

*A Musical Journey*  
**DEPARTMENT OF SACRED MUSIC**  
**35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

***HISTORY OF MUSIC IN THE***  
***ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE***  
***OF NORTH AMERICA***  
***From 1906-2008***

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### **EARLY ROOTS**

Although the Department of Sacred Music had its official beginning 35 years ago, in 1968, with the appointment by His Eminence, Metropolitan Philip Saliba of its first Chairman, Father James C. Meena (later Archbishop), it had its root beginning as early as 1906 with the publishing in English, of the *Service Book of the Holy Orthodox-Catholic Apostolic Church*, by Isabel Hapgood, which provided the first, standardized text in English of the major church services, and laid the groundwork for transliterated, translated, and composed music in the English language and allowed the priests and chanters, for the first time, to chant the service in English.

### **TEXT TRANSLATIONS**

In general, the original and present translations of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese in North America were derived from two early 20<sup>th</sup> century translations of the church services into English: the 1906 Hapgood book, which relied heavily on the language of the then current Anglican Book of Common Prayer; and the 1939 *Service Book* by Seraphim Nassar, a translation of services from throughout the church year. Both of these books are still in print, the Hapgood book in its 1996, 7<sup>th</sup> edition, and are available from the Archdiocesan bookstore.

### **MUSIC TRANSLATIONS AND SETTINGS**

Based on existing documents, the earliest known musical works to appear were issued by Archbishop Emanuel Abo-Hateb whose 1926 manuscript, donated by his niece, Georgette Abo-Hateb, is still extant at the Antiochian Village Heritage Center Library. Although it is certain that other clergy and musicians must have issued arrangements of music in English, none are presently known to have survived. By 1936, Archbishop Antony Bashir, sensing the increasing need for English in the music of the church, authorized the use of English in the music of the church and asked a newly ordained convert, Rev. Michael G. H. Gelsinger of St George, Niagara Falls, NY, to put together a book of four part Orthodox music. Fr. Gelsinger was a scholar of Greek and included in his work Byzantine settings in four-part harmony with translations in English based on

the meter of the Greek. In addition he included translations and adaptations of Russian choral composers. In the next few years, Fr. Gelsinger's son, John (later, also ordained by Archbishop Antony, formed the first choir of the Archdiocese at St. George's using the then unpublished manuscripts of his father. By 1939, Fr. Gelsinger's work was finished and the first, professionally published music book of the Archdiocese appeared as, *Orthodox Hymns in English*, a collection of four-part Russian and Byzantine melodies still in use today and commonly referred to as the "Blue Book" because of the pale blue color of its cover with its familiar triple bar cross with a flowering lily entwined. This book contains, in addition to the music, a brief description of many of the most common church service books, a description of Byzantine hymnology, a pronouncing glossary of Byzantine musical terms and a pronunciation guide of the transliterated Greek texts. There are 45 musical selections

After the formation of the Archdiocesan youth organization, *SOYO* in the 1940s the music came, of necessity, under the auspices of *SOYO*, which appointed a choir director each year to organize the music for the Archdiocesan annual convention. *SOYO* became, *de facto*, the "Music Department" and issued, in an informal manner, any new music. This was usually via musical exchanges at the national and regional conventions and through informal gatherings of the musicians at this time. Through *SOYO* and the national conventions, the music of the Archdiocese became universal throughout the parishes and certain pieces became "standardized". Examples of music which was introduced at that time and are still sung throughout the Archdiocese, even today, are the *Entrance Hymn* by Archpriest Dmitri Razumovsky and the *Hymn to the Theotokos*, by Dmitri Bortniansky.

