The "Economy of Incarnation" and the Cherubic Hymn in Nineteenth-Century Russia

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Izhe kheruvimy taino obrazuiushche,	Let us who mystically represent the Cherubim,
i zhivotvoriashchei Troitse trisviatuiu pesn' pripevaiushche,	and who sing the thrice-holy hymn to the life-creating Trinity,
vsiakoe nyne zhiteiskoe otlozhim popechenie.	now lay aside all cares of this life
Iako da Tsaria vsekh podymem,	that we may receive the King of All,
angel'skimi nevidimo dorinosima chinmi.	who comes invisibly upborne by the angelic host.
Alliluia.	Alleluia.[1]

The Cherubic Hymn is the text of the Orthodox liturgy most frequently set by musicians in modern Russia. Dmitry Bortniansky (1751–1825)—the first major professional composer of

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[1] Translation from Vladimir Morosan, ed., *One Thousand Years of Russian Church Music: 988–1988* (Washington, DC: Musica Russica, 1991), 85. All other translations are my own unless otherwise indicated. I have used the Library of Congress transliteration system throughout with some modifications for proper names. In the main text, I give proper names in commonly accepted English spellings, while I have given them in transliterated form in notes for Russian-language sources (i.e., "Kastalsky" in the main text and "Kastal'skii" in the notes).

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sacred music in Russia—composed seven settings in the early years of the nineteenth century,[2] and Alexander Kastalsky (1856–1926) composed seven more at the end of the century, five in 1897–98 alone. In the interim, many of the country's leading composers tried their hand, including Mikhail Glinka in 1837, Pyotr Tchaikovsky (one for his *Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*, op. 41, of 1878, and three in his *Nine Sacred Pieces* of 1884–85), and Milii Balakirev, who arranged Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's motet *Ave verum corpus* to the text of the Cherubic Hymn in 1882. Many lesser-known composers, too, took up the text, from the conservatory-trained professional to the parish cantor.[3] The hymn's self-referential musicality and mystical evocation of angelic song surely captured composers' imaginations, but there was also a practical reason for the lengthy, elaborate settings it inspired: in the liturgy of Russian Orthodox Christianity, the Cherubic Hymn accompanies the Great Entrance, a procession in which the clergy carry the Eucharistic gifts—the bread and wine that will become the body and blood of Christ—to the altar, an elaborate set of actions that requires a similarly elaborated musical accompaniment.[4]

The hymn's popularity belies the dense semiotic and theological tangle it presents. On the surface, the mystical representation of the first line of the text is that of the clergy standing in for angels, yet there is also the issue of the Eucharistic gifts themselves: although the bread and wine are not yet consecrated, some commentators suggest that "the King of All" is already present at this moment.[5] The line between symbolism and what Robert Orsi calls the "real presence" of the divine is similarly blurred by the song of the angels.[6] The "thrice-holy hymn" of the text can at once be taken as the Trisagion, sung earlier in the liturgy, or the Sanctus, sung just after the consecration of the gifts, both of which are called the *trisviatoe* ("thrice-holy") in Russian and are modeled on the

[2] While the first of these dates from 1782, the dating of the rest is not certain. Dunlop writes that most of Bortniansky's sacred music can be placed in the last decade of the eighteenth century and first decade of the nineteenth. See Carolyn C. Dunlop, *The Russian Court Chapel Choir: 1796–1917* (London: Routledge, 2013), 111–12.

[3] Since the publication of sacred music was limited in Russia prior to the late nineteenth century, the most representative collection of such compositions can be found in the censorship files of the Court Cappella, the institution chiefly responsible for the regulation of all musical settings of liturgical texts during this time. "O tsenzure," Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv (RGIA) f. 499, op. 1.

[4] Dimitri E. Conomos, *Byzantine Trisagia and Cheroubika of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (Thessaloniki: Patriarchal Institute for Patristic Studies, 1974), 36–37.

[5] Robert Taft, *The Great Entrance: A History of the Transfer of Gifts and Other Pre-anaphoral Rites of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom* (Rome: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1975), 62–64.

[6] Robert A. Orsi, *History and Presence* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), 8–10. Though Orsi's distinction is between Roman Catholic and Protestant approaches to communion, the Russian Orthodox interpretation roughly aligns with the Roman Catholic.

angelic hymn in Isaiah 6:3.[7] A popular Byzantine legend reports that the original melody of the Trisagion was revealed to a child by an angel.[8] Reference spills over into direct imitation—or participation, depending upon one's interpretation—in the "alleluia," understood by nineteenth-century Russian thinkers to be the actual song of angels.[9] Finally, the referential embrace of the hymns that precede and follow the Cherubic Hymn speaks to its placement in a transitional, even liminal moment in the liturgy. The hymn initiates the Liturgy of the Faithful, the part of the service in which the unbaptized (the catechumens) are instructed to leave while the faithful remain.[10] In this "conjunctive stage" of the liturgy, "the eternal and the temporal meet, cross over, and image each other," in preparation for their ultimate unification in the Eucharist.[11] Liturgical texts mark this shift, as well; readings from narrative texts such as the Old Testament and the Epistles precede the Cherubic Hymn, after which the hymns and prayers turn toward the reenactment of the Last Supper.

The Cherubic Hymn's liturgical context raises questions about its role in simulating, regulating, or preparing for divine encounter. Does mystical representation simply entail an imaging, oral or embodied, of the angelic hosts, or is the unseen escort of angels believed to be actually present? Does human song imitate or meld with the angelic in these moments? What is the role of this hymn in preparing worshippers to receive the divine in the sacrament of the Eucharist? Does its music simply serve as celebratory praise offered toward God, or does it *do something* to the worshippers?[12] This article offers both a historical and a theoretical response to these questions. By examining aesthetic trends within this hymnodic genre in nineteenth-century Russia, alongside music criticism and theology, I demonstrate a gradual but profound shift

[7] Taft, *Great Entrance*, 64–65.

[8] Conomos, *Byzantine Trisagia*, 25.

[9] Mikhail Sokolov, *O bogosluzhenii pravoslavnoi tserkvi: Vsenoshchnoe vdenie i bozhestvennaia liturgiia*, 7th ed. (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia M. Akinfieva i I. Leont'eva, 1899), 63; and Nikolai Gogol, *Meditations on the Divine Liturgy of the Holy Eastern Orthodox Catholic and Apostolic Church*, trans. L. Alexieff, ed. Archimandrite Lazarus (Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity Publications, 1952), 31.

[10] By the nineteenth century this dismissal was taken to be a reminder of one's unworthiness, or a call for believers to banish unworthy thoughts, rather than a literal dismissal of the unbaptized observers (Gogol, *Meditations on the Divine Liturgy*, 27–28). While most commentators of this period believed that such a literal dismissal was practiced in the early Church, more recent scholarship has cast doubt on this notion of secrecy. See Lynne C. Boughton, "An Imagined Past: Initiation, Liturgical Secrecy, and 'Mass of the Catechumens,'" *Antiphon: A Journal for Liturgical Renewal* 25 (2021): 161–210.

[11] Richard Barrett, "'Let Us Put Away All Earthly Care': Mysticism and the *Cherubikon* of the Byzantine Rite," *Studia Patristica* 64 (2013): 111–24, at 123.

[12] For a discussion of this distinction see Christina M. Gschwandtner, "Mimesis or Metamorphosis? Eastern Orthodox Liturgical Practice and Its Philosophical Background," *Religions* 8, no. 5 (2017): 1–22, at 2, 5; and Jim Sykes, "The Secularism of Music Studies," *Yale Journal of Music & Religion* 6, no. 2 (2020): 119–43, at 119–22.

in Russian Orthodox thought.[13] Over the course of the nineteenth century, an Enlightenment sensibility that treated religion as a means of instruction based on divine models ceded to a belief, encapsulated in the Orthodox doctrine of deification or theosis, that the divine and earthly interpenetrated one another, and that through moral or spiritual endeavors the human could aspire to be like the divine.[14] The Cherubic Hymns I examine chart this trajectory musically, beginning in the early part of the century with representational paradigms and progressing to define a new idiom that suggests the presence of the otherworldly and its efficacy upon listeners and believers.

The development of Cherubic Hymn settings reflects the broader intellectual and cultural shifts that resulted from the transformations of Russia's religious institutions during this period. Reforms to the Spiritual Academies (*Dukhovnye akademii*) that trained clergy, beginning with a new charter in 1814, and a fourteen-fold increase in Russia's monastic population from the end of the eighteenth century to 1914, helped usher in a "religious renaissance" that extended to the intellectual elite by the turn of the twentieth century.[15] At the same time, the reinvigoration in the 1880s of the institutional apparatuses of church music—primarily the Synodal College of Church Singing in Moscow and the Imperial Court Cappella in St. Petersburg—led to what was called the "New Direction" (*Novoe napravlenie*) in Russian church music.[16] This New Direction included a wave of scholars dedicated to studying premodern chant manuscripts, composers who turned to these chants for inspiration, and critics who debated issues of style and religious meaning. All shared preoccupations with the movement's relationship to past traditions and Russia's relationship to Europe.

This article examines a series of Cherubic Hymns that register the impact of these developments. It begins with the Enlightenment

[13] I measure significance by the number and seriousness of critical responses, as well as by the prominence of such pieces in performance, represented particularly by their presence in the repertoire of the two most important sacred choral institutions of this period, the St. Petersburg Court Cappella and the Synodal College of Church Singing.

[14] Ruth Coates, *Deification in Russian Religious Thought: Between the Revolutions, 1905–1917* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 55–81.

[15] The classic text on this moment and the first to use the term is Nicolas Zernov, *The Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1963). On the reforms to Spiritual (or Clerical) Academies, see Patrick Lally Michelson, *Beyond the Monastery Walls: The Ascetic Revolution in Russian Orthodox Thought, 1814–1914* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2017), 59–88; on the monastic population, see Scott M. Kenworthy, *The Heart of Russia: Trinity-Sergius, Monasticism, and Society after 1825* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 2–3.

[16] M. P. Rakhmanova, "IV. 1900–1910-e. Novoe napravlenie (Vstupitel'naia stat'ia)," in *Tserkovnoe penie poreformennoi Rossii v osmyslenii sovremennikov 1861–1918*, ed. A. A. Naumov and M. P. Rakhmanova (Moscow: Iazyki slavianskoi kul'tury, 2002), 513–24 (hereafter *Tserkovnoe penie*).

approach epitomized by Bortniansky, then moves through efforts by Glinka, Balakirev, and Tchaikovsky to reconfigure the balance of representation and presence in the hymn, and concludes with the interpretations of the New Direction, exemplified here by Kastalsky. There are several reasons for this selection. While ordinary Russian churchgoers were more likely to hear the simple harmonizations of the Cherubic Hymn found in the *obikhod*, a compendium of liturgical hymns similar to the Western *Liber Usualis*, or functional settings by composers such as Alexander Arkhangelsky (1846–1924) and Pyotr Turchininov (1779–1856), these rarely received extensive critical commentary. The hymns discussed in this article, in contrast, were prominent in the discourse of the scholars and critics of the New Direction who became increasingly invested in assessing the legacy of church music from Bortniansky to Kastalsky. It was ultimately the settings of Kastalsky's generation and the critical engagement that they engendered that would define a musical language of deification through a liturgically attuned approach to traditional chant melodies. Moreover, these hymns, even if their popularity did not persist past the period under consideration, were hardly obscure: they figured in the concert programs of the Synodal Choir, and some could be heard in the major cathedrals and monasteries of Moscow and St. Petersburg.[17] This represents the same type of elite cross-pollination between worship and aesthetics that animated the discourse of deification, which owed as much to Dostoevsky as it did to patristics.[18] Rather than a comprehensive survey of the development of the Cherubic Hymn, then, I offer musicological evidence for a shift in the understanding of representation and presence in Orthodox thought through a hymnodic genre that itself thematizes these issues.

