

Tutorial for Learning the Church Tones

Common Chant

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Common Chant

Common Chant, also known as Obikhod Chant, originated from certain canonical chants and their variants that were used daily in monasteries , parish churches, and especially at the Imperial Court Chapel in St. Petersburg.¹ The melodies from the original tones were abbreviated and simplified, so that the melodies could fit more conveniently into a simple major-minor harmonic scheme. Originally transmitted orally, the chant melodies were transcribed and harmonized for four voices under the supervision of the director of the Imperial Court Cappella, Alexis F. L’vov, in 1848. It was then propagated all over Russia and enjoyed great popularity, being employed not only for daily services when only a small number of singers were available, but also for festive services sung by large choirs. In 1869, a new edition of this Obikhod, with corrections and additions, was published under the direction of Nikolai Bakhmetev, who succeeded L’vov as director of the Imperial Court Cappella. It is this edition that is used for the source of the present tutorial for the study of the Tones of the Common Chant, commonly referred to as the L’vov-Bakhmetev Obikhod or the Bakhmetev Obikhod.

Common Chant is divided into five different classifications of melodies that comprise each “tone”. Within a given Tone these melodies, with few exceptions, do not have any relationship to each other. These five classifications represent repertoires of melodies for the singing of:

- 1) Stichera
- 2) Stichera refrains
- 3) Troparia
- 4) Prokeimena
- 5) Heirmoi (Kanon)

¹ Johann von Gardner, *Russian Church Singing, Volume 1, Orthodox Worship and Hymnography*, (Crestwood, NY, SVS Press, 1980) 105.

Part I

Common Chant for the Singing of Stichera

Stichera (sticheron, *sing.*) are poetic verses of varying content and length, having anywhere from as few as two lines to as many as twelve. Stichera are commonly inserted between the verses of a psalm in such a way that the psalm verse precedes the sticheron, i.e., at Vespers following “Lord, I Call” (Psalms 140, 141, 129, 116), at Matins following the Gospel reading and Psalm 50 (Post-Gospel Sticheron), and at the Praises (Psalm 150) when Matins includes the Polyeleion and the Great Doxology. Less often, the psalm verses follow the sticheron: Aposticha at Vespers and Aposticha at Matins when Matins does not include the Polyeleion and the Great Doxology. Stichera are sung without any Psalm verses during the Litia, which occurs during feast-day Vespers.

In Common Chant, the Tone is defined not only by the short melodic patterns that are used in each tone, but also by the sequence of the melodic phrases. For example, Tone One consists of four distinct melodic phrases (A, B, C, and D), with each line comprising a reciting tone (usually preceded by an introduction) and a short cadence. A fifth distinct melodic line (final cadence) is used for the final textual line of the hymn.

The **introduction** or **intonation** of a phrase is a note or several notes that precede the reciting tone. At times the intonation will simply be a held note (half note), either on the same pitch as the reciting tone, or one tone above or below the reciting tone. A phrase may begin immediately on the reciting tone, in which case there is no introduction.

The **reciting tone** is a single pitch on which many syllables of text can be sung. In the unison examples showing chant melody only, the reciting tone is indicated with a filled-in (blackened) whole note. In the harmonized printed examples, groups of words that are sung on the reciting tone begin with a notehead over the first syllable and a notehead over the last syllable. All the syllables between this first and last notehead are sung on the same pitch (chord). Frequently the reciting tone will conclude with a **preparation** for the cadence. This preparation (indicated as **prep** in the tutorial) can consist of a single note sung on a different pitch or a series of notes sung on different pitches.

The **cadence** forms the conclusion of the phrase. It usually begins with an accented syllable sung on a “held” or half note, introducing a brief melodic pattern. In each cadence, one or more accented notes determine the “curve” of the cadence.

