

The Sense of “Pleasure” in Eastern Chant

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Abstract

Music is by default a key element of every kind of *Entertainment*. Actually, the two terms (*Pleasure* and *Music*) are almost synonymous in the geographical area of the East – especially during the late medieval period – and there is a plethora of relevant evidence in the rescued literature and musicological sources to support this argument. It seems that there is a mutual and interactive “dialogue” between the two terms. This is an ideological and philosophical dialogue, as well as a completely fundamental and practical one: the musicians (the people who actually carry out the musical task) channel in abundance and mainly ensure the pleasure of the people who participate in any type of entertainment; and they do so through both their presence and their performance. However, at the same time, in order to acquire the ability to act in this way, i.e. to bring the “entertaining” dimension of music to the forefront, they themselves have to be in a position to experience music as pleasure, to grasp the multiple gratifications which are hidden at the very core of every kind of music. In both circumstances we can refer to two high level conquests of the Spirit and the Art: **the pleasure of Music and music for Pleasure**. In the present article I will attempt a first approach of the issue and an outline of its twofold dimension.

Keywords

Music, Pleasure

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What is pleasant and what is unpleasant in music is, of course, a matter of taste, which is highly idiosyncratic¹; even though we know what *pleasure* is, *musical pleasure* is a phenomenon that is difficult to assess objectively. For instance, any musician, and especially any performer, can tell when certain pieces of music stir strong emotional responses in the audience. But what actually causes such feelings of euphoria and ecstasy and why music is so important in human society is a matter of specific musicological research².

In his paper entitled “The Plural Pleasures of Music”³, David Huron of Ohio State University used the following remarkable example of *the flower and the bee* in order to show existing connections between Music and Pleasure:

In understanding the relationship between music and pleasure it may be helpful to consider a simpler and more familiar biological analogy – such as the relationship between flowers and bees. Sexual reproduction first appeared in plants. But since plants have a limited ability to move around, the transporting of pollen from plant to plant raises formidable challenges. One of the most successful strategies employed by plants has been to make use of the mobility of insects. Foremost among these insects have been bees. The “flower” is a specialized organ whose purpose is to encourage insects to help in the process of sexual reproduction. Flowers are adaptations whose function is to facilitate reproduction by harnessing insects (like bees) to do the “heavy lifting” of pollen transport. But this can be achieved only if the flower proves to be an effective bee attractant. Hundreds of millions of years of evolution have transformed flowers into consummate “bee attraction devices.” Flowers exhibit at least four design features that are consistent with this goal: (1) Flowers provide food in the form of nectar. (2) Flowers provide a distant lure in the form of smells that make use of volatile aromatics. (3) Flowers provide distant lures in the form of color (reds, yellows, and violets are popular). (4) Flowers provide a convenient “landing strip” for insects. In the case of color, the best strategy is to employ colors that form marked visual contrasts. Since the world is full of green-colored chlorophyll, the worst color to use for a flower is green. The most spectrally distant color is red, followed by orange and yellow – colors that occupy the low-frequency end of the visible spectrum. If one selects a contrasting color at the high-frequency end of the spectrum, then violet is the result. [...] the most “successful” flowers will appeal to bees in as many ways as it is possible to be

attractive to bees. That is, flowers are structured according to the pleasures afforded by bee brains. Whatever a bee likes, provide it [...].

Music appeals to humans in a similar fashion to the way flowers appeal to bees. The most “successful” musical works appeal to people in as many ways as it is possible to be appealing. Like the flower, successful musical works are structured according to the pleasures afforded by human brains. These pleasures are not limited to a single pleasurable dimension. There are sensory pleasures, cognitive pleasures, social pleasures, kinesthetic pleasures, and other domains of appeal. Moreover, within each of these domains (such as the realm of social pleasures), there may exist many distinct ways of evoking pleasure.

So, in Huron’s terms as a performer of some specific pieces of music, I am a “flower” and any one person in the audience is a “bee”. And in this context, it’s important to pinpoint the exact quality of feelings amongst my audience arising from them listening to me performing. On one occasion, a member of the audience sent me the following note, which was so moving: *“I am so happy I was at church and got to hear you sing again! I would like to try to explain what it felt like. I got completely wrapped up in your voice, as if I sank in a cloud or sea. But your voice also vibrated right through me – lifting me up, like on a magic carpet. It is a wonderful and marvelous experience”*.