While demonstrating this historical shift, I also propose a theoretical framework for understanding it that takes into account a broader context of music's status in negotiating immanence and transcendence in Christian worship. Jeremy Begbie has argued that the tension between transcendent and immanent conceptions of the divine—of "God's 'thereness' and 'hereness'"—can be modeled by musical perception.[19]

[17] The programs of the Synodal Choir are collected in S. G. Zvereva, A. A. Naumov, and M. P. Rakhmanov, eds., *Sinodal'nyi khor i uchilishche tserkovnogo peniia. Kontserty. Periodika. Programmy* (Moscow: Iazyki slavianskoi kul'tury, 2004), 717–828. The partially published diaries of Sergei Kablukov, a church music enthusiast and member of the St. Petersburg Religious-Philosophical Society, indicate that much of the same repertoire was heard in venues including Kazan Cathedral and Alexander Nevsky Monastery in St. Petersburg. See, for example, S. P. Kablukov, "Dnevnik za 1909 g. (s 26 sentiabria po 31 dekabria)," Rossiiskaia Natsional'naia Biblioteka (RNB), f. 322, no. 7, 68–69.

[18] Paul L. Gavrilyuk, "How Deification Was Rediscovered in Modern Orthodox Theology: The Contribution of Ivan Popov," *Modern Theology* 38 (2022): 101–27, at 105–7.

[19] Jeremy Begbie, *Music, Modernity, and God: Essays in Listening* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 144–45, 173.

While Begbie often has secular European concert music in mind when he argues for music's applicability to theology, recent studies have also demonstrated Christian liturgical music's direct engagement with this dynamic. Theologies of incarnation, which hold that Christ was himself the embodiment of the divine within the human or created world, are particularly relevant. Braxton Shelley, for example, argues that "the gospel tradition is animated by an incarnational approach to text: a pervasive belief that sacred words hold together visible and invisible realms, occasioning traffic between the two."[20] If the sacred words are what enable this "interworldly traffic," it is the use of musical techniques, such as "tuning up," that drive it.[21] Jeffers Engelhardt, in his study of Orthodoxy in modern Estonia—a tradition closer to the one at hand—likewise argues that the theology of incarnation provides the very premise for divine encounter through the liturgy. Engelhardt summarizes the "economy of the incarnation": the divine *logos* was made incarnate in Christ, and humans participate in this economy by taking part in the Eucharist and worshiping in the sacred words of hymnody.[22]

While the omnipresence of music in the Orthodox liturgy is often acknowledged, it is seldom subject to detailed technical discussion, and in the scant English-language discussion of Russian sacred music, nationalist narratives and their deconstruction have greatly overshadowed consideration of religious thought.[23] The Cherubic Hymn has attracted some scholarly interest; its origin and meaning in Byzantium and pre-Petrine Rus, as well as its transmission to the Latin West, have been well-documented.[24] Apart from cursory discussion of basic formal tendencies, however, the Cherubic Hymns of modern Russia have received little attention, musicological or otherwise.[25] By analyzing the musical

[20] Braxton D. Shelley, *Healing for the Soul: Richard Smallwood, the Vamp, and the Gospel Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 163.

[21] Shelley, *Healing for the Soul*, 128, 136.

[22] Jeffers Engelhardt, *Singing the Right Way: Orthodox Christians and Secular Enchantment in Estonia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 42; Engelhardt draws the concept from Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 2, *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600–1700)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 48.

[23] See, for example, Marina Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism: From Glinka to Stalin* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 226–300.

[24] The most comprehensive study of the Byzantine Cherubic Hymn is Conomos, *Byzantine Trisagia*; on the earliest Slavic transmission from Byzantium, see Kenneth Levy, "A Hymn for Thursday in Holy Week," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 16 (1963): 127–75; on subsequent developments through the reforms of the seventeenth century, see Mariia Engstrem [Maria Engström], *Kheruvimskie pesnopeniia v russkoi liturgicheskoi traditsii* (Stockholm: Almqvist och Wiksell International, 2004); and on transmission in the West, see Nina-Maria Wanek, "The Greek and Latin Cherubikon," *Plainsong and Medieval Music* 26 (2017): 95–114.

[25] N. S. Gulianitskaia, *Poetika muzykal'noi kompozitsii: Teoreticheskie aspekty russkoi dukhovnoi muzyki XX veka* (Moscow: Iazyki slavianskoi kul'tury, 2002), 43–44, 177–79.

techniques, critical appraisals, and occasional institutional sanctions or disavowals of a series of Cherubic Hymn settings, I demonstrate the specific theological and religious-philosophical interpretations that made the belief system of Orthodoxy attractive to nationalist and other contemporaneous interests. In doing so, I aim to reintegrate music within the economy of incarnation in Late Imperial Russia in a way that takes seriously the experience of the otherworldly while acknowledging its utility for such worldly purposes as nationalist historiography.

Bortniansky, Glinka, and the End of the (Russian) Enlightenment

The historiography of Russian church music, which emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was heavily intertwined with the compositional and critical activities of the New Direction. The first historical accounts of Russian sacred music were penned by New Direction composers who framed their own novel compositional style as a return to a national tradition that had been led astray by the Westernizing impulses of the Imperial Court from the time of Peter I. In developing this narrative, composers and critics sought, somewhat polemically, to cast their predecessors as deviations from this national path.[26] As the most prolific and institutionally supported figure of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Dmitry Bortniansky often served as the negative example against which the New Direction positioned itself. Born in Ukraine in the mid-eighteenth century and trained by the Italian composer Baldassare Galuppi (1706–85) in St. Petersburg, Bortniansky was the influential head of the Court Cappella under Catherine the Great and, later, Paul I and Alexander I.[27] As an employee of the Westernizing empress with a cosmopolitan musical style, Bortniansky would become the Italianate punching-bag of future generations. This narrative has proved powerful; even more recent, sympathetic treatments of his oeuvre apologize for his cosmopolitan style.[28]

Bortniansky's historiographical reputation rests largely upon his sacred concertos. Described by Marina Ritzarev as "emphatically superficial in style," they included marches for "imperial glitter," baroque dance forms, and at times lavish imitative counterpoint.[29] The generic designation of *konsert* for these works is somewhat misleading: while the

[26] Mikhail Lisitsyn wrote the first extensive account of the New Direction as an apotheosis of centuries of synthesizing native and foreign elements. See Mikhail Lisitsyn, "O novom napravlenii v russkoi tserkovnoi muzyke" (1909), in *Tserkovnoe penie*, 525–61.

[27] Dunlop, *Russian Court Chapel Choir*, 5–9.

[28] See, for example, Dunlop, *Russian Court Chapel Choir*, 113. On Bortniansky's posthumous reputation, see Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, 268–69.

[29] Marina Ritzarev, *Eighteenth-Century Russian Music* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 160, 162.

Court Cappella would have performed some of them for the entertainment of the autocrat, they also had a distinct liturgical function. As in the Roman Catholic tradition, these musical sections were performed during communion to retain the interest of worshippers while the clergy took the Eucharist—in the eighteenth century, weekly participation in communion was not usual among ordinary churchgoers.[30]

Bortniansky's seven Cherubic Hymns—several of which returned to the repertoire of the Synodal Choir toward the end of the nineteenth century—leave an entirely different impression.[31] In contrast to the textural variations that characterized the concertos and reflected their function in providing diversion during an otherwise dull moment in the liturgy, the Cherubic Hymns largely adhere to a slow, processional, homophonic style suited to the moment of the Great Entrance, and his text setting in this genre tends to be relatively transparent and intelligible (see ex. 1). While Bortniansky's output as a whole may have indeed drawn upon Western secular styles, these hymns demonstrate a significant amount of care and restraint, particularly given the temptations such a self-referentially musical text would have had for as versatile and eclectic composer as he.

While subsequent generations deemed Bortniansky's sacred concertos to be too close to entertainment, a secular delight that subordinated sacred texts to musical form,[32] his Cherubic Hymns served as a paradigm for later settings: as Vladimir Morosan has pointed out, his formal design—three slow sections with variation, followed by a fast section beginning at "that we may receive the King of All"—was adopted by the majority of composers throughout the nineteenth century, including Tchaikovsky, Glinka, and Kastalsky.[33] Another feature that was to prove influential was his setting of the text "unseen ranks of angels" in his Cherubic Hymns, nos. 1, 2, 6, and 7, for treble voices in close harmony, a mimetic device for angelic song (see ex. 2).[34] While scholars have emphasized the imperial pomp of Bortniansky's music for Empress Catherine's court, this device highlights another important facet of Catherinian Russia: an Enlightenment approach to religion, based on

[30] Nadieszda Kizenko, "The Orthodox Church and Religious Life in Imperial Russia," in *The Oxford Handbook of Russian Religious Thought*, ed. Caryl Emerson, George Pattison, and Randall A. Poole (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 21–37, at 23.

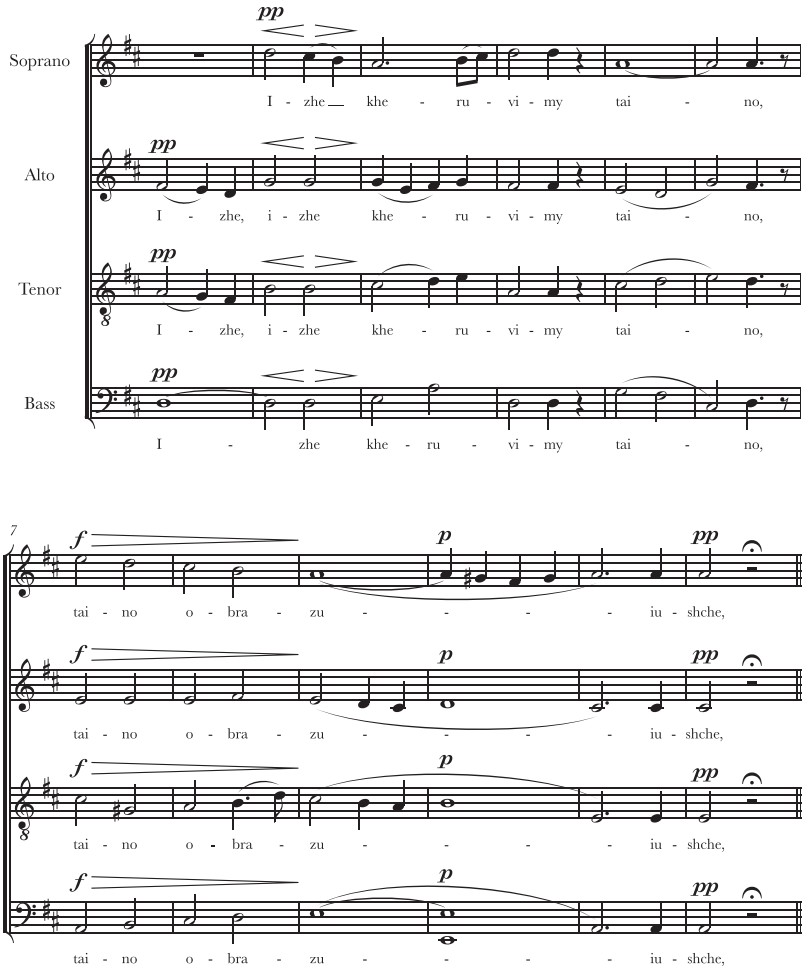
[31] See Zvereva, Naumov, and Rakhmanov, *Sinodal'nyi khor i uchilishche tserkovnogo peniia*, 752–82.