As traditional liturgical chants are based on the rhythm of the texts, there is no time signature, either in the Bakhmetev Obikhod or in this tutorial. The half note is the predominant pulse, which in the chant is equivalent to a single beat. The recitative (reciting tone) section of phrases consists of quarter notes that should be grouped in two’s or three’s, depending upon the location of the accents. All recitation syllables are sung on the same reciting tone using normal speech rhythms (with the basic, indivisible rhythmic unit being that of a quarter note, i.e., one-half of the full beat). Thus, a two-syllable word with an accent on the first syllable will receive a full beat, while a three-syllable word with the accent on the first syllable will receive a full beat and a half.² The groups of two’s can be counted in this way: 1-and, 2-and, 3-and, etc. Groups of three’s are not equal to a triplet but to three more or less identical quarter notes and can be counted in this way: 1-and-a-, 2-and-a-, 3-and-a-, etc. The conductor must be able to indicate by an extension of the beat a grouping of three, so that the singer is able to sing all three quarter notes, not as a triplet but as distinct quarter notes within the beat pattern, before moving on to the next beat.

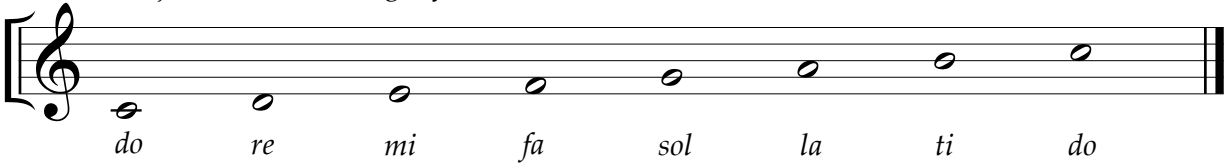
In the notation for the reciting tone, four or more syllables sung on the same pitch will be indicated with a quarter note on the first syllable and a quarter note on the last syllable, with all syllables between the first and last notehead sung as quarter notes on the same pitch. In the conducting of chant with asymmetric rhythm it is often necessary to indicate the stressed syllables in order to maintain the established tempo.

Moveable do

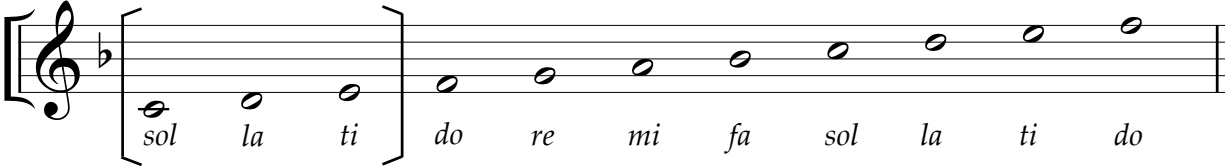
The tutorial uses the “moveable do” system which is ideally suited for learning the church tones. In this system, each solfege syllable, do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, and ti, corresponds not to an absolute pitch, but rather to a scale degree. The first degree of a major scale is always sung as do, the second as re, etc. Using the “moveable do,” a given melody would always use the same solfege syllables, regardless of the key in which it is written. Thus, in the key of C major, C is do, whereas in the key of F major, F is do.

² For a fuller discussion concerning problems related to syllabic and recitative chant, cf. Vladimir Morosan, *Choral Performance in Pre-Revolutionary Russia* (UMI Research Press, 1986) pp. 290-295, also 260-267.

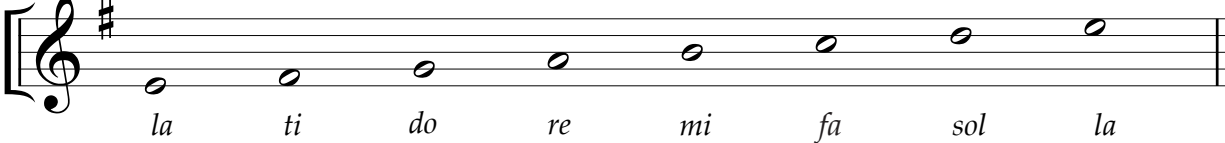
C major scale with solfege syllables



F major scale with solfege syllables




E minor scale with solfege syllables



When chant melodies are harmonized, the harmonic minor with the raised leading tone is often used.