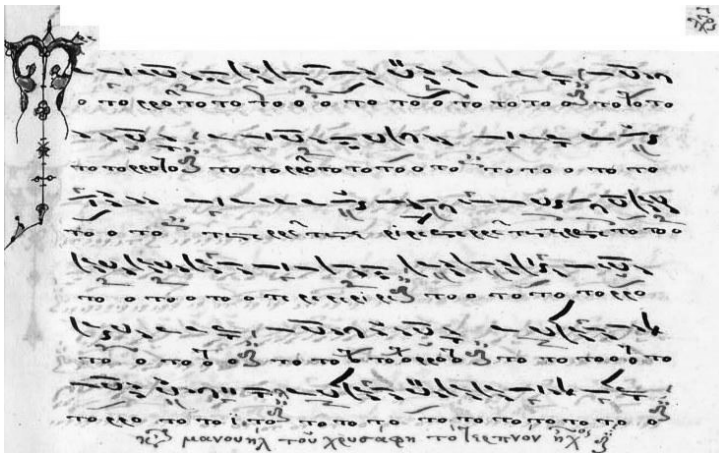
I come to wonder: where is pleasure hidden? In the performer’s skill and ability and consequently in the way in which any piece of music appeals to the audience, the circumstances under which any composition is generally performed and listened to, or in the music itself (i.e. in the beauty of any composition’s musical structure, the fascination of any composer’s fantasy)? The latter possibility – to speak again in Huron’s terms – proves Music to be the “flower” while the performer might be considered to be the “bee”.

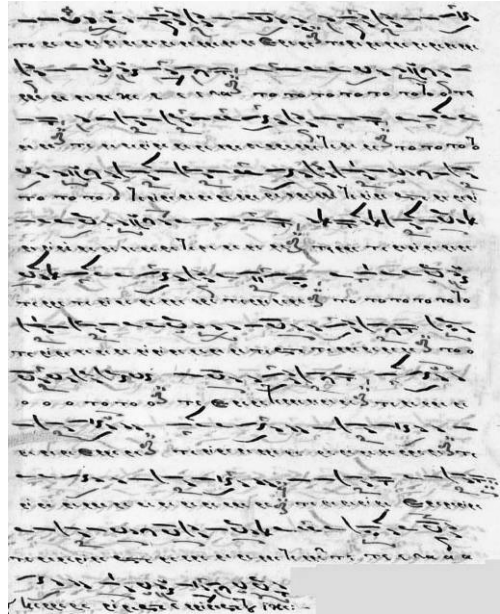
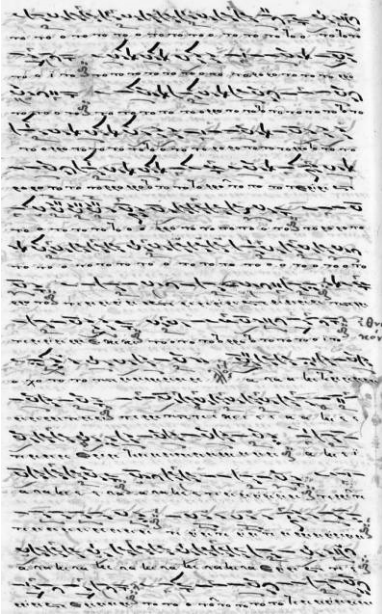
Let’s take a closer look to the last question, using two very appropriate musical examples, taken from the 15th and 18th century and composed by Manuel Chrysaphes and Panagiotes Chalatzoglous, respectively; interestingly, musicological sources referred to both these musical examples as the *pleasant* and the *very pleasant* compositions from the very beginning!

1

The first example is by Manuel Chrysaphes, a very well-known Byzantine composer who flourished during the 15th century in Constantinople. It is widely known (through a rich relevant manuscript tradition) as *the pleasant composition* (cf. Gregorios G. Anastasiou, *The Kratemata in the Psaltic Art*, Athens 2005, p. 327, No. 22) and it is a so-called kratema, i.e. a kind of “absolute music” based on some non-sense syllables, composed in the fourth mode (even though in relevant sources, i.e. Byzantine and post-Byzantine manuscripts, it is frequently considered as composed in the fourth plagal mode).

