



## Introduction



BYZANTINE chant, the traditional music of the Eastern Orthodox Church, boasts an uninterrupted history that stems from the chant dialects of the ancient eucharistic communities throughout the Christian world. Over the centuries, it evolved naturally and within specific traditional parameters, and was continuously refined by the Church.<sup>1</sup> It is the music that the saints found most appropriate for communal prayer and for expressing Orthodox theology; the music that the emissaries of Prince Vladimir heard in Constantinople in the service that made them exclaim ecstatically, “We knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth!... We cannot forget that beauty,”<sup>2</sup> and thus led to the conversion of Russia to Orthodoxy. This book is a humble attempt to make a part of this sacred music available to the Western world in its most authentic form.

In order for Orthodox Christians in the West to sing Byzantine chant in the traditional manner, it is necessary for them to realize how it differs from the kind of secular Western music to which everyone today is so accustomed. These differences can be divided into three categories: quantitative, qualitative, and spiritual.

The *quantitative* differences lie in the intervals used in Western and Byzantine music. Byzantine chants contain certain intervals, accidentals, and tonal attractions (ἔλξεις) which result in pitches that do not exist on the equally tempered keyboard, the standard for pitch relationships in contemporary Western compositions. These subtle differences add a unique beauty to Byzantine melodies. Nevertheless, these differences are usually of sufficiently minor significance that most pitches in Byzantine music may be agreeably approximated by corresponding pitches in the equally tempered scales.<sup>3</sup> Exceptionally, however, the modal genre known as the

<sup>1</sup> Byzantine music was systematized primarily by St. John Damascene in the eighth century, and St. John Koukouzelis, who lived (according to contemporary musicologists including Gregory Stathes and Edward Williams) in the fourteenth century.

<sup>2</sup> “Повесть временных лет”, Нестор летописец, монах Киево-Печерского монастыря, ок.1112, часть 2-ая. Перевод академика Лихачева Д.С., в книге «Великое Наследие», изд. «Современник», М., 1980. (See also Ware, Timothy, *The Orthodox Church*, Penguin Classics, London, revised edition, 1993, p. 264.)

<sup>3</sup> To be precise, the pitches in all Byzantine modes (except for the soft chromatic) may be approximated by pitches of the equally tempered keyboard such that the intervallic discrepancies never exceed 33 cents (2 μούρα), which is equivalent to one-third of a half step.

## Introduction

soft chromatic presents a serious dilemma, because the pitch “Κε” (i.e., “La”) is neither flat nor natural but falls in between in such a manner that any approximation using equally tempered pitches is unsatisfactory. This problem and its solution are discussed at greater length in Appendix I.

The *qualitative* differences between Western and Byzantine music are many. The primary difference is that Western music is for the most part polyphonic (i.e., harmonized), whereas Byzantine music is monophonic, constructed of melody alone. This melody is accompanied only by a bass drone, or “ison,” which enriches the chant by adding solemnity and power to it.<sup>4</sup> Thus, even when many people chant together, the resulting sound seems to be coming “from one mouth,” as St. John Chrysostom described the music of the fourth century.<sup>5</sup> This simple combination of melody and ison is a practice that has been in use for centuries.<sup>6</sup> Adding harmonies to the melody is foreign to traditional liturgical music, even if in recent centuries some Orthodox churches have chosen to adopt elements either of Western-style polyphony or of indigenous folk music.

Western-style harmonizations became the norm for the first time in Orthodox liturgical music in Lviv and then Kiev,<sup>7</sup> where, due to Roman Catholic influences from Poland, this polyphony “suddenly burst into Russian liturgical singing from the West in the middle of the seventeenth century,”<sup>8</sup> putting an abrupt end to a seven-century epoch of monophonic liturgical music.<sup>9</sup> Henceforth, this polyphonic music continued to develop under Italian and German

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<sup>4</sup> As a British philologist observed, “The effect [achieved through the ison] is much fuller and more satisfying than might be imagined.” (Tillyard, H.J.W., *Byzantine Music and Hymnography*. London, 1923, p. 64.)

<sup>5</sup> Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. 61, col. 315 (Commentary on I Cor. 14:33 by St. John Chrysostom, Homily 36): “For indeed there must always be but one voice in the church, as there is but one body. Thus the reader alone speaks, and the bishop himself is content to sit in silence; and the chanter chants alone. Even though all respond [ὑπηχώσιν], the sound issues as if from one mouth.”