E harmonic minor scale with solfege syllables



The 1869 Bakhmetev Obikhod uses the “C” clef for the soprano, alto, and tenor voices. The clef always rests on a line and simply tells you where “*do*” is located. The “F” clef is used for the basses. The melody for the Tones of the Common Chant in the Bakhmetev Obikhod is given to the top voice and is usually doubled by the first (top) basses. The harmonized settings in this tutorial have been transposed and are in “narrow” or “closed” harmony, and the melody is found in the alto voice. Unless otherwise noted, the chant melody in the unison musical examples for each Tone throughout the text of the tutorial will be identical to the alto voice in the harmonized settings.

Tone 1

Tone 1 consists of four (4) melodic phrases (A, B, C, D) that are sung in rotation and repeated in that order, depending upon the number of phrases in the text. The last phrase of the text has its own, unique melodic phrase. If a sticheron is divided into five textual phrases, the musical lines will consist of A, B, C, D, and Final Phrase. If there are eight lines of text, the musical lines will consist of A, B, C, D, A, B, C, and Final Phrase. If there are only three lines of text, then A, B, and Final Phrase, etc.

PHRASE A

Phrase A consists of an *intonation* with an accented syllable, a *reciting tone* on *re*, and a *cadence* beginning on the last accented syllable of the phrase.

The diagram shows two musical staves in G-clef with a B-flat key signature. The first staff is divided into four sections: 'intonation' (two quarter notes on 're'), 'reciting tone' (two quarter notes on 're'), 'prep' (a quarter note on 'ti'), and 'cadence' (two quarter notes on 'do'). The second staff shows the same structure with a different rhythmic pattern for the intonation and reciting tone.

The *intonation* is used to sing one (if the first word is a one syllable word that is accented, for example, “Lord”) or several syllables on *re*. If the first word of the sticheron text begins with an unaccented syllable or syllables, then these unaccented syllables are sung on the same pitch as the first half note; their rhythmic value, however, is a half-beat or quarter note.

Three musical staves showing intonation for the words 'Lord, I call', 'To-day let', and 'The first fruit of'. Each staff shows the notes on a G-clef with a B-flat key signature, with the text written below.

The *reciting tone*, also sung on *re*, is used to sing the syllables that constitute the body of the textual phrase. If the last syllable of the *reciting tone* is accented (as in the second example below), then this syllable is sung on the last note of the reciting pitch, slurred together with the *preparatory note*. The *preparatory note* for the *cadence* is sung on *ti*.

Two musical staves showing the reciting tone for 'his root has' and 'O pure— Vir - gin'. The notes are on a G-clef with a B-flat key signature. The text is written below. The second example shows a slur over the final note of the reciting tone and the preparatory note.

The *cadence* is used to sing the final syllable or syllables of the phrase, beginning on the last accented syllable, and can consist of one, two, three, or more syllables. If there are unaccented syllables following the last accented syllable of the phrase, then these additional syllables are sung on the same pitch as the accented syllable. An option is to begin the *cadence* on the last internal accent of the phrase, e.g. “Móther of God.”

glo-ry of Christ dance, O faith-ful Vir-gin Moth-er of God

Example of *Phrase A* (from the feast of the Meeting of our Lord, third sticheron at “Lord, I Call”)

Come, let us also go to meet Christ with di-vine songs!

PHRASE B

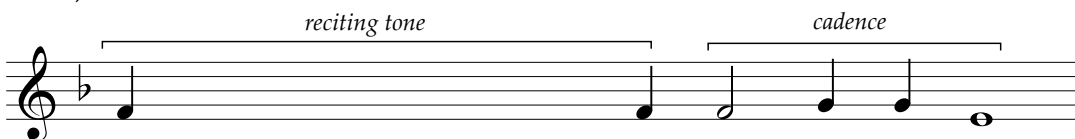
Phrase B consists of the *reciting tone* (*do*) and the *cadence*, which consists of a half note sung on the same pitch as the *reciting tone*, followed by a second half note a tone higher (if two or more syllables, then each syllable is a half pulse, i.e., a quarter note), and concludes with a half note a third below i.e., on *ti* of the scale. If the last word of the text has only one syllable, then, as in *Phrase A*, the *cadence* begins on the last internal accented syllable.

do do re ti

do do re ti

Tem - ple. forth from God Tree of the Cross.

