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CHURCH SINGING IN RUSSIA

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Abstract. *The article provides a brief overview of church singing in Russia. It is noted that its main type is znamenny singing (znamenny chant). The name and purpose of the znamenny singing are explained.*

The special content of the znamenny singing at the time of the performance of the “Cherubic song” is indicated. The role of the “Cherubic song” in affirming the uniqueness of Russian music is emphasized.

Keywords: *church singing, znamenny singing, “Cherubic song”, Russian music, Russia.*

Church singing in Russia is a characteristic feature of the Russian Orthodox Church. Its main type is *znamenny singing (znamenny chant)*.

The name of the singing comes from the Old Slavonic word “banner”, which means a sign. Banners (or hooks) are called non-linear signs used to record tunes. Znamenny singing was originally a monody performed in unison; later (no earlier than the middle of the 16th century), elements of polyphony appeared in it [9, col. 465–466]. The importance of singing is evidenced by its assessment by a well-known expert in the field of Orthodox liturgical singing, B.P. Kutuzov. As the researcher notes, “znamenny singing is a prayer expressed in sounds, musically, where we will look in vain for the play of emotional tones. The task of znamenny singing is the same as that of the icon: not a realistic representation of the inner life of an earthly person with his experiences and feelings, but the purification of the soul from passions, the reflection of images of the spiritual, invisible world” [4, p. 43].

The znamenny singing at the moment of the performance of the “*Cherubic song*” during the Divine Liturgy has a particularly deep, sacred content. At this moment, those singing in the temple are likened to angels singing in heaven (therefore, singing in the temple is called *angelic*). At the same time, the angels

singing in the sky glow and become more and more enlightened, approaching the Source of Light – God! As St. Gregory Palamas writes: “(Angels. – A.K.) are light, and are always filled with light, and they themselves become more and more luminous ... rejoicing in joy near the First Light ...” [3, p. 224]. This means that those who sing like angels in the temple are also becoming more and more luminous, radiant... (1).

Znamenny singing existed in Orthodox Worship until the middle of the 17th century, after which it was replaced by partes. But what is amazing is that the znamenny singing has not gone away, has not faded away. Like the once legendary city of Kitezh, which plunged into Lake Svetloyar, it plunged into the depths of history in order to radiantly shine with the Light of Russian music from there, from the depths of time!

Russian music had three bright flashes (glows), which consistently manifested themselves in three types of Russian music: *secular*, *ecclesiastical*, and *secular-ecclesiastical* (secular-ecclesiastical music is actually the “third layer” of Russian music, using the term “third layer” proposed by V.J. Konen to characterize a completely different music).

The first outbreak, curiously enough, which arose precisely in secular (!) music, was Glinka’s opera “*A Life for the Tsar*” (“*Ivan Susanin*”) (1836). How?

The fact is that Glinka’s work on the opera was preceded by his work on the “Cherub song” (which he created, focusing on the traditions of Russian church singing).

Glinka began working on “Cherubinskaya” in 1828, but did not finish, did not write the final part – “Like the Tsar”, depicting the expectation and finding of the Heavenly King, but began to create the opera “Life for the Tsar”, in the finale of which – “Glory”, in fact, realized the idea of “Like the Tsar” (the coincidence of both melodic material and key is in C major). According to Natalia Beketova, “‘Glory’ was originally an internal plot of the opera, ‘programmed’ by another ‘Like a King’” [1, pp. 59–60]. (Glinka’s “Cherubinskaya” was first performed in its entirety by the Court Singing Chapel in 1837, that is, a year after the premiere of “Life for the Tsar”).

The second outbreak that appeared in church music was P.I. Tchaikovsky’s composition “*The Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*” (1878). As Tchaikovsky noted, when creating this work, he dreamed of reviving the “primordial church-Russian singing” in the Russian Orthodox Church [7, p. 272].

Tchaikovsky uses elements of antiphonal sounding of various choral compositions in the “Liturgy”, striving to compose in the tradition and spirit of Liturgical singing based on antiphonal (angelic) singing.

The “Cherubic song” (No. 6) is particularly expressive in the “Liturgy”, in which he follows Glinka’s “Cherubic song”. (Only if Glinka’s “Cherubinskaya”

is in C major, and Tchaikovsky's "Cherubinskaya" is in e minor – C major.) The finale of Tchaikovsky's "Cherubinskaya", "Hallelujah", is sonorous, bright, and brilliant, with the composer many times exceeding the permissible number of "Hallelujahs". In the everyday "Cherubic song" there are usually only three "Hallelujahs", he has 11! According to Evgeny Tugarinov's exact thought, "Tchaikovsky sings 'Hallelujah' 11 times, which expresses a certain symbolism of endless jubilation" [8].

The third outbreak, within secular church music, was G.V. Sviridov's composition "*Chants and prayers*" (1980–1997). This work is performed on stage, but it has a deeply liturgical meaning (written in words from liturgical poetry). As Irina Brovina shrewdly noted, the structure of "Chants and prayers" "evokes associations with the variation and closeness of church services, where each chant represents an element in a higher-order structure" [2, p. 110]. In accordance with the tradition of antiphonal (angelic) singing, Sviridov uses a division into two choirs in some hymns. One part of the choir (the smaller one is probably the "parishioners"), the other (the larger one is probably the "angels"). And, of course, the Light. Due to the special fret organization of the chants, where the frets of the major and minor moods merge into one fret, an effect arises in them, called by Yuri Paisov the effect of the "mysterious glow of choral harmonies" [5, p. 185].

According to Sviridov, with the help of this effect, "a face of strong expressiveness is drawn or... The Divine face" [6, p. 207] (2).

There is no doubt about the uniqueness of the phenomenon called church singing in Russia.

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(1) The “Cherubic song” serves to prepare believers for the Great Entrance. The Great Entrance is called the Transfer of the Holy Gifts – bread and wine, according to the church faith, transubstantiated into the Body and Blood of Christ, from the altar to the throne, marking the solemn procession of Jesus Christ to free suffering and death on the cross. The Great Entrance prepares the central event of the Divine Liturgy – the Sacrament of the Eucharist, during which the faithful receive communion – they eat bread and wine transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ, for the sake of the essential union of believers with Christ.

(2) Interestingly, there is another type of znamenny singing in the Russian Orthodox Church – the “singing” of church bells – the ringing of church bells. The bell ringing called “Blagovest” is especially significant, since the word “Blagovest” is synonymous with the word “Gospel”, as it is used in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, as well as in other books of the New Testament – not in the meaning of “book”, which was introduced later, but in the meaning of “good news”. The Blagovest itself is the Gospel expressed in sound. The Blagovest indicates the stages of Worship. And, in particular, what is important to note, it sounds during the Divine Liturgy at the beginning of the Eucharistic Canon (Canon of the Eucharist), a series of prayer services during which the Sacrament of the Eucharist takes place.