority with the reintroduction of the III/I 16′ coupler. The pedal part re-enters to provide the foundation for the final grand cadence, closing with a major chord featuring a Picardy third.

III.5 Neo-modal Chorale Variations on the Hymn *Ave Maris Stella*

The cycle of variations presented in the recording is based on the hymn *Ave Maris Stella*, here situated within a neo-modal aesthetic. *Ave Maris Stella* has its roots in medieval Gregorian chant and is among the most important Marian hymns in the liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church. Both text and melody date from the eighth century[58].

In this part of the work, the author deliberately abandons direct references to historical stylistic models. Instead, a contemporary reinterpretation of modal sources is undertaken,

[58] ks. J. Siedlecki, *Śpiewnik Kościelny* - wydanie XLI, red. ks. Wojciech Kałamarz CM, ks. Andrzej Ziółkowski CM, Kraków 2015, p. 1077.

grounded in the author's own musical language. Although influences of the twentieth-century French organ school — particularly the works of Jehan Alain, Charles Tournemire, and Jean Langlais — can be perceived, they do not function as literal stylistic imitation. In this realisation, the sonic material is developed through the author's individual artistic idiom. An important aspect of the registration concept was the exploration of new tonal possibilities of the instrument that had not been employed in the previous improvisations.



Figure 7 - Excerpt from the hymn *Ave Maris Stella*[59]

I. Variation

The cycle opens with a solemn introit presenting the *tutti* sonority of the organs of the Holy Family Church in Warsaw–Zacisze. The beginning of the piece is based on a monophonic quotation of the *Ave Maris Stella* melody, serving as a direct reference to the monodic nature of the original Gregorian chant. The quotation is given a freely flowing rhythmic character, alluding to Gregorian performance practice associated with the earliest adiastematic sources, in which the word itself functioned as the carrier of rhythmic flow.

The opening phrase of the introit comes to rest on the pitch A, in accordance with the caesura marked in the chant version. Over this sustained tone, a sequence of chords extending beyond a single tonal centre is superimposed, culminating in a major chord. A similar construction returns in the following phrase, which concludes on the pitch D.

In the third section, a clear reference to *organum* appears — a two-voice texture moving in parallel perfect fourths. This passage also leads into a chordal sequence. In the fourth section of the improvisation, the melody is presented within a three-voice texture reminiscent of the *fauxbourdon* technique. The final, fifth segment once again introduces a quotation of the melody, this time accompanied by a neo-modal harmonisation. The movement concludes on the pitch

[59] *Liber antiphonarius*, Solesmes 1960, https://media.musicasacra.com/books/liber-antiphonarius-1960-compact.pdf, p. 1201 (accessed: 17.12.2025).

D, with the final chord deliberately deprived of its third. This gesture emphasises the modal character of the thematic material and intentionally archaizes the harmonic language of the improvisation.

II. Variation

The second movement of the cycle takes the form of a canon at the octave. Its foundation is an incessantly repeated melodic–rhythmic ostinato in the right hand, based on a motif of four semiquavers: f–a–b–d. This figure functions as a musical background intended to evoke the imagery of sea waves. The use of such a repetitive affect directly refers to the text of the hymn *Ave maris stella* ("Hail, Star of the Sea").

Following a brief introduction of the ostinato, the canon begins. The entire chorale melody is divided into four sections. In order to achieve greater metric and structural clarity, the melody is presented in a rhythmically regularised form. The first voice of the canon enters in the pedal, while the answer — sounding an octave lower in real pitch — appears after the duration of a minim in the left hand. Both voices proceed in imitation throughout the movement.

Registration: *Grand Orgue*: *Flûte harmonique 8′* — ostinato in the right hand; *Récit expressif*: *Hautbois 8′* — answer in the left hand; *Pédale*: via III/P 4′ coupling — first voice of the canon performed on *Hautbois 8′*, transposed an octave higher.

This configuration enabled a unified tonal colour for the canonic voices while maintaining a clear separation of the ostinato. The use of the III/P 4′ coupling prevented the line from sounding excessively low and ensured greater clarity of texture.

III. Variation

The third movement fulfils a dual function — that of a musical echo and a dialogue. Its structure is based on four quotations of the chorale melody, following the original Gregorian notation. Each phrase is treated according to the same textural and symbolic concept. The right and left hands successively present the notes of the theme, each time adding a parallel perfect fourth below the principal pitch. The alternating execution between the two hands creates the impression of a spatial echo, achieved through the use of 4′ flute stops from two different manual divisions.