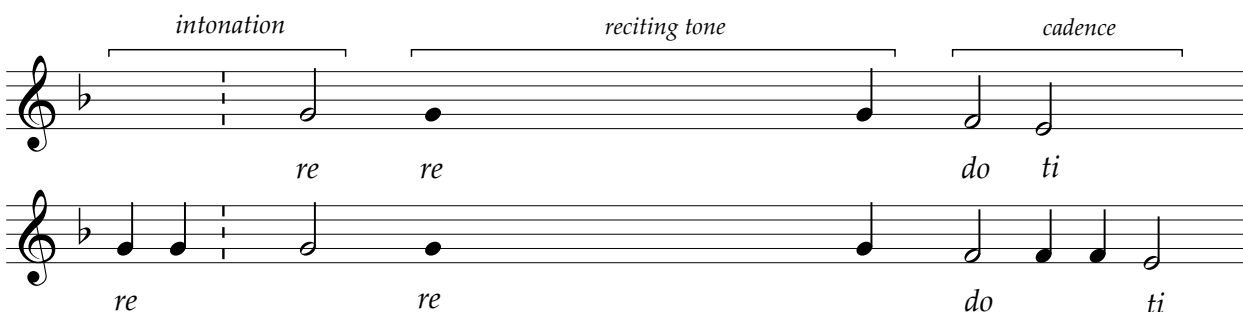
Example of *Phrase B* (from the feast of the Meeting of our Lord, third sticheron at “Lord, I Call”)



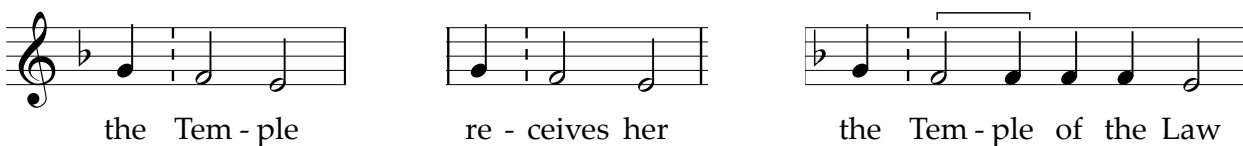
Let us receive Him Whose salvation Sim - e - on saw!

PHRASE C

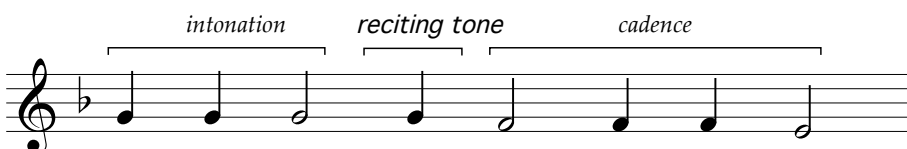
Phrase C consists of an *intonation note* (a half note on the first accented syllable, sung on *re* of the scale), followed by the *reciting tone*, sung on the same pitch, and the *cadence*, which consists of two descending pitches. If unaccented syllables precede the first accented syllable of the text, these are sung on the same pitch (i.e., *re*).



If the last word of the phrase is a one-syllable accented word, e.g., “Law,” then the *cadence* begins on the previous accented syllable (i.e., the last internal accent of the phrase). Any unaccented syllables between the last internal accent and the final syllable are sung on the same pitch as the last internal accent, i.e. *do*).



Example of *Phrase C* (from the feast of the Meeting of our Lord, third sticheron at “Lord, I Call”)



This is He Whom Da - vid an-nounced;

PHRASE D

Phrase D consists of the *reciting tone* and the *cadence*. The *reciting tone* is sung on *do*, while the *cadence* consists of a melodic pattern of at least five notes on these pitches: *ti, do, re, do, and ti*.

