



Metropolitan Hilarion's symphony 'A Song of Ascents' performed at the Church of the Christ the Saviour's Church Councils Hall

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The symphony for a choir and orchestra 'A Song of Ascents' was performed on 5 April 2010 at the Church of Christ the Saviour's Church Council Halls as part of the 9th Easter Festival. Composed by Metropolitan Hilarion, it was rendered by the Patriarchal Choir, the Chamber Choir of the Smolny Cathedral in St. Petersburg and the Mariinsky Theatre choir and orchestra conducted by Valery Gergiev.

'A Song of Ascent' was composed by Metropolitan Hilarion in August 2008. Its libretto is based on seven psalms in the concluding parts of the Psalter. Two of these psalms have the subtitle 'A Song of Ascents', which has given name to the whole composition. The symphony consists of five parts. Its general dramatic concept is ascension from the depths of despair to the heights of prayerful jubilation and exalted praise to God.

The first part of the symphony resounds with words from Psalm 129: 'Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord' (Ps. 130). It is one of the most sorrowful psalms expressing the spiritual state of a person on the edge of despair who appeals to God with a prayer for salvation. The first part is composed in the form of passakalia, a variation on the theme invariably repeated in bass.

The second part is based on Psalm 121: 'I lift up my eyes to the hills - where does my help come from?' Its main theme is trust in God Who protects a believer from every evil. This part is composed in the form of a fugue on the theme weaved out of a C-minor triad.

The third part written to the words of Psalm 136 'By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion' is a lyrical culmination of the symphony. Psalm 137 is about the tragic fate of the Jewish people during the Babylonian captivity. The main themes are nostalgia, oath of allegiance to the homeland, remembrances of home songs. The third part is composed in a couplet form with its characteristic sharps in every new couplet. In keeping with the psalm verse 'There on the poplars we hung our harps', a harp is added to the orchestra.

Beginning from the fourth part, the emotional pitch of the symphony changes, moving from a sorrowful and lyrical mood to that of a solemn praise expressed in Psalm 135 'Praise the name of the Lord; praise

him, you servants of the lord, you who minister in the house of the Lord, in the courts of the house of our God'. While in the first two parts the orchestra prevails, the forth one is dominated by the choir, with the orchestra only rear-filling it. The male and female voices sound in antiphon.

The final part is written to the words of the three last Psalms, 148, 149 and 150. The choral voices merge into a recitative sung by men and women in close harmony. The choir as if chants the words of the psalm going a half-tone higher with each phrase. Psalm 150 mentions musical instruments, which enter at the moment when they are mentioned. The symphony is concluded with a repeated solemn and triumphant 'Alleluia' (Heb. 'God be praised')

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