[32] A representative critique of Bortniansky's style can be found in V. Beliaev, "O 'tserkovnosti' dukhovnoi muzyki," *Khorovoe i regentskoe delo* nos. 7/8 (1910): 171–85, reprinted in *Tserkovnoe penie*, 584–96, at 587.

[33] Vladimir Morosan, "One Thousand Years of Russian Church Music: An Introduction," in *One Thousand Years of Russian Church Music: 988–1988*, ed. Vladimir Morosan (Washington, DC: Musica Russica, 1991), xliii–lvi, at lii.

[34] Morosan, "One Thousand Years," lii.

EXAMPLE 1. Bortniansky, Cherubic Hymn no. 7, opening strophe.

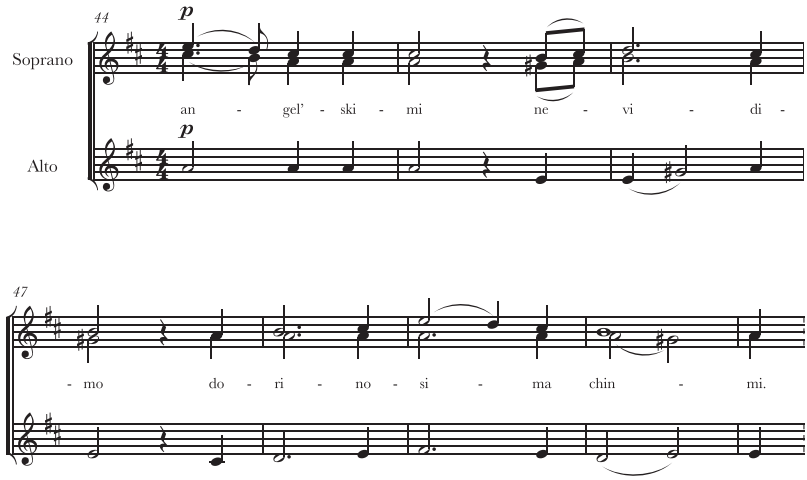


Western and increasingly Protestant models. The leading churchmen of Catherine's time cultivated an aesthetic sensibility that sought to put scriptural ideas into natural, accessible terms through their sermons and writings.[35] Bortniansky's Cherubic Hymns appealed to just this sensibility, matched by contemporaneous church interiors in which, as Kizenko points out, "naked cherubs with rosy cheeks cavorted in fluffy clouds on pale blue skies in elaborate gilded frames."[36] Although music and visual

[35] Elise Kimerling Wirtschafter, *Religion and Enlightenment in Catherinian Russia: The Teachings of Metropolitan Platon* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2013), 12–13.

[36] Kizenko, "Orthodox Church and Religious Life in Imperial Russia," 24.

EXAMPLE 2. Bortniansky, Cherubic Hymn no. 7, mm. 44–51 (tenor and bass tacit).



art in Catherine's Russia certainly made use of Western models, the Enlightenment emphasis on clarity of depiction, of pictorial representation, presents a specific and intentional religious attitude against which later settings of the Cherubic Hymn may be compared.

Glinka adopted Bortniansky's representation of cherubic voices in his setting of the text, and Tchaikovsky followed suit in all but his final setting. When Kastalsky revived the trope, it was no longer perceived as representation, a sonic reminder of the content of the hymn. The influential composer, critic, and priest Mikhail Lisitsyn heard the splitting of the soprano and alto into a separate choir from the bass and tenor in Kastalsky's setting not as an emblem of angelic song but rather as an embodiment of the antiphonal practices of the ancient church.[37] This progression from depiction to embodiment was at once aesthetic and theological. Just as Bortniansky's style became a source of embarrassment for some New Direction critics, so too were the rosy-cheeked cherubim on church walls an embarrassment for the Russian artists and religious thinkers who invested increasingly in the icon tradition of medieval Rus.[38] What icons offered, in the thinking of their proponents, was

[37] Mikhail Lisitsyn, *Tserkov i muzyka. Po povodu novykh techenii v muzykal'nom isskustv. Panchenko, Kastal'skii i Grechaninov*, 2nd ed. (St. Petersburg: Tipo-litografiia V. V. Komarova, 1904), 28.

[38] On the turn away from naturalism in sacred visual art and the revival of icon aesthetics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Maria Taroutina, *The Icon*

not a depiction of heaven but rather a window into it: a physical embodiment of the sacred through eternal archetypes.[39] As the following analyses will demonstrate, composers and critics of Russian church music gradually formulated an aesthetic response to the growing theological emphasis on the sacrality of the physical world. I argue that while Glinka and Tchaikovsky pioneered the stylistic vocabulary that appealed to such developing religious sensibilities, it was only with Kastalsky's settings of the Cherubic Hymn that icons found their musical analogue in medieval chant melodies.

By the time Glinka composed his Cherubic Hymn in 1837, Enlightenment models of religious thought had begun to recede. Nikolai Gogol's *Meditations on the Divine Liturgy* (1845–51) is evidence not only of the increased import of liturgical thought but also of the penetration of its symbolic modes into elite, secular society. The tract is not a moral apologia or a philosophical or even theological treatise but rather a commentary on the acts and prayers of the liturgy. Beginning with the premise that "the Divine Liturgy is the eternal repetition of the great act of love" of "the incarnation of God on earth," Gogol describes the liturgy in detail, emphasizing divine immanence in the Eucharist.[40] For Gogol, the meeting with the divine in the Eucharist is initiated first during the Cherubic Hymn, with hymnody playing a crucial role in enabling this meeting. Of the Hosanna added to the end of the Sanctus (one of the "thrice-holy" hymns to which the Cherubic Hymn alludes), he writes:

> With this song the whole Church now meets Him as He invisibly comes from heaven into the temple as into the mystic Jerusalem to offer Himself as a sacrifice in the Mystery about to take place. For that reason, just as previously when representing the Cherubim and in union with the heavenly hosts which proclaimed the incarnation of Christ, everyone present sang to Him Who was borne in triumph by the Angelic Orders, as the King of All, the song of the Cherubim, so in union with the flaming Seraphim let everyone now sing to Him the seraphic song of triumph.[41]

In his conclusion, Gogol also offers an intimation of the role of the human in the economy of incarnation, writing that the believer's "soul attains a high state," but *only* "if the worshipper follows every action reverently and diligently," highlighting at once the efficacy of the liturgy

and the Square: Russian Modernism and the Russo-Byzantine Revival (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2018), 49–57.

[39] P. A. [Pavel Aleksandrovich] Florenskii, *Ikonostas* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1994), 62–71.

[40] Gogol, *Meditations on the Divine Liturgy*, 5.

[41] Gogol, *Meditations on the Divine Liturgy*, 39–40.

and the agency of the individual.[42] His repeated emphasis on "attention," moreover, foreshadows the Cherubic Hymn's role in preparing the receptive believer for the divine encounter.[43]

Glinka's forays into church music were minor in terms of output but had an outsized influence on the narrative of the sacred music revival constructed by New Direction critics. Of his handful of sacred compositions, his final, "Let my prayer be answered," became much mythologized by such critics for its use of a traditional chant melody as a cantus firmus, a precursor to the techniques of the New Direction.[44] Before striking upon this technique, however, Glinka, during his brief tenure as *Kapellmeister* of the Court Capella from 1837–39, also composed a Cherubic Hymn, which the critic Nikolai Kompaneisky, an important voice of the New Direction, dwelt upon at length in an article in the *Russian Musical Gazette*. Predictably framing Glinka's effort in nationalist terms, Kompaneisky claimed that Nicholas I had directed the composer to make the Court Cappella sing "not like Italians," to turn away from the style of "free counterpoint."[45] Glinka, he claimed, accordingly rejected the free, Italianate style of Bortniansky's concertos for another, older Italian model: that of Palestrina. Although Kompaneisky registered the moving effect of Glinka's dissonances on drawn-out passing tones and their influence on Tchaikovsky and others, he ultimately considered the Cherubic Hymn a failure.[46] Glinka had only replaced one Italian, "the contemporary singer in the choir loft," with another, "a medieval monk from the Vatican." Nevertheless, Glinka had "changed the course of development of our church music," Kompaneisky wrote, not so much with these missteps but rather with his great secular composition, *A Life for the Tsar*, which returned the Russian folk spirit to national music culture.[47]

Kompaneisky claimed that Glinka was himself dissatisfied with the Cherubic Hymn, because "he [Glinka] felt that it was not music, but

[42] Gogol, *Meditations on the Divine Liturgy*, 57.

[43] Gogol, *Meditations on the Divine Liturgy*, 57. Gogol was well-positioned to track the shift in religious thought that was underway as Glinka composed his Cherubic Hymn. Through his philosophical writings, Gogol has been credited with influencing Archimandrite Feodor's (Bukharev) "positive theology of the body" that would help pave the way for the peak of interest in the doctrine of deification among the following generations. See Kizenko, "Orthodox Church and Religious Life in Imperial Russia," 30.

[44] Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, 136–38, 272.

[45] N. I. Kompaneiskii, "Vlianie sochinenii Glinki na tserkovnuiu muzyku," *Russkaia muzykal'naia gazeta* 11, no. 19–20 (1904): cols. 494–503, at 495–96.

[46] Kompaneiskii, "Vlianie sochinenii Glinki," col. 497.

[47] Kompaneiskii, "Vlianie sochinenii Glinki," cols. 500–501. Kompaneisky's nationalist reading of Glinka's music is in keeping with broader historiographical trends. On Glinka's contemporaneous reception, see Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 25–47; on his posthumous historiographical construction, see Daniil Zavlunov, "Constructing Glinka," *Journal of Musicology* 31 (2014): 326–53.

architecture, a building of dead material, and in it there was no life and no artistic truth. It was as if Glinka was able to perform a miracle, to resurrect the Palestrinian style from the dead, but from it blew forth the cold of the grave, not the warmth of a prayer."[48] Glinka famously derided Bortniansky's music as saccharine;[49] he seems to have removed this sweetness, but, as Kompaneisky might put it, he failed to replace it with another living presence. *A Life for the Tsar* provided a path toward this vitality, Kompaneisky argued, with its use of folk melody and folk-inspired counterpoint. Crucially, Kompaneisky was not suggesting that composers should infuse church music with secular folk melodies (although he would encourage this in other articles), but rather that there should be a parallel movement to revive the traditional chant melodies of pre-Petrine Russia.[50]

The path set by Glinka, then, was not merely one to the further nationalization of church music, but rather a path to the perceived reintroduction of livingness in the form of traditional melodies animated by devotional practice, the "warmth of a prayer." Kompaneisky's interpretations only hint at the large body of religious-philosophical, theological, and music-critical thought that underpinned them. The criterion of livingness and the opposition of dynamic prayer to lifeless forms open up this vast religious territory by connecting the specialist interests of chant scholarship and the crude strokes of nationalist historiography to the economy of incarnation. The theology of incarnation justified the presence of the spiritual within the material, as well as the agency of the human within divine activity. As I will argue, the New Direction looked to traditional chant melodies as ideal material vessels for the spiritual that were themselves cultivated by generations of human (and specifically Russian) voices.

Balakirev (and Mozart) at the Threshold

The economy of incarnation embraced fundamental aspects of Russian Orthodox belief, and setting liturgical texts such as the Cherubic Hymn offered composers a hand in directly shaping how such aspects were understood. Unwilling to cede this territory entirely to composers, both church and state regulated the publication and circulation of sacred

[48] Kompaneiskii, "Vlianie sochinenii Glinki," col. 497.

[49] Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, 268.