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The first staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). A bracket above the first two notes is labeled "reciting tone". The notes are: a whole note on G4 (labeled "do"), followed by a quarter rest, then a quarter note on A4 (labeled "ti"), a quarter note on B4 (labeled "do"), a quarter note on C5 (labeled "re"), a quarter note on B4 (labeled "do"), and a quarter note on A4 (labeled "ti"). The second staff is identical to the first.

The cadence can be used to sing two or more syllables.

The image shows three examples of the cadence being used for multiple syllables. Each example is on a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat.
 Example 1: "di - vine — bright - ness" and "lift - ing up his voice to cry". The cadence notes (ti, do, re, do, ti) are spread across the syllables.
 Example 2: "caught up in a di - vine — trance". The cadence notes are spread across the syllables.
 Example 3: "is He who spoke through the Law". The cadence notes are spread across the syllables.

Example of *Phrase D* (from the feast of the Meeting of our Lord, third sticheron at "Lord, I Call")

The image shows a single staff of musical notation with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. A bracket above the first two notes is labeled "reciting tone". The notes are: a whole note on G4 (labeled "do"), followed by a quarter rest, then a quarter note on A4 (labeled "ti"), a quarter note on B4 (labeled "do"), a quarter note on C5 (labeled "re"), a quarter note on B4 (labeled "do"), and a quarter note on A4 (labeled "ti"). Below the staff is the text: "this is He Who spoke in the Proph - ets,".

FINAL PHRASE

The *Final Phrase* consists of a *reciting tone* and a *cadence*. The *reciting tone* is sung on *re* of the scale. The *cadence* consists of three descending pitches, a half note sung on *do* on the first accented syllable of cadence, followed by a half note (or two or more quarter notes, depending on the amount of syllables occurring before the last syllable of the text) sung on *ti*, and a whole note sung on *la* for the last syllable of the sticheron.

reciting tone
cadence

re do ti la

re do ti la

His Moth - er us wor - ship Him

sal - va - tion of our souls

Example of *Final Phrase* (from the feast of the Meeting of our Lord, third sticheron at "Lord, I Call")

reciting tone
cadence

Let us wor - ship Him!

Melodic Phrases in Four-Part Harmony – Common Chant, Tone 1

Phrase A

intonation *reciting tone* *prep* *cadence*

Soprano
Alto

Tenor
Bass

Phrase B

reciting tone *cadence*

Phrase C

intonation *reciting tone* *cadence*

Phrase D

reciting tone *cadence*

Final Phrase

The musical score is written on two staves: a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The melody is indicated by a single line of music with notes and lyrics. The lyrics are: *fa*, *re*, *la*, *re*, *la*, *re*, *mi*, *mi*, *la*, *do*, *ti*, *si*, *mi*, *do*, *la*, *mi*, *la*. The *reciting tone* is marked above the first two notes (*fa* and *re*). The *cadence* is marked above the last three notes (*do*, *la*, *mi*). The notes are: *fa* (F4), *re* (D4), *la* (A3), *re* (D4), *la* (A3), *re* (D4), *mi* (E4), *mi* (E4), *la* (A3), *do* (G3), *ti* (F3), *si* (G#3), *mi* (E4), *do* (G3), *la* (A3), *mi* (E4), *la* (A3). The notes are written as half notes on the treble staff and half notes on the bass staff. The *reciting tone* is marked above the first two notes (*fa* and *re*). The *cadence* is marked above the last three notes (*do*, *la*, *mi*).

Sticheron at "Lord, I Call"

The Meeting of Our Lord - February 2

Common Chant
arr. from L'vov/Bakhmetev

Phrase A

Soprano
Alto

Tenor
Bass

Come, let us also go to meet Christ with di - vine songs!

Phrase B

Let us receive Him Whose salvation Sim - e - on saw!

Phrase C

This is

Phrase D

He Whom Da - vid an-nounced; this is He Who spoke in the

Phrase A

Proph - ets, Who, for our sakes, has taken flesh and Who speaks

Final Phrase

through the Law. // Let us wor - ship Him!