<sup>6</sup> Some music historians (such as George Papadopoulos, Demetrios Panagiotopoulou, and George Constantinou) argue that the word “ὑπηχώσιν” in the quote in the previous footnote means “to sing the under-sound.” They conjecture that this under-sound was the predecessor of the ison. However, other music historians (including James McKinnon, Dimitri Conomos, and the patristic scholar G.W.H. Lampe) believe that the “ὑπήχησις” is not an under-sound but a response. Their theory is more plausible, since the use of the words “ὑπηχήσεως” and “ὑπηχεῖν” by St. John Chrysostom in his homily on Psalm 117 (PG 55:328) leaves little room to doubt that it can only refer to a response. Other patristic texts also support the latter theory, since they frequently mention responsorial singing, whereas there is no clear testimony to the use of the ison until after the fifteenth century. (Vid. Fellerer, K.G., “Die Gesänge der bysantinischgriechischen Liturgie” in *Geschichte der katholischen Kirchenmusik*, Kassel, 1972, p. 130. See also Strunk, William Oliver, *Essays on Music in the Byzantine World*, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., New York, 1977, p. 300.)

<sup>7</sup> Kochmarchuk, Franko, “Dukhovni vyplyvy Kieva na moskovshchynu v dobu hetmans'koi Ukrainy” (New York: Shevchenko Scientific Society, 1964), p. 120f.

<sup>8</sup> Gardner, Johann von, *Russian Church Singing, Vol. 1: Orthodox Worship and Hymnography*, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, New York, 1980, p. 143. To be precise, this music was not polyphonic but homophonic, since homophony is defined as “music in which melodic interest is concentrated in one voice or part that is provided with a subordinate accompaniment, as distinct from polyphony, in which melodic interest is distributed among all parts of the musical texture.” —Randel, Don Michael, *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1986, p. 380.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139. This statement by Gardner is actually a simplification of a more complicated development. Dr. Nicolas Schidlovsky explains: “Concerning polyphony in Russian church singing we should note the following: it is certain that it existed before the seventeenth century; but its history is obscure, and we cannot be sure of the time or the place of its origin. Based on manuscript evidence, the native polyphonic technique is generally regarded as an outgrowth of folk heterophony cultivated in a few centers with privileged status. There is no writ-

## Introduction

influences.<sup>10</sup> Today many Orthodox parishes have adopted this polyphony for their services without regard for its origins or its guiding aesthetic principles.

Of more significance than the historical differences between polyphony and monophony are their spiritual ramifications. As Dr. Constantine Cavarnos aptly notes:

A single line of melody makes it easy for the congregation to follow the meaning of the text of the hymns chanted. When the melody is in several parts, it tends to suppress the meaning. In addition, it introduces a secular quality into the chant, an element of ostentation and lightness. Traditional, one-part chant is, by contrast, characterized by humility and solemnity, qualities which are of the very essence of Orthodox spirituality.<sup>11</sup>

One of the foremost contemporary Byzantine musicologists, Dr. Dimitri Conomos, has made the following observations regarding the practical drawbacks of polyphony in ecclesiastical music:

[Monophonic music] is usually easy to sing, easy to learn, and easy to remember. The chanters can readily match their note to the celebrant's... This style of music is ideal for congregational singing... Polyphonic music, on the other hand, is by its very nature more complex, denser, and more difficult. In order for it to be done well—both musically and liturgically—one has to concentrate. The music demands a lot of attention—attention that could better be given elsewhere during a divine service... Unlike polyphony—the music of fashion in the Baroque, Classical and Romantic periods—simple chant melodies can be tailored to follow the text, to amplify its meaning and rhetoric, to give it an appropriate musical dress.<sup>12</sup>

For these and many other reasons, the use of Western-style polyphony in church has been opposed in recent centu-



St. Barsanuphius  
of Optina

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ten theory preserved on the practice, and the surprising dissonance of the music shows a complete independence from Western counterpoint." (Schidlovsky, Nicolas, *Sources of Russian Chant Theory*. In Gordon D. McQuere (Ed.), *Russian Theoretical Thought in Music*, UMI Research Press, Michigan, 1983, pp. 103-104.)

