

THE RUSSIAN CHANT

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AT the end of the tenth century, Prince Vladimir, ruler of Russia, was converted to Christianity and, in 988, was baptized at Korsun in the Crimea. He then married Anna, sister of the Emperor of the Roman Empire of the East. On his return to his capital, Kiev, he brought with him a Bulgarian bishop, Michael, and many priests and monks. In his train were also singers who had come up to Korsun from Constantinople with his bride. Vladimir made Michael the first Metropolitan of Russia. Michael moved from Kiev to Rostov, where he christened countless numbers of people, erected many churches, appointed clergy, and organized a choir.

Shortly after the arrival of the southern Slavs and Greek singers came Greek music teachers, three arriving together with their families and assistants. These teachers are said to have inaugurated the "8-mode singing" in Russia, and they brought with them examples of church chant books. They became instructors and directors of choirs in Kiev, Rostov, and neighboring towns. From reports of such activity, it is evident that, together with the principles of Christianity, Russia obtained from Byzantium the religious services, chants, and the notation necessary for liturgical music, and that a south Slavic influence was present.

To give a general and comprehensive summary of Byzantine music is an impossible undertaking. Byzantine music is Church music, timeless and still flourishing. Though based on the music of antiquity, to-day it relies to a great extent on contemporary European music for its form and content. From the fourth to the nineteenth century, a musical practice of distinctive style and principles, confined to theoretical writings, was created.

The first Christian hymns and songs were taken either directly from the Jewish liturgy or were imitative of it. The Psalms settings of this period were simple. Following the Biblical text, the choir sang a troparion or round, which soon developed into a composition independent of the Psalm, with original text and music.

Church music was predominantly vocal in nature. Primitive congregational singing was replaced by choirs, especially boys' choirs and soloists. The growth of instrumental music was never encouraged. The liturgical music was governed by the text and subordinated to it.

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The basis of the Byzantine Chant is religious poetry of exceptional wealth. Included are the Evangelier—containing Evangelical passages read at the service; the Psalterion—with psalms from the Old Testament; the Euchologion—liturgies and rites of the sacraments; Pentecostarion—the office from Easter to Pentecost.

Chants, truly Russian in nature, were not long in appearing. They waited only a suitable occasion, such as the special services in memory of Russian saints. These chants, which were probably created by native singers, appeared as early as the eleventh century and were inscribed in books in the twelfth century. Varieties of other songs appeared at this time, such as the Acclamation or praise song of the Emperor, who was at the same time God's representative on earth, bearing the double title—King and Apostolic Prince. These songs were short pieces of poetry sung at all public ceremonies held in the presence of the Emperor. Another example of music is the polychrominos, or "wishing many years", which were sung in honor of the Patriarch. Even when this creation consisted of merely the setting of a new text to a given melody, the process was applied with technical skill and a competent knowledge of the contemporary chants and their constructions. In time, the musical creativity of the Russian people, brilliantly displayed in their folk music, enabled them to counter balance the influence from abroad considerably, so far as the actually melodic phrase of the music was concerned.

It is evident from the earliest documents of the 11th century that there did not exist at first any special Russian notation, the method used having been employed previously at Byzantium. The ekphonic system, which consisted of approximately twelve symbols used in the Russian compositions, was taken from a Greek document. Some of the signs were used by the Russians in the most ancient form of notation. Russian music, however, soon began to develop by itself. The new notation looked like hookshaped notes and was known as *kriuki*, which is the Russian for "hook", or *znameny*, notation (*znamia*-note).

The introduction of the *Znameny* notation did not immediately oust the Greek notation. Examples are to be found of the so-called *Kondakarny* notation (*kondak*-short hymn of praise), which consisted in part of a row of small symbols written above the text. Above these was a second row of symbols, fewer in number, but larger in size, resembling the letters of the Greek alphabet and pointing to Byzantine origin. The key to this

system has not been discovered, but it is believed that the smaller symbols indicated the melody, the larger the dynamics.

This double notation may indicate that music so written not only was of Byzantine origin but also was possibly performed for the most part by well-schooled Greek singers. It would seem that the same music may eventually have found written expression in the Znameny signs.

The Znameny, or Kriuki, notation can be traced as far back as the 11th century. It was known as the "Kriukovoi Znameny Rospiev." This name has been applied to the whole corpus of Russian Chant since its codification.