After each quotation, both hands continue in dialogue, forming a musical background based on the pitches of the D Dorian scale. Above this texture, an augmented version of the chorale theme is introduced in the pedal.

Registration: *Grand Orgue*: *Flûte 4′* (right hand); *Récit expressif*: *Flûte octaviante 4′* (left hand); *Positif*: *Montre 8′*, *Nasard 2 2/3′* (theme in the pedal); Couplers: II/P 4′. The use of this coupling transposes the pedal theme one octave higher, allowing it to blend more effectively within an acoustically balanced register relative to the manual voices. This solution contributes to a sonority characterised by spaciousness and lightness.

IV. Variation

The next movement of the cycle is based on the presentation of the theme in the tenor register. The section opens with a harmonic ostinato in the right hand. The pattern is built on a D-minor ninth chord, in which the ninth resolves to the root, followed by a G-major harmony featuring a suspended fourth resolving to the third in the upper voice. This harmonic scheme directly refers to the characteristic Dorian relationship between the chords of D minor and G major. At the same time, the pedal introduces motivic fragments derived from the theme, functioning as a background to the harmonic narrative. Of particular interest is the shift of tonal axis: mediant-related modulations are introduced, moving towards tonal areas such as F Dorian and A Dorian. These transitions appear already in the introduction and are further developed throughout the variation.

Subsequently, the first segment of the theme enters in the left hand in the tenor register, enriched with passing tones that enhance the expressive and colouristic dimension of the movement. Later statements of the theme appear in new tonal contexts resulting from the aforementioned mediant shifts. Consequently, the melody undergoes slight modifications, including chromatic alterations adapting it to the evolving harmonic framework.

Registration: *Pédale*: *Soubasse 16′*, *Montre 8′*, *Flûte 8′*; *Grand Orgue* (right hand): *Montre 8′*, *Gambe 8′*, *Flûte 4′*; *Positif* (left hand — solo): *Montre 8′*, *Bourdon 8′*; *Récit expressif*: *Flûte traversière 8′*, *Gambe 8′*, *Trompette harmonique 8′*, *Hautbois 8′*; Couplers: III/II, II/I, II/P. This registration allowed for a clear differentiation of tonal layers and for the effective projection of the tenor theme against a subtly shaped accompaniment.

V. Variation

The movement opens with the creation of a calm, ethereal atmosphere. This effect is achieved through the use of *Gambe 8′* and *Voix céleste 8′* from the *Récit expressif*, combined with a bass foundation based on *Soubasse 16′* in the pedal with the III/P coupling. The primary aim of this section is to reveal a rich harmonic palette resulting from the expansion of the tonal system employed. Chords frequently contain added tones, and at times the acoustic scale is introduced, creating a varied and colouristic sonic background.

Against this texture, a solo line emerges in the right hand, developing motives derived from the chorale. The entire variation maintains a calm, prayerful character. The melodic line unfolds freely through a technique of motivic spinning, yet without losing the contemplative quality of the movement. The solo is presented using *Flûte harmonique 8′* from the *Grand Orgue* combined with *Bourdon 8′* from the *Positif*.

VI. Variation

The following movement combines two contrasting concepts: a rapid, highly active texture and the symbolic tolling of bells (*Carillons*). The improvisation is based on 4′ flute stops, ensuring clarity and precision even within a dense and mobile texture. At the same time, their warm and rounded timbre balances the intensity of rhythmic motion. Within this intricate sonic fabric, fragmentary motivic references to the chorale theme appear — often articulated in a pizzicato-like manner, serving as points of orientation.

Subsequently, the pedal introduces repeated strikes on the pitch D using the *Carillons* stop, evoking the sound of church bells. Against this background, the theme is presented — also on *Carillons* — in fragmentary statements that engage in dialogue with the manual parts.

The harmonic language of this movement is grounded in modal colouration, occasionally enriched by whole-tone scale elements introduced through chromatic displacement. This adds an ethereal quality while maintaining structural coherence. Fragments of the theme also appear in the uppermost manual voice.

Registration: *Pédale*: *Carillons*; *Grand Orgue*: *Flûte 4′*; *Positif*: *Flûte à cheminée 4′*; *Récit expressif*: *Flûte octaviante 4′*; Couplers: II/I, III/I, II/II 4′.

VII. Variation

The conceptual intention of this variation was to evoke the character of a litany chant. Its structure is based on three clearly defined musical layers. In the left hand, an ethereal harmonic foundation is sustained — a subdued background created through the combination of *Gambe 8′* and *Voix céleste 8′*. The role of the accompaniment is to establish a calm, almost mystical atmosphere.