Although there is a sixteenth century document (Книга Степенная Царского Родословия Содержащая Историю Российскую) which mentions that "tripartite sweet-singing" was introduced in Russia by Greeks in the eleventh century, Stasov convincingly proves (vid. Стасов, В.В., "Заметки о Демественном и Троестрочном Пении", *Известия Императорского Археологического Общества* V, 1865, сс. 225-254.) that this does not refer to harmonization and must be treated as a later interpolation. (See also Velimirović, Miloš M., *Byzantine Elements in Early Slavic Chant: The Hirmologium*. Main Volume and Appendices. *Monumenta Musicae Byzantinae Subsidia*, Vol. IV, Copenhagen, 1960, p. 10. For other possible explanations of this curious phrase, see Gardner, Johann von, *Russian Church Singing, Vol. 2: History from the Origins to the Mid-Seventeenth Century*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2000, pp. 30-36 and 313-314.)

<sup>10</sup> Vid. Gardner, Johann von, *Russian Church Singing, Vol. 1*, p. 145.

<sup>11</sup> Cavarnos, Constantine, *Byzantine Chant*. Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, Belmont, Massachusetts, 1998, pp. 25-26.

<sup>12</sup> Conomos, Dimitri. Excerpt from a lecture given at the St. Sergius Orthodox Institute, Paris, in 1997. Published on [http://www.monachos.net/liturgics/chant\\_history.shtml](http://www.monachos.net/liturgics/chant_history.shtml) February 2003.



## Introduction

ries by several saints (including St. Seraphim of Sarov;<sup>13</sup> St. Philaret Drozdov, Metropolitan of Moscow;<sup>14</sup> St. Ignatius Brianchaninov;<sup>15</sup> St. Barsanuphius, Elder of Optina;<sup>16</sup> and the New Martyr St. Andronik Archbishop of Perm<sup>17</sup>) as well as by the Holy Synod of Constantinople,<sup>18</sup> the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece,<sup>19</sup> and by many venerable hierarchs (such as Patriarch Germogen of Russia<sup>20</sup> in the seventeenth century, Metropolitan Evgeny of Kiev<sup>21</sup> in the eighteenth century, and Archbishop Averky of Syracuse and Holy Trinity Monastery [Jordanville] in the twentieth century). Nevertheless, other saints (primarily some of the New Martyrs of twentieth-century Russia) and other hierarchs used and loved Western-style polyphonic ecclesiastical music because they appreciated its beauty and were inspired by it. Their acceptance is perfectly understandable, since musical preferences are not dogmatic issues but are dependent upon cultural circumstances and personal taste. Besides, if, according to St. John of the Ladder, lovers of God are moved to spiritual joy, to divine love, and to tears even by worldly songs,<sup>22</sup> incomparably more so will they be inspired by hymns, even if their melodies are of a worldly character or bear some of the aforementioned shortcomings.

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<sup>13</sup> Vid. Zander, Constantine, *St. Seraphim of Sarov*, translated by Sister Gabriel Anne S.S.C., St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, New York, 1975, p. 64.

<sup>14</sup> Vid. Письма митрополита Филарета к архимандриту Антонию часть 3. 1850-1856. М., 1883. сс. 17-18.

<sup>15</sup> Vid. Собрание писем святителя Игнатия (Брянчанинова), Епископа Ставропольского и Кавказского, М-СПб, 1995, сс. 130, 131.

<sup>16</sup> Vid. Afanasiev, Victor, *Elder Barsanuphius of Optina*, St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, Platina, California, 2000, pp. 452-3. Despite his disapproval of Western-style polyphony in a liturgical context, St. Barsanuphius had a great appreciation for serious opera music and played the harmonium while still a layman.

<sup>17</sup> See article published (in Russian) on <http://www.oko.mrezha.ru/article.php?id=gallery> December 2004.

<sup>18</sup> In an encyclical dated November 5, 1846, the synod proclaimed that the use of polyphony in church is a sin against the canons and the holy Church of Christ due to its "unspiritual melody, unbecoming to ecclesiastical propriety." (See also Παπαδημητρίου Ἀλεξάνδρου, *Ἐπίσημος Καταδίκη τῆς Τετραφωνίας*, "Κιβωτός" Ἀθήνα, Ἰούλιος 1952, σελ. 301-303.)

<sup>19</sup> When four-part harmonies were introduced in churches in Athens, the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece issued many encyclicals vehemently opposing their use. See encyclicals dated: July 31, 1870; June 13, 1874; February 1, 1886; March 10, 1886; May 25, 1886; March 23, 1888; and March 29, 1888. See also Παπαδόπουλος, Γεώργιος, *Ἱστορικὴ Ἐπισκόπησις τῆς Βυζαντινῆς Ἐκκλησιαστικῆς Μουσικῆς*, Ἀθήναι, 1904, σελ. 298-314.

