

The art of singing Byzantine chant and the vocal technical issues

Dimosthenis Fistouris*

defist@otenet.gr

The Byzantine ecclesiastical music, as one of the most long-lived musical cultures with a duration over a millennium, is distinguished for its monophonic vocal chant, whose interpretation is based on the living tradition handed down from generation to generation. This chanting art - whose way of teaching carries common elements from the ancient Greek chant tutors – demands high vocal skills. Therefore, the knowledge of the vocal instrument and technique should be of paramount concern for the modern Byzantine chanters. The long and strenuous tutorial course experienced by the chanter so as to achieve a faithful and mature interpretation, according to the elements of tradition and the solid vocal technique as well, is full of ongoing diligent efforts. Occasionally in the effort to render the vocal timbre and the vocal projection of various prominent chanters, distortions of the personal vocal organ occur due to their imitations, as a pretext for the interpretive approach of their chanting style. At times changing perceptions and sensations about chant singing, phonation and articulation, where the interpretation in the context of the traditional style is ostensibly interweaved with the vocal technique. During the course of this process, occasional lessons with voice teachers are observed, either within a training tutorial or when vocal health problems arise. However in both cases, usually a doubt or a scruple about the desirable vocal projection, according to the standards of ecclesiastical tradition, underlies. In what ways are all the aforementioned issues combined, where do they conform and how do they conflict? What should the concern, the care and the vocal practicing be on behalf of a Byzantine chanter? How will a young Byzantine chanter cultivate his natural vocal talent and leave his own interpretational mark within the chant tradition? The purpose of this paper is to raise some issues of interpretation and to submit some recommendations based on the actual experience of chanting tradition and documented by the scientific knowledge and the classical vocal education.

-
- *Born in Istanbul. Student of the Megali tou Genous Scholi (Great School of the Nation) in Fanar of Constantinople, Prime kanonarches (child chanter) in the Ecumenical Patriarchal Church. Studies Byzantine music beside Basilis Nicolaides, the Protopsaltes (First chanter) of the Great Church of Christ. Later on in Athens, apprenticed to Constantine Mafides, the First chanter (protopsaltes) of the Holy Monastery of Zoodochos Pigi (Life Giving Spring) of the Archdiocese of Constantinople and Demosthenes Paikopoulos, Second Domestiko of the Great Church of Christ and eminent protopsaltes. Graduate of the Polytechnic School of Mining and Metallurgical Engineers of National Technical University of Athens. Ph.D. in musicology from the Faculty of Musical Studies of the University of Athens. Diplomas of Byzantine music, Opera singing, Harmony, Counterpoint and Fugue. Scholar of the Foundation "Alexander S. Onassis ", studies in Italy. Soloist singer: National Opera of Athens, Megaron Concert Hall, Opera of Thessaloniki, Dimitria Festival of Thessaloniki and in Italian lyrical theaters. Solo recitals and participations in concerts: the Municipality of Athens, The Theocharakis Institute, the NTUA, the University of Athens, the Alexander Onassis Foundation, etc. International musicological conferences in Greece and abroad. Composer on music for the theater and radio producer.*