[50] Kompaneisky does, however, argue that there is a natural affinity between such traditions and that they may mutually enhance one another in his analysis of Tchaikovsky's Cherubic Hymn no. 3 in C major. See N. I. Kompaneiskii, "Kheruvimskaia pesn' no. 3 (C-dur) P. I. Chaikovskogo," *Russkaia muzykal'naia gazeta* 11, no. 44 (1904): cols. 1019–23.

music. There was a labyrinthine process of review and censorship for sacred music in the Late Imperial period, presided over by the occasionally competing apparatuses of the Moscow Synodal College of Church Singing and the St. Petersburg Imperial Court Cappella.[51] Although the stated goal of this process, to preserve "churchliness" (*tserkovnost'*) in music for the liturgy, was notoriously open-ended, one criterion that was typically upheld by both censorship bodies was the exclusion of inappropriate contrafacta.[52] Given this prohibition, it is surprising that at precisely the time that these censorship programs were being codified in the 1880s, Balakirev—who was director of the Court Cappella from 1883 to 1894—introduced a Cherubic Hymn into the repertoire that was a contrafactum of a Western hymn: Mozart's *Ave verum corpus*.[53] Moreover, Stepan Smolensky, one of the primary intellectual and institutional figures behind the revival of sacred music, considered this arrangement to be one of Balakirev's most important contributions to the movement.[54] The work was performed several times by the Synodal Choir in 1896, including in private concerts for such high-ranking officials as Konstantin Pobedonostsev, Chief Procurator of the Synod, and Grand Duke Konstantin Romanov. In one public concert the choir performed it on the same program as Bortniansky's Cherubic Hymn no. 7 and Glinka's Cherubic Hymn, inviting comparisons.[55] The piece was also likely heard by the Cappella's elite private and occasional public audiences since Balakirev arranged it only one year before he was appointed as the Capella's director.

Balakirev's selection of *Ave verum corpus* for arrangement was likely determined by personal taste as well as its familiarity for singers (it was in the repertoire of both the Synodal Choir and the Court Cappella,

[51] On the Court Capella's censorship program, see Dunlop, *Russian Court Chapel Choir*, 101–23; on that of the Synodal College, see S. G. Zvereva, "Arkhivnye dokumenty: Vstupitel'naia stat'ia," in *Sinodal'nyi khor i uchilishche tserkovnogo peniia: Issledovaniia, dokumenty, periodika*, ed. S. G. Zvereva, A. A. Naumov, and M. P. Rakhmanova (Moscow: Iazyki slavianskoi kul'tury, 2002), 261–92.

[52] On the discourse of *tserkovnost'* in the (nonmusical) religious press, see Vera Shevzov, "Letting the People into Church: Reflections on Orthodoxy and Community in Late Imperial Russia," in, *Orthodox Russia: Belief and Practice under the Tsars*, ed. Valerie A. Kivelson and Robert H. Greene (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 59–77.

[53] According to Tatiana Zaitseva, although the arrangement was not published until 1906, Balakirev completed it in 1882. See T. A. Zaitseva, "Balakirev," in *Pravoslavnaia Entsiklopediia*, April 5, 2009, https://www.pravenc.ru/text/77410.html.

[54] N. I. Kabanova and M. P. Rakhmanova, eds., *Stepan Vasil'evich Smolenskii, Vospominaniia: Kazan', Moskva, Peterburg* (Moscow: Iazyki slavianskoi kul'tury, 2002), 427.

[55] Zvereva, Naumov, and Rakhmanov, *Sinodal'nyi khor i uchilishche tserkovnogo peniia*, 748–54.

although typically performed in the Western portion of their programs).[56] His arrangement was not, however, an indication of a general lack of enforcement of censorship policies. Just a few years later his deputy, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, denied the publication of a Cherubic Hymn by the experienced scholar and composer Vasilii Metallov for a much smaller infraction than an inappropriate contrafactum—a nonsimultaneous resolution of a suspension in two voices.[57] Since no other Western contrafactum rose to such heights as to represent the cherubim in the voices of the most prominent choirs in the Empire, it is worth considering what significance Mozart's hymn held for Russian Orthodoxy.

Although the offertory in the Western rite is a parallel to the Great Entrance, the motet *Ave verum corpus* is not an offertory hymn. The Cherubic Hymn is sung as the unconsecrated gifts begin their path to transmutation and are brought through the congregation and beyond the iconostasis, which separates the nave from the sanctuary; *Ave verum corpus* is sung during the celebration of the Eucharist itself, when, as Scott Burnham puts it, "Christ and the communicant meet and merge at a shared threshold."[58] By putting "the lift of awed presentiment" supplied by Mozart's music to the service of the Great Entrance,[59] Balakirev anticipated Burnham's understanding of this music as constitutive of a threshold for divine encounter. This sense of presentiment, of anticipation for this meeting, is also crucial for the increasing burden of liturgical efficacy placed on the Cherubic Hymn. *Ave verum corpus* does not explain or illustrate the mystery of the Eucharist so much as it prepares the listener for it.

For Burnham, Mozart's music, with its gracefully scored space and harmonic halo whose chromatic incursions only reinforce its impenetrability, places us on "a threshold that can never be crossed."[60] The Orthodox liturgy can similarly be understood as a "threshold" experience in which worshippers are led to the border of understanding.[61] In Burnham's understanding of Mozart's music, however, the threshold that cannot be crossed is "created by modern subjectivity."[62] In contrast, the

[56] Dunlop, *Russian Court Chapel Choir*, 212; and Zvereva, Naumov, and Rakhmanov, *Sinodal'nyi khor i uchilishche tserkovnogo peniia*, 731.

[57] Metallov to Rimsky-Korsakov, January 28, 1891, RGIA f. 499, op. 1, d. 2718, "O tsenzure (1891)," 71–73ob. Ironically, Metallov subsequently led the Supervisory Committee of the Synodal College, which replaced the Court Cappella as the most active institutional censor of sacred compositions.

[58] Scott G. Burnham, *Mozart's Grace* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 69.

[59] Burnham, *Mozart's Grace*, 72.

[60] Burnham, *Mozart's Grace*, 114.

[61] Christina M. Gschwandtner, *Welcoming Finitude: Toward a Phenomenology of Orthodox Liturgy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019), 129–30.

[62] Burnham, *Mozart's Grace*, 114.

Orthodox liturgy was not premised on principles of modern subjectivity. Not only did the theology of incarnation hold the human and divine as interpenetrable, but the liturgy also dramatizes the crossing of carefully constructed physical thresholds within the church that signify terraced levels of mystery. The Cherubic Hymn participates in this crossing as it accompanies and animates the procession of the clergy and gifts through the Royal Doors into the sanctuary. Over the course of the nineteenth century, liturgical singing became charged with leading the human across this divide, expanding upon the role of *Ave verum corpus*. In bringing together *Ave verum corpus* and the Cherubic Hymn, Balakirev overlays the otherworldly presences suggested by the hymn—of angels and the "King of All"—and the experience of divine Encounter in the Eucharist. He thus gestures at the theological and liturgical work that the Cherubic Hymn could perform in connecting the human to the divine, but the question of how it would forge this link remained open.

Tchaikovsky's Path of Ascent

If Balakirev's insight opened the door to the otherworldly, his borrowing of Mozart's music did not provide a clear template of how music could support the two-way traffic between human and divine represented by the twin concepts of incarnation and deification. In subsequent decades, traditional chant melodies gradually emerged as the favored conduit. These melodies had an authorless, "found" quality, and a discernibly pre-modern modal language, which linked them to a time before the supposed deviation from the path of sacred music that Bortniansky represented. These melodies, according to Lisitsyn, lent compositions an "abstract, dispassionate character of expression," the voices of "millions of singers" eroding away any signs of composers' individual voices.[63] As Lisitsyn's comments suggest, they became a tangible means of providing access to a marked otherness and would become a hinge by which earlier representations of the otherworldly would cede to the evocation of its presence. Although these chants had been integrated into modern harmonizations by composers before Balakirev, including Aleksei L'vov (director of the Court Cappella from 1837 to 1861), it was Tchaikovsky who drew greater attention to their full creative potential.

Tchaikovsky had first brought Orthodox sacred music and its institutional protectors into the spotlight through the highly publicized (and much-mythologized) legal battle in 1879 with the Court Cappella over his *Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*, which he published without submitting

[63] Lisitsyn, "O novom napravlenii v russkoi tserkovnoi muzyke," 538.

the work to the ordinary censorship process.[64] Many of the work's critics denounced the premise of a full liturgy being performed in concert, a rather uncommon event at the time, or leveled vaguely defined charges against the work's secular or theatrical style.[65] Others admired Tchaikovsky's artistry and his interest in church music but admonished his failure to incorporate chant melodies to a significant degree.[66] Tchaikovsky heeded this critique: his next major sacred composition, the *All-Night Vigil*, op. 52 (1881–82), is an austere setting, based almost entirely on traditional chant melodies.[67] His final effort in the genre, *Nine Sacred Pieces* (1884–85), which includes three Cherubic Hymns, struck a balance between the compositional ingenuity of the *Liturgy* and attention to traditional source material in the *Vigil*.

The third of these Cherubic Hymns (in C major)—which Tchaikovsky considered to be the strongest of the three[68]— attracted the particular attention of Kompaneisky. When the hymn was first composed, Balakirev had taken issue with its opening motive, which he considered "dance-like" and "unchurchly."[69] A generation later, Kompaneisky likened this motive to folksong, specifically the convention of the *zapev*, an introductory formula sung by a soloist prior to a group response, which also features in the Orthodox tradition.[70] Kompaneisky described the chant theme that follows this motive as "wholly churchly," identifying it as a Kievan chant, one of the traditions considered most canonic by scholars at the time (see ex. 3).[71] Together, the introductory motive and chant theme formed an "organic whole," which Kompaneisky associated not only with Russianness but with churchliness. The "energy" in the section is driven not by "the resolution of dissonant intervals" but

[64] Stepan Smolenskii, "O 'Liturgii', op. 41, soch. Chaikovskogo. (Iz literaturno-iuridicheskikh vospominanii)," *Russkaia muzykal'naia gazeta* 10, nos. 42–43 (1903): cols. 991–98, 1009–23.

[65] Several of the most prominent of these reviews are compiled in *Tserkovnoe penie*, 159–89.

[66] See for example Mikhail Lisitsyn, "P. I. Chaikovskii—Kak Dukhovnyi Kompozitor (Kriticheskii Ocherk)," *Russkaia muzykal'naia gazeta* 4, no. 9 (1897): cols. 1199–1214.

[67] Vladimir Morosan, "The Sacred Choral Works of Peter Tchaikovsky," in *Peter Tchaikovsky: The Complete Sacred Choral Works*, ed. Vladimir Morosan (Madison, CT: Musica Russica, 1996), lxxxiii–cxix, at xcv–xcix.

