

BOOK REVIEWS



The Divine Liturgies Music Project

St Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery, Florence Arizona 2005, CD-ROM. Home page: <http://stanthonysmonastery.org/music/Index.html>

The sheer enormity of the work that has gone into this CD-ROM should not be understated. The CD contains a full colour book (1000+ pages) of Byzantine Chants in Western notation. It is a comprehensive compilation of all the hymns that are chanted in the liturgies of St John Chrysostom, St Basil, St James and the liturgy of the pre-sanctified gifts. It also contains a full series of fast doxologies and a number of slow ones.

The CD has many features, accessories and tools. The material first appears as a webpage. The music can then be viewed with Adobe Acrobat Reader and with the program 'Finale Notepad', the hymns can ingeniously be played by the computer. Hymns can appear in Modern English, Elizabethan English or Greek.

Extra tabs lead the user to essays on the history of Byzantine chant, on Byzantine musical notation, as well as guidelines for pronunciations and some theoretical issues such as common expressive embellishments (αναλύσεις) and the intonations (απηχήματα) of the eight modes. The

introduction points out those features of Byzantine music that differentiate it from western music: monophony, the absence of musical instruments, irregular meters ('tonic' rhythm), embellishments and expression, and its spiritual or liturgical function.

The music follows traditional Byzantine melodic lines as chanted on the Holy Mountain, even though it is written in western notation. It means that a choir can be set up with some members chanting from Byzantine script and others from western script. *Isokratemata* are in place and the various scales are rendered by using flats and sharps for each note (as opposed to a *phthora* which operates as a switch for each mode).

The choice of hymnography comes from a variety of sources. Most are from the publications of the 'classical' era of the nineteenth century and others are re-workings of these originals by musicians of the twentieth century. Others still are outright compositions of the last century such as most of the hymns of the Liturgy of St James. This method of transcribing Byzantine music to English means that the original musical compositions have been kept virtually intact and that the English words have been moulded to fit to the original music. This demonstrates that the music was given priority over the words. But fears that words would suffer for the sake of music may be allayed because the monastery has taken the issue very seriously and the nature of the hymns of the Liturgy do allow for some flexibility. However, the dream of uniformity of liturgical texts in the English language (just as there is only one Greek version and only one Slavonic version) seems distant as long as English-speaking churches continue to produce work independently of each other. Perhaps it will be a matter of time or 'survival of the fittest'.

Prospective users must understand that they must learn the various elements of Byzantine expression acoustically/aurally and not depend entirely on what is on paper. This applies to all students of Byzantine music regardless of which script they use. It must be stressed that the audio produced by the 'Notepad' program, while following the basic melodic lines, cannot stand in the place of authentic Byzantine music and that this audio version should only be used as a guide or as an educational tool.

The audio is a bare skeleton and is missing the flesh of many expressive features, especially many *elxeis*.

Similarly, some of the hymns have an accompanying recording of a person chanting. Once again, these recordings should be used as a guide or educational tool. This is because the weak and trembling voice of this chanter can in no way be considered representative of the Byzantine norm in voice colour and quality.

The use of some of the twentieth century *diaskevai* is a concern. The choice may have been made so as to include the various *analyseis* (embellishments supposed to be learnt aurally) which are not specified in the ‘classics’. But the choice of one *diaskeve* which reflects the style of that specific composer does not leave room for other interpretations and the complexity of some of that music, especially in *cheroubika* and *koinonika* does not favour choral chanting which requires a certain level of simplicity. Also, the attempt to clarify the issue of the soft chromatic scale in one of the essays is commendable and important. But the choice of audio illustration is not a good example as it does not clarify the matter at all.

The CD would be of most use to parishes or chanters who are trying to make Orthodox Church music accessible to more people by setting up choirs. Of course this CD is designed for use by those who know western script. However, St Anthony’s monastery is now also working on producing the same work with Byzantine script. In any case, the Divine Liturgies Project is a significant and monumental production, authored by dedicated professionals who have made it their vocation to serve the body of the church through ecclesiastical music.



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