<sup>20</sup> Metallov, Archpriest Vasilii, *An Essay on the History of Orthodox Church Singing in Russia* [in Russian], p. 101, n. 2, cites Metropolitan Makarii, *The History of the Russian Church* [in Russian], vol. X, p. 154.

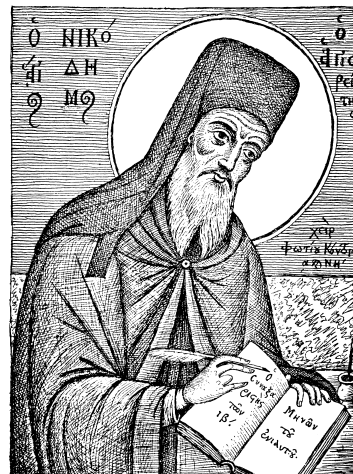
<sup>21</sup> Metropolitan Evgeny (1767-1837) opposed European music in church for the following reasons: "The works of many foreign kapellmeisters have in our time been adopted as compositions of the Greek-Russian Church... The truth must be stated that either because of their unawareness of the power and expressiveness of many moments in our church poetry, or because of a prejudice only for the laws of their music, they have often disregarded the sanctity of the place and the subject of their compositions, so that generally speaking, it is not the music which is adapted to the sacred words, but instead, the words are merely added to the music and often in a contrived manner. Apparently, they wanted more to impress their audience with concert-like euphony than to touch their hearts with pious melody, and often during such compositions the church resembles more an Italian opera than the house of worthy prayer to the Almighty." (translation taken from Schidlovsky, Nicolas, *Sources of Russian Chant Theory*, pp. 84-5.)

<sup>22</sup> cf. *Κλίμαξ Ἰωάννου τοῦ Σιναΐτου*, Ἐκδόσεις Ἱ.Μ. Παρακλήτου, Ὠρωπὸς Ἀττικῆς, Ἐ' ἔκδοσις, 1992, σελ. 207 (ΙΕ', νθ'). See also *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Brookline, 1979, p. 113 (Step 15:61).

## Introduction

There are several other noteworthy qualitative differences between Western and Byzantine music. The latter was always entirely vocal.<sup>23</sup> The use of musical instruments is condemned in the *Rudder*,<sup>24</sup> because the Holy Fathers viewed instrumental music as something secular that tends to evoke a kind of emotionalism<sup>25</sup> and is foreign to the Orthodox spiritual life.<sup>26</sup> As Dr. Cavarnos explains:

The Greek Church Fathers ruled out the execution of church music *by means of instruments* as well as *the accompaniment* of the chant *by instruments*, as incompatible with the sublime, spiritual character of the religion of Christ. Those who seek to justify the use of instrumental music in our churches call attention to the fact that in the Old Testament period musical instruments were used in public worship. However, St. Gregory the Theologian (Nazianzen), St. John Chrysostom [PG 55:494-495], and other holy Church Fathers [St. Isidore of Pelusium, PG 78:628 and St. Theodoret of Cyrus, PG 80:1996] note that this practice was due to a concession of God by reason of the grossness of mind of the Old Testament people which rendered them incapable of appreciating a more refined kind of music, the purely vocal.<sup>27</sup> Supporting the Patristic basis for excluding all man-made musical instruments in church is the consensus of great philosophers, such as Aristotle and Emerson, that the “human voice is the best, most refined of all musical instruments.”<sup>28</sup>



St. Nicodemus of  
the Holy Mountain

<sup>23</sup> Wellesz, Egon, *A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography*, Oxford, 1949. Revised edition, 1961, p. 32, 108, 366. For convincing evidence of the absence of musical instruments in the early Church, see McKinnon, James, *The Temple, the Church Fathers and Early Western Chant*, Variorum Collected Studies Series, Ashgate Publishing Ltd., Great Britain, 1998, sections IV, V, and VII.

<sup>24</sup> Explanation of Canon LXXV of the Sixth Œcumenical Synod. Vid. Agapios, Hieromonk and [Saint] Nicodemus, Monk, *The Rudder*, translated by D. Cummings, The Orthodox Christian Educational Society, Chicago, 1957, p. 381. In a footnote on the same page, St. Nicodemus quotes the following explanation by Meletios Pegas (1549-1601) regarding this condemnation of instruments: “Excessive music, pursuing what is sweet beyond moderation fails to excite pleasure, but, on the contrary, tends to enervate... for it is on this account that only the human voice finds acceptance in the Church, on the ground that it is inherent in nature and unartificial, whereas percussions and efflations produced by instruments are sent packing by the divine Fathers on the ground that they are too artificial.”

