

Ut queant laxis

Gregorian Chant

Melody attributed to Guido d'Arezzo (991/992 – after 1033)

Text attributed to Paulus Diaconus (c. 720s – 13 April 799 AD)

Translation and Pronunciation

[ut kwɛ-ant lak-sis rɛ-sɔ-na-rɛ fi-bris]

1. Ut queant laxis resonare fibris

[mi-ra dzɛ-stɔ-rum fa-mu-li tu-ɔ-rum]

Mira gestorum famuli tuorum,

[sɔl-vɛ pɔ-lu-ti la-bi-i rɛ-a-tum]

Solve polluti labii reatum,

[sɑŋk-tɛ jɔ-a-nɛs]

Sancte Joannes.

[nun-tsi-us tʃɛl-sɔ vɛ-niɛns ɔ-lim-pɔ]

2. Nuntius celso veniens Olympo,

[tɛ pa-tri ma-ŋum fɔ-rɛ na-fi-tu-rum]

Te patri magnum fore nasciturum,

[nɔ-mɛn ɛt vi-tɛ sɛ-ri-ɛm dzɛ-rɛn-dɛ]

Nomen, et vitae seriem gerendae

[ɔr-di-nɛ prɔ-mit]

Ordine promit.

[i-lɛ prɔ-mi-si du-bi-us su-pɛr-ni]

3. Ille promissi dubius superni,

[pɛr-di-dit prɔmp-tɛ mɔ-du-lɔs lɔ-kwɛ-lɛ]

Perdidit promptae modulus loquelae:

[sɛd rɛ-fɔr-ma-sti dzɛ-ni-tus pɛ-rɛmp-tɛ]

Sed reformasti genitus peremptae

[ɔr-ga-na vɔ-tʃis]

Organa vocis.

[ven-tris ob-stru-so re-ku-bans ku-bi-li]

4. Ventrīs obstruso recubans cubili

[sen-se-ras re-dzem ta-la-mo ma-nen-tem]

Senseras Regem thalamo manentem:

[in̄kpa-rens na-ti me-ri-tis u-ter-kve]

Hinc parens nati meritis uterque

[ab-di-ta pan-dit]

Abdita pandit.

[sit de-kus pa-tri dze-ni-te-kve pro-li]

5. Sit decus Patri, genitaeque Proli,

[et ti-bi kom-par u-tri-us-kve vir-tus]

Et tibi compar utriusque virtus,

[spi-ri-tus sem-per de-us u-nus om-ni]

Spiritus semper, Deus unus, omni

[tem-po-ris e-vo a-men]

Temporis aevo. Amen.

<p>1. Ut queant laxis resonare fibris Mira gestorum famuli tuorum, Solve polluti labii reatum, Sancte Joannes.</p> <p>2. Nuntius celso veniens Olympo, Te patri magnum fore nasciturum, Nomen, et vitae seriem gerendae Ordine promit.</p> <p>3. Ille promissi dubius superni, Perdidit promptae modulus loquelae: Sed reformasti genitus peremptae Organa vocis.</p>	<p>1. For thy spirit, holy John, to chasten Lips sin-polluted, fettered tongues to loosen; So by thy children might thy deeds of wonder Meetly be chanted.</p> <p>Lo! a swift herald, from the skies descending, Bears to thy father promise of thy greatness; How he shall name thee, what thy future story, Duly revealing.</p> <p>Scarcely believing message so transcendent, Him for a season power of speech forsaketh, Till, at thy wondrous birth, again returneth Voice to the voiceless.</p> <p>Thou, in thy mother's womb all darkly cradled, Knewest thy Monarch, biding in His chamber, Whence the two parents, through their</p>
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<p>4. Ventrīs obstruso recubans cubili Senserās Regem thalamo manentem: Hinc parens nati meritis uterque Abdita pandit.</p> <p>5. Sit decus Patri, genitaeque Proli, Et tibi compar utriusque virtus, Spiritus semper, Deus unus, omni Temporis aevo. Amen.</p>	<p>children's merits, Mysteries uttered.</p> <p>Praise to the Father, to the Son begotten, And to the Spirit, equal power. possessing, One God whose glory, through the lapse of ages, Ever resoundeth. Amen.¹</p>
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Background