In the late 1940s, Fr. Michael Simon, serving the parish of St. George, Patterson, NJ (later Little Falls, NJ) was searching for someone who could put the Byzantine chant so familiar to the many immigrants and first generation parishioners, into four -part choral music with a transliterated Arabic text. The task fell to Professor Michael Hilko, choir director of the nearby St. John Carpatho-Russian church in Perth Amboy, NJ

Professor Hilko wrote down the Byzantine melodies for the two Arabic liturgies by listening to the Rev. Michael G. Simon for the first liturgy and Rev. Wakim Dalaak of St. Nicholas Cathedral, Brooklyn, for the second and then writing down the notes in Western musical notation and harmonizing in four-parts, the resulting melody. Professor Hilko also added the eight resurrectional tones harmonized in four parts according to Byzantine melodies sung on the 78 rpm record set of Archbishop Samuel David, of Toledo, Ohio as well as additional hymns in Arabic transliteration in four parts including the Paschal Troparion, *Christ is Risen* and the Hymn to the Theotokos from St. Basil's Liturgy, *In Thee Rejoiceth*. He then arranged a third Liturgy, a simple setting based on Russian tones, but entirely in English.

In 1950, Professor Hilko completed his task and Archbishop Bashir, continuing his support of the English language, had Archdiocese publish Professor Hilko's *Three Divine Liturgies*, two in Arabic transliteration and one in English including the resurrectional troparia and other hymns. Although this book, commonly called the "Yellow Book" after

its bright yellow cover, has fallen into disuse due to the loss of Arabic in the church services, the English liturgy music is still widely sung throughout the Archdiocese and much of it is standard music, still appearing in our convention and conference music settings. In order not to lose the beautiful Byzantine melodies, the two Arabic liturgies and the 8 resurrectional tones have been combined into one liturgy and have been adapted into English by Michael G. Farrow for future publication.

Also issued during the decade of the 1950s were two works of Fr. James Meena (later Archpriest), the first, *Hymns of Praise*, (1955) containing Byzantine selections in English, in four-part harmony of the 8 resurrectional troparia, 14 feast day troparia and two kontakia, one for Pre-Nativity and another for the Presentation of the Lord as well as kontakia in the 8 tones for Ordinary Sundays. This publication marked the first time such a large amount of Byzantine music was set to 4-part harmony in English. It marked the beginning of what would be a half-century of producing Byzantine music in four-part harmony that would encompass selections for all of the major services of the church.

The second publication, issued in 1959 by the Archdiocese was an English adaptation by Fr. Meena, of the *Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*, by Peter I. Tschaikevsky. This booklet highlighted the growth of the choirs of the Archdiocese, which now were able to sing the works of the greatest Russian composers. Selections from the works of Sergei Rachmaninov, Nikolai Rimsky-Kosakov, and other great Russian composers of the 18<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century were becoming part of the usual repertoire of Archdiocesan choirs during this period. Choir “contests” and “festivals” were the norm at the Archdiocese conventions. Large and small choirs from throughout the Archdiocese took great delight in competitive singing at the *SOYO* gatherings.

Responding to requests for complete books of music containing entire services other than the Divine Liturgy Archbishop Bashir asked Ray George, choir director at St. George in Detroit to compile the two small booklets issued by the Archdiocese in 1964, *Resurrection Service* and *The Night of Great Friday, Matin Service of Great Saturday*. These two publications contain four-part music in English set to traditional Byzantine and Slavonic melodies for these services and are still available from the Archdiocese.

Two years later, in 1966, Metropolitan Philip succeeded to the office of Archbishop and, realizing the pressing need to make the church services meaningful and relevant to the younger generations and to the many converts in the church, immediately instituted programs for increasing the use of the English language in church music.

Also by 1968, *SOYO* had successfully completed its task of forming and supporting local parish choirs. Metropolitan Philip, due to the many new functions and duties pressing on the Archdiocese in the realm of music, and the many and varied programs he envisioned, established, in 1968, the Department of Sacred Music. The Rev. James Meena was appointed as its first Chairman.