<sup>25</sup> Staretz Sampson (1898-1979) made the following distinction between feeling and emotionality in regards to music: “[In church] Never lose the feeling that you are standing before the Lord. This feeling can be only noetic, prayerful, without the participation of emotionality. Emotionality in worship is something foreign to Orthodoxy. This is why our polyphonic music often hinders our prayer, because it brings into our life the element of emotionality.” (Старец иеросхимонах Сампсон. Жизнеописание, беседы и поучения, письма. М., Библиотека журнала «Держава». 1999, Второе издание, с. 195.)

<sup>26</sup> cf. *Byzantine Chant*, p. 21.

<sup>27</sup> Likewise, in more recent times St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain (1749-1809) confirmed St. John Chrysostom’s interpretation of Amos 5:23 [vid. PG 48:853] by writing: “Since God rejected their [the Hebrews’] instruments—as He said through Amos: ‘Remove from me the sound of thy songs, and I will not hear the music of thine instruments’—thenceforth we Christians execute our hymns only with the voice.” *Εορτοδρόμιον, Νικοδήμου τοῦ Ἁγιορείτου*, Βενετία, 1836, σελ. ιη’.)

<sup>28</sup> Cavarnos, Constantine, *Victories of Orthodoxy*, IBMGS, Belmont, Massachusetts, 1997, pp. 70-71.

## Introduction

Even the great Western composer Beethoven felt that “pure ecclesiastical music should be executed only with the voice.”<sup>29</sup>

Byzantine chants typically have meters that are steady but free in the sense that the rhythm may frequently change within a given piece.<sup>30</sup> These “irregularities” make the use of time signature and measures awkward.<sup>31</sup> The vibrato in Byzantine chant is more subtle than its counterpart in, for example, operatic singing. A Byzantine chanter shifts between notes in a manner that is more liquescent (smoother) than that of a Western singer. Moreover, the embellishments used in Byzantine chant are for the most part so foreign to the Western ear that it is impossible for staff notation to express them. Indeed, most Western singers find it difficult to execute them at all, since they are not accustomed to the physical manner in which they are performed.

The most important difference between Byzantine and Western secular music lies in the *spirituality* they convey. Byzantine music is an art that expresses the Orthodox spiritual life, which differs greatly from Western spirituality. Photios Kontoglou of blessed memory made many keen observations about these spiritual differences:<sup>32</sup>



Photios Kontoglou

Music is of two kinds (as are the other arts also)—secular and ecclesiastical. Each of these has been developed by different feelings and different states of the soul. Secular music expresses worldly (i.e., carnal) feelings and desires. Although these feelings may be very refined (romantic, sentimental, idealistic, etc.), they do not cease being carnal. Nevertheless, many people believe that these feelings are spiritual. However, spiritual feelings are expressed only by ecclesiastical music. Only ecclesiastical music can truly express the secret movements of the heart, which are entirely different from those inspired and developed by secular music.<sup>33</sup>

He further illustrated that Byzantine music, a highly stylized art (as is Byzantine iconography),<sup>34</sup> has as its objective to raise the thoughts and emotions of man from the realm of the mundane

<sup>29</sup> *Θεωρία καὶ Πράξις τῆς Βυζαντινῆς Ἐκκλησιαστικῆς Μουσικῆς*, σελ. 27.

<sup>30</sup> cf. Tillyard, H. J. W., *Handbook of the Middle Byzantine Musical Notation*, Vol. I, Copenhagen, 1935, p. 13.

<sup>31</sup> The great Russian composer Aleksei Fedorovich L’vov (1798-1870) (who with the support of Tsar Nicholas I did much to resurrect chant-based ecclesiastical music in Russia and also won the respect of several Western composers including Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer for his talent as a secular composer and violinist) also concluded that chant must be written in a free, non-restrictive rhythmic setting without bar lines and time signature. (vid. Львов А.Ф., *О Свободном или Несимметричном Ритме*, СПб., 1858, с. 10. See also Dolskaya, Olga, *Aesthetics and National Identity in Russian Sacred Choral Music: A Past in Tradition and Present in Ruins*, chapter four [unpublished].)