Ut queant laxis is a hymn celebrating the feast of Saint John the Baptist on June 24th. While this chant melody is often attributed to Guido d'Arezzo, it is likely that the melody already existed, and that he combined the existing chant with the text of Paulus Diaconus.²

This chant is noteworthy for its place in the canon of music theory. Wanting to help singers remember Gregorian chant more efficiently, the Benedictine monk, Guido d'Arezzo, devised a methodology and became known for the effectiveness of his methods. Noting that each half-phrase in *Ut queant laxis* began on the next pitch in the medieval hexachord he used for teaching chant, he developed a system of *solmization* using the first syllable of each half phrase of the first verse, giving us most of the solfege syllables that music students are familiar with in the present: *ut re mi fa sol la*.³ Eventually the first syllable *ut* was replaced with *do*.⁴ The addition of the seventh note came later.⁵

¹ Campelli, trans. "Ut Queant Laxis." *The Choral Public Domain Library*. Web. 25 June 2019. Reproduced under the Choral Public Domain Creative Commons License [<http://www1.cpd.org/wiki/index.php/ChoralWiki:CPDL>].

² Wikipedia contributors. "Ut queant laxis." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 1 Jun. 2019. Web. 25 Jun. 2019.

³ Wikipedia contributors. "Guido of Arezzo." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 22 Jun. 2019. Web. 25 Jun. 2019.

⁴ For a more thorough discussion of this change, see McNaught, W.G. "The History and Uses of the Sol-Fa Syllables." *Proceedings of the Musical Association*, volume 19, Novello, 1893, p. 43.

Ut queant laxis
resonare fibris
Mira gestorum
famuli tuorum,
Solve polluti
labii reatum,
Sancte Joannes.

Recordings

Loup Aveyron, 2010: <https://youtu.be/SugtS3tqsoo>.

Kórus Spontánus, 2013: <https://youtu.be/9xJaQOonfMU> - Very cool setting of this chant

Available on Google Books:

<https://books.google.com/books?id=nNYPAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA43#v=onepage&q&f=false>

⁵ This is definitely going out into the weeds a bit. Guido taught chant through the use of a medieval hexachord – a six note scale with whole steps between all pitches aside from pitches 3 and 4, C D E F G A. If the chant had a range wider than a sixth, the hexachord would be modified to add another hexachord on top. (“Hexachord”, Wikipedia). This chant does not have the seventh scale degree, but the seventh scale degree eventually was named *si* for the first letters in **S**ancte **J**ohannes, and later *ti* so that each syllable would start with a different letter. (“Ut queant laxis”, Wikipedia).

Hymn
II

U T que- ant la- xis * reso-ná-re fibris mi- ra

ges-tó- rum fámu- li tu- ó-rum, sol- ve pollú- ti

lá- bi- i re- á-tum, sancte Io- án-nes.

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Resources

Walker, Micheline. "Ut Queant Laxis." *Micheline's Blog*. Web. 2011. Accessed 25 June 2019. <https://michelinewalker.com/2011/11/22/musical-notation-ut-queant-laxis>

Unknown author. "Ut Queant Laxis." *chantblog*. Web. 23 June 2008. Accessed 25 June 2019. <http://chantblog.blogspot.com/2008/06/ut-queant-laxis.html>

Wikipedia contributors. "Guido of Arezzo." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 22 Jun. 2019. Web. 25 Jun. 2019.

Berten, Olivier. "Ut Queant Laxis." *GregoBase*. Web. N.D. Accessed 25 June 2019. (View the full score in neumes) https://gregobase.selapa.net/chant.php?id=2539#source_1

McNaught, W.G. "The History and Uses of the Sol-Fa Syllables." *Proceedings of the Musical Association*, volume 19, Novello, 1893, p. 43.

Analysis

Mode: Dorian

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Meter: Unmetered chant

Form: Strophic, 4 phrase, unequal in length, based on meter of text

Text meter: 11.11.11.5 (called Sapphic and Adonic meter – there is a detailed description of [Sapphic and Adonic meter](#) at Poets.org.

Texture: monophonic