

# Liturgical Singing: Alaskan Native Languages

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When members of the Orthodox Church arrived in Alaska, they brought with them a rich singing tradition that was to evolve even more richly as Orthodoxy developed a variety of dis-

tinctively Alaskan styles. The Orthodox Church encouraged the use of Native languages, quickly developed a Native clergy, promoted Bible translation, and reading and writing in the Native languages.

Last year, St. Innocent Orthodox Church in An-

chorage received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to sponsor community liturgical singing in the Pribilof Islands and in Southeast Alaska, to record the events, and produce cassette recordings. The project is in its final stages now, and cassettes are expected to be ready by summer. The project is important for encouraging community singing of music unique to Alaska, and for making samples available to music historians.

Much of "mainstream" Orthodox church music comes from the Byzantine Greek "Eight Tone" system. In Russia, the Orthodox Church developed additional music from folk sources as well as from written compositions by such well known people as Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakoff, Rachmaninov, and others. All of this was brought to Alaska, where distinctly Alaskan choral music began to develop as a folk art.

All Russian Orthodox Church music is sung "acappella" - without instrumental accompaniment. There are now four kinds of singing heard in Alaska: 1) in Slavonic or English, to mainstream published music; 2) in Slavonic or English, but to uniquely Alaskan and unpublished music; 3) in

Alaska Native languages, with mainstream music; 4) in Alaska Native languages with music unique to Alaska.

All are beautiful, but the Alaska combinations are the most interesting. For example, the hymn "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal" is a "classic" both in Tlingit and Aleut, sung in the Native language to a uniquely Alaskan melody. Likewise, the Tlingit "Lord's Prayer" is a combination of language and music found only in Southeast Alaska. The Tlingit also evolved a beautiful tradition of singing hymns in Tlingit during Holy week and

Easter and at other major feasts. There is also a popular English version of "Glory to God in the Highest" unique to Southeast Alaska, composed in Sitka by the Tlingit Paul Liberty and sung mostly as a Christmas carol.

"Glory to God in the Highest" is also popular in Aleut tradition, sung in Aleut, to a distinctive melody, and is a highlight of the Matins service. Another uniquely Aleut contribution is the development of special Alaska melodies for Tones 2 and 4 of the ancient 8 tone system.