You can see below a copy of that composition, taken from Codex No. 1416 of Vatopaidiou Monastery at Mount Athos (written during the 2nd half of the 18th c. by Stavris domestikos), ff. 42^v-44^r; this is a version written according to the so-called old and concise type of Byzantine Notation, where one can see written down just the core and the skeleton of the entire melody:





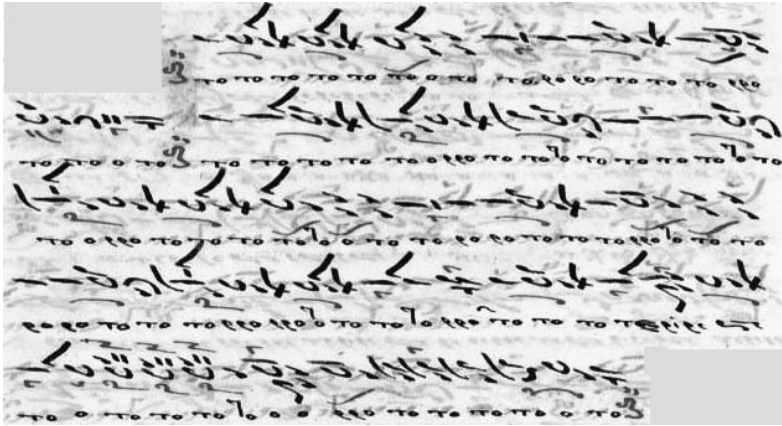
In the score that follows you can see another way of writing down the same composition, in the form of the so-called new and analytical type of Byzantine Notation; the latter is based on a transcription made by Chourmouziou Chartophylax after 1814, while it is taken here from a recent musical edition [see Charalampos Karakatsanis, *Kratimatarion I*, Athens 2000, pp. 363-371]:

Μεσοδή, τό λυγρότερον Τρισημίου ἤθως. ♯ Δι.

The image shows a page of musical notation in the 'new and analytical' style. It features a grid of notes with rhythmic values and Greek letters on a four-line staff. The notation is more structured and easier to read than the older styles shown in the previous images. The page is titled 'Μεσοδή, τό λυγρότερον Τρισημίου ἤθως. ♯ Δι.' and contains several lines of music.

How come this composition has been described as *the pleasant* one from the very beginning (i.e. it was so described by the composer himself but also by the first audience and receivers)? Well, I am afraid this question has no easy or obvious answer!

In my attempt to identify the specific reason in this composition’s musical development, I would ask readers to pay particular attention to the following musical passage of it: there, one can easily observe a kind of “musical game” between the plagal and the authentic version of fourth mode, a game of using the base and the top, respectively, of the mode’s basic pentachord, i.e. notes G-C (i.e. Sol³-Do³) or – in a remarkable contrary motion – G-C (i.e. Sol²-Do³), a game whose structure is developed (written according to the aforementioned version of the so-called old and concise type of Byzantine Notation⁴) as follows:



I have made the following transcription of the said sort musical passage of the so-called *pleasant* kratema, a transcription into the staff notation, trying to identify and realize the core of its composer musical idea, the one a performer (or any kind of performance) has to present to his audience; in the musical example No. 1 one can hear such a performance of this musical passage, performed by me (voice) and accompanied by my colleague Achilleas Tigas (ney):