The majority of the chants came supposedly from Novgorod. During the period of their origin, this city led Russia culturally, and its situation removed it from the danger of the 13th century Tartar invasions. These chants have been preserved. It was from the 12th century until well into the 14th century that the chants probably became adapted little by little to Russian needs, and the music became specifically Russian Chant. Later, in the 14th century, the notation assumed an abbreviated form. Thus far there had apparently been no musical manuscript, and music was taught solely by oral means until the 15th century.

In the 16th century, owing to corruption in the Church Chant resulting from the abuse of the text, there arose a dire need for schools of singing. The result was a lengthening of the liturgical services. To shorten the very long services, two or three different prayers were sometimes sung simultaneously. The sacred text received scant respect. To combat this new corruption assailing the chant, a project was drawn up in 1551 at the instance of Ivan the Terrible for the formation of institutions for the teaching of reading, writing and singing. The instruction was to be given by the clergy. This project met with success in certain directions, although not in that of uprooting the evils. Many schools arose, from which came many masters. The best schools were at Moscow and Novgorod. Numerous choirs were organized, of which those of the Tsar and the Patriarch were outstanding. As a result many valuable additions, as well as revisions and variations of it, were made to the Znameny musical literature.

The middle of the 17th century found several types of chants in Russia: Znameny (which centered itself in Moscow), Kiev, Greek, Bulgarian and the lesser Znameny. There were others also, but these five were the most important. The lesser

Znameny, which was used in small daily services, was basically the same as the regular Znameny, but less ornamental in style. The Kiev Chant was so similar to the Znameny Chant that certain pieces in it could easily be mistaken for their equivalent in the Znameny repertoire. The Greek Chant was quite different. It more nearly resembled the Bulgarian, which was highly melodic. The rhythm of these last two chants differed greatly in structure from the unsymmetrical rhythms of the Znameny Chant. It is simple, even, and easily grasped by ears accustomed to the standard musical literature of the West. The most richly represented was the Kiev Chant; the least frequently, the Bulgarian.

All these types of chants were widely diffused, first in south western and then in north eastern European Russia. The growth of the Uniate Church in the 17th century constituted a dangerous threat to the Orthodox Church. To combat this danger, the southwestern Orthodox Churches aligned themselves more closely with those of Greater Russia, Greece, and the other Greek Orthodox countries. With respect to Church singing, this approach to union resulted in the borrowing by Russia of all that was best from other Orthodox countries.

The vast quantity of Russian Church music may be divided into two main groups: that governed by the fundamental law of Church singing, made up of 8 echoi, and that constructed independently of the 8 echoi. The law of 8 echoi includes among its requirements melodic patterns or typical melodic figures. Though this idea came to the Russians by way of the Byzantine system, the final result, in details of organization, differs considerably from the source.

Ecclesiastical activity became very marked in the 17th century. It was then that the Patriarchate was established. This necessitated greater pomp in ritual and music, so that variations were welcomed in the treatment of chants that required repetition. However, the fact remains that the increased singing and reading caused the service to grow even longer. It followed that the contents of the chant books became disorganized and inaccurate to such an extent that, in 1625, Tsar Alexis Michailovitch appointed a commission of 14 to revise the texts. The revision made by the commission led to a schism within the church, the "Old Believers" rejecting the new texts.

Shortly after the revision was accepted, and especially during the reign of Peter the Great, Russian music fell strongly

under western European influence, notably that of Italy. Galuppi and Sarti, two Italians brought to Russia by Peter, were long active in St. Petersburg and Poland. Even though Bortniansky, Lvov and others made attempts to use the old liturgical chants in their compositions, European influence led them to modify the melodies to suit western tastes and to harmonize according to western rules. Development of the methods of these last two composers is represented by the settings of Turchaninov and Potulov. The latter learned the melodies absolutely intact and limited his choice of chords to fundamental triads only and their first inversions.

With the appointment of Balakirev as director of the Imperial Chapel in St. Petersburg, Church music generally began to take on a more national style. Rimsky-Korsokov and Lvovsky continued somewhat in this style, as did also Tchaikovsky. The greatest step toward harmonizing the chants in a strict, national Russian style was taken by Kostalsky (1876-1926). Most of the credit is due to him for the tremendous advance made by later composers—Gretchaninov, Tchesnokov, Nicolsky, Rachmaninov, Shvedov, and others in their attempts towards rejuvenating the chant.