

In Memory of Archimandrite Matthew (Mormyl')

5.03.1938 – 15.09.2009

The author of the article has been most fortunate to have had the opportunity to study the choral traditions of the Trinity Sergius Monastery, spend time with, sing in choirs under the direction of and spend many hours conversing with Archimandrite Matthew (Mormyl') since meeting him in 1996. The following information was collated and submitted as part of a Masters Thesis at the Victorian College of the Arts (Melbourne, Australia).

The preservation of the Sacred music in Soviet Russia and the resurgence of Sacred Choral Music in the post Perestroika period owes a great deal of gratitude to Archimandrite Matthew (Mormyl') (1938-2009). Archimandrite Matthew, a monk of the Trinity Sergius Monastery in Sergiev Posad and Professor at the Moscow Theological Academy and Seminary, was considered by many to be one of the last remaining sacred choral bastions of a bygone era. It was through the work of this remarkable monk that a thread containing the choral traditions of pre-revolutionary Russia was carried through many difficult decades of persecution and hardship. These threads have now become a large web of choral activity and liturgical tradition spanning the breadth of Russia and many other countries.



Archimandrite Matthew (Mormyl'), subdeacon Nicholas Cowall (Kovalenko) and Protodeacon Nikolai Platonov in Fr Matthew's cell in the Holy Trinity Sergius Monastery- Feast of St Nicholas 19 December 1999

For over forty years the name of Archimandrite Matthew (Mormyl') was well known; not only by Russian sacred music specialists, Russian clerics and Russian secular musicians- but the mere mention of sacred Russian choral music brings to light the associations of the Monks of Zagorsk, as they were known before the fall of the Iron Curtain, and the choirs of the Holy Trinity Sergius Monastery under the direction of Archimandrite Matthew.



The great legacy of Fr Matthew can be seen through his many compositions and arrangements of chant, the current liturgical-choral performance practices in Russia and abroad, the foundation of the Choir Directors School at the Moscow Theological Academy and Seminary, and through the hundreds of students that have sung and studied under his direction and guidance. Many of these students have themselves become Russian Liturgical music specialists, talented choral directors and clerics serving in parishes across Russia and abroad, passing on the knowledge that had been passed on to them by Archimandrite Matthew.

Surprisingly there is no substantial Russian or English literature detailing the life, compositional activities and choral legacy of Archimandrite Matthew. One of the reasons for the lack of literature on Fr. Matthew is due to his monastic meekness and unwillingness to be interviewed. The author is truly grateful for time Fr Matthew has given him, and the following information is based on interviews with Fr Matthew conducted both in Russia and over the telephone. Unfortunately, much of the remarkable story telling, play on words, animated intonation of the voice and rich use of the Russian language by Fr. Matthew is lost in English translation.

In 1938 Fr Matthew was born the suburbs of Vladikavkaz, the capital of North Ossetia-Alania (formally part of the Terskoi Region) in the Northern Caucasuses and given the name Lev. He was born into a pious family of clerics and church musicians and is a fourth generation choir director.

There is a family history of monasticism on both his mother's and father's sides of the family. His grandfather's sister was a nun (Sofia) of the St George Monastery located on the Kura River, near the city of Georgievsk in the pre-revolutionary diocese of Vladikavkaz and Mozdok.



His maternal grandfather, Leontsyi Grigoryevich Tratsenko, began singing as a bass in the local stanitsaⁱ parish choir and later became a member of the 40 voice male choir associated with the governor-general of the Caucasus-Baron Vorontsov Dashkov. Leontsyi Grigoryevich later became the assistant conductor of this ensemble. This choir, directed by Mikhail

Kalatulin, also received much praise for its fine choral sonority. Later, Leontsyi Grigoryevich completed studies at Tbilisi Conservatorium of Music in Georgia majoring in voice and as part of the 300th anniversary of the House of Romanov (1913) sang the role of *Ivan Susanin* in Glinka's Opera *Life for the Tsar*. After the Revolution he joined the White Army under the command of Anton Ivanovich Denikin. During the civil war Leontsyi Grigoryevich conducted Denikin's choir of 120 voices in Pyatsigorsk and upon the withdrawal and subsequent defeat of the White Army was imprisoned for three years in Siberia. Upon his release he returned to Vladikavkaz, continued working as a church choir conductor and was arrested and executed on the 22nd of September at the age of 49. Following the years of Perestroika and Glasnost', the Mormyl' family was given access to KGB archival sources and it was discovered that he was not fatally shot but was in fact buried alive. In the words of Fr. Matthew: "Stalin devoured my grandfather, whilst Hitler devoured my father and uncle. My brother and I were the only male descendants of the Mormyl' family left after the purges and the Great Patriotic War."