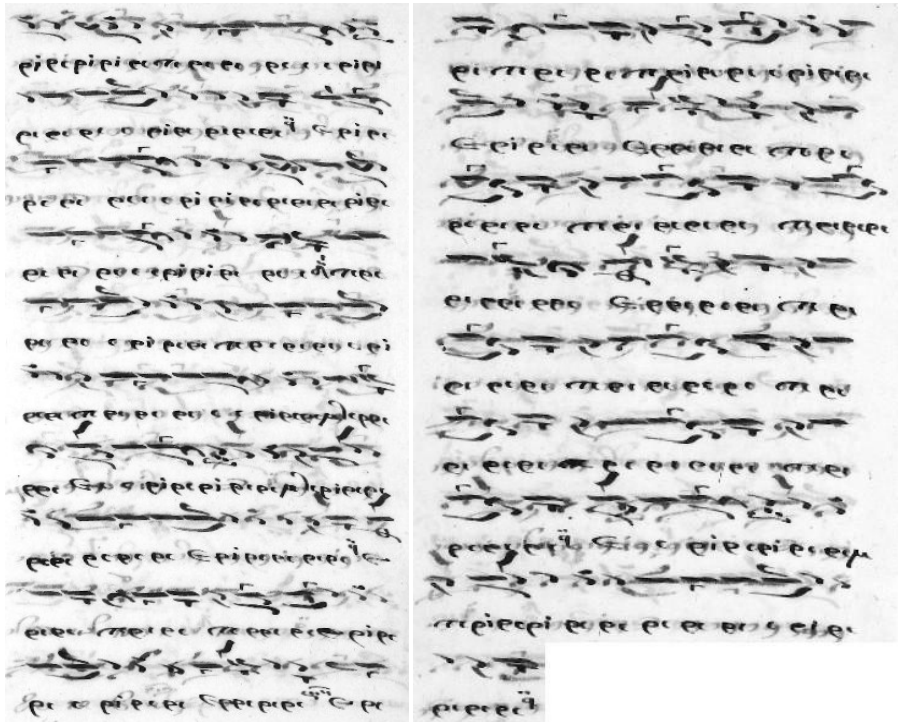
In this sense, pleasure could possibly be associated with a type of “entertainment”, entertaining music, or in this case, of music entertainment which is perceived as such either because of its structure, i.e. its composition, or because of the feelings that the performance sets in motion when the audience listens to it. Such a piece of music that entertains and offers pleasure is made of the simplest possible melody material, which is easy to remember and which repeats a sequence in a way that generates contentment while offering the audience a chance to participate.

2

Besides, this is the same idea and technique at the heart of the second composition I mentioned, a composition termed the *very pleasant*.

You can also see below a copy of that composition, taken from Codex No. 85/223 of K. Psachos’ Library (written in 1805 by Apostolos Konstas from Chios), ff. 54^v-56^r; this is the version written according to the aforementioned old and concise type of Byzantine Notation:





The one that follows is consequently written according to the relevant new and analytical type of Byzantine Notation, also based on a transcription made by Gregorios the Protopsaltes; the latter is taken here from the very well-known musical edition of the so-called *Kalophonikon Heirmologion*, published in Constantinople in 1835 [pp. 227-230]:

Παναγῆ Πρωτοψ.
Χαλδαίου.

The musical score consists of two systems of staves. Each system contains 10 staves of neumes with corresponding Greek text below them. The text is a repetitive pattern of the characters 'ρε' and 'ε'. The first system starts with a large 'Τ' and ends with 'ρε'. The second system starts with 'ρε' and ends with 'ε'. The neumes are arranged in a complex, rhythmic pattern across the staves.

This chant has been a favorite one for years, with numerous performances – anything from classic performances by psalitic choirs to unconventional, groundbreaking performances by Eastern Music Orchestras⁵. However, it is worth noting that the orchestra versions of this piece do not make the most of the repetitive pattern of the composition which demonstrates and bears out the extremely pleasant *simplicity* described earlier, while such a structure

could exactly work for any instrumental editing of the composition; let me give an example:

I have re-written first and third parts of aforementioned composition under two notation versions; through the first version, written according to the typical Byzantine Notation, one could see the initial musical ideas of the said composer, i.e. Panagiotes Chalatzoglous; they are just some very simple melodic motives, which are repeated immediately and (most of the times) identically; I have written latter repetitive motives through staff notation; in the musical example No. 2 one can hear a performance of these parts of the said composition (formed in a type of a “musical dialogue”, based exactly on the composition’s repetitive pattern), performed again by me (voice) and accompanied by my colleague Achilleas Tigas (ney):

The image displays a musical score for Eastern Chant, featuring two systems of notation: Byzantine notation and staff notation. The lyrics are in Greek.

System 1:

- Byzantine notation:** (π) Τε ρι ρε ρε ε ρε ε ρι ρε ε ρε ε ρεμ τε ρε ρε ρε ε ρι
- Staff notation:** A single staff with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature, showing the melody for the first line of lyrics.
- Byzantine notation:** ρι' ρι ρε ρε ρε εμ

System 2:

- Byzantine notation:** Δ ρι τε ρε ρε ρε ε ε ρι' ρι ρε ρε εμ ε ε ε ρι ρε ρι ρι' ρι ρεμ π
- Staff notation:** A single staff with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature, showing the melody for the second line of lyrics.