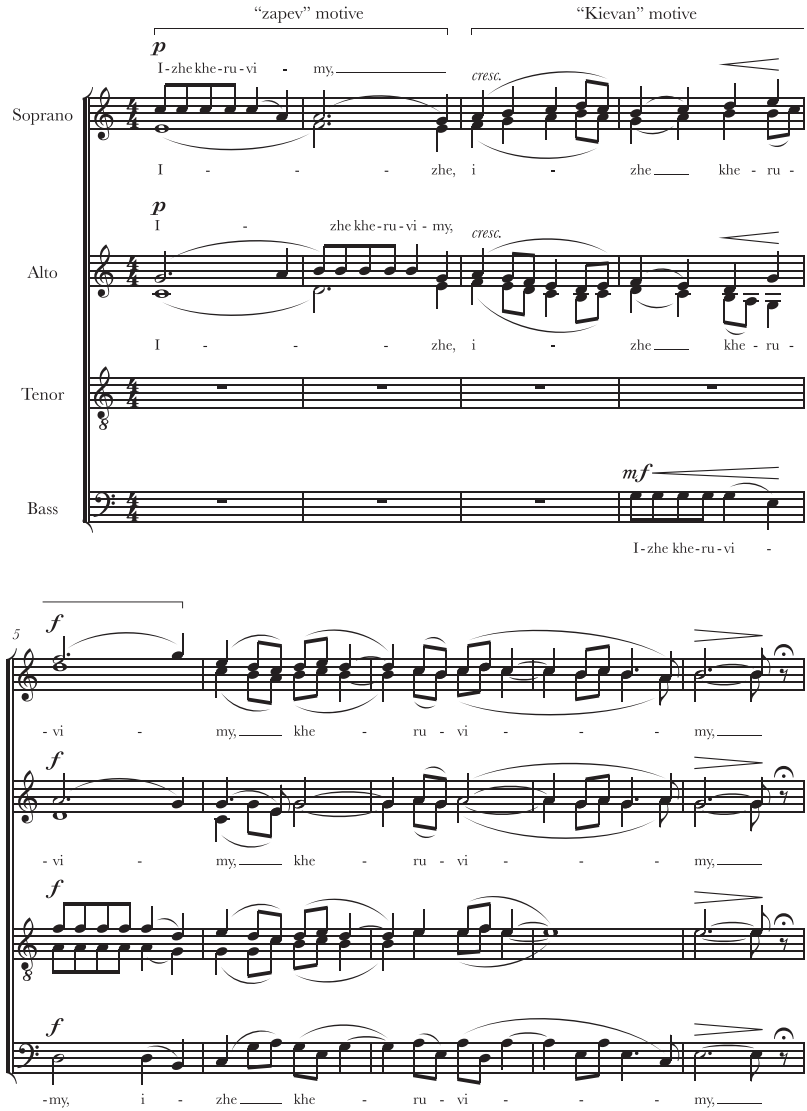
[68] Morosan, "Sacred Choral Works," cv.

[69] Morosan, "Sacred Choral Works," cv. Morosan details that Tchaikovsky wrote to Balakirev in 1884 that the Court Cappella might not find the setting appropriate, as he had attempted to approximate the sound of the unnotated, spontaneous polyphony of a parish choir in the second half of the hymn (at "the King of All").

[70] Kompaneiskii, "Kheruvimskaia pesn'," col. 1020. Morosan attributes this melody to the seventeenth-century *kant* tradition (Morosan, "Sacred Choral Works," cvi).

[71] On the various bodies of chant and their rediscovery, see Nicolas Schidlovsky, "Sources of Russian Chant Theory," in *Russian Theoretical Thought in Music*, ed. Gordon D. McQuere (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Resaerch Press, 1983), 83–108.

EXAMPLE 3. Tchaikovsky, Cherubic Hymn no. 3 in C major from *Nine Sacred Pieces*, mm. 1–9.



by the "tension of two whole figures, striving to crowd one another out." These two internally complete entities, which are integrated into a larger whole by the composer, demonstrate a "folk thinking," an alternative to rational processes of Western counterpoint that had left Kompaneisky

cold in the case of Glinka's Cherubic Hymn. The ordinary peasant, "taken from his plow," he wrote, could immediately and intuitively grasp and appreciate this hymn, "and it is therefore churchly."[72]

In such musical discourse, concepts of folkishness and churchliness help mystify the imperial nature of nationalist historiography, which assumed Imperial Russia to be the natural successor to Kievan Rus.[73] The centrality of Kievan chant melody in Kompaneisky's reading of Tchaikovsky's C-major Cherubic Hymn, however, demonstrates the utility of such chants for both nationalist and theological interpretations. As Kompaneisky's description suggests, the opening strophe is far more melodically driven than Bortniansky's Cherubic Hymn no. 7 (or even Tchaikovsky's first Cherubic Hymn in the *Liturgy*). The nature of its Kievan melody as a discrete entity with inherent meaning is a clear contrast to Bortniansky's chordal approach in which harmony delivers a text for listeners to digest. The Kievan melody also dictates Tchaikovsky's harmony, which moves not to the dominant, as in Bortniansky's, but to the parallel minor, thus conforming to the modal language of the church chant and to the folkish tendency of tonal mutability (*tonal'naia peremennost'*).[74]

For Kompaneisky, the apprehensibility of the composition is aided not by mimesis, as in Bortniansky's depiction of angelic voices, but rather by the natural qualities of the melodies themselves, the Kievan chant in particular. Kompaneisky also valued the hymn for its ability to affect the spiritual state of the listener. Of its concluding portion, the supposed song of angels, he wrote:

> The music of the final strophe, 'Alleluia,' creates a breathtaking [*zakhvatyvaiushchee*] impression, the sounds grow energetically and pour out like a flowing waterfall, filling the soul with such pure and energetic ideas, raising it up ever higher and higher, to there, where the heavens open up, where the eternal, great Sabaoth [Lord of Hosts] sits solemnly, surrounded by the Seraphim, singing out the Thrice-holy hymn.[75]

The "path of ascent from the earthly to the heavenly plane," known as anagogy, was an important way of understanding liturgical texts and art during Tchaikovsky's time.[76] The specific idea of angelic song as a link

[72] Kompaneiskii, "Kheruvimskaia pesn'," col. 1021.

[73] For a nuanced discussion of this process of national and imperial definition, see Faith Hillis, *Children of Rus': Right-Bank Ukraine and the Invention of a Russian Nation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 21–57.

[74] Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically*, 133.

[75] Kompaneiskii, "Kheruvimskaia pesn'," col. 1023.

[76] Oliver Smith, "Anagogical Exegesis: The Theological Roots of Russian Hermeneutics," in *Thinking Orthodox in Modern Russia: Culture, History, Context*, ed. Patrick

between heaven and earth, however, became more explicit in subsequent decades, culminating in the 1929 claim of theologian Sergius Bulgakov that music had the power to form a "perceptible ladder between heaven and earth," a "Jacob's ladder."[77] Kompaneisky was thus to some extent projecting his own generation's priorities onto Tchaikovsky's. Yet it is clear that Tchaikovsky himself was intentional about how he constructed this ladder. In the Cherubic Hymn from his *Liturgy*, and the first and third of his final collection of Cherubic Hymns, he sets the angelic song, the Alleluia, in elaborate imitative polyphony (see ex. 4). Bortniansky, whose sacred concertos were criticized by later generations for their subservience to Italian models,[78] seldom employed such polyphonic textures in his Cherubic Hymns. The New Direction, in fact, followed Tchaikovsky's lead here. If the found chant melodies became a means of embodying the essence of the church, the part of the hymn associated with the actual song of angels became the designated space for composers to try their hand at joining this song.

Perhaps the most representative composer of the New Direction was Kastalsky. The son of a parish priest, he studied with Tchaikovsky at the Moscow Conservatory before taking up a post at the newly reformed Moscow Synodal College of Church Singing at Tchaikovsky's recommendation.[79] Kastalsky exemplified the phenomenon of the *raznochinets* in Late Imperial Russia. Literally, a "person of different ranks," the *raznochinets* was often a son of a priest who left the largely hereditary clerical estate to join the intelligentsia in the decades leading up to the revolutions of 1905 and 1917.[80] In Kastalsky's case, this meant that he had a deep familiarity with liturgical customs and religious life but was trained in the secular tradition of the Conservatory. Kastalsky's position

Lally Michelson and Judith Deutsch Kornblatt (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), 196–214, at 197.

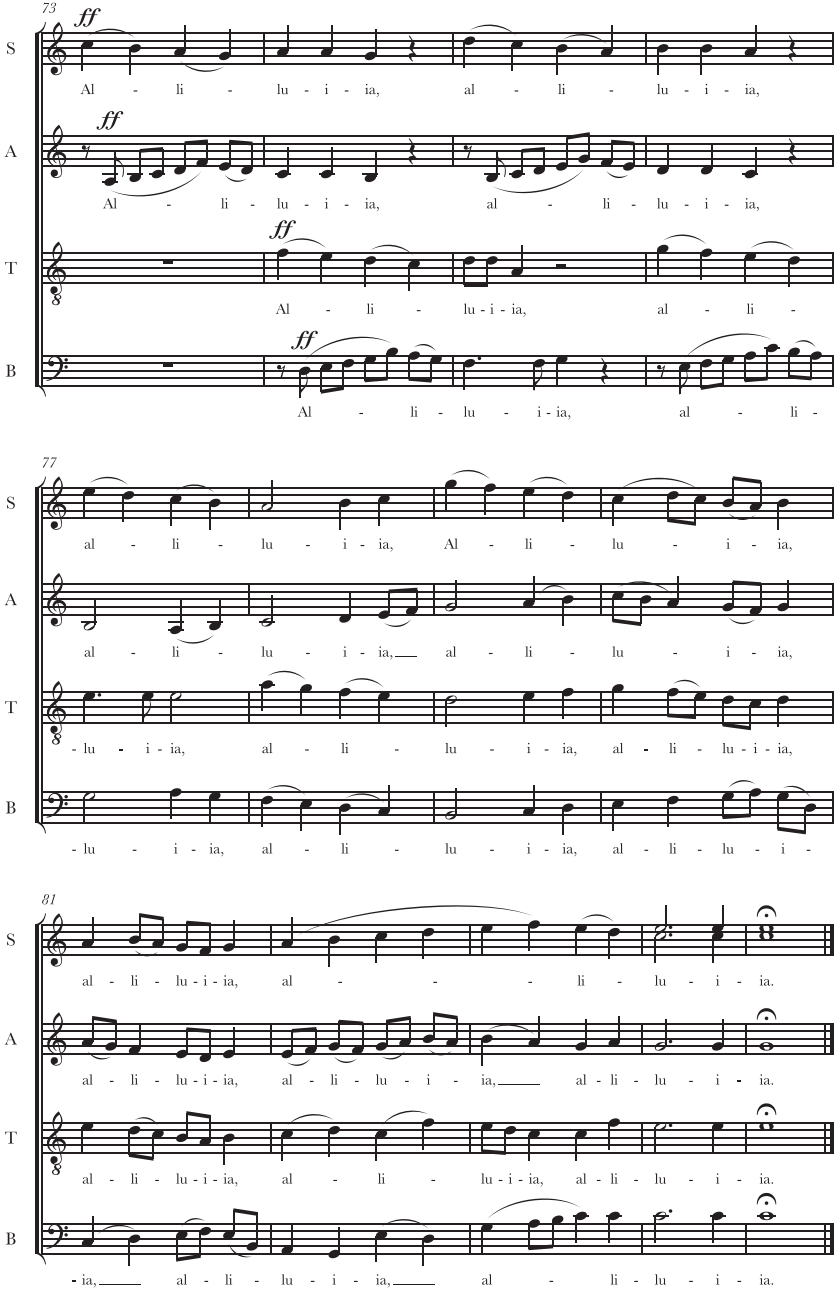
[77] Sergius Bulgakov, *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels*, trans. Thomas Allan Smith (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdemans, 2010), 127.

[78] Dunlop, *Russian Court Chapel Choir*, 113; and Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, 267–68.

[79] On Kastalsky's biography, see Svetlana Zvereva, *Alexander Kastalsky: His Life and Music*, trans. Stuart Campbell (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 1–13; on Kastalsky's appointment and Tchaikovsky's role in it, see Vasilii Metallov, "Sinodal'noe uchilishche tserkovnogo peniia v ego proshlom i nastoiashchem," in *Sinodal'nyi khor i uchilishche tserkovnogo peniia: Issledovaniia, dokumenty, periodika*, ed. S. G. Zvereva, A. A. Naumov, and M. P. Rakhmanova (Moscow: Iazyki slavianskoi kul'tury, 2002), 99–196, at 126.

