

Jenny Stanford Series on Sacred Music Vol. II



CHRISTIAN MUSIC IN JERUSALEM

The First Two Thousand Years

Alexander Rosenblatt



The image shows the interior of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. The architecture is highly ornate, featuring a large central dome and a series of smaller domes. The walls are covered in intricate carvings and mosaics. A prominent feature is a balcony with a series of arched niches, each containing a statue of a figure. The lighting is soft, highlighting the architectural details. The overall atmosphere is one of historical grandeur and religious significance.

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The First Two Thousand Years

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*To the Christians of the Holy Land who heartedly
shared with me their knowledge on various
topics and subjects presented in the book.*



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Preface

The book summarizes a fifteen-year project by its author, which involved exploring various aspects of Christian music as it has developed and is currently heard (or otherwise presented) in churches located in Jerusalem and throughout the State of Israel.

Since there has never been a single comprehensive book on the topic—neither on the shelf nor on the Internet—and only a few scattered studies have been conducted over the past fifty years, both academic and general audiences, including Christians, have more than a vague idea about what Christian music might have been and how it sounds today in the land where Christianity was born.

In light of the above, the present book provides an almost exclusive and fairly comprehensive introduction to the subject, built on sample data, longitudinal studies, comparative studies, historical research, and references to recordings from the Sound Archive of the National Library of Israel and several related studies conducted primarily by local, that is, Israeli researchers (it is not easy for foreign scholars to get in touch with local Christians, who are very closed communities that take months and sometimes years to establish contact with).

I would like to express my thanks to:

- The Senate and Faculty of Humanities of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and personally to Prof. Edwin Serussi for hosting and supervising my doctoral project on the music of contemporary Anglican churches in Israel (2009–2012), as well as for a travel grant to present on this topic at an interdisciplinary conference on the Harvard Campus (2011);
- The leadership of St. James' Formation Group, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, for the invitation to speak on a research-related topic to the members of the group (2014);

- Centre for Studies in Religion and Society, University of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, for invitation as a visiting scholar and lecturer on a related topic in the Centre’s lecture series (2022);
- Research Authority of Zefat Academic College, Zefat, Israel, for providing me with a travel grant to speak on a related topics at two World Conferences of the former ICTM (International Council for Traditional Music)—in Limerick, Ireland (2017) and Bangkok, Thailand (2019), and also for a research grant to complete this book (2024).

To date, presentations on topics related to the book have been made at the IJAS conference on Harvard Campus (2011), meeting of the Formation Group of the Anglican Church of St. James, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada (2014), two World Conferences of the International Council for Traditional Music (2017 and 2019), lecture series at the Centre for Studies in Religion and Society, University of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada (2022), as well as at several research forums, meetings, and conferences in Israel.

All relevant materials published by the author on related topics (from 2014 to 2022) are referenced in the appropriate sections of the book. Parts of previously published materials have been reproduced with the permission of the publishers.

Alexander Rosenblatt
Summer 2025

Introduction

Let me start with a simple question: why should we study religious music? Or, to put it more contextually, *what* do we actually learn by studying contemporary Christian music? Are we learning music? Do we know anything better after we find out what hymns or songs are being sung in a nearby church?

Once at a conference, I attended an oral presentation on church music in one of the Chinese provinces. The speaker enthusiastically spoke and demonstrated single-voice music in the church of his village for fifteen minutes, and in the end, apparently wanting to amaze the audience, he played a recording of a four-voice chorale from a neighboring village, which, according to him, was original and unique for the church of that village. And the music that played was nothing other than Strauss's waltz *On the Beautiful Blue Danube* in an unaccompanied choral version. The audience was divided into those who enthusiastically received this original melody from the Chinese church, and those who were looking for words to, observing the requirements of academic ethics, comment on what they heard, indicating the authorship of this "chorale." The latter position was ultimately voiced by the author of this book. The speaker looked carefully and said, "you don't seem to understand; this is an original work from such and such a village in Guangdong Province!" Further arguing was not only useless but also inappropriate.

One more example. During an exchange of views at one of the doctoral seminars at the Hebrew University, we touched on music in Catholic churches, and mentioned choirs accompanied by an organ, as well as organ voluntaries. One of the participants suddenly told us, "Guys, you are all wrong! There is no organ in the Catholic Church, I am a Catholic!" All the participants, mostly Jews in kippot, looked at each other and then looked at me expressively, knowing