In 1945, at the age of 7, Fr Matthew began to serve as an altar boy and sing in the local church choir. The rector of this church was Heiromonk Iosaf (Bundelelev). One of his first choral experiences involved helping two blind singers- Anna Mikhailovna Kalashnikov and Yelena Sergeyevna Kasyanova. These women knew the rubrics of entire church calendar by heart and simply required the occasional prompting from the young Lev. As is the tradition of many churches in Russia, this church also had a "festive" (праздничный) choir which included singers that were trained by Leontsyi Grigoryevich.

Secondary school life was difficult for Lev and he endured criticism from both his class mates and teachers for attending church. This problem spiraled as Lev refused to become a member

of the Pioneers and Komsomol. A refusal of the anti-religious doctrine even led to Lev being seriously assaulted by his fellow students for not toeing the Party-line. The rector of the local church, Fr Iosaf, tried to protect the schoolboy and wished that the young Lev enter the Moscow Theological Academy and Seminary, but due to Lev's young age he was initially not accepted into the Moscow Seminary. Upon the recommendation of Fr Iosaf, Lev was eventually accepted into the Stavropol Seminary.

Initially, Lev did not plan to become a choral conductor and upon the request of Archbishop Anthony (Romanovsky) during one of his Seminary study breaks was sent to the tourist town of Yessyentuki and asked to conduct the local parish left kliros choir. The conductor of the right kliros choir was deacon Pavel Zvonik (?-1964) (himself an accomplished composer and conductor). Deacon Pavel did not possess the vocal prowess that is synonymous with many Russian deacons, instead Lev learnt the importance of good musicianship, clear diction and correct intonation in sacred choral performance.



During his study at the seminary his interest in choral performance was further promoted under the tutelage of Vyacheslav Pavlovich Pyestritski. Vyacheslav Pavlovich would conduct the main mixed-voice choir and Lev was required to conduct the seminary male-voice choir. A part from his conducting duties he was also required to prepare and copy out liturgical texts for use during services as there was a shortage of liturgical texts and no copying facilities. Following undergraduate Theological studies Lev was accepted into the Moscow Theological Academy.

During his first two years at the Moscow Theological Academy, Lev sang in the choir and wished to become a monk of the Trinity Sergius Monastery. He was tonsured on the 21st of June 1961. On the 1st of August of the same year he was asked to conduct the singing at a morning Liturgy for the first time. The first service the Fr Matthew was asked to conduct was on the day of the feast dedicated to St Seraphim of Sarov. As the 19th Statute of the 1961 Khrushchev reforms closed many church choirs, Lev was required to sing this first service on his own. Fr Matthew did not receive formal conducting tuition before commencing his *obedience* of choir direction at the Trinity Sergius Monastery. His conducting skills and repertoire

interpretation were developed out of necessity and were based on developing a musical expression most appropriate to the Russian Orthodox liturgy.

Fr Matthew's extensive research into the various Russian sacred choral schools included visits to many of the remaining functioning churches and monasteries as well as discussing these traditions with the few specialists who remained alive after the purges and were educated by institutions such as the Moscow Synodal School. He has also told the author of this article that "one can often deduce the vocal traditions of a person by observing the way they sing- through articulation and rendering of a given chant. This observation is particularly prevalent in the students that come to study at the Moscow Theological Seminary from the various regions of Russia and neighboring countries. A Kievan rendering of chant has a particular florid style, whilst the Petersburg style has Western flavour and the Moscow school has its own specifications. The aesthetics of Russian monastic singing are closer to the Moscow School".