<sup>32</sup> Selections of his writings constitute the Epilogue of this book.

<sup>33</sup> Cavarnos, Constantine, *Byzantine Sacred Art*. Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, Belmont, Massachusetts, second edition, 1992, p. 148.

<sup>34</sup> In the words of Professor Alexander Lingas, “Byzantine chant is, from a technical point of view, an immensely sophisticated ‘art’ tradition that is also, from a religious perspective, a spiritually profound aural analogue of iconography in its ability to offer humankind a taste of the perpetual heavenly liturgy of the angels.”

## Introduction

to that of the spiritual.<sup>35</sup> For this reason Byzantine music must be executed in a state of devoutness, contrition, humility, and great inner and outer attention.<sup>36</sup> In the words of Dr. Cavarnos, traditional Byzantine music “is characterized by simplicity or freedom from undue complexity, purity or freedom from everything sensual, ostentatious, insincere, and by unsurpassed power and spirituality.”<sup>37</sup> According to Dr. Conomos, “Byzantine music is unequalled in its scope and its ability to move people in a genuine and not an emotional way. It emphasizes the words and tries to eschew all theatricality<sup>38</sup> so that it does not draw attention to itself.” The great Byzantine musicologist Egon Wellesz wrote: “Byzantine hymnography is the poetical expression of Orthodox theology, translated, through music, to the sphere of religious emotion.”<sup>39</sup> A contemporary historian, awed by the splendor of Byzantine art (which was inspired by the same guiding principles as Byzantine music), observed that “never in the history of Christianity—or, one is tempted to add, of any other of the world’s religions—has any school of artists contrived to infuse so deep a degree of spirituality into its work [as did the Byzantines].”<sup>40</sup> In particular, Metropolitan Emilianos of Selyvria affirms:

[Byzantine music] is a means of worship, of inner purification, of ascent from earth to heaven. It expresses supplication, hope, adoration, gratitude and contrition. From the beginning it has borrowed whatever beauty there has been in secular music [i.e., the ancient Greek modal system], and has assimilated and spiritualized it, imparting to it the holy, ecstatic note of mystical theology, so that the music in no way detracts from the words. This music has its own harmony, which avails for spiritual resurrection.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Likewise, in 1880 the Patriarchate of Constantinople explained in an encyclical opposing liturgical innovations that the Church “chose and developed a music which suits the purpose of the people coming to church: to raise the mind from the mundane to the heavenly and to pray to our God and Father with a music that corresponds to the Church’s divine hymns and has grandeur in simplicity, delight in rhythm, and modesty in clear, articulate, unaffected, melodious psalmody executed with humility, peace, and compunction.” (Vid. Παπαδοπούλου, Γεωργίου, *Συμβολαὶ εἰς τὴν Ἱστορίαν τῆς παρ’ ἡμῖν Ἐκκλησιαστικῆς Μουσικῆς*, Ἀθήναι, 1890, σελ. 421.)

<sup>36</sup> The importance of having a proper inward state while singing in church cannot be overemphasized, since even the most inspiring ecclesiastical music loses its ability to inspire when executed irreverently. This is why the Holy Fathers of the Sixth Œcumenical Synod wrote the following canon: “We wish those who attend church for the purpose of chanting neither to employ disorderly cries and to force their nature to cry aloud, nor to foist in anything that is not becoming and proper to a church; but, on the contrary, to offer such psalmodies with much attentiveness and contriteness to God, Who sees directly into everything that is hidden from our sight. ‘For the sons of Israel shall be reverent’ (Lev. 15:30) the sacred word has taught us” [Canon LXXV of the Sixth Œcumenical Synod, *The Rudder*, pp. 379-380]. But in order for a church singer to be reverent, he must have a certain degree of sanctity which, as Dr. Conomos comments, “requires a determination of character, a strong faith, great modesty, and a high sense of integrity. To be a Church singer in an Orthodox Church is to respond to a calling, to a vocation—it demands purity, sureness of faith and conviction.” [Excerpt from a lecture published on Monachos.net, February 2003.]

<sup>37</sup> *Byzantine Chant*, p. 20.

<sup>38</sup> As early as the fourth century, the Holy Fathers preached against theatricality in church singing. St. Niceta of Remesiana (d. after 414) said in a sermon on psalmody, “One must sing with a manner and melody befitting holy religion; it must not proclaim theatrical distress but rather exhibit Christian simplicity in its very musical movement; it must not remind one of anything theatrical, but rather create compunction in the listeners.” (*De utilitate hymnorum*, PL 68:365-76. See also McKinnon, James, *Music in early Christian Literature*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987, p. 138.)

