

ENTROPY new Album / Release Sept. 2016
EDA ZARI feat. IBRAHIM MAALOUF
ENJA RECORDS Germany



Foreword

Sailing to Byzantium

"[...] And therefore I have sailed the seas and come
To the holy city of Byzantium."

Sailing to Byzantium

by William Butler Yeats

by Sokol Çunga,
Archivist, Paleographer,
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In the modern western imagination, Byzantium continues to represent an exotic, mysterious and dark historical period, belonging to a very distant past. In everyday use, the adjective "Byzantine" refers to a person or behavior that is dodgy, illicit, and immoral. The still standing monuments, found throughout the expanse of the Byzantine Empire, counter this prejudice in silence: visible or yet to be unearthed ruins, documents preserved in the historical archives of Europe, architecture, literature, art and, what is less known, music.

Even though Byzantine music has played an important role in the development of western music, it has remained *terra incognita* for western researchers and musicians (save for a very small community), as well as the public at large. The reasons for this ignorance are complex and bilateral. On one hand stand the cultural and linguistic differences between East and West, a distance that was imposed between these two cultural spaces after the schism of the Churches (in 1054), followed by a narrow interest of researchers in studying only the overlapping areas between the two civilizations. In fact, researchers in the West primarily focused on the 10th-13th century manuscripts, while dismissing "neo-Byzantine" music, not without mockery, as virtually indistinct from Ottoman music. After the fall of Constantinople and the destruction of the Empire, Byzantine music mostly evolved within the ecclesiastical context and never became court music (the opposite of what happened with classical music in the West). It thus stayed independent of any governmental structure and remained known only to those who entered the church gates.

On the other hand, the local communities that used the Byzantine music did not promote its study until recently, which would also contribute to the lack of interest among westerners. Performers and musicologists of Byzantine music have found it hard to develop a constructive dialogue with the western public and researchers, because of internal reasons (for simple practical grounds or out of a pride in protecting a thousand-year-long tradition), as well as their involvement in a debate at the edge of cultural imperialism, which western researchers did keep alive.

Meanwhile, western music opened up to the influence of older or unknown music models. The interest in Far Eastern culture by Western philosophers and 19th-20th century authors (such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Herman Hesse, etc.) had an impact on generations of people after WWII. In searching for new ways to achieve happiness and spiritual enlightenment, while shunning what traditional Christianity had to offer, a part of the western civilization found a solution in Eastern spirituality and culture. Zen and Buddhist philosophy, literature and spirituality became a way of life for many people in the West, while also serving as a leitmotiv for social and cultural movements, such as the Beat Generation and Hippies. In being adopted as a form of ritual-spiritual music, Buddhist music easily found a space inside modern music, giving it the opportunity to develop with musical genres such as Rock'N'Roll, Pop and, especially, New-Age music. It became equally present in popular American cinematography. Its vast commercial appeal, naturally led to wide exposure throughout the XX-XXI century.

Western predilection for the exotic and the old did not stop at Eastern music. During the second half of the 20th century even the Gregorian chant and music gained attention. Aside its employ in worship and the promotion by choirs of modern monks, Gregorian music also became popular in environments diametrically opposed to its initial mission and was borrowed by musical genres such as Rock'N'Roll, Pop, Techno, New-Age, Power/Thrash Metal, Black Metal, etc. It is easy to imagine that, after such integration, preference for Gregorian music would be a matter of taste, not of information.

In what constitutes modern Albania, Byzantine music paralleled the spread of Christianity. Its development came naturally, as was the case in other regions where the Eastern Church was active. The only significant interruption in tradition occurred between 1967 and 1991, when the atheist Albanian state imposed a ban on all forms of religious practice in the territory of the People's Socialist Republic of Albania. Great harm was done, but awareness of it was not lost. Tracing Byzantine music traditions in today's Albania is like having to scratch a wall covered with many layers of paint, while trying to bring into light frescoes hidden by time and man.

Byzantine music – a cultural unit of Byzantium

The governmental, political, military, economic and cultural entity known nowadays as the Byzantine Empire was called Roman Empire (or Eastern Roman Empire) by its subjects. It was officially created in 324 A.D., with Constantinople as its administrative center: a city founded by Constantine the Great and named after him.

Secular music, both vocal and instrumental was widely cultivated in Byzantium. Unfortunately, the tradition of this music has not survived to our days, and information on it is fragmentary and scant. What has survived is the music chanted in church.

Byzantine music is vocal, monophonic and liturgical. It has widely been used in worship by the Eastern Christian Church, and it continued to develop even after the Empire's demise in 1453. The origin of the Byzantine music is complex. Its earliest roots can be found in Judaic religious music, classic Greek music and poetry, as well as Syrian music. Before the foundation of Constantinople, it was practiced in the early Christian cities of Alexandria, Antioch and Ephesus. The oldest manuscripts featuring the Byzantine music notation, called *ekphonic notation*, go as far back as the 9th century (A.D.), while proper music manuscripts that follow the *neuma* notation system, date from the 10th century.

Early Paleochristian Church used to practice chanting by the whole group of worshipers present. By the 4th century, since not all believers could remember the melodies that were being chanted, but also for aesthetic reasons, the responsibility of chanting was given to a group of believers who were talented and trained in the art of chanting, the *chanters* (in Greek: *psaltai*). The chanters' job was to sing during the religious services in church, carefully and with humility. Traditionally, chanters who performed solo or in choirs were males, since they were considered to be part of the lower clergy, while women were not allowed to join the clergy ranks. Nevertheless, in modern times this rule is not strictly adhered to. Women or children may chant alone or in a choir, during worship or outside of religious ceremonies, even if they have not received the required blessings.

According to the theological and mystical belief of the Orthodox Church, Byzantine music was transmitted from angels to mankind during the first years of Christianity, in a time when believers used to pray and chant together with angelic choirs. This concept, which was dominant until the fall of Byzantium, had a threefold effect on Byzantine music: 1. It led the Church to maintain a conservative attitude toward uncontrolled composing; 2. It stabilized the melodic tradition and partly the hymns themselves; 3. It also inspired, during a certain period, the anonymity of the composer / author. With the fall of Byzantium and the establishment of the Ottoman Empire, which, in Asia Minor and in the Balkans extended on the same territories that once were part of Byzantium, Byzantine music continued to be preserved and cultivated by Orthodox Christians, a multi-ethnic population that lived within the

Empire's borders. Later, with the rise of the nation-states during the 19th-20th centuries, the Christian subjects of these states continued to practice the Byzantine music through their worship, to the point that it continues to represent, to this day, a very special element of the Orthodox adoration.

The Orthodox Church active in the territory of nowadays Albania has been, for the most part, under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, from where it inherited the liturgical tradition. Its official language used to be Greek, until the rise of the Albanian national identity. After being declared autocephalous (i.e. independent from the Patriarchate), the Orthodox Church of Albania continued to preserve the Constantinopolitan tradition of the offices, using Byzantine music in worship, while changing its language from Greek to Albanian. In 1908, Orthodox clergyman Theofan S. Noli translated and published, for the Orthodox Albanians of Boston, in Massachusetts, USA, the first book of offices in Albanian language.

As the 1967 ban of religion in Albania was lifted in 1991 and the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania rebooted, the use of Byzantine music was revived as well. Today there are several Byzantine choirs in different cities of Albania. A school of Byzantine music named "John Koukouzelis" opened in Tirana in 2013; this school's choir, which bears the same name, is featured in this album.



eda zari

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