In 1969 the Archdiocese published the *Standard Divine Liturgy*, compiled and arranged by Fr. Meena. This publication contained four-part arrangements in English of both

Byzantine Tones and Slavonic settings. Included in this publication were musical selections for the Divine Liturgy in Byzantine Tones 1,2, 5 and 8; the *Many Years* for a Bishop; the *Hierarchical Trisagion*, as well as various selections from the Slavic tradition.

Fr. Meena, having completed his task of establishing the Department of Sacred Music on a firm foundation, and establishing the initial programs, was transferred in 1972 to the large parish of St. George, Cleveland where his duties precluded him from devoting the necessary time to the growth of the Department.

In that same year, 1972, Ray George was appointed as the second Chairman of the Department of Sacred Music, a position which he held for 30 years until his death in 2002. In his first year, he began issuing in English, in loose-leaf form, many hymns of the church. In 1978, the Department issued "The Festal Music" much of it composed by Fred Karam, Ph.D. The talented choir director at St. Elias in Ottawa, Canada, in 4-part Byzantine harmony. Among the selections issued were four feast day troparia, 12 kontakia for Ordinary Sundays and feast days, and 14 hymns to the Theotokos for various feast days.

As the 1970s progressed, Metropolitan Philip realized that in order to preserve the Byzantine chant, which was fast disappearing in the parishes due to the deaths of the older, immigrant chanters and the difficulty of instructing new chanters in the fast growing Archdiocese, a program would have to be instituted to preserve this ancient and beautiful chant. With that in mind, he asked the protopsalte, Basil Kazan to undertake writing out in western musical notation, the Byzantine chant in English for the entire church year. This loose-leaf music multi-volume set includes 1) Vespers, 2) Matins, 3) Holy Week [2 volumes], 4) the Pentecostarion [3 volumes], 5) the Triodion [2 volumes], and 6) Hymns of the Menaion. This massive project, organized and copied for publication by Ray George, would take Mr. Kazan over 25 years to complete and came to be known as the *Byzantine Project*. It would prove to be the most important project in training generations of chanters, both cradle Orthodox and converts and unifying the chants throughout the Archdiocese. Now chanters in parishes as widely scattered as Alaska, California, Texas, Florida and Massachusetts could chant the same hymn together, to the same melody and same text. This endeavor gave rise to the formation of Byzantine choirs, groups of individuals all chanting the same melody together. The largest of these choirs are the antiphonal choirs of St. Philip Church, Souderton, PA under the direction of Khouryee Joyce Black who have been singing, since 1980, the entire 11 volumes of this music, adding each volume as it was issued over the years.

In 1979 the Camp opened at the Antiochian Village and a need for music for the children to sing the church services became immediate. Rt. Rev. John Namie, the first Director of the Antiochian Village, and himself a Byzantine musician, composed the Byzantine music for the Divine Liturgy, Vespers, and Daily and Sunday Matin Services and issued it in booklet form. Fifteen years later, Michael Farrow compiled the 1993 edition in which additional selections were added to the services as well as additional hymns and extra-liturgical hymns. A recording of the music in the 1993 edition was made in 1995. In

the present edition of 1997, the Antiochian Archdiocese Congregational liturgy arranged by Fr. Elias Bitar and Laila Corey has been substituted for that of the former editions, the Vespers and Matins have been revised and additional hymns have been added. This easy-to-use booklet has been invaluable in teaching the children to chant the Byzantine tones in English.

In 1984, Metropolitan Philip realized that a more formal format for teaching the musicians of the Archdiocese was needed. With Ray George at the helm along with James Meena and with Fr. Joseph Allen as an advisor, he established the first of an on-going series of music instruction classes originally known as the *Choir Directors Seminar and later changed to the Sacred Music Institute (SMI)*. The first sessions took place in 1985 at the Antiochian Village and were geared primarily to choir directors. To emphasize its importance, the Metropolitan required each parish in the Archdiocese to sponsor their choir director's attendance at these sessions. Over the years, this Institute has expanded and now brings together instructors, lecturers, musicians, choir members, choir directors and clergy for an exchange of music and knowledge. In the early 1990s, chanters and chanting classes were added. Each year the SMI met at the Antiochian Village and by the year 2003, it had expanded to two sites, one in the East, at the Antiochian Village and the second site in the Western USA, in California for 2003.

