

## Liturgical Chant

by Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston

The truth of the matter is that John Sakellarides had a certain influence on some of the chant heard today in the Greek Church. Much of his music was more like light opera, or something you expect to hear in Broadway musicals. But *some* of his compositions were really good, *if* you made a few adjustments. Most of his music, it is true, is solidly adjusted to the well-tempered Western scale.

But so are the ears of the vast majority of our faithful today. Most of us no longer live in the Middle East, or, for that fact, in the Middle Ages. So our ears are solidly attuned to modern music.

The fact of the matter is that there are two distinct schools of thought regarding the chant that is used in our churches today. One school of thought, centered chiefly in Copenhagen, maintains that much of the music used in our churches today was influenced in its musical scales by Eastern music.\* After the Fall of Constantinople, they say, for example, many Orthodox Christian chanters could support themselves and their families only by learning how to sing Ottoman secular music. With the passage of the centuries, that music and its tonalities began, in turn, to influence the way the Christians there sang their music. And even more influences came from the West (especially in the aspect of the tempos, and also some musical techniques used in European music of the 1700's).

According to the transcriptions of music they have from 11<sup>th</sup> century manuscripts, this school maintains that real Byzantine music most likely sounded like Gregorian Chant or Znamenny Chant (if these transcriptions are indeed accurate).

Another school of thought, having Mr. Gregory Stathis as its chief exponent, together with many other chanters and musicologists who represent the "received tradition", maintains that the ancient notation was stenographic, and the music actually did sound much like what we have today.

The debate is intense, and both sides seem to have valid points to make. I feel I am not qualified to take sides in this matter.

Anyway, as far as "influences" are concerned, it is obvious that we should not pin all the blame on Sakellarides.

I believe a good name for our church music is "liturgical chant," since it doesn't use 3 or 4 part harmony, but a changing tonic note — the "ison" (which, itself, has varied traditions) — which gives it its own distinct and sacred flavor. Our liturgical chant today is, for the most part, appropriate and beautiful music. Some of it, I think, could stand some improvement — like the music for the Odes of the Great Canon of Saint Andrew, where the music does not fit the

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\* They maintain this especially for Second Tone, Plagal of Second Tone, Grave Tone (based on B natural), and maybe the *Áyia* scale of Fourth Tone.

penitential mood of the text at all. In this particular case, I believe the ancient Byzantine melodies maybe were superior in some instances, and should be restored, or, at least, an appropriate modification made to today's music.

We may never know for sure what the intervals were in the music scales used by the Byzantines, but what we have now is appropriate in large part, and serves its purpose well.

However, we should keep in mind that the Byzantines were an adaptable people, and they were ever absorbing all sorts of ideas and influences from both the East and the West. And when you come right down to it, had the Byzantines survived to our times, their chant might very well have developed in such a way that it would just like what we have in our Church today.

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