

# **Music interpretation in the oral tradition of the Greek Church Music**

## **Η μουσική ερμηνεία στην προφορική παράδοση της Ελληνικής Εκκλησιαστικής Μουσικής**

Aglaia Chatzara

Department of Musical Studies, Ionian University, Corfu

### **Introduction**

Art can offer cultures the prospects of communication and creation. Music is being recreated by performance in the immediate present each time. In the case of Byzantine Music the researcher should not be absolute, which means that there is not only one “proper” way of execution, but there are many ways, and that spring from the wealth of the oral Byzantine tradition. With the comparison of different features in every performance, one can detect differences, which possibly concern specific particularities and origins of each performer. As it concerns these differences I intent to distinguish and justify the points, which I consider worthy of being emphasized.

### **Development of the Subject**

Explanation of expression signs through different interpretations of different hymns is the object of my research. Parameters that concern the specific spot in which a sign might occur are taken into consideration, that is four – chord / five – chord, mode, style).

A basic criterion for the selection of the hymns which where about to be examined comes from the need that these hymns had to be available in effective recordings, including their whole score.

That is why I have chosen the series: "Monuments of Ecclesiastical Music", Anthologies 1 to 10. Manolis K. Xatzigiakoumis.

We will only listen the beginning of the hymn and the specific spots, which I intend to analyze. The presentation concerns each expression sign separately. It is useful to note, that only snapshots (which is short passages with specific signs) are being compared and not the whole hymns.

## **PETASTI**

Petasti belongs to the signs with the most different ways of recitation. Considering its place into the text (with or without a klasma), petasti has many acts and because of that, the following example is about petasti.

Theoretical presentation results from different sources and mainly from a treatise titled “*Η Παρασήμανση της Μουσικής Έκφρασης*” [H Parashmansh ths Mousikis Ekfrasis] written by Georgios Konstantinou. Recitation of expression signs, according to several theoretical writings, is formulated in this treatise.

### **1. Theoretical presentation**

Phrases which come back systematically many times in theoretical explanations about petasti, are referring to:

- 1.1 ‘‘A short flight of voice’’ [petaghma].
- 1.2 ‘‘Sharpen the tune of voice and return quickly’’.
- 1.3 ‘‘Mellifluous [melismatiki] energy’’.
- 1.4 ‘‘Power, emphasis’’.

#### **2.1 Petasti with apostrophos (without Klasma)**

Chant by Mattheos Tsamkiranis from ‘‘Eirmologion Syntomon by Peter the Byzantine’’ (Anthology No 9).

*«Χριστός γεννάται»*. I Mode

#### **Text and Explanation [analysis]**

- 2.1.1
- 2.1.2
- 2.1.3

**Comments:** Cases 2.1.1 and 2.1.3 correspond with theoretical explanation 1.2.

As it concerns case 2.1.1, according to Neratzis D.: ‘‘The perfect explanation of petasti can be achieved when kentimata with gorgon are being interpreted by sliding from the throat’’.

Case 2.1.2 corresponds with theoretical explanation 1.4

#### **2.2. Petasti with apostrofos and elafon (with klasma)**

Chant by Matthaïos Tsamkiranis from ‘Eirmologion Syntomon by Peter the Byzantine’ (Anthology No 9).

## **Text and Explanation [analysis]**

2.2.1

2.2.2

2.2.3

2.2.4

2.2.5

2.2.6

**Comments:** Case 2.2.1 corresponds with theoretical explanation 1.3.

Cases 2.2.2, 2.2.3, 2.2.4, 2.2.5, 2.2.6 correspond with theoretical explanation 1.1.

At this point it would be useful to note that while listening, we detect more roulades and vocal embellishments, comparing to the written explanation. This happens because of the chanting possibilities of every interpreter as well as his origin but none of this can be recorded in paper.

## **The object of my research**

The object of my research is to prove that short - improvisation is a stable factor in traditional chanting, which, in some cases follows in specific ways a general frame of voice’s movement, and it is, at the same time, subject to personal restrictions of the voice’s capabilities.

Chorus interpretation differs because analysis has a stylized character and it becomes stable according to the school (tendency).

Talking about improvisation we should have in mind that duration of the Liturgy is not granted from the beginning, so the chanter must be able to improvise not only in the sense of generating the unexpected but also by responding to it.

One of the arising questions at this point is whether the capability of improvisation is in existence for an interpreter. Can we for example determine with a certainty if an interpreter improvises or reproduces something that himself or someone else has invented earlier? Is it about memory or about improvisation?

In any occasion, short improvisations, are based on general or concrete types of explanation, and together with the timbre of the voice they form personal style.

When a chanter prints his personal version in the text, he is writing down explanations in his own manner. But since analysis in paper becomes perceptible in a different way than explanation with voice, it is subsequent that in the text, explanation is stereotyped.

In such a writing there is a big capability of short improvisations, therefore while a chanter interprets a musical text, he interprets from memory, and on the basis of his capabilities, what he has printed in his memory as an explanation. This can't be in accordance with other chanters interpretations but only for general terms.

## **Epilogue**

Summarizing this short announcement, I would like to underline the previous thoughts with the phrase by St. Gregory of Nyssa, which could also be part of a comment about the theme of this congress: "We need not only one but many analogies in order to lead ourselves to the truth".