With the late 20<sup>th</sup> century trend of family participation in a myriad of events, attendance at choir rehearsals slowly declined throughout the Archdiocese and the need for congregational singing became apparent. Further necessitating this need was the establishment of so many small missions in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century where the formation of a choir was not feasible. This form of ancient singing was familiar to many of the converts to the faith and requests to compile a music book for the pew were received by the Archdiocese with favor. An initial booklet (1997) containing the Byzantine musical settings along with the text of the Divine Liturgy, edited by Fr. Elias Bitar and Leila Corey, was published by the Archdiocese for congregational use in parishes. The music follows the traditional Byzantine Tones for the standard hymns of the Liturgy. A second booklet, featuring alternate melodies is in preparation to allow congregations a choice of different selections of music.

As the decade of the 1990s progressed, Ray George established a Department of Sacred Music Committee, composed of musicians throughout the Archdiocese. It was the function of this Committee to help establish the goals of the Department and to aid in their promulgation. By the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with Ray's health being frail, Michael Farrow assisted Ray in the organization of the SMIs and upon the sudden death of Ray in 2002, continued in an interim position until, in April of that year Metropolitan Philip chose a young, talented, professional musician, James Meena, as the third Chairman of the Department of Sacred Music. James is the son of the first Chairman of the Department, Fr. James C. Meena and is the General Director and Principal Conductor of Opera Carolina, in Charlotte, NC. Reflecting the growth of the music program within the Archdiocese, Metropolitan Philip appointed Michael Farrow as the first Vice Chairman of the Department to assist the Chairman with the expanded goals set for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Under the leadership of James Meena, the Department of Sacred Music immediately was expanded. In less than two years, a number of new endeavors have been established.

Recognizing the need to accommodate a growing cadre of composers, James established an *Editorial Board*, with Al Mamary appointed as Administrator. The purpose of this board is to gather all newly composed music for review and adherence to Archdiocesan and Departmental guidelines and to assist new composers in the music goals of the Department and Archdiocese; and to encourage them in composing new music.

Guidelines for computerizing music were issued to assure a standardization of all Archdiocesan music. Relations with sister Orthodox jurisdictions were put on an official basis. An e-mail system whereby all priests, choir directors, and head chanters at all 250 parishes are contacted several time per month with announcements and new music downloads. This e-mail system reaches Antochian parishes in the USA, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand.

In 2006, James Meena, who was also the General Director and Principal Conductor of Opera Carolina, resigned the Chairmanship due to an increasing workload at the at the North Carolina Opera company. Metropolitan Philip appointed Christopher Holwey as the fourth Chairman of the Department and retained Michael Farrow as the Vice Chairman. It the two short years of his leadership, Chris has continued expanding the achievements of the Department by restructuring the Departmental website and adding hundreds of hymns, both in chant and choral versions, including all the music necessary for Feast Day Liturgies, Weddings, Funerals, Memorial Services, and Prosomia for services throughout the year. During his tenure, the leadership of the Sacred Music Institute (SMI) was passed from the Vice Chairman, Michael Farrow, who directed it for 20 years, to Paul Jabara, Conductor of St. George Choir, Montreal, Canada. The Institute, which now is held on both the East Coast and the West Coast, features workshops and presentations for conductors, singers, chanters, and choir directors, will celebrate its 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2010. The West Coast SMI is organized by Fr. John Finley.

With 102 years of experience since 1906, and at 40 years of age, the Department of Sacred Music has established itself as a leading outreach for Orthodox Music throughout North American and in English speaking countries throughout the world.