<sup>39</sup> Wellesz, Egon, *A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography*, p. 157.

<sup>40</sup> Norwich, John Julius, *Byzantium: The Early Centuries*, Viking Penguin, London, 1988, p. 28.

<sup>41</sup> Timiadis, Bishop Emilianos of Meloa, *Orthodox Ethos, Vol. 1: Studies in Orthodoxy*, edited by A.J. Philippou, Oxford, 1964, p. 206.



## *Introduction*

None of the aforementioned quantitative, qualitative, and spiritual differences can be fully appreciated simply by reading a description of them; it is necessary to hear a proper execution of Byzantine chant in the context of a worship service in order to appreciate its ethos and to understand how it differs from Western secular music. Furthermore, any attempt to perform Byzantine chant solely from music written in Western staff notation will inevitably be inadequate,<sup>42</sup> since the latter is determinative while Byzantine notation is descriptive.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, such an attempt is necessitated by current trends in Orthodox churches of the West, the majority of which do not use the traditional Byzantine chant developed by the saints. On the contrary, they prefer music written in Western notation that is either completely heterodox in origin, or if it is of Orthodox origin, it has been seriously altered by secular or heterodox influences (such as harmonization, polyphony, the accompaniment of an organ,<sup>44</sup> etc.). As a consequence of this departure from tradition, Dr. Conomos writes:

[Church music must regain its holiness.] Today this means freeing Church music from the heavy burden of centuries of decadence and secularism. Holiness means otherness, sacredness, apartness—not the common or the ordinary but the unique, the particular, the uncontaminated...<sup>45</sup> The real concern of those responsible for musical performance in the Orthodox Church today should be to draw upon the richness of the Church's centuries-old, accumulated practices and traditions in order to discover the cardinal contribution that [Byzantine] music has made to its liturgical life.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> As Tillyard observed, “to appreciate and enjoy a Byzantine hymn, it must not merely be played over on the piano, but thoroughly mastered and sung with the words and with due regard to rhythm and expression.” (Tillyard, H. J. W., *Handbook of the Middle Byzantine Musical Notation*, p. 13.)

<sup>43</sup> As Professor Demetrios Giannelos explains: “A descriptive notation, such as that of Byzantine music, describes the essentials of the piece, leaving to oral tradition the task of completing with precision whatever is not described. On the contrary, a determinative form of writing, such as Western notation with staves, determines with great precision the manner of execution, to the point that the interpretation of the person executing it is delineated by factors that depend directly on the definitive indications of the music symbols. These indications can be so absolutely restricting that they preclude all room for interpretation.” (*Θεωρία και Πράξη της Ψαλτικής Τέχνης· Πρακτικά Α΄ Πανελληνίου Συνεδρίου Ψαλτικής Τέχνης*, σελ. 173.) Moreover, a piece written in descriptive notation has the flexibility to be chanted simply by a beginning chanter and elaborately by an experienced chanter. Nevertheless, this super-prescriptive aspect of staff notation is not an inherent but an assumed attribute. As Dr. Lingas explicates: “[A] Byzantine melody written in Western score, in contrast to a transmission in Byzantine neumes of any period, is assumed to be a relatively complete representation of its realisation in sound. Yet...such assumptions are a relatively recent development, for staff notation, like its Byzantine counterpart, has only gradually progressed toward greater precision.” (Lingas, Alexander, *Performance Practice and the Politics of Transcribing Byzantine Chant*, Acta Musicae Byzantinae, Vol. VI, Iași, 2003, p. 56. Available online at: <http://www.csbi.ro/gb/revista.html>)

<sup>44</sup> Despite the popular notion that the organ is an “ecclesiastical instrument” and despite the erroneous statements propagated by the Greek Orthodox Hymnal of George Anastassiou regarding its supposed liturgical use by the Byzantines, the fact remains that the organ was a secular instrument for one thousand years before it was introduced in the Western church in the ninth century, while in the Eastern Orthodox Church it was never used until only very recently and only in some places, contrary to the traditional practice. (Vid. Παπαδόπουλος, Γεώργιος, *Ιστορική Έπισκόπησις της Βυζαντινής Εκκλησιαστικής Μουσικής*, Ἀθήναι, 1904, σελ. 72-74.)

