

growth of our church music. This can be illustrated with reference to the relation between text and music. In Western Europe and North America (and elsewhere) there are many arrangements in use in Orthodox churches that try to fit a translated text into a pre-existing musical straitjacket. I say "try to", as these arrangements are often characterised by a failure to bridge the huge gap between the syntax and grammar of Slavonic and those of West European languages. The result is a mismatch between words and notes, a marked weakening of the impact of the original, with no interesting fresh elements to compensate.

The English-language arranger faces a number of challenges when preparing English versions of Slavonic chants or compositions: For example, Slavonic texts have many more syllables than English, which means there are often too many notes left over, so that the arranger feels obliged to use excessive melismata. The syntactical gap can also cause problems: for example, the words appear in a different order, so that a word will end up being set to a musical figure that was not intended for that word. Another importance difference is that in most western European languages there are many more articles and prepositions to accommodate than in Slavonic. Sometimes these problems can be solved without too much difficulty or with minimum compromises. In other cases, greater freedom and sensitivity are required, but these are often wanting.

We must, in our musical settings, unleash the full energy of the words of our liturgical texts, so that worshippers can be better inspired and edified. We have grown far too accustomed to singing Slavonic or Greek church music in versions with ill-fitting translations, and it behoves us to be a great deal more sensitive about this issue and to do whatever is necessary to correct the problem. The more metrical the music, and the further away from chant it is, the greater the problem. We can illustrate this by considering two examples from Arkhangelsky. At the opening of Arkhangelsky's "Vzbrannoi Voyevode" ("To thee

---

far as I can tell, Finland is further along the path towards solving these problems than any other west European country.

our leader", a prayer to the Mother of God and the Kontakion of the Annunciation), one arranger has attempted to fit the first, accented, note to the English preposition "to" (*Ex. 1a*). The opening could easily be improved by adding an upbeat (*Ex. 1b*), but I still far from happy with the melisma on "thee", and so one is compelled to ask oneself if the piece is worth performing in English at all, and whether the effort would not be better spent in composing new music.

Ex. 1a: Arkhangelsky: Kontakion *Взбранной Воеводе*

S  
 Взбран-ной Во - е - во - де по-бе - ди - тел-на - я, я - ко из -  
 To \_\_\_\_\_ thee, the cham - pion lea-der I thy ser- vant of - fer  
 A

Ex. 1b: *ibid.*, suggested emendment

бавль - ше-ся от злых To thee, \_\_\_\_\_ the [etc.]  
 thanks for vic - to - ry,

I also have a problem with attempts to make an English version of Arkhangelsky's popular Song of Simeon (*Ex. 2*).

Ex. 2: Arkhangelsky: Song of Simeon

Ты - не от-пу - ща - е-ши ра - ба Тво-е - го, Вла - ды  
 Lord, now let - test Thou thy ser - vant de - part in peace,  
 ко,

Am I alone in finding the first word, "Lord" a little too jaunty, a shade too light? In the Slavonic the music here falls on the much more inconsequential "Nyne" (now). The Slavonic "Vladyko" (Lord), by contrast, falls on a suitably solemn, drawn out half-cadence.

In both the above cases, it is obvious what has been lost in translation. But sometimes the harm is more insidious: we have become so used to our translated version that we have grown oblivious to what has been lost. An example of this is the opening music for Vespers, "Blagoslovi dushe moya", with its seemingly inseparable melody (*Ex. 3a*).

Ex. 3a: Благослови, душе моя (unidentified printed source)

Бла-го-сло-ви, ду-ше мо-я, — Гос - - - по - да.  
 [Bless the Lord — o my soul, — bless — the Lord, o my soul.]

The score consists of two staves, treble and bass clef, in a key with one flat (B-flat). The melody is written in a style where the vocal line and the accompaniment are highly integrated, with many notes beamed together and slurs connecting them across the two staves. The lyrics are written below the treble staff.

In the Slavonic, the second part of the opening phrase is exclusively devoted to the word "Gospoda", which is sung to a melisma and to notes that are higher than the previous phrase. This is an elegant piece of musical iconography that is lost in translation.

Ex. 3b: "Bless the Lord", Eng. version, arr. Boris Ledkovsky, *Great Vespers*, n.p.:  
 St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976, p. 3

Bless — the Lord, — o — my soul.

The score consists of two staves, treble and bass clef, in a key with one sharp (F#). The melody is written in a style where the vocal line and the accompaniment are highly integrated, with many notes beamed together and slurs connecting them across the two staves. The lyrics are written below the treble staff.

Neither 3a nor 3b are wholly satisfactory from this point of view, though my preference lies with 3a as sounding more natural. (*Ex. 3b*, by the way, illustrates the usefulness of the English word "o" to use up surplus notes.) If I were to make

an English-language version of this piece, I would make some radical musical interventions in an attempt to restore the spirit of the original by changing the letter (**Ex. 3c**).

Ex. 3c: "Bless the Lord", composed (or arranged by?) James Chater

Bless the Lord, o my soul, bless the Lord, o my soul.

In my version, I restore prominence to the word "Lord", but using different musical means. Where the Slavonic has melismata, I have restated the phrase at a higher pitch and introduced a rising fourth second time round. Some elements of the original remain, but much has changed, and the mood is livelier. In fact it is arguable that this is not the same piece of music at all, but the start of an original composition. All to the good!

The premise underlying the arrangements we have so far considered is that original melodies are treated as a series of notes that are inviolable, non-negotiable, representing an absolute, fixed object which cannot be tampered with whatever the cost.<sup>4</sup> Actually this is a good description of our Creed. And this brings me to my next point, which is that we must learn to distinguish what is fixed and unalterable in our faith from what is relative and subject to modification.

We can compare our church to a series of concentric circles with a triangle in the middle. The triangle represents the Holy Trinity. The inner circles represent the inner core of our faith – our Creed, the Gospels, holy scripture and so forth – which is unchanging, like the essence of God. As we move to the outward circles, we find a limited freedom to change or

---

<sup>4</sup> In some cases the desire to preserve the music unchanged has influenced the translation, so that words have been fitted to notes rather than vice versa, with disastrous results: see the remarks with regard to translations into French in Nicolas Lossky, *Essai sur une théologie de la musique liturgique: perspective orthodoxe*, Paris: Cerf, 2003, p. 93.