[80] Laurie Manchester, *Holy Fathers, Secular Sons: Clergy, Intelligentsia, and the Modern Self in Revolutionary Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008), 3–12, 14.

EXAMPLE 4. Tchaikovsky, Cherubic Hymn no. 3 in C major from *Nine Sacred Pieces*, mm. 73–85.



as the assistant director (and later director) of the Synodal College also provided him with access to an extensive library of chant manuscripts and publications, a first-rate choir to perform his music, and a seat on the censorship board for sacred compositions. The development of theology and religious philosophy in Russia throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was largely fueled by the application of secular, European intellectual advances to ideas and traditions believed to be essentially Russian through institutional channels established by bureaucratic modernization.[81] Kastalsky's background, position, and career represent the very same paradigm at work in the revival of sacred music.

Kastalsky made his compositional debut in 1897 with a series of chant arrangements, including his "Cherubic Hymn on a Znamennyi Chant," the first of seven such hymns that he published between 1897 and 1903, each based on a different traditional chant melody. Many of the most common traditional chants were collected in the *obikhod*, and the use of these as *cantus firmi* for compositions had been increasing since the 1880s, following the example of Tchaikovsky's *All-Night Vigil*. Kastalsky and other composers of the New Direction drew on a much wider range of source material, including manuscripts, oral traditions, and a patchwork of published transcriptions.[82] The *znamennyi* corpus, which served as the source for his first Cherubic Hymn, is a liturgical tradition that dates back to eleventh-century Rus.[83] The titles of the melodies used in Kastalsky's other Hymn settings denote their origins in nearby monasteries ("Old Simonov," 1898, and "Sofronievsky," 1898), Slavic sister traditions ("Serbian," 1902), and the major churches of Moscow and its environs ("Moscow Uspensky Cathedral," 1898, and "Vladimir," 1903). One, "Cherubic Hymn on 'The Plunder of Moscow'" (1898), is based on a contrafactum attributed simply to an "unknown author."[84]

Kastalsky's approach to source material reflects the broader interest in ethnographic and archeological musical projects in Late Imperial

[81] Michelson, *Beyond the Monastery Walls*, 59–88.

[82] Some of the most noteworthy of these include Pavel Chesnokov (1887–1944), Semyon Panchenko (1867–1937), and Viktor Kalinnikov (1870–1927), each of whom composed hymns based on chant, including Cherubic Hymns during this time. Alexander Grechaninov (1864–1956) also stands out as an important representative of the New Direction, although his works more frequently included motives redolent of chant but not drawn from specific chant sources.

[83] G. A. Pozhidaeva, *Dukhovnaia muzyka Slavianskogo srednevekov'ia: Rus, Bolgariia, Serbiia* (Moscow: Kompozitor, 2017), 100–103.

[84] Aleksandr Kastal'skii, "Kheruvimskaia pesn'. Znamennago rospeva" (1897); "Kheruvimskaia pesn' napeva Moskovskago Uspenskago sobora" (1898); "Kheruvimskaia pesn'. 'Na razorenie Moskvy'," "Sofronievskaia kheruvimskaia pesn'. Po napevu Glinskoi pustyni" (1898); "'Staro-Simonovskaia' kheruvimskaia pesn'" (1898); "Kheruvimskaia pesn'. Serbskogo napeva" (1902); and "Kheruvimskaia pesn'. 'Vladimirskaia'" (1903).

Russia.[85] While Kastalsky himself did not conduct research with primary sources, his colleagues at the Synodal College were engaged in such work, and he occupied something of a mediating position between positivist, academic research and the churchgoing and concertgoing public.[86] Once these chants were recovered they had a dual status: on the one hand, they required deference as material traces of an idealized past, while on the other, they were teeming with life that could be cultivated in the present. In his 1901 article "On the Style of Church Singing," Kompaneisky praised Kastalsky for being able to "listen in and record" the polyphonic potential in the monophonic *znamennyi* melody, which has "thousands of undervoices" (*podgoloski*) inherent in it. Premodern, collective creation takes on a status superior to the Western masters and Kastalsky assumes the role of steward rather than author. As Kompaneisky writes, "What kind of composer is this, after whom you do not want to listen to Bach and Haydn? This composer is the Russian folk [*narod*]."[87] Lisitsyn likewise ascribes a teleological narrative to the hymn with the Russian people as agents of musical perfection:

> Millions of singers have sung this melody in its almost thousand-year period of existence. It has been modified, honed, and taken up in the mouths of whole generations of performers, taking on truer and truer forms, which, if they were depicted graphically, would be represented as perfectly symmetrical geographic figures.[88]

This discourse reflects what Patrick Lally Michelson describes as the writing of the *narod* "into providential narratives, first as a contributing beneficiary of God's plan, then as its principal agent."[89] The communal, multigenerational perfection of a *znamennyi* melody is a musical illustration of the *narod* as the repository for "authentic" Orthodoxy and subject to the designs of Providence, but exempt from modernization and the deviations from Russia's ordained path it introduced.

Undergirding this narrative is the idea that humanity can be an active participant in the work of the divine. This concept was increasingly defined through the doctrine of deification and would have profound implications for the theology of church music. Deification has deep roots

[85] On this trend, see Adalyat Issiyeva, *Representing Russia's Orient: From Ethnography to Art Song* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), esp. 209–54.

[86] David Salkowski, "(Re)constructing Medieval Rus' in Kastalsky's *Furnace Rite*," in *Sacred and Secular Intersections in Music of the Long Nineteenth Century: Church, Stage, and Concert Hall*, ed. Eftychia Papanikolaou and Markus Rathey (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2022), 395–417, at 396–97.

[87] N. I. Kompaneiskii, "O stile tserkovnykh pesnopenii" (1901), in *Tserkovnoe penie*, 471–83, at 480.

[88] Lisitsyn, *Tserkov i muzyka*, 27.

[89] Michelson, *Beyond the Monastery Walls*, 67.

in patristic thought but was largely absent from Russian religious discourse until a rediscovery of these sources in the nineteenth century. This fueled a wide interest in the doctrine, from the official Spiritual Academies to the intellectual avant-garde, which reached a climax in the early twentieth century.[90] The theological foundation of deification is that God, in becoming man in Christ, the Incarnation, also made it possible for man to become like God, or to unite with the divine. Ruth Coates argues that this doctrine requires a "dynamic anthropology," which endows humans with a remarkable degree of agency in divine activity.[91] Within the discourse of deification, two of the several strains of thought to emerge in the nineteenth century are particularly relevant here. The first, the "ethical" understanding of deification, stressed that humans could become *like* the divine, primarily through ethical or moral endeavor. The second, the "realistic" interpretation of deification, posited that humans could literally, physically participate in the divine through the sacraments, liturgy, or ascetic feats.[92] Both provide frameworks for understanding Kastalsky's Cherubic Hymn on a *znamennyi* chant and its critical responses.

The ethical interpretation of the doctrine of deification found its primary expression in the moral theology promoted by the Spiritual Academies.[93] It also gave rise, however, to the conviction that humans should emulate God's role as a creator, leading, at the turn of the century, to a glorification of artistic activity, the reach of which can be observed in Nikolai Berdyaev's *The Meaning of the Creative Act* (1916). A religious philosopher with an ambivalent attitude toward the institutional Orthodox Church, Berdyaev nevertheless echoed the patristic doctrine of deification, arguing, as Coates summarizes, "that humans are called to continue the creative work of God," reintroducing the ordered image of God into the world, in the model of Christ, to repair Adam's introduction of disorder.[94]

Kastalsky saw his own task as creatively ordering and arranging received material. He wrote that the task of church music was the "idealization of authentic church chants" and their "transformation

[90] Coates, *Deification*, 55–81.

[91] Coates, *Deification*, 31.

[92] Coates, *Deification*, 36–38. Coates draws these categories from Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1–2. Russell places both ethical and realistic understandings under the general umbrella of the "metaphorical" use of deification in patristic thought, as opposed to the "nominal" and "analogical."

[93] Coates, *Deification*, 60.

[94] Coates, *Deification*, 117, 121–25. On Adam and Christ, see Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Meaning of the Creative Act*, trans. Donald A. Lowrie (London: Victor Gollancz, 1955), 147–50.

(*pretvorenie*) into something musically elevated."[95] He often labeled works such as the *znamennyi* Cherubic Hymn as "arrangements," and his approach suggests both the importance of human agency and creativity and the pre-givenness of the original chants. Lisitsyn writes that the *znamennyi* chant melody "flows out freely as a stream" with delicate rhythmic intricacies developed through generations of oral transmission. He continues:

> It is hard to give it a correct, periodically repeating rhythm, but the author has managed to put this marvelous arabesque into a measured frame without destroying the whole. Next the author begins to harmonize it and through this creates similar, patterned arabesques in the other voices, variations to the foundational, ancient voice. All these interlace together and depict an illustration [*risunok*] of unusual beauty.[96]

These "arabesques" and "variations" characterize Kastalsky's contrapuntal style, devised, as in Tchaikovsky's final Cherubic Hymn, to give the impression of improvisation (see ex. 5). Kastalsky aspired to "the ancient psalmists' inspired improvisations,"[97] thus appealing to the aura of the archaic but in a spirit of constant re-creation. In submitting the chant melody to contrapuntal variations, Kastalsky undermines conventional harmonic function even further than Tchaikovsky had done. He retains a single harmony throughout the opening strophe; brief emphases on the subdominant (mm. 5, 7, 13) appear toward the beginnings and endings of phrases, but dominant function is absent.

Despite Kastalsky's positioning of himself as an arranger rather than a composer, it seems the chant melody was too obscured for some listeners by Kastalsky's creativity. The composer suspected that this was one of the reasons that the general public received some of his early chant-based works coolly, unlike the enthusiastic clergy and critics.[98] Marina Frolova-Walker claims that such opaque treatment of the source melody is a sign of "self-defeating nationalism," in which the source of supposed social unity, a traditional chant, is rendered inaudible to those it intended to unify.[99] The enthusiasm of critics such as Kompaneisky and Lisitsyn, however, paired with insights of thinkers like Berdyaev, afford an alternative interpretation. In both drawing upon source material

[95] Aleksandr Kastal'skii, "O moei muzykal'noi kar'ere i moi mysli o tserkovnoi muzyke," in *Aleksandr Kastal'skii: Stat'i, materialy, vospominaniia, perepiska*, ed. S. G. Zvereva (Moscow: Znak, 2006), 60.