The right hand presents a short, repetitive melodic-rhythmic motif, symbolically reflecting the structure of a litany — prayerful invocations built upon recurring textual and musical formulas. The use of *Bourdon 8′* and *Nasard 2 2/3′* gives this motif a luminous and distinctive timbre. The chorale melody is placed in the pedal. Employing *Prestant 4′* from the *Grand Orgue* together with the I/P coupling allows the theme to emerge clearly within the sonic texture, creating a contrast with the subtle colouristic character of the manual parts.

VIII. Variation

The final part of the cycle was conceived in a march-like character. At the beginning, a distinctive rhythmic motif is introduced in the manual part. The pedal line is based primarily on stepwise motion in seconds with uniform rhythmic values, forming a cohesive whole with the manual texture and directly shaping the march-like character of the movement. The fanfare-like expression of the variation is achieved, among other elements, through the organ registration and the dominant, characteristic rhythmic layer. This may evoke clear associations with the sound of brass and percussion sections in a symphony orchestra.

Following the introduction, a solo voice appears on the *Grand Orgue*, whose melody incorporates quotations from the chorale *Ave Maris Stella*. The harmonic language of this section is grounded in a neomodal idiom. Mediant and stepwise progressions are also employed, leading momentarily toward neighbouring tonal areas. The solo line returns several times, each appearance embedded within a newly developed harmonic context. The movement concludes with a chord without a third, deliberately directing the listener’s attention toward the modal aspect of the thematic material.

Registration used: *Pédale: Montre 16′*, *Soubasse 16′*, *Montre 8′*, *Flûte 8′ Grand Orgue (solo): Montre 8′*, *Gambe 8′*, *Prestant 4′*, *Cornet V*, *Trompette 8′ Positif (accompaniment): Montre 8′*, *Bourdon 8′*, *Prestant 4′ Récit expressif: Flûte traversière 8′*, *Cor de nuit 8′*, *Gambe*

8′, *Octavin 2′*, *Trompette harmonique 8′*, *Hautbois 8′* Couplers: III/II, III/II 4′, II/II 4′, II/I, II/I 4′, I/I 4′, III/I, III/I 4′, I/P, II/P, III/P.

III.6 Arabesque in a Romantic Style on the Antiphon *Salve Regina*

The Gregorian chant *Salve Regina* is among the most important and widely known Marian antiphons in the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church. The text and melody date back to the 11th century, and its authorship is often attributed to Blessed Hermann of Reichenau (*Hermanus Contractus*) [60]. However, there is no unequivocal documentary confirmation regarding the identity of the antiphon's composer. *Salve Regina* is one of the four Marian antiphons assigned to specific periods of the liturgical year. It is sung in particular from the day

[60] P. Wiśniewski, *Tropowana antyfona maryjna Salve Regina w XV-wiecznym psałterzu oliwetańskim z Łodzi*, quarterly *Collectanea Theologica* 2022, vol. 92 no. 4, p. 121.

after Pentecost until the First Sunday of Advent. Additionally, *Salve Regina* was traditionally sung at the end of the day within the Liturgy of the Hours, especially during Compline.



Figure 8 - Salve Regina[61]

[61] *Liber antiphonarius*, op. cit., p. 158-159 (accessed: 17.12.2025).

The improvisation was conceived in the form of an arabesque, with a clear reference to the Romantic style. In its textural layer, the improvisation drew on models of piano music, employing continuously flowing figurations throughout the entire form. The motoric manual part was performed using four-foot flute stops from the *Grand Orgue* and *Récit expressif* divisions (with the use of the III/I coupling). This choice of stops aimed to achieve a precise yet warm and projecting sound. The improvisation begins with a short introductory passage that establishes the motoric manual texture. In the opening section, a freely shaped melody appears in the upper register, preparing the entrance of the main theme. Subsequently, *Salve Regina* is presented in the pedal, performed using the same four-foot flute couplings from the manuals with the addition of *Prestant 4'* from the *Positif*. Placing the theme in the pedal within the small-octave register created a singing tone resembling an eight-foot stop. The theme was rhythmically adapted in order to be framed within clear, symmetrical musical phrases.

In this improvisation, particular importance was given to shaping a principal melodic line, which, according to the author's intention, assumed the primary expressive role. The entire structure is permeated by an expanded harmonic language drawing on solutions characteristic of nineteenth-century music. Among the techniques employed are mediant relationships, secondary chords, functionally distant harmonies, as well as chromatic procedures, alterations, and modulations.