Over the years Fr Matthew instigated and maintained one of today's largest Russian sacred choral music libraries in the world. This library was re-established in 1962 and contains printed and manuscript material covering all the various schools of Russian sacred composition. Before the revolution, the Trinity Sergius Lavra was known for its vast music collection which was mostly destroyed during various purges on the Lavra and its monastic community. Fortunately, many of the items from the original library were saved, hidden for years and have been now returned. As there was little published choral material for male choirs by composers of the Moscow School such as Kastalsky, Chesnokov and Nikolsky, Fr Matthew was faced with the task of arranging their music for the monastery's all-male ensembles. The library also contains over one thousand of Fr Matthew's own compositions, chant harmonisations and choral arrangements for both mixed and male choral ensembles. As part of his daily routine he made an effort to compose or arrange various chants for upcoming services. Through his friendship and discussions with: composers such as Sergei Zosimovich Trubachev and Sergei Ivanovich



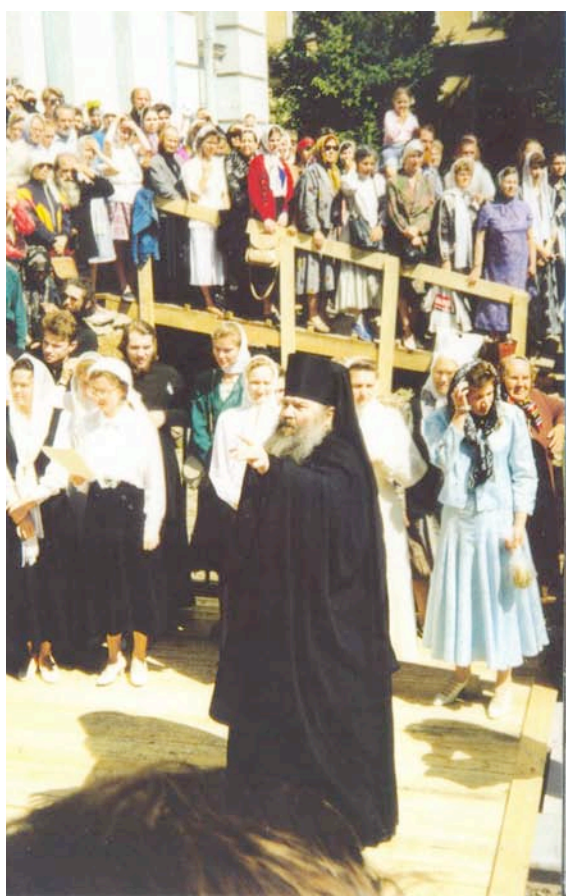
Zubachevsky; conductors such as Nikolai Vasilyevich Matfeev and Victor Stepanovich Komarov; and musicologists such as Nikolai Dimitrievich Uspensky; he was also able to expand the library and his own views of sacred choral composition.

In regards to the selection of repertoire most appropriate to the Russian Orthodox worship Fr Matthew tended to choose music that is indigenous and national in character. His main focus concerning the performance of repertoire lies with his attempt to combine both the intentions of worship, prayer, the composer and/or the chant that is being sung. The combination of these intentions is also affected by the liturgical action that was taking place at a given time during a service. The solemn, penitential, joyous or laudable nature of a text must also be reflected in liturgical performance. Fr Matthew believed that one should also research and understand the organization of the Oktoikh. In choosing non-chant based music such as a “Cherubic Hymn” and “A Mercy of Peace” one must also attempt to blend the quality and nature of Russian chant with these freely composed works. Fr Matthew took a different approach to the choice of concert repertoire as his choirs are often invited to perform at various festivities in Russian and abroad. His approach to concert repertoire was also concerned with education of an audience and the balance of a given program. For example the text of the vespers hymn “O Gladsome Light” is based on the theme of Christ (*O Gladsome Light*) and the Trinity (*we praise the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit: God*). Many compositions of this hymn exist, but not all of them convey and contrast the two mentioned themes or are suited for arrangement into a male choral ensemble. An example of “O Gladsome Light” that is suited for concert performance, has been



arranged and recorded by his male choirs is the setting by Ivanov Radkevich (1878 - 1942). According to Fr Matthew: “The performance of concert repertoire must reach the heart of the listener and must give a aural sense of Orthodox spirituality without being in visual surrounds of a Russian church.”