System 3:

- Staff notation:** A single staff with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature, labeled "Voice" on the left. It shows a vocal line corresponding to the lyrics.

System 4:

- Byzantine notation:** 10 ε ρε ε ρε ε εμ τε ρε ε ρεμ τε ρι ρε ρε ε ε ρι' ρι ρε ε ε ρε ε
- Staff notation:** A single staff with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature, showing the melody for the third line of lyrics.
- Byzantine notation:** ε ρι ι ρεμ ε ρι ρε ε ρε ε ρεμ

Voice

10

TE PE PE PI PI PE PE PEI

TE PE PE PE E PI PEI

TE PE PE E PI PE EI

Voice

10

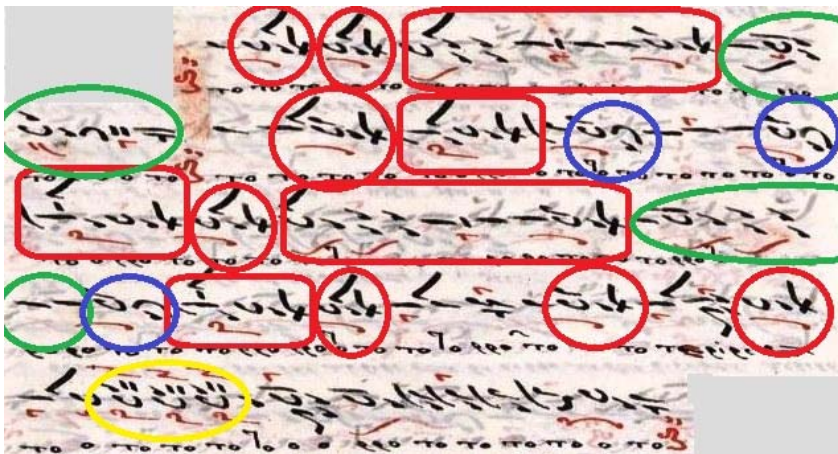
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Some concluding remarks: it is really amazing how the aforementioned *simplicity*, something one could undoubtedly find at the core of any Byzantine and post-Byzantine melody, is most of the times

covered under a melismatic or even a very melismatic cloak!

To speak in details, please allow me to show you again the previously mentioned musical example, taken from the so-called *pleasant* kratema composed by Manuel Chrysaphes; here, the aforementioned motive of a fifth (Sol³-Do³) appears totally 15 times; 7 of those times (marked through a red circle), it appears under an identically concise version (it consists of just a descend from Sol³ to Do³), while 3 times (also marked through a red parallelogram), it also appears under a more melismatic way of musical development (with the additional use of the *lygisma* sign); finally, the same motive appears twice, written analytically, through a sequence of a double descend and ascent respectively, from Sol³ to Do³; in addition, 3 times (marked through a blue circle) the melody of the same motive develops in a contrary motion from Sol² to Do³;

a. The version written according to the aforementioned old and concise type of Byzantine Notation:



b. The version written according to the aforementioned new and analytical type of Byzantine Notation:

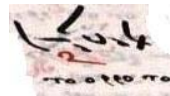
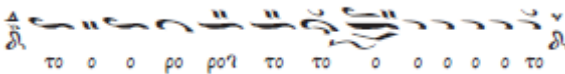
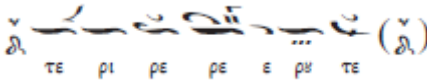
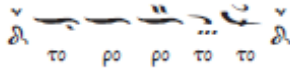
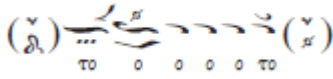


A transcription of the same version into the staff notation:

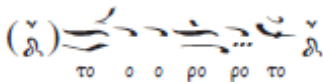
In the latter version, that is the traditional, received, “exegeses” of the same melody, i.e. the transcription of the said composition into a more analytical type of Notation, made especially by Chourmouzios Chartophylax after 1814, one can easily see the very different ways of transcribing, in other words of performing practically, this very simple musical motive of the fifth Sol³ to Do³. Let us see that in details: As it is clear from above observations, we have here a total of 4 types of the very same motive; in all types listed below, you can clearly observe different ways of transcribing, i.e. of approaching and performing, the said very simple motive...

