

## The Tone 5 Bolhar melody

This is the most difficult of the Bolhar (Bulgarian) melodies, which are used at the funeral service and in singing the hymns of the solemn Vesper procession called the litija.

Here is the fifth of the Hymns of Saint John Damascene, commemorating the faithful departed. It is sung at Vespers on Friday evenings in Tone 5, and at the funeral service.



I re-called the proph - - - et cry - ing out: I am ash - es and dust!

Then I con - sid - ered those in the tombs; I be - held bones

laid bare and I said: Which is king or sol - dier, rich or poor,

sin - ner or just? But, O Lord and Lov - er of all of us, give rest

to your serv - - - ants a - mong the just.

### The form of the melody

This melody is a good example of the more ornate kind of prostopinije chant represented by the irmos melodies: it is made up of common melodic patterns with a great deal of variation from one phrase to the next.

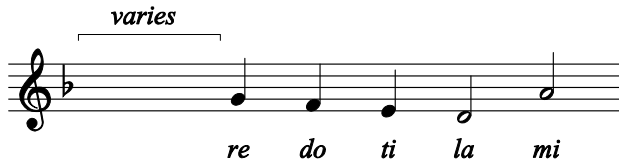
So it is easiest to look at this melody as consisting of three basic phrases. The A phrase goes like this:



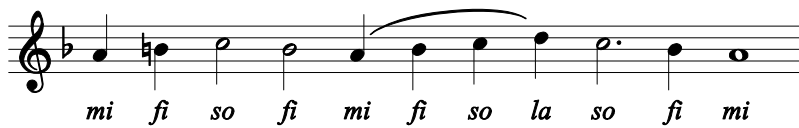
*varies*

mi re di re mi do re do ti do re

The B phrase ends with a characteristic upward leap of a fifth:



And the C phrase is very “modal” – that is, it is neither major nor minor:



The melody has almost *modulated* (changed keys) so that *do* is on G rather than F. Every time we return to the A phrase, we will need to make a transition back to the “do on F”.

So let’s look through the Tone 5 funeral hymn from the beginning, and see how the music flows from one phrase to the next.

Here is the first phrase:



Take a look at the F natural (the second syllable “-et” of “prophet.”) Because we aren’t used to seeing a natural in this position – as a note to stop on – it is easy to get lost right on this note.

But if we omit the little ornamental “turn” on the “pro-“ of “prophet”, we can see that this phrase is perhaps easier than we thought:

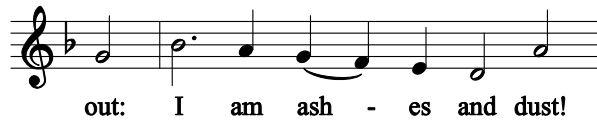


Now add the rest of the phrase:



Once you are used to “landing” on *do* – F natural – you should be able to sing the entire first phrase all the way through. Every time we return to that F natural, it will have a feeling or stability, as if we have our feet back on the ground.

Here is the last note of that same phrase, together with the entire second phrase:



The first phrase ended on *re*, so to start the second phrase, we need to go up to *fa*. If you can find your way to *fa*, the rest of the phrase is just a descending scale – *fa mi re do ti la* – followed by a leap of a perfect fifth up to *mi*.

Note: the half note on “and” (“and dust”) is going to sound like it comes just a little quicker than we expected. This is normal, and serves to really emphasize these words (“and dust”) in a striking way. Try to sing the rhythm as it is notated!

In the third phrase, the B natural on “I” changes the “sound” of the scale:

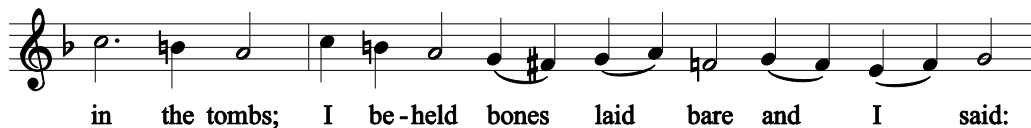


But if you can sing the first three notes, which will sound LIKE *la-ti-do*, the entire rest of the phrase is easy, and wonderfully minor – it now sounds like our *do* is on C instead of F:

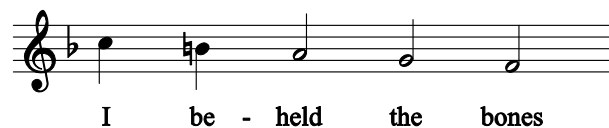
*La – ti – do – ti – la – so – la – ti – do – re – do – ti – la*

Practice the first three phrases until you can sing them accurately.

In the fourth phrase, we start out with “*do* on C” – the modulated tonality – and end up back on our original key. Look at the entire phrase; the first three notes are the same as the ones for “in the tombs” that ended the previous phrase:



The notes on “bones laid bare” delay the return to our original *do*. Suppose we omit the delay and see if it’s easier to sing:



Practice this till it is second nature! Then add the remainder of the phrase:

I be - held the bones and I said:

Now we are ready to sing the entire phrase. Remember that when we get to the word bare, we are back on our good old-fashioned *do*, and you should feel a great deal of stability return. The natural on F is not a sign of a problem; it's a sign that things are back to normal!

in the tombs; I be-held bones laid bare and I said:

The next phrase ends with the same leap upward that we remember from “ashes and dust”:

said: Which is king or sol - dier, rich or poor, sin - ner or just?

But what's going on in the earlier part of this phrase? In effect, the melody circles around to emphasize each class or person whose bones these might be. Pay attention to each place where the melody rises to *fa*:

said: Which is king or sol - dier, rich or poor, sin - ner or just?

Insert a short break in the voice after “poor”, and *stay on the same note* to sing the beginning of “sinner”. It is very tempting for the cantor to start descending too early, and end up lost.

The next phrase has our familiar “modulation” or modal passage, just little simpler than the first time:

just? But, O Lord and Lov - er of all of us,

Now, for the final phrase, we would expect that it will take some effort to return to our “home pitch”, with *do* on F. But the final phrase right away on F natural, with *do re mi*. Practice singing this final phrase, starting at the end of the previous phrase:

all of us, give rest to your serv - ants a - mong the just.

Every time we return to the F natural – in the words “prophet”, “bare”, and “servants” – you should feel the return to the solidity of our original scale. (But don’t over-emphasize it; just acknowledge it and keep singing!)

Now go back and sing the entire hymn. Since the last note is the same as the first, you can sing the hymn several times in a row if you like, without stopping.

## Another example

Here is one of the hymns of the litija service at Great Compline on the eve of the Nativity:



The Per-sian Magi clearly recog-nized the heav-en-ly King born on earth.

Led by a bright star, they ar-rived at Beth-le-hem

bear-ing choice gifts of gold and frank-in-cense and myrrh; and fall-ing down,

they a-dored him; for they saw the eternal One, ly-ing as a Child, in the cave.

Remember that the words “King”, “gold”, and “Child” are precisely the points at which the melody should return to a sense of stability and “groundedness.”