

The Way We Sing Greek Orthodox Church Music in America Today

Looking at the Main Issues

On Chant vs. Modern Polyphony

- What is Chant?
 - Purely vocal music of limited scales & rhythms.
 - One single melodic line used to convey words.
 - Music is subordinate to the text.
 - Chant is a form of speech.
 - Chant uses a system of set melodic formulas based on syllabic meter of text and of complete melodies used as models for many hymns.
 - Chant uses various microtonal intervals and specific melodic ornaments.
 - Byzantine chant has its own peculiar notation.

- What is Polyphony? (“Many voices”)
 - Usually 3 or 4 parts to create chords
 - 1st Type: All voices sing the same rhythm
 - 2nd Type: Each voice has its own rhythm and melodic flow, usually in counter motion or counterpoint to the main melody
 - Each voice individually has it’s own melody sung simultaneously with the other voices
 - No limit on musical tools and expression
 - Variable tempos, dynamics, and rhythms
 - Art of music is the focus, words can be obscured
 - Liturgies are seen as one whole musical opus

- Issues (Facts not opinions)
 - Byzantine chant is the traditional, canonical music of the Greek Orthodox Church
 - Polyphony developed in the Western schismatic churches and not native to Orthodoxy
- Questions to consider
 - Are there really “two musical traditions?” Is polyphony a church tradition or a fad
 - Has Byzantine chant become too complex and too ornamented as to put music over the words?
 - What are some legitimate ways and places to use harmonized music in the Divine Liturgy?
 - What is the place of para-liturgical music?

The Octoechos (Eight Tones)

- Are they TONES or MODES?
 - “Ἦχος” means “Tone,” referring not to the musical sound, but the spiritual tone each mode provokes.
 - Each tone in the Octoechos is a family of related musical modes, each with its own scales, sub-scales, intervals, dominants, & melodic formulas.
 - Ending formulas (cadences) are very important.
- Names of the notes in the Byzantine scale.
 - Greek Letter: Α Β Γ Δ Ε Ζ Η
 - Greek Name: πα βου γα δι κε ζο νη
 - Western Note: D E F G A B C

- There are eight modes, each with three forms, that each has its own patterns and peculiarities.
 - **Eirmological**: generally faster melodies, mostly one beat per syllable. (As an eirmos.)
 - **Stichararic**: slower melodies, often with two or more notes per syllable. (As a sticheron.)
 - **Papadic**: very slow, melodies with full phrases on one syllable. (As Cherubic and Communion)

Four Authentic Tones and Four Plagal Tones

- **First Tone** (diatonic scale, minor feel)
 - Has a base of D (pa)
 - Strongly drawn to G
 - Phrases usually end on G or D
 - Magnificent, happy, and earthly character
- **Second Tone** (soft chromatic scale)
 - Has a base of G (dhi)
 - Melody often falls below the base (ison), so there is a lot of unison singing
 - Moving, languid, and graceful character, often used in hymns to the Theotokos

- **Third Tone** (Enharmonic scale, F major feel)
 - Has a base of F (gha)
 - Like F Major scale, phrases end on D or C
 - Perceived to have an arrogant, mature nature

- **Fourth Tone** (Diatonic scale, unique feel)
 - Has a base of E (vou)
 - As diatonic, B is natural when it ascends to C and flatted when it descends
 - Has a family of different modes using different scales; most common mode is called *legetos*
 - Distinguished by festive, joyful character

- **Plagal First Tone** (Diatonic, minor feel)
 - Base of A (ke) for short form and D (pa) for slower
 - Short form revolves around the notes A, B, C
 - Longer forms alternate between tetrachords based on D and A, sometimes final note is G
 - Merciful and dance-like character
- **Plagal Second Tone** (Hard Chromatic)
 - Base of D (pa), short form is soft chromatic and has cadences on G and E
 - Longer forms move between tetrachords on D and A and have a Middle Eastern feel, due to an interval of one and a half steps between the two lower notes of each tetrachord.

- **Grave Tone** (Enharmonic, major feel)
 - Base of F (gha)
 - Melodies often begin with a C ison resolving on F
 - Strong, masculine character
 - Fewer hymns are associated with this mode
- **Plagal Fourth Tone** (Diatonic, C or F major)
 - Short form based on F (gha), called “triphonos”
 - Longer forms on C (ni)
 - Chosen for its humble style and expressions of suffering and repentance