type 1 (the simplest possible),





type 2 (the “melismatic” one),




το ο ο πο πο ο ο ο ο το

το ο ο ο to to o o o o to

το ο ο πο πο ο ο ο ο ο το

to o o to to o o o o o to

type 3 (the “analytical” one), 

το ο ο ο ο ο ο ο το ο το ο το ο το ο το πο πο το ο ο ο ο ο το

to o o o o o o to o to o to o to o to to o o to o o o o to

(το) ο ο ο ο ο ο ο το ο το ο ο το το

to o o o o o o to o to o to o to o to

and type 4 (the “contrary” one); 

το ο ο ο το

to o o o to

The image displays two examples of musical notation. Each example consists of a line of neumes (Eastern Chant notation) and a corresponding Western staff notation. The neumes are written on a four-line staff with a (z) symbol at the beginning. The Western staff notation is written on a five-line staff with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. The notes in the Western notation are placed on the lines and spaces of the staff, corresponding to the pitch of the neumes. The first example has neumes with the syllables 'po o to o o o to' underneath. The second example has neumes with the syllables 'to to o o o to' underneath.

So, perhaps this odd “transformation” of *melodic simplicity* to a kind of “*melodic multiplicity*” is the distinctive element, the very key component of *Eastern Chant*. Still *Pleasure* is always there; *Pleasure* is still there, in the Music Structure, either hidden or revealed! *Pleasure* is still there, in the Music Performance, be it simple or complex. If I were to repeat – and re-formulate – my initial example, I would say that *the most “successful” Music aspires to captivate its audience as much as possible in as many performing ways as possible. In other words, Music is structured according to the pleasure it offers to the audience’s brains. So, give the audience what they like! What the audience likes is what the performer has to deliver ... and, in my opinion, that’s the “sense of pleasure in Eastern Chant”*.

References

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LPs

Revelation and Historical Witness 1088-1988; The 900th Anniversary of the Holy Monastery of St. John the Theologian, Patmos; Sung by the Choir of Chanters ‘The Maistores of the Art of Chant’; Leader: Gregorios Stathis, LP [Athens 1988 (No. II.a.3)].

Tampouris, Petros *Kratimata; masterieces of Byzantine instrumental music*, LP [Athens 1990 (No. I.3)].

Codices

Codex No. 85/223 of K. Psachos’ Library (written in 1805 by Apostolos Konstas from Chios). Codex No. 1416 of Vatopaidiou Monastery at Mount Athos (written during the 2nd half of the 18th c. by Stavris domestikos).

Websites

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OtqRZYyFkgQ>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K8MOCRR0arw>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I9YmXmZlits>

¹ See <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0148296399000922>

² See <http://www.gizmag.com/mcgill-research-shows-dopamine-responsible-for-music-pleasure/17663/>

³ See <https://ccrma.stanford.edu/~cc/soco/Huron.pdf>

⁴ The relevant version of the same musical passage written down according to the above mentioned form of the so-called new and analytical type of Byzantine Notation has (according to the same transcription made by Chourmouziou Chartophylax after 1814) as follows:

⁵ See respectively: *Revelation and Historical Witness 1088-1988; The 900th Anniversary of the Holy Monastery of St. John the Theologian, Patmos; Sung by the Choir of Chanters ‘The Maistores of the Art of Chant’; Leader: Gregorios Stathis*, LP [Athens 1988 (No. II.a.3)]; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OtqRZYyFkgQ>; and: Petros Tampouris, *Kratimata; masterieces of Byzantine instrumental music*, LP [Athens 1990 (No. I.3)]; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K8MOCRR0arw>; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I9YmXmZlits>

Biographical notes

Achilleas Chaldaiakis, Ph.D., is an assistant professor of Byzantine Musicology at the Department of Music Studies of the University of Athens and director of the Maestros of the Psaltic Art, an internationally acclaimed Byzantine choir. He serves as general secretary of the Synodal Institution of Byzantine Musicology and he is a scientific collaborator of the critical publication of the complete works of Saint Nektarios and a member of other scientific associations and art organizations. He also is an internationally recognized and praised artist-performer of Byzantine Music. He has published six self-contained books and coordinated the publication of as many collective volumes. His research activity focuses on the cognitive realms of Byzantine musicology, music folklore, Christian worship, hagiology and hymnography.