

and 17). After two litanies, the second part of Great Vespers is finished. The third and last part, not included in this recording, begins with the reading of the First Hour, preparing the faithful for the illumination with the light of Christ and reminding them that at this hour He appeared before the Court of the Unjust, opposing to their anger His love, His sacrifice, His humility and the humbleness of His birth.

The history of Russian Orthodox music begins in the 10th century with the bringing of Christianity to Kiev (then the capital of ancient Rus, now the chief city of Ukraine) from Byzantium. Together with it came the elements of the Byzantine chant. From the 12th century on, native Russian musical development gradually led away from Byzantine models, and there evolved the *znamenny* chant or *znamenny rospev*, so called because the signs (*znamena*) expressed the melodic pattern. Chants of the 13th and 14th centuries are preserved in a number of liturgical manuscripts, the complexity of which has never been deciphered. The *znamenny* chant evolved differently in the southern and northern parts of Russia. During the 17th century, polyphonic singing was officially adopted by the Russian church but was rejected by the Old Believers, who continue to use the *znamenny* chant and the old system of notation to the present day.

From the time of Peter the Great western influences, particularly those of Italian and German operatic music, came to be felt, and the old music was in process of dying out. In the 19th century, however, interest in the old liturgical style was revived. Composers, musicologists and choirmasters began the systematic study of it, and many of them attempted to recreate its spirit in their own works. This recording contains examples of the *znamenny* chant such as "We Praise You" (No. 10) and of harmonization in the spirit of *znamenny chant* ("Glory Be to God on High," harmonized by Lvovsky (No. 13).

Monasteries such as those of St. Alexander Nevsky, Solovky, Valaam and the Kiev Crypt Monastery, played an important role in printing and disseminating the works of liturgical composers. At the same time choirmasters were trained in such institutions as the Choirmaster School at the Imperial Court, and the Moscow Synodal School and the Smolensky School. In seminaries and ecclesiastical schools the study of the theory and practice of liturgical music was obligatory. There were also a number of eminent private choirs such as those of Prince Yussupov, Duke Cheremetiev and others.

Since musical instruments are not used in the Russian church, all choral singing is a *cappella*. The language of the service is Old Church Slavonic, the oldest recorded Slavic language, containing elements of Old Macedonian, Czech, Slovenian, Croatian and Bulgarian. For a fuller explanation, see *The Divine Easter Liturgy*, Monitor recording MCD 71441.

Notes by Nicholas Spassky and Beatrice Stillman

Cover: Icon of the Nativity, Novgorod School, 15th century.
This recording was made in the Cathedral on Rue Daru, Paris, under the personal supervision of Michael Stillman.

CHRISTMAS VESPERS

ВСЕНОЩНАЯ РОЖДЕСТВА ХРИСТОВА

THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX
CATHEDRAL CHOIR
OF PARIS
CONDUCTED BY
P.V. SPASSKY



The Slavic Christmas is a festival of joy. In addition to services in the church, the holiday is celebrated with the singing of special carols called *kolyadki*, in which religious themes are narrated in folk language. Young people go from house to house, bearing a great star with a Christmas ikon in its center, sing carols, congratulate their hosts on the festival and wish them joy, health and prosperity. Their hosts and hostesses in turn give presents to the carollers.

In response to the mood and message of Christmas, Slavic composers have aspired to create music expressing all the glory, emotion and pathos of the Christmas story. This recording presents the evening services of Great Vespers, one of the most beautiful services of the Eastern Orthodox Rite, through selected works of the greatest Russian and Ukrainian liturgical composers.

Christmas is the festival of God's love for man, embodying the idea that God took the body of man to save humanity from inevitable destruction. At the beginning of Great Vespers, psalms from the Old Testament are read describing the world of sin and the helplessness of men. Still, the Old Testament contains the hope of salvation. According to Christian belief, the prophet Isaiah, crying "God is with us" (No. 1) predicted the coming of the Child from the Virgin. So there resounds the Nativity *troparion* "Your birth, O Christ" (No. 2), proclaiming God's appearance like a sun of light and truth rising from the East to dispel the darkness of ignorance and hate. This is followed by the Nativity *kondakion* "The Virgin today gives birth": angels and shepherds give blessing, kings journey by the light of a star, for our sake the Infant was born, the eternal God (No. 3). [The musical forms of *troparion* and *kondakion*, both very ancient elements of the Byzantine chant, are more fully explained in *The Divine Easter Liturgy*, Monitor recording MCD 71441].

After the reading of psalms of repentance, the church calls on angels and men to rejoice at God's appearance on earth ("Heaven and Earth," No. 4). This litany is sung with a canonarch or leader, who intones each sentence of the hymn before it is repeated by the choir.

The celebrants then emerge through the Holy Doors and proceed to the church entrance, where the *Litany*, an intense prayer to God to deliver mankind from grief and misfortune, is sung. The open Holy Doors symbolize the opening up of the Kingdom of God and Paradise to humanity through Christ's descent from Heaven to the people of earth.

The Old Testament hymns culminate with St. Simeon's confession, "Lord, now let this Thy servant depart in peace...for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all the people" (No. 5). The celebrants approach the center of the church where a small table is set with five loaves of bread, wine and oil. These are censed three times by the deacon, to the accompaniment of the Nativity *troparion* (No. 6). The celebrant then sanctifies bread, wine and oil to the reading of a special prayer commemorating the miracle whereby God fed the multitude of five thousand with five loaves. With this the first part of Great Vespers, known as *povecheriye* or complines, comes to an end.