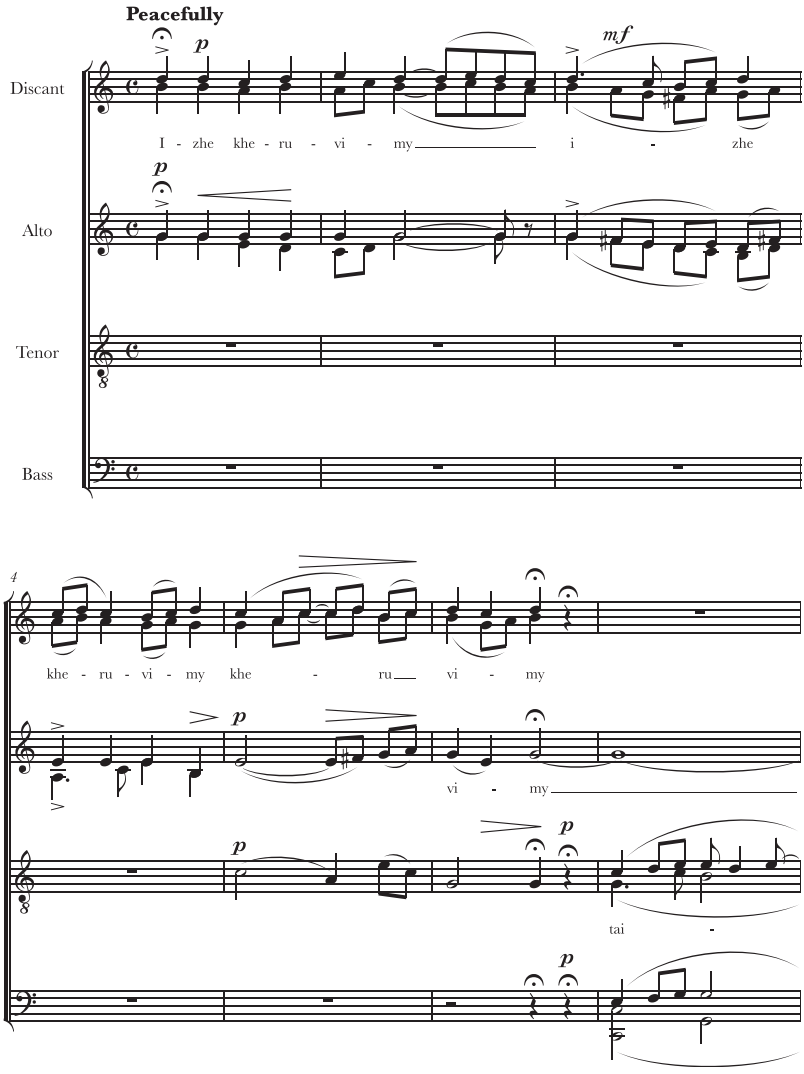
[96] Lisitsyn, *Tserkov i muzyka*, 27–28.

[97] Kastal'skii, "O moei muzykal'noi kar'ere," 60.

[98] Kastal'skii, "O moei muzykal'noi kar'ere," 54.

[99] Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, 287–91.

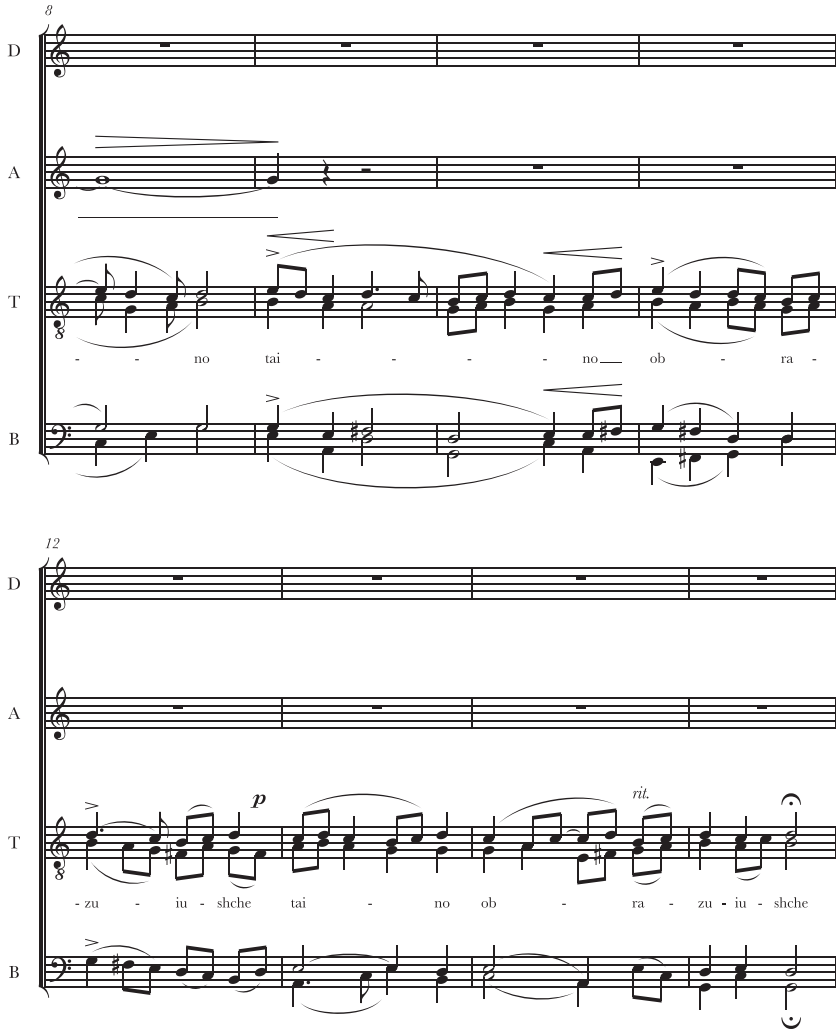
EXAMPLE 5. Kastalsky, "Cherubic Hymn on a Znamennyi Chant," mm. 1–15.



marked with the trace of providence by association with the anonymous *narod*, and striving to continue the creative act, Kastalsky forged a compositional process in the spirit of ethical deification.

If the ethical understanding of deification posits that humans may strive toward an image of godliness through ascetic, philosophical, or here, creative endeavors, the realistic understanding posits an actual,

EXAMPLE 5. *(continued)*



physical, and spiritual transfiguration of the human.[100] This is an explicitly mystical idea, which finds its clearest expression in the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist—when worshippers are initiated into the Church and when they partake in the body of Christ. Even beyond the specific doctrine of deification, the belief that the spiritual and material worlds interpenetrated one another became increasingly prominent in

[100] Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 1–2.

Russian religious thought in the late nineteenth century.[101] While critics and composers of the New Direction do not themselves provide an explicit account of how chant fits into the economy of incarnation, their language, along with the Cherubic Hymn's organic connection to the sacraments, suggests that chant-based settings of this hymn have a role to play in such real transfigurations.

The chants used by New Direction composers are ontologically ambiguous in the writings of Kompaneisky, Lisitsyn, and Kastalsky. They are neither composed nor revealed but rather found; they are not the voice of God, nor of the individual artist, but rather of the "people" of many generations. This is a presence that is clearly treated as removed from the mundane, but it does not yet constitute an encounter with the divine. A theory of musical deification, therefore, must be attuned less to what chant *is* and more to what it *does*. In an 1899 liturgical commentary, Mikhail Sokolov affirmed the Cherubic Hymn's preparatory function, noting its placement between the Liturgy of the Catechumens and the Liturgy of the Faithful.[102] These are "affecting [*umilitel'nye*] minutes," and the hymn should "prepare the attendees for the great, nearing mystery."[103] Christina Gschwandtner has argued for the role of intentionality in understanding both divine encounter and the believer's role in it. She characterizes "the intentionality of liturgical consciousness" as "an attitude of receptivity," and it is this disposition that enables the worshipper to experience God and participate in his work.[104] Unlike the invisible transmutation that takes place in the Eucharist, this "human posture of expectation, desire and preparation" is an empirically discernible change that takes place in the liturgy.[105] Cherubic Hymns based on chants helped condition this posture in the listener.

The Cherubic Hymn was expected to effect a human transformation through worshippers' participation in divine activity, a deification that is at once "real" and "mystical," even if, like the ethical understanding of deification as compositional practice, it is somewhat banal to the naked eye. (Though perhaps the ear is a better judge; Kompaneisky admits that while "looking at the score" of Kastalsky's hymn, "it is a vague mess," but "you listen and wonder.")[106] Lisitsyn notes that it is fitting that the contrapuntal climax of the piece coincides with the religious culmination of the text, where it "speaks of meeting the Tsar of all" in the Eucharist and

[101] Vladimir Soloviev's philosophy is exemplary in this regard. See Oliver Smith, *Vladimir Soloviev and the Spiritualization of Matter* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2010), 34.
[102] Mikhail Sokolov, *O bogosluzhenii*, 63.
[103] Sokolov, *O bogosluzhenii*, 62–63.
[104] Gschwandtner, *Welcoming Finitude*, 185.
[105] Gschwandtner, *Welcoming Finitude*, 184.
[106] Kompaneiskii, "O stile tserkovnykh pesnopenii," 480.

spills out into imitative "alleluias" (see ex. 6).[107] The chant has been transformed through human agency, the Eucharistic gifts will be transformed through divine intervention, and the musical setting itself transforms listeners in preparation for this encounter:

> Those worshiping are captured by a broad wave of the joy of religious feeling. The feeling flows from one to another. . . . But if the deep, internal, religious mood of those who truly believe can be depicted with sounds, then on the contrary, can such an artistic illustration in sounds not also act upon the religious feeling of all the generally believing worshippers and cause their hearts to beat quickly? If so, then, besides the musical-national meaning, such a Cherubic Hymn is also important in a purely religious sense.[108]

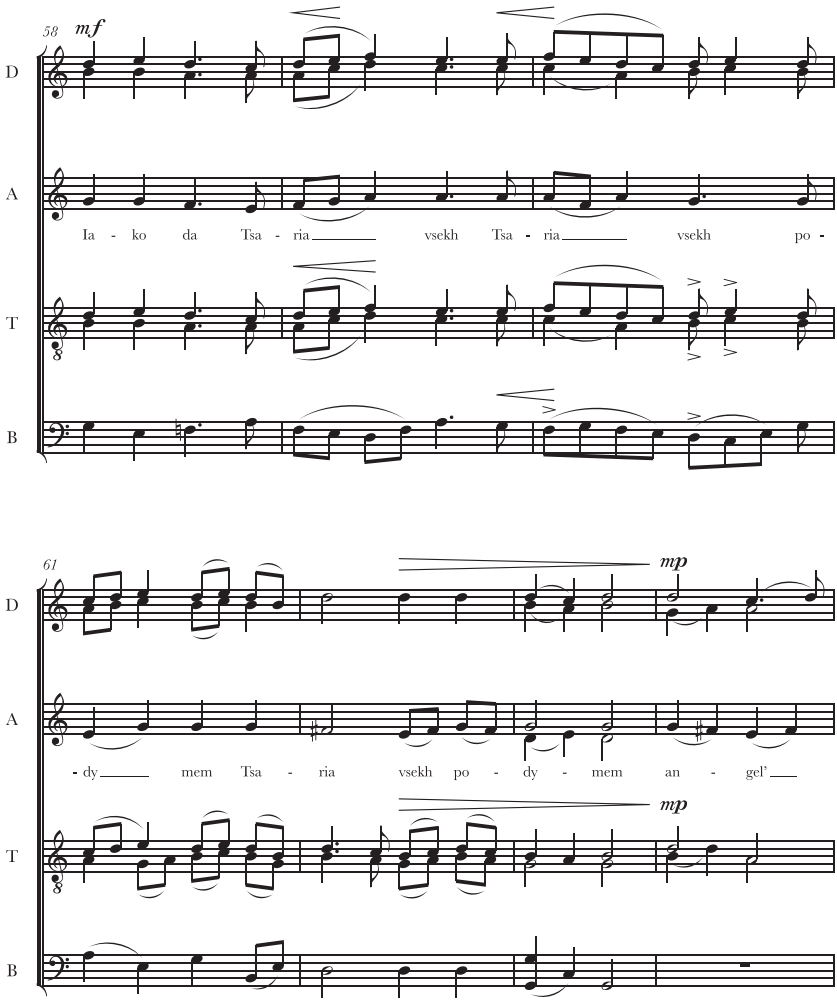
For Lisitsyn, Kastalsky's hymn is capable of actually changing those who hear it, transforming individual worshippers into a *church* and the general believer into an ardent one.

The status of chant, together with the composer-steward's creative continuation of its thousand-year progress toward perfection, is also a reminder of the bidirectional nature of the economy of incarnation. In the dynamic anthropology of deification, creativity, attention, and intention allow the human not only to receive or meet the divine but also to actively become like the divine. Through the agency of generations of singers, chant melodies had already become, in the minds and ears of the New Direction, deified to a certain extent; they served as a starting point for the modern composer and the listener-worshipper to connect material and spiritual realms. While earlier frameworks for understanding liturgical art had characterized this "gradual ascent" in the sphere of spiritual contemplation,[109] the increasing emphasis on the tangible medium of chant and the renewed focus on the Eucharist placed the Cherubic Hymn firmly at the crossroads of spiritual and material.