The members of Fr Matthew's choirs were constantly changing every couple of years due to fact that the majority of voices in his choirs are seminary students who only sing for the duration of their study. This high turnover of singers required Fr Matthew to develop a system of training his choir based on the similar methods employed by the conductors of the Moscow Synodal School. The main difference between the pre-revolutionary and contemporary model of teaching is that the Moscow Synodal school educated treble voices as well as tenors and basses in the performance of sacred choral repertoire, whilst the Moscow Theological Academy and Seminary only trains changed voices, i.e. tenors and basses. This fact also was a problem for Fr Matthew as he often was faced with "raw" untrained talent that had had no previous musical education. In the instance of untrained singers he initially employed the Stanislavsky method with these students: "so that they watch with their ears and listen with their eyes". At choir rehearsals Fr Matthew would often select individual voices to sing through certain sections of a piece. He would then conduct a performance analysis of the individual with the whole choir. "By learning from one's mistakes and the mistakes of others the standard of the ensemble gradually improves."



During rehearsals Fr Matthew often began to rehearse a composition from the most "interesting, beautiful, important or most difficult section of a work". For example, when approaching a "Cherubic Hymn" the rendered portion of the text that is frequently most difficult to perform is on the text of the "And the life creating Trinity" or "Let us lift the king of all". Pavel Chesnokov's settings of these two portions of text in his "Cherubic Hymns" are also often based on identical melodic and harmonic material (although the main difference concerning the performance of these sections are related to changes in tempo: "And the life creating Trinity" text is often performed at a much slower tempo than the "Let us lift the king of all" text). Fr Matthew would begin rehearsing one of the sections then immediately rehearse the alternate section of text. This approach to repertoire is also applied to sectional and *tutti* rehearsals.



Fr Matthew also developed a method of music training for his choristers. Each student of the seminary studies Russian church singing from both historical and practical perspectives. In the first semester of study students study the Obikhod. By understanding the Obikhod and the liturgical function of specific hymns, chant melodies and texts students learn to approach a given piece of music in the same way as composers of the Moscow School approached their compositions. Fr Matthew taught that the correct placement of the voice requires solid breath control and involves the activation or resonance of sound through various bones and cartilage of the face and skull. Fr Matthew also uses the same ensemble principals of P. Chesnokov and K Pigrov, where “the main objective is to demonstrate balance, not only

between parts, but within each part, ultimately leading to the choir sounding as one, and, in essence, resulting in a perfect vehicle for transmitting the sacred text. The method proceeds with technical means to achieve that balance, from the proper singing of intervals to developing pitch intonation, breath control, form and phrasing, nuances, etc.”

On the issue of reading during divine services, Fr Matthew believed that reading has a solid connection to the act of singing. When scripture is read aloud in church there are clear elements of singing. The reader must not disrupt the natural flow of the service, which is dictated by the final cadence sung by the choir,



by diverting to a completely unrelated pitch. Both the reader (and choir) must have clear diction so the text is not misinterpreted by the congregation.

When asked what was the reason for the decline of popularity of Znamenny chant singing during the 18th and 19th centuries and whether there is any credence in returning to entire monophonic Znamenny services, Fr Matthew gave the following assessment: "When Metropolitan Anthony (Harpovitsky) was asked the causes of the Russian Revolution



he replied: "We all attempted to halt the Revolution, but it all slipped through our hands- like water or air". This same history occurred with the demise of Znamenny chant by the reforms of the 17th century. Znamenny chant is the precious gem of our church- it is the Patriarch of all church chants. We have no right to replace all other chants with znamenny chant today. Each faith has its own singing, and, together with church canonical norms and Byzantine hymnography established by St John Damascus, we all must be faithful to these norms. I believe that church singing is the Divine Service. If church canons are followed, one could say that a chant belongs to the church (and not to Fr Mathew), as much as an icon belongs to the church, or the artistic composition of an icon belongs to a church. This is why we should continue to perform and revere znamenny chant and why chant should be revered as a Divine Service."

