

Melodies for Simple Responses

In addition to the various melodies in the eight tones, the prostopinije tradition provides traditional melodies for readings, prayers, and the people's responses at the Divine Liturgy, Vespers and Matins, and other services. This handout explains the simple response melodies – the melodies which are sung *in response* to chanting by the priest, deacon, or ecclesiarch, and which do not involve repetition or alternating pairs of melodies.

The short Amen

The word “amen” is Hebrew, and means “so be it.” We use this word to express our agreement with the priest's prayers on our behalf, and to conclude our own prayers.

The beginning of the Divine Liturgy, for example, begins with a solemn opening blessing:

Blessed is the kingdom of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,
now and ever and forever.

This blessing, like all the priest's prayers, can be chanted or intoned in a variety of ways. But in almost every case, it ends with a **cadence** (closing formula) which concludes on the tonic or *do*. This sets both the scale and the pitch for the people's response:

Priest:

...now and ever and fore-ver. A - men.

This three-note **short Amen** is the simplest of our chanted responses. When singing it, you can begin either as the priest's voice is holding the last note of the blessing, or after a one-beat pause. Whenever it occurs, this response emphasizes our common worship with one another, and with the clergy, as well as with the angels and the whole company of heaven. It should not be passed over lightly.

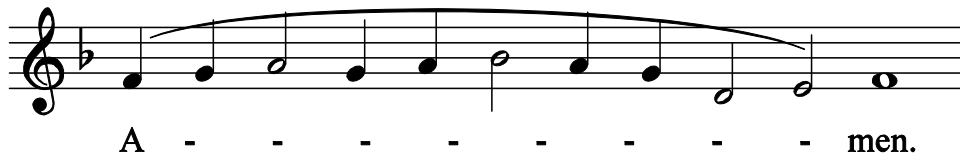
As with all our responses, you must match the priest's pitch to the extent possible. The people's response must *sound* connected to the priest's blessing. If this is done properly, then the priest or deacon's next prayer or exclamation, in the same key as the Amen, will continue this smooth flow.

The long Amen, and the other responses based on it

At the end of each service, and at certain moments during the services, we sing a more ornate Amen, which we call here the **long Amen**. Here is one way it was traditionally sung in Europe:

A - - - - - men.

In the United States, the cadence was ornamented with a leap of a perfect fourth downward, and two notes ascending to the final *do*:



The next-to-last note is the seventh of the scale, or *ti*, sometimes called a “leading tone,” as it “leads into” the final note. Over time, this version of the long Amen became the common one here in America, and made its way from the oral tradition into our printed chant books.

This pattern of notes – the long Amen, with or without the leading tone - became the source for the melodies of most of the other simple prostopinije responses.

Why a long Amen?

There are two reasons for a long response:

- It can mark moments of special solemnity or resolution.
- It can “cover” the priest’s actions or silent prayers, as it does at the Divine Liturgy, when the priest has several things to do at the holy table before continuing.

It is important to realize that not all solemn singing should be slow! Slow measured singing can add intensity to a service, but not if it *drags*, or makes the hymns incomprehensible or ugly. When singing slowly, you must make an especial effort to watch your breathing, in order to keep the pitch from dropping, and maintain the flow of the service.

In the case of the long Amen, it has become common in some places to come to a complete stop and take a breath just before the lowest note (the beginning of the ornamental cadence). If possible, you should *continue singing* at this point, even if you have to steal a breath immediately before the low note. A better place to do this might be just *after* the highest note. In either place, the note you sing just before you breathe can be “broadened” and held just slightly longer than its notated value. As the people continue singing the note, you can steal a breath without it being noticeable.

It would be best, of course, to breathe just **BEFORE** the response, and exercise enough control of your breathing to make it all the way to the end of the phrase in good voice. (Very often, you will have more air left in your lungs than you realize!) But if you *must* take in more air in the middle of a phrase, then you should pick in advance where you will breathe, so that it does not distort the response.

Responses based on the long Amen

As mentioned earlier, almost all the simple prostopinije responses are variations of the long Amen.

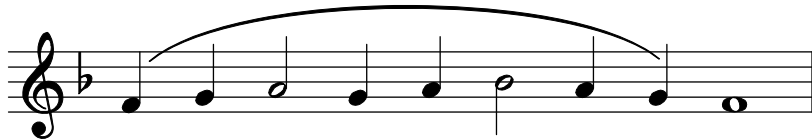
Whenever the priest intones, “Peace be to all”, we respond:

Priest:



And to your spir - - - it.

Compare this with the original version of the long Amen:



A - - - - - men.

Please note: the response “And to your spirit” does not start on *do*, where the priest’s invocation most probably ended; it starts on the third degree of the same scale, *mi*. So taking the priest’s final note as *do*, go up a major third (from *do* to *mi*) to start the response.

The timing here is the same as for the Amen. If the priest holds the final note of his exclamation, then begin singing the response while he is holding the note. If he does not hold the final note, then begin the response on the next “beat”. You do not need to match his tempo exactly, especially if it is either very fast or very slow. Aim for a consistent pace that the congregation can comfortably follow.


Before and after the Gospel at the Divine Liturgy, we sing:

Priest:




Glo - ry to you, O Lord, glo - ry to you.

Before the Symbol of Faith, our response completes the priest’s exclamation:



The Fa - ther, and the Son, and the Ho - ly Spir - it:



the Trin - i - ty, one in es - sence and un - di - vid - - ed.

The melody for this response consists of the long Amen, *twice*. The first time, we sing all the way up to the fifth degree of the scale, *so*. The second time, the melody repeats the high note *fa* and inserts a small scale-wise passage connecting the two high notes.

At the beginning of the Anaphora, we sing a response which is NOT closely based on the long Amen, but goes all the way up to *so* by means of a broken chord (*do – mi – so*). In this way, the response serves to get our attention at the beginning of the most solemn part of the Divine Liturgy.

Priest:

Mer-cy, peace, a sac - ri - fice of praise.

The remaining responses at the start of the Anaphora follow the long Amen, sometimes starting on *do*, and sometimes on *mi*:

Priest:

And with your spir - - - it.

Priest:

We lift them up to the Lord.

Priest:

It is prop - er and just.

At the end of the Anaphora, our response uses the long Amen melody, omitting the middle segment:

Priest:

And re - mem - ber all your peo - ple.

The melody for the response we sing while the priest prepares for Holy Communion consists of two very ornate repetitions of the long Amen:

One is ho - ly, one is Lord, Je - sus Christ,
to the glo - ry of God the Fa - ther. A - - - - - men.

Finally, as cantors, you should be aware of the extended version of the long Amen, which is still sometimes heard:

A - - - - - men.

The minor Amen

We mentioned earlier that the priest always ends on the tonic pitch, or *do*. This is not always true: at services for the departed, and during penitential seasons or services, the priest may end on *la* rather than *do*. This can usually be identified by the “minor key” tonality of his singing.

Priest:

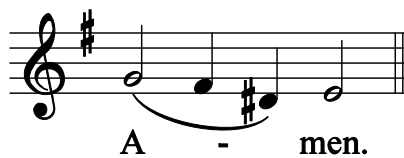
Bless-ed is our God, always, now and ever and for - ev - er.

This is when the minor Amen is used:

A - men.

This response can be found in the Divine Liturgies book in the panachida service, and during the singing of the Cherubic Hymn melody for the departed.

Like the long Amen, the minor Amen has an ornamental version which emphasizes the concluding pitch:



We will study this again when we cover the services for the dead.