



**IN MEMORIAM**  
**ARCHPRIEST MICHAEL FORTOUNATTO**  
**(1931–2022)**

**F**ather Michael Fortounatto was born in Paris, the eldest son of Russian émigrés Vsevolod and Evgenia, on 19 May 1931. After 1940 the family moved to Asnières, where the parish of Christ the Saviour was an important centre for Russian spirituality and culture. He spoke only Russian as a small child, and was very attentive to the church choir. At the age of ten he began to frequent the Russian Cadets school in Versailles, and during this period his musical talents became apparent. From the age of fifteen he sang regularly in the choir and conducted a children's group.

Fr Michael began his studies at the Institut de Théologie Orthodoxe Saint-Serge in Paris in 1951, and it was here that he built up the technical and theological knowledge that he would so freely share in later life. He worked on liturgical chant under the direction of Nicolas Ossorgin, and Fr Michael recalled that both the singing and the teaching at the Institute preserved the liturgical *ordo* of the pre-revolutionary Russian church life. After his studies and his military service, Fr Michael married Mariamna Feokritoff in 1961; they moved to England the following year at the invitation of Bishop (later Metropolitan) Anthony Bloom. He succeeded his father-in-law, Mikhail Feokritoff, as choir director in 1965. Mariamna dedicated herself to icon painting, having studied with Leonid Uspensky while in Paris, and later began to lecture on the subject herself.

He was ordained priest on 28 December 1969, and though he maintained an intensive pastoral ministry, he continued to conduct the Cathedral choir. Part of this work was his membership of the translation committee that was established, and the adaptation of Russian chants to the English language. He began to travel regularly to Russia in the 1990s, a frequent guest at conferences and workshops dealing with sacred music, and between 1994 and 2002 organized six seminars on sacred chant for seminary teachers and choir directors at the Moscow Theological Academy, and published on the history and theory of church music and practical questions relating to choir conducting.

In 2005 Fr Michael retired and moved to Chargeraud in France, not far from his brothers Vladimir and André. Fr Michael was transferred into the clergy of the Archdiocese of Russian Orthodox Churches in Western Europe, and in 2009 gave a series of lectures at the St Serge Institute entitled "Liturgical musicology". Though his health worsened from 2014 onwards, he continued to write and to correspond.

My own recollections of Fr Michael date from even before I was received into the Orthodox Church. He invited me to sing in the choir at the Cathedral of the Dormition at Ennismore Gardens, because I could read Cyrillic, as well as pretend to be a tenor, and was received into the Church a little later. I remember Fr Michael's clear direction and his manner of explaining the mysteries of Russian chant, as well as his beautifully crystalline voice.

We also worked together when The Tallis Scholars reissued their disc of Russian Orthodox music, which had astounded me when it first appeared (most of all because of John Tavener's "Great Canon of St Andrew of Crete" and the mediaeval polyphony) so that I could write new booklet notes for the CD, and I became a regular visitor to his house and plunderer of his library. It is difficult to overestimate quite how much I learnt from this experience.

I also had the great joy of having him sing the priest's parts when I recorded John's "Panikhida" for Ikon Records (with the Kastalsky Chamber Choir); in particular, I shall never forget the palpable tension as I waited for him to sing the exclamation at the end of the Lord's Prayer – I wanted him to come in slightly early to as to overlap with the choir, and he was waiting for the choir to stop. I gave him a signal and he came in, and you can hear that extraordinary moment in the recording. We made other recordings in the Cathedral too, and gave some memorable concerts.

When I moved to Portugal, I was a regular telephone correspondent, usually with a doubt regarding some liturgical detail or other, and then, even later, when he moved to France, an electronic correspondent. He was always so generous with his time, and invariably patient. I translated his "Cours de Musicologie," which began to appear in instalments online, from French to English, and e-mailed him to ask for his corrections and approval, and though we did not progress far because of his health, he was certainly approving. I regret that his health problems meant that he was unable to attend any of the ISOCM conferences, but he was very much aware of the Society's activities. I imagine him now directing the heavenly choirs, and leading them with the bell-like clarity of his voice.

The Very Reverend Archpriest Michael Fortounatto fell asleep in the Lord on the evening of 19 February 2022 at the age of 90.

Protopresbyter Ivan Moody