Registration used: *Grand Orgue*: *Flûte 4'*; *Positif*: *Prestant 4'*; *Récit expressif*: *Flûte octaviante 4'*; Couplers: III/I, I/P, II/P, III/P.

III.7 Meditation on *Tantum ergo Sacramentum*

The hymn *Tantum ergo Sacramentum* constitutes the final two stanzas of the sequence *Pange lingua gloriosi corporis mysterium*, written by St. Thomas Aquinas. The sequence originated in the thirteenth century for the Office of Corpus Christi, established by Pope Urban IV[62]. The text expresses a profound theological confession of faith in the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The hymn is performed within the liturgy of the Catholic Church, especially during the rite of Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

In the artistic conception of this improvisation, the author deliberately adopted the perspective of the Phrygian mode as a point of reference for shaping the melodic material,

[62] R. Pośpiech, *Kult Eucharystii w muzyce na Boże Ciało*, Liturgia Sacra 3 (1997), no. 1, pp. 105-106.

without treating it as a historical model inherent to the chant itself. The primary inspiration was the melodic contour of the chant, its cadences, and its *finalis* on the pitch E. The application of this modal perspective lends the work a mystical character, corresponding to the contemplative and adorational dimension of the text.



Figure 9- Tantum Ergo Sacramentum[63]

[63] *Liber antiphonarius*, op. cit. , p. 1380 (accessed: 17.12.2025).

Registration was selected in a way that emphasized the intimate character of the piece. *Pédale: Soubasse 16', Flûte 8'; Grand Orgue: Montre 8', Gambe 8', Flûte harmonique 8', Flûte 4'; Récit expressif: Gambe 8', Voix céleste 8';* Couplers: III/III 16′ , III/III 4′ , III/P. The use of the III/III 16′ and 4′ couplers allowed for the creation of an expansive, full string-choir sonority, in which the timbre of the Gambe stop was enriched by the Voix céleste, producing an effect of ethereal harmony.

The improvisation begins on the III manual, where chords oscillating around a tonal center—yet frequently departing from it—create a harmonic background that intensifies the sense of contemplation and elusiveness. The leading melodic line is placed in the highest voice and serves as the principal narrative element of this section. In the lowest voice, a characteristic motif of the chant appears, functioning as a prefiguration of the forthcoming presentation of the theme. After this introduction, the first fragment of Tantum ergo sounds on the I manual, rendered in a single voice and stylized as a chant-like recitative. The theme is then enriched by a second voice moving in parallel perfect fourths, clearly referring to the technique of organum. A short interlude on the III manual restores the mysterious atmosphere, after which a dialogue between two solo voices unfolds. Although the harmony is distinctly inspired by the Phrygian mode, it extends beyond its framework through mediant and stepwise progressions as well as expanded harmonic sonorities. The choice of harmony is subordinated to the shaping of the melodic line, which remains the primary structural and expressive force.

The meditation concludes with a characteristic cadential gesture derived from the structure of the Phrygian mode, juxtaposing the chords of D minor with E minor, followed by D minor in first inversion against E minor. The work culminates in a final E-major chord with an added second.

III.8 Conclusion

The cycle of organ improvisations presented in this recording corresponds to the assumptions of the doctoral dissertation *The Evolution of Organ Improvisation in the Context of the Use of Melodies Based on Modal Scales*. The starting point for the entire work consisted of melodies whose treatment was not intended as mere reconstruction, but as a conscious reinterpretation. Improvisation is thus presented as a space where historical idioms meet the author’s individual musical language.

A particular challenge in the creative process was shaping a satisfying sonic layer for the pieces. This issue proved especially complex in improvisations referring to historical styles. Knowledge of historical registration practices, combined with the possibilities offered by the instrument used, often required compromise decisions. The primary objective remained to achieve the closest possible approximation to the intended sound effect, one that would directly evoke the original timbral qualities of historical instruments.

The author aimed to achieve a high level of performance precision in all forms despite their improvised nature. The creative process demanded considerable concentration, particularly in maintaining a balance between spontaneity and control. The nature of improvisation makes it impossible to reproduce a recorded section in an identical manner. The necessity of making numerous rapid and irreversible decisions added further pressure during the recording process, presenting a challenge different from that of interpreting a composed work. The art of improvisation requires the mastery of several essential elements: control of form, counterpoint, meter and rhythm, shaping of melodic phrases, and the overall musical trajectory. Equally important are appropriate articulation and familiarity with the principles of organ performance practice. The work sought to present improvisation as a multidimensional art which, although rooted in tradition, remains open to individual artistic sensibility.

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