<sup>45</sup> Excerpt from a lecture published on Monachos.net, February 2003.

<sup>46</sup> Conomos, Dimitri E., *Byzantine Hymnography and Byzantine Chant*, Hellenic College Press, Brookline, Mass., 1984, p. 29.



## Introduction

Similarly, in 1882 the great composer Tchaikovsky wrote, “The rebirth of our church singing lies in the characteristic spirit of its ancient melodies with their stately, simple, sober beauty.”<sup>47</sup> Likewise, Alexander Kastal’sky, who was a disciple of Tchaikovsky and another distinguished composer of polyphonic music, became disenchanted with modern compositions in his later years and said in 1913:

If we fall into the present-day tendency to create music that is too complex, for the sake of sound effects that are fashionable, then it will lead only to the fact that church music will become the same as secular music—only with sacred text... Our indigenous church melodies when set chorally lose all their individuality: how distinctive they are when sung in unison by the Old Believers,<sup>48</sup> and how insipid they are in the conventional four-part arrangements of our classic composers, on which we have prided ourselves for nearly a hundred years; it is touching, but spurious... The future of our creative work for the church should be to get away from continual four-part writing... I should like to have a music that could be heard nowhere except in a church, and which would be as distinct from secular music as church vestments are from the dress of the laity.<sup>49</sup>



Pyotr Tchaikovsky

The ideal way for Orthodox parishes to return to traditional roots would be for their choristers to learn and use Byzantine notation and thus reap the many benefits of knowing this notation.<sup>50</sup> But since Byzantine chant is a sacred art that usually requires an experienced teacher and years of training to learn thoroughly, few people in the West are able to do so. Our solution, therefore, is to bring Byzantine music to them in a form more easily accessible—in a notation they can read.<sup>51</sup> It is to this end that this book has been written.

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<sup>47</sup> П. Чайковский, *Предисловие П.И. Чайковского к первому изданию "Всенощного Бдения"* опубликовано в *Чайковский: Полное собрание сочинений* под редакцией Л. Корабельниковой и М. Рахмановой, (Москва: 1990), с. 273.

<sup>48</sup> The “Old Believers” are a conservative faction that in the mid-seventeenth century refused to accept the liturgical reforms of Patriarch Nikon and the introduction of polyphonic, Western-style choral singing into Orthodox worship. (cf. Gardner, Johann von, *Russian Church Singing, Vol. 2*, p. 280.)

<sup>49</sup> English translation taken from S.W. Pring: Kastal'sky, A. “My Musical Career and my Thoughts on Church Music,” *The Musical Quarterly*, XI, no. 2 (1925), pp. 238-245 and <http://liturgica.com/html/litEOLitMusDev3.jsp?hostname=null#nationalism>

<sup>50</sup> For a detailed exposition of the advantages of Byzantine notation, please read our online article entitled “Byzantine vs. Western Notation” at: <http://www.stanthonysonastery.org/music/NotationB.htm>

<sup>51</sup> In the early twentieth century, Tillyard also transcribed many ancient Byzantine hymns into Western notation and reached the following conclusions: “[A]n attempt to harmonise Byzantine hymns or to adapt them to a conventional European pattern for congregational use seems to us a mistake... Our plea is that Greek [i.e., Byzantine] music should be sung in the Greek way—unaccompanied, save by the drone, and in free rhythm. For such performance no knowledge of the Byzantine notation would be needed. An accurate transcription, either in Gregorian four-line staff, or in our ordinary clefs, would answer perfectly, so long as the singer had a general notion of the mediæval style of chant.” (Tillyard, H.J.W., *Byzantine Music and Hymnography*, Faith Press, London, 1923, p. 70.)

## *Introduction*

The troparia in this book have been selected from masterpieces of Byzantine composition written down by the greatest chanters of the preceding three centuries. Even though they have been taken from books written in recent times, the actual melodies are for the most part several centuries older. These melodies are those most commonly used today on the Holy Mountain, which for over a millennium has been a bastion of traditional Orthodoxy. Likewise, the style of embellishment is that which is used by contemporary monks of the Holy Mountain.

It is our humble prayer that this book and the accompanying recordings will help all who wish to embrace the divine music of the Orthodox Church in its traditional form as preserved on the Holy Mountain, to the glory of God.



**THE HOLY MOUNTAIN**

*Introduction*

**THE GARDEN OF THE PANAGIA**