

revealing Orthodox Christianity  
through its sacred music



ST. JOHN OF  
DAMASCUS  
SOCIETY

2609 South Spicewood Lane  
Bloomington, IN 47401

[www.johnofdamascus.org](http://www.johnofdamascus.org)

23 September 2012

Dear Friend of the Saint John of Damascus Society,

The music of the Eastern Orthodox Christian Churches has, in recent years, become an integral part of the fabric of Western musical culture. Works such as the Rachmaninoff All-Night Vigil are staples of the American choral scene, and composers like Arvo Pärt and John Tavener have introduced the musical language of the various international bodies of chant repertoire to audiences everywhere. Even Bloomington has seen its share of these developments in recent years. Highlights have included:

- **2004:** Bloomington Early Music Festival appearance of Cappella Romana
- **2006 - present:** Several performances of the Rachmaninoff Vigil – New Art Voices (2006), Bloomington Chamber Singers (2008), and the Indiana University Singers (2009)
- **2008:** The choir of All Saints Orthodox Church presents a concert of Greek and Middle Eastern Holy Week music as part of the Middle Eastern Arts Festival sponsored by the IU's Near Eastern Languages and Culture department
- **2010:** Cappella Romana's John Michael Boyer leads a workshop on Byzantine chant at All Saints, the IU Jacobs School of Music is home to "Arvo Pärt: A Jubilee", put on with the Estonian Studies Department; *Orient*, a multimedia presentation of Orthodox music and iconography put on by the School of Music; as well as a symposium titled "We knew not if we were in heaven or on earth: Liturgy, music, and beauty in Orthodox Christianity", featuring Boyer, ethnomusicologist Alexander Khalil, composer Kurt Sander, and composer Richard Toensing

From all of this activity, a new arts organization has emerged: the Saint John of Damascus Society. Our founders have been involved with all of those events, and we seek to promote awareness of Orthodox music, on a local, regional, and national level. We are working on projects that will involve performance, education, outreach, and research, all focused on one of the world's richest inheritances of sacred vocal music — and we want to collaborate with you to make these things happen.

The Society grew out of the planning efforts for the 2010 Orthodox Music Symposium, and since its official incorporation as a non-profit in 2011, the Society has sought to continue the efforts begun by the Symposium by organizing and performing

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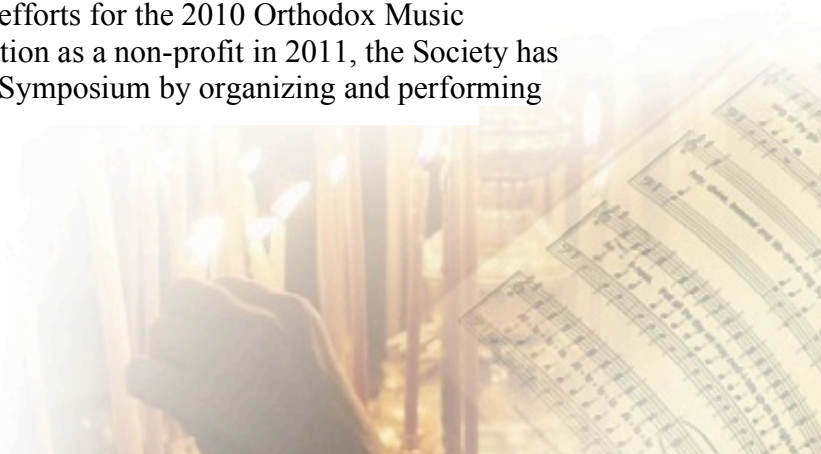
John Michael Boyer

Alex Khalil, Ph.D.

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*St. John of Damascus Society  
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events of public interest centered on the liturgical music of the Orthodox Christian Churches. In the coming year, we will be putting on multiple public presentations on Byzantine chant, including one at Trinity Episcopal Church in Bloomington, Indiana and one at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, as a collaboration with Ball State's OCF chapter and Fr. Nabil Hanna of St. George Orthodox Church in Indianapolis. We plan to offer the Divine Liturgy at regular intervals in Bloomington, served in particular languages in a particular musical idiom, as a public outreach effort. We are starting with a Greek-language liturgy sung with antiphonal Byzantine chant choirs; future such liturgies will include a Slavonic-language celebration with Znammeny chant, as well as Arabic. We have collaborated with NPR's early music program Harmonia on a segment of Orthodox Christmas music (to air in December), we are preparing the publication of the first issue of our journal, *Paraklitiki*, and we also are planning a presentation at the federal penitentiary in Terre Haute, Indiana in the coming year.