Part two of the service, called *utreniya* or matins, begins immediately after the celebrant's proclamation, with the hymn of the angels, "Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace, good will to men" (No. 7). This was the song heard by the shepherds in the fields, coming to worship the Christ Child. It is followed in the service by six psalms of repentance and thanksgiving.

Then begins the most solemn part of Great Vespers. The hymn "God is the Lord and has revealed Himself to us" (No. 8) is sung, followed by the Nativity *troparion*. The church calls upon the people to glorify God with the singing of *Poliyeleos*, "Praise ye the Name of the Lord, O ye servants of the Lord, alleluia..." (No. 9). The celebrants, clothed in magnificent garments and with the bishop at their head, come in triumphal procession through the open Holy Doors to the center of the brilliantly illumined church. The chief celebrant, preceded by lighted candles and lamps, censes the entire church while the choir sings the song of praise "We Praise You, O Christ, Giver of life, born in the flesh today for our sake..." (No. 10). A sincere prayer is as agreeable to God as the fragrant smoke of the censer, and the joy of the congregation must be as pure as the light of the candles.

The next hymn, "From my youth..." (No. 11) says that despite the passions against which man must struggle, God will save mankind from those who hate Zion, the city of God. The deacon proclaims the *prokimen* (No. 12), in which is heard the Old Testament prophesy of the birth of Christ out of the Womb of God. The *prokimen* is followed by the reading of the Evangel of Christmas, after which the choir sings the Christmas *stikhira*, the characteristic hymn of the festival, glorifying the act of salvation: "Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace, good will to men" (No. 13).

At this point comes one of the most important parts of matins – the singing of the *hirmos* or odes from the *kanon*. *Kanons* – a very old development in the history of the Byzantine chant – are extremely long poems dating from the 7th and 8th centuries, consisting of a succession of nine parts, called *hirmos*, each of which was supposed to contain allusions to one of the nine canticles. In this recording only the first and the last chants are performed (No. 14). They describe in detail the joy and triumph of Christ's coming to earth: "Christ is born, glorify Him; acclaim His Coming from the heavens." The *hirmos* glorify also the Virgin, who took upon Herself the torment of the Son of God, but who rejoices in the salvation of man. During the singing of the *kanon* the members of the congregation kiss the Evangel and the ikon of Christmas, are anointed with oil by the celebrant and are given pieces of the bread sanctified during the Litany. The celebrant proclaims, "Glory to You, Who have shown us the light."

The singing of the Great Doxology (No. 15) follows: "Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace, good will to men. We praise Thee, we bless Thee..." This hymn concludes with the triple invocation, "O holy God, holy and mighty One, holy and immortal One, have mercy on us." Once again the Birth is glorified in the singing of the Nativity *troparion* and *kondakion* (Nos. 16

CHRISTMAS VESPERS

Choir of the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of Paris
conducted by Piotr V. Spassky

Soloists: Reverend Deacon Mikhail Storogenko and Maria Evetz
(Sung in Old Church Slavonic)

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|--|---|
| 1. God Is with Us (Stepanov) 2:28 | 10. Znamenny Chant: We Praise You 2:57 |
| 2. Nativity Troparion: Your Birth, O Christ (Turenkov) 1:17 | 11. From My Youth (Vishnevsky) 2:57 |
| 3. Nativity Kondakion: The Virgin Today Gives Birth (Turkenov) :52 | 12. Prokimen: Out of the Womb 3:07 |
| 4. Heaven and Earth 3:03 | 13. Glory Be to God on High (Lvovsky) 2:45 |
| 5. Lord, Now Let This Thy Servant Depart (Arkhangelsky) (3:30) | 14. Hirmos: Chants 1 and 9 (Allemanov) 1:30 |
| 6. Nativity Troparion: Your Birth, O Christ 1:16 | 15. Great Doxology: Glory Be to God on High (Arkhangelsky) (8:00) |
| 7. Glory Be to God on High (before the reading of the 6 Psalms) 2:45 | 16. Nativity Troparion: Your Birth O Christ (Lirin) 1:40 |
| 8. God Is the Lord (with Troparion) 1:25 | 17. Nativity Kondakion: The Virgin Today Gives Birth (Bortniansky) 2:30 |
| 9. Praise Ye the Name 2:55 | |

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|--|---|
| 1) С нами Бог (Степанов) | 10) Величание (Знаменный распев) |
| 2) Рождество Твое (Туренков) | 11) От юности моя (Вишневецкий) |
| 3) Дева днес (Туренков) | 12) Прокимен: Из Чрева... |
| 4) Небо и земля (с канонархом) | 13) Слава в вышних Богу — стихира (Львовский) |
| 5) Ныне отпускаши (Архангельский) | 14) Ирмосы: 1-ый и 9-ый (Аллеманов) |
| 6) Рождество Твое... | 15) Великое славословие (Архангельский) |
| 7) Слава в вышних Богу (перед шестопсалмием) | 16) Рождество Твое (Лирин) |
| 8) Бог Господь и Тропарь (4-ый глас) | 17) Дева днес (Бортнянский) |
| 9) Хвалите Имя Господне (Максимов) | |

Total Timing: 46:20



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CHRISTMAS VESPERS

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conducted by P.V. Spassky

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