Fr Matthew began to compose music in 1961 when he was asked to prepare a series of stichera dedicated to St Sergius of Radonezh. These hymns needed to be arranged in a style that both matched the monastery traditions and were faithful to the liturgical text. These hymns were to be based on the 4th tone *special melody Свыше званый* and required detailed research. This research required the collection and study of manuscript scores as well as transcribing melodies from church musicians and monks who knew and sang these chants before the revolution. The most famous and oft performed of Fr Matthew's compositions is *Земле русская (Russian Land)*, a set of stichira from the service dedicated to the Saints of Russia. This service was written by Bishop Afanasy (Saharov) and one year following his death in 1961, Fr Matthew arranged the set of four stichira on the 28th of October 1962. This set of hymns were based on the Kiev-Pechersk Monastery special melody *Доме Евфрафов* and were first performed in 1963, in the week dedicated to the Saints of Russia in the lower church of the Assumption Cathedral of the Trinity Sergius Monastery. This first performance was a

particularly solemn and memorable as Kruschev had just closed down over half of the churches that were “re-opened” by Stalin during the Second World War. Many of the churches within the Trinity Sergius monastery were also closed for services and some were only open as museums. The following is an account of this first performance of the *Russian Land* stichera: “Rarely, when conducting a choir, one feels some sort of inner calm. Of course, this is God’s will, but during a service the conductor has their own performance concerns. This first rendering of the work left the entire choir and congregation in tears. These tears reached their utmost on the rendering of the text “HOLY RUSSIA, PROTECT YOUR ORTHODOX FAITH”. Up to that point in my life I had never experienced such emotion and perfection in performance. I have not experienced the combined emotion and quality of performance since. I consider this day to be one of the most memorable days in my entire life.”

Nine days following the repose of Fr Matthew, his work as a professor of the Moscow Theological Academy and Seminary, conductor and composer will continue to inspire and educate a new generation of future clerics and church musicians in the traditions of the Holy Trinity Sergius Monastery. In words of Archbishop Evgeni of Verey: [People such as Fr Matthew] “are born, perhaps, once in a hundred years, maybe once in a thousand years.” His past students have been appointed to dioceses as bishops, to parishes as priests, deacons and choir directors across the breadth of Russia and the world. These students are now passing on those traditions that were preserved and not destroyed during a seventy year regime by a wonderful person, a true monk, an ascetic, who loved God, people and the Church. Fr Matthew was able to pass this love on to all who knew and learned from him.

Eternal Memory to Archimandrite Matthew.

Subdeacon Nicholas Cowall (Kovalenko)
Chair of the Liturgical Music Committee of the
Australia and New Zealand Diocese (ROCOR)

September 24, 2009



Земле русская (Russian Land)
by Archimandrite Matthew (Mormyl')

Стихиры на стиховне
глас 2, подобен "Доме Евфрафов"

Напева Киево-Печерской Лавры

1

T.1
T.2
8

Зем - ле Рус - - - ска - я, гра - де свя - тый,

Бар.
Б.

у - кра - шай Твой дом

в нем же Бо - жест - вен - ный ве - лий сонм свя - тых про - сла - - - ви.

2

8

Цер - - - ковь Рус - - - ска - я, кра - суй - - - ся

и ли - куй: се бо ча - - - да Тво - я

пре - сто - лу Вла - дыч - ню во сла - ве пред - сто - ят ра - ду - ю - ще - ся.

3

Со - бо - ре Свя - тых - Рус - ских, Пол - че Бо - жест -

вен - ный, мо - ли - те - ся ко - Гос - по - ду о зем - ном О -

те - чест - ве ва - шем и о по - чи - та - ю - щих вас лю - бо - ви - ю.

4

Но - вый до - ме Ев - фра - фов, у - де - ле из -

бран - ный, Русь Свя - та - я!

Хра - ни Ве - ру Пра - во - слав - ну - ю: в ней же те - бе ут - верж - де - ни - е.

Archimandrite Matthew (Mormyl') conducting the choirs of the
Trinity Sergius Monastery