Chant, then, played an analogical role for the final presence that must be accounted for in this economy: that of angels. As Sokolov (and Gogol before him) pointed out, the actual song of the Cherubim consists only of the word Alleluia; the word carries forward the wave initiated by the intimation of impending encounter with the divine.[110] Within the hymn itself, there is a shift from describing "the unseen ranks of angels" to imitating them, and the contemporaneous theology of angels encouraged believers to treat such imitation as actual participation in the work of angels. In the 1880s Bishop Makarii (Mikhail Petrovich Bulgakov) of

[107] Lisitsyn, *Tserkov i muzyka*, 31.
[108] Lisitsyn, *Tserkov i muzyka*, 31–32.
[109] Smith, "Anagogical Exegesis," 197.
[110] Sokolov, *O bogosluzhenii*, 63; and Gogol, *Meditations on the Divine Liturgy*, 31.

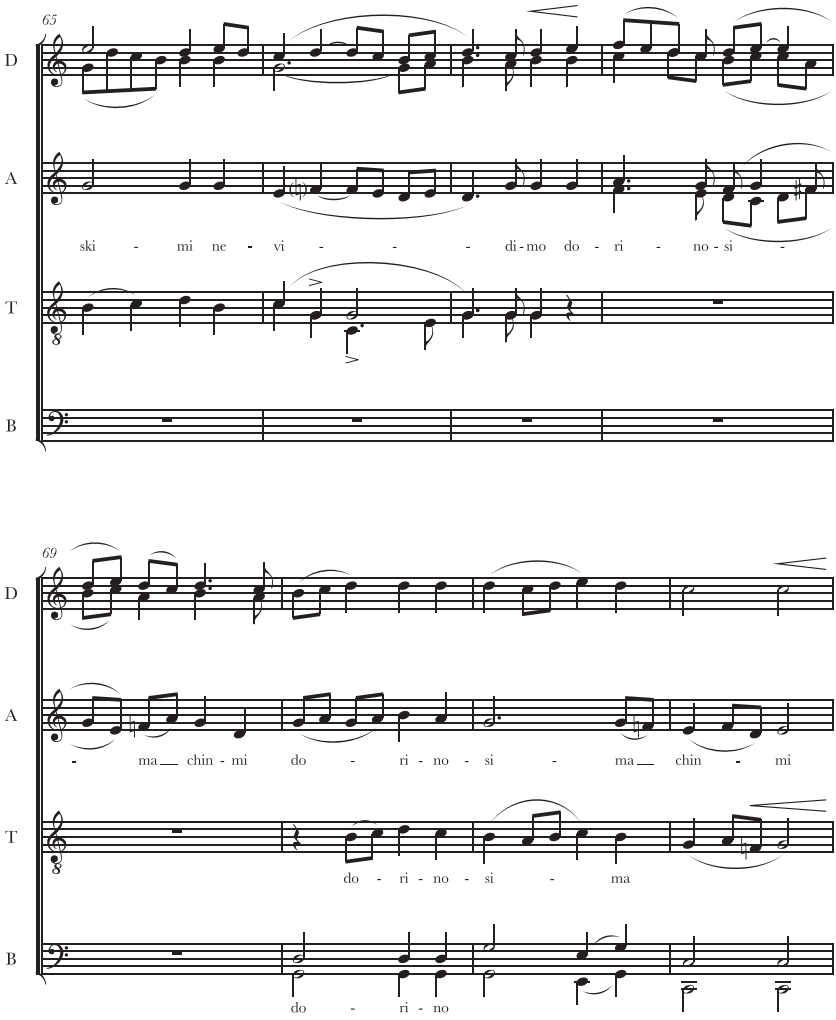
EXAMPLE 6. Kastalsky, "Cherubic Hymn on a Znamennyi Chant," mm. 58–72.



Moscow, one of the hierarchs responsible for the academic revival of patristics,[111] helped lay the foundation for such beliefs. In his commentary on angelic references in scripture and patristics, Makarii wrote that the work of angels is to at once serve God through praise and serve

[111] Patrick Lally Michelson, "Russian Orthodox Thought in the Church's Clerical Academies," in *The Oxford Handbook of Russian Religious Thought*, ed. Caryl Emerson, George Pattison, and Randall A. Poole (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 94–110, at 104.

EXAMPLE 6. *(continued)*



humanity as emissaries of God, with the Cherubim in the first circle surrounding God.[112]

Sergius Bulgakov, a younger contemporary of Kastalsky, expanded the theology of angels greatly. In *Jacob's Ladder*, Bulgakov provided a framework for understanding the Alleluia of the Cherubic Hymn. He argued, citing the book of Revelation, that "the angelic and human

[112] Makarii (Bulgakov), *Pravoslavno-dogmaticheskoe bogoslovie*, 4th ed. (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia R. Golinke, 1883), 1:379–401.

world, all of creation, are united in *one* doxology *with one and the same content*."[113] This is supported in part by a nominalist understanding of language, a mystical view that "words-meanings-essences are from the Divine Word," and that the Divine word "is the same in the angelic and creaturely world."[114] Based on such an understanding,

> in hymnody a human song is united with an angelic one and is in a certain sense homogenous. For that reason, the possibility of the joint service of humans and angels becomes comprehensible. It follows that the distinction of human and angelic language is not a divisible obstacle. This is confirmed by the fact that the song of angels, which is humanly audible, finds direct access to the human soul and is apprehended or translated into human language.[115]

Such nominalist interpretations of words and prayers gained traction in Late Imperial Russia, most famously in the case of the Name Glorifiers dispute, a controversy over a monastic prayer that held that "the name of God is God himself."[116] While a common criticism of this belief was its proximity to a talismanic treatment of prayer, Bulgakov's angelology makes it clear that, in singing the Cherubic Hymn, humans were not summoning the servants of God but rather elevating themselves to the paradigmatic angelic activity. He writes, "that which in our life comprises a rare festival among wearisome workaday routine—a song, the light of poetry, beauty—is the element that fills the whole life of the holy angels, who know no rest either by day or by night in their hymnody."[117] Icons were often described at this time as "windows into eternity";[118] here, hymnody serves a similar function, opening an aural aperture through which humans may commune with the beyond.

This angelic activity, importantly, is not static, but must be understood "dynamically as a continual creative work in cognition, an ever deepening knowledge of the Creator in Himself and in creation."[119] Bulgakov's words resonate with Berdyaev's metaphorical deification as creativity and its relationship to compositional practice. They also allow us to return specifically to Kastalsky's *znamennyi* Cherubic Hymn. Kompaneisky wrote of Kastatalsky's detailed yet unsystematic polyphony that as "all the voices run along

[113] Bulgakov, *Jacob's Ladder*, 120.
[114] Bulgakov, *Jacob's Ladder*, 117–21.
[115] Bulgakov, *Jacob's Ladder*, 124.
[116] Scott M. Kenworthy, "Archbishop Nikon (Rozhdestvenskii) and Pavel Florenskii on Spiritual Experience, Theology, and the Name-Glorifiers Dispute," in *Thinking Orthodox in Modern Russia: Culture, History, Context*, ed. Patrick Lally Michelson and Judith Deutsch Kornblatt (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), 85–107, at 86.
[117] Bulgakov, *Jacob's Ladder*, 124.
[118] Florenskii, *Ikonostas*, 71.
[119] Bulgakov, *Jacob's Ladder*, 121.

their own paths, they help one another, one adorns another and then rushes ahead, . . . you wait for when a repetition might come. But no, again everything is new and in new combinations. Play it every day and everything is new, everything is interesting."[120] Kastalsky's song of angels had the element of livingness that Glinka's Cherubic Hymn did not.

Conclusion

The Cherubic Hymn, as set by Kastalsky and understood by his contemporaries, was not merely an imitation of angelic song but a perceptible means of participating in it. The hymn does not only describe an impending encounter with the divine; it also prepares the congregation for this encounter, led by the angels who continuously sustain it. Composers setting Cherubic Hymns in the first half of the nineteenth century, including the supposedly secular-minded Bortniansky, were very much alive to the liturgical significance of the hymn, yet their evocation of angelic song remained primarily in the realm of mimetic representation. As religious discourse moved away from an Enlightenment model toward a rediscovery and reimagining of patristic sources, composers and critics increasingly sought musical and conceptual language to move beyond representation to real presence, matching the central event of the liturgy: the unification of the material and the spiritual.

The discourse of the spiritual and material featured in the thinking of both eclectic philosophers like Berdyaev and more dogmatic liturgists like Sokolov—not to mention those who traversed these spheres, such as Sergius Bulgakov. This discourse only skirted the edges of musical thought, which, although possessing its own robust theoretical and technical language, remained opaque on how exactly chant, and music more broadly, entered into the economy of incarnation. The Cherubic Hymn provides insight in this respect: its text and liturgical function bring the tension of representation and presence directly to the fore as both a theological and an aesthetic question.

For critics associated with the New Direction, Kastalsky's approach to setting the Cherubic Hymn provided a solution to the task of mystically representing divine encounter. In recently rediscovered archaic chant melodies, composers found a balance of pre-endowed alterity and opportunity for compositional agency. The supposed antiquity of these chants and their historical connection to pre-modern Rus certainly allowed for their utility in nationalist narratives, but their suggestion of the otherworldly and their efficacy on believers in the here-and-now had

[120] Kompaneiskii, "O stile tserkovnykh pesnopenii," 480.

a theological valence that was far more dynamic than imperialist symbolism. The Cherubic Hymn of the New Direction shifted the burden of representation to the sacrament of the Eucharist itself, claiming music as a perceptible means of transforming listeners, of conditioning them for the leap of faith of divine encounter. The reverently recovered plainchant, the living and ever-changing counterpoint that animated it, and the revivifying cultivation provided by the composer—all these became rungs on Jacob's ladder, the path to deification.

ABSTRACT

The Russian Orthodox liturgy constantly hovers on the boundary of representation and supposed real presence of the divine. This tension is dramatically illustrated by the Cherubic Hymn, which purports to "mystically represent" angelic song and accompanies the transfer of the bread and wine that will be transformed into the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist. The Cherubic Hymn was the most commonly set liturgical text in modern Russia, attracting many of Russia's leading composers, including Dmitry Bortniansky, Mikhail Glinka, Pyotr Tchaikovsky, Milii Balakirev (who arranged the text to Mozart's *Ave verum corpus*), and Alexander Kastalsky. In this article I analyze Cherubic Hymns from Bortniansky to Kastalsky to demonstrate a gradual shift from an emphasis on formal clarity and localized mimetic devices to a musical idiom based on medieval chant melodies and folk-inspired polyphony. I argue that this shift embodied a profound transformation in Russian religious thought across the long nineteenth century, wherein rational, enlightenment sensibilities ceded to a mystical emphasis on the interpenetrability of the material and spiritual worlds, or the "economy of incarnation." Drawing upon intellectuals ranging from the novelist Nikolai Gogol to theologian Sergius Bulgakov and prominent critics of the so-called New Direction that emerged in Russian sacred music at the end of the nineteenth century, I show that the Cherubic Hymn, and liturgical music at large, became invested with the ability not simply to imitate angelic song but to join in it, a perceptible and embodied participation in the activity of the divine. In doing so, I aim to demonstrate the persistence of sacred epistemologies in the modern world and develop an analytic approach that attends at once to musical detail and liturgical meaning.

Keywords: Russian church music, deification, liturgical theology, angelology, Kastalsky