To briefly describe our overall goals in the coming years locally, regionally, and nationally:

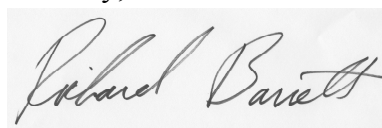
- **Locally**, to support activities that use Orthodox music as outreach -- activities that will be of musical, academic, and spiritual interest in a university town. To put it a different way, to raise the profile of Orthodox Christianity in Bloomington by contributing to the town's cultural profile and that has its own particular infrastructure. This includes lecture presentations, workshops, and concerts, and to the extent possible, partnering with other local arts organizations to do it. Along similar lines, we also seek to be the first point of contact for other arts organizations when expertise in the area of Orthodox music is required.
- Another broad, long-term (and I stress long-term) local goal would be to establish a reputation for Orthodox music in Bloomington that is roughly commensurate with the reputation of the Jacobs School of Music. I would like for it to make sense for Orthodox parents to send their kid who has grown up loving to chant (whatever the particular national heritage) to Indiana University, because, hey, it's a great school, and they'll also be able to participate in and learn a lot about singing in church there too.
- The St. John of Damascus Society initially was conceived as a "Friends of Music at All Saints", and while the idea has been considerably expanded past that, I don't want to lose the specific applicability of what we're doing for the local parish. Part of the local function of the St. John of Damascus Society is to help build the choir and chanting ministries at All Saints Orthodox Church into a robust program that strives for an iconographic level of musical quality and is dynamically engaged with education and outreach at all levels. Ideally, such a program would incorporate both an adult musical education program as well as an active youth choir or choirs, serving to form children into capable Orthodox church singers and leaders as adults. Establishing the funding sources necessary to pay for these goals is an additional part of the objective.
- To stress again that the objective is to be outwardly focused -- and to the extent possible, local efforts also need to include activities that serve the community and don't just try to sell them on the aesthetic value of Orthodox music. Prison outreach is

something we've already discussed as a component of this, but there are lots and lots of other opportunities out there for us to – as our Society President so eloquently puts it -- feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and give hope to the hopeless on a local level, and to the extent music can do those things, we should take advantage of those opportunities. If nothing else, we're helping to bring some amount of beauty into the lives of others.

- ***Regionally***, to organize musical events for the larger area. We are partnering with the St. John Koukouzelis Institute for Liturgical Arts to plan a multi-day Orthodox music festival in 2013 or 2014; we are also planning a festival with our Advisory Board member Kurt Sander at Northern Kentucky University in the coming couple of years. In general, we hope that future such events could establish Bloomington as a “destination” for Orthodox music.
- ***Nationally***, to contribute to the conversation in a way that celebrates the uniquely multicultural Orthodox inheritance of musical excellence and beauty regardless of particular national heritage, encourages both church musicians and non-singers to take an active interest in participating in that inheritance, cultivates the environment for its future, and brings it to the attention of non-Orthodox. It seems to me there is room for voices that can point the way forward in terms of fostering the understanding of what our music does, how it functions, what beauty and excellence mean in this context, how we can support it, and how we can articulate and execute these ideas in a way that makes sense in an American setting. The 2010 Symposium was a first attempt at trying to make those kinds of voices heard, but there is more that we can do.
- ***Conceptually***, we want to encourage and develop the next generation of Orthodox church musicians, because they aren't going to appear out of nowhere. We want to cultivate an environment where kids might grow up thinking, “Hey, I could be a cantor or a choir director when I grow up!” That's not something that can really be a vocation at this stage of the game, and in the super long-term it would be good to contribute in some small way to making it more of one. The National Forum of Greek Orthodox Church Musician's booklet, Starting a Youth Music Program in Your Parish, is a good place to start, but it seems to me that there is more that can be done from there. To this end, we hope to eventually set up a scholarship fund to benefit Orthodox college students at Indiana University who want to pursue the study of their Church's music.

All of these things are just a taste of what we hope to do and what we're actively planning to do. We hope that you're intrigued, and we hope you'll keep in touch with us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Richard Barrett". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Richard" and last name "Barrett" clearly distinguishable.

Richard Barrett  
Artistic Director