

THE BYZANTINE CHORAL PROJECT:  
ICONS/IDOLS  
**IRENE**  
**(PODCAST)**

**AUDIO SCRIPT: Episode 12**

Book and lyrics  
by  
Helen Banner

Music  
by  
Grace Oberhofer

[h.banner@outlook.com](mailto:h.banner@outlook.com)  
917-373-3947

## VOCAL PARTS

We are interested in casting cis women, trans women, non-binary, gender non-conforming and gender fluid performers of all backgrounds who meet the note range for any individual role.

The characters splinter into two groups during the course of the play. Some characters are "iconoclasts", who want to destroy all religious icons, which they condemn as idols. Other characters are "iconophiles" who are committed to re-introducing religious icons across the whole Byzantine Empire. For them icons are essential to personal worship and a way to get close to an invisible god.

## CHORAL VOICES:

Start as THE COURT all  
(often singing as two groups COURT 1 and COURT 2)

In part two of the play The Court gradually divides into:

The iconophiles in the court: all  
PHILES (develops from COURT 1)

The iconoclasts in the court: all  
CLASTS (develops from COURT 2)  
Made up of the CAESARS (Constantine V's sons from his third marriage) and the powerful military ARGYROS family.

## SOLOISTS (from within the CLASTS and PHILES):

CHARACTER NAME /BRIEF DESCRIPTION/ AGE /GENDER IN STORY/NOTE RANGE

Irene	Child bride, Empress	F
Staurakios	Young court eunuch	M/Non-binary
Constantine V	Emperor, iconoclast, Irene's father-in-law	M
Leo	Irene's husband, Emperor	M



**START EPISODE TWELVE**

A.

NARRATOR

Leo is buried and Irene is Regent for her son. Staurakios tries to be with her constantly, so much so that around the court a new phrase fills the air...

COURT

(whispering on repeat)

Irene and her eunuch...

NARRATOR

But Staurakios still feels this is temporary... a fix he hasn't quite got under control. Sometimes he escapes deep into the city, looking to see how others feel, giving Megaris her chance....

Irene is with Megaris in her room.

MEGARIS

It's hard for Constantine to come in here... to see so many images painted on the walls.

IRENE

Well he has to come in here. I want him to learn how to speak up again. He doesn't behave like a prince.

MEGARIS

It's tiredness, the Argyros are still dragging him to drill and he doesn't sleep at all. You go in at dawn and he tells you he hasn't even closed his eyes.

IRENE

Maybe he's not tired enough when he goes to bed.

Megaris snorts. Beat.

IRENE (CONT'D)

You see one thing happen, Megaris, and that's it, you think you know how everything will go.

MEGARIS

No. I don't know how everything will go. Of course not. Who'd have thought we'd see Cyra bending her knee to you again? But talking to Constantine, he's still so scared to say what he wants/

IRENE

/Why's he scared? There's no need to be scared.  
He can have what he wants!

MEGARIS

Well he wants you to make one of his uncles  
Regent! Would you do that for him? Do it nicely  
and they would probably give you a dowager  
apartment and Constantine would be so grateful,  
he would see you're giving him what he wants...

CUT TO STAURAKIOS OUTSIDE

NARRATOR

But outside the palace walls, where Megaris  
can't go, Staurakios is now watching a group of  
young bearded men. His whole gut curls away  
from them, remembering his worst days as a  
soldier. He recognizes some of their faces.  
These are the sons and nephews and grandsons of  
the Argyros. These are the "best" of the  
bearded men.

CONSTANTINE'S FEARS, CONSTANTINE'S NEEDS

CLASTS

CONSTANTINE'S FEARS,  
CONSTANTINE'S NEEDS,

CHANGE US INTO HIS BODYGUARD.

CONSTANTINE'S FEARS,  
CONSTANTINE'S NEEDS,

CYRA AND CLASTS

WATCH US IRENE,  
BECOME EVEN MORE FIERCE.

CYRA

A WOMAN AS REGENT, A WOMAN CROWNED?

EAST AND WEST LAUGH.

CLASTS

NEVER YOU FEAR, NEVER YOU DOUBT  
NOBLE BOYS WILL JOIN US,

WE WILL BECOME A NEW ARMY,  
DEVOTED TO YOUR SON

CYRA

CONSTANTINE'S FEARS,  
CONSTANTINE'S NEEDS,

ORDER MUST BE RESTORED FOR HIM.

CLASTS  
NEVER YOU FEAR, NEVER YOU DOUBT

CYRA  
SOON MY BROTHERS WILL CALL

CYRA AND CLASTS  
FOR A MAN TO RULE  
INSTEAD OF YOU.

Aii.

NARRATOR  
Staurakios walks across the palace building,  
his mind beginning to build arguments to escape  
the fear in his body. It's a relief to be in  
the room with Irene. He knows now he wants to  
keep her ruling. He wants to change the rules.

CUT TO IRENE'S ROOM

IRENE  
(bitterly, to Staurakios)  
Did you hear them? Right outside my window?  
Outside of Eden, nothing seems to have  
changed...

STAUAKIOS  
Because outside of Eden, you have to force your  
way...

STAUAKIOS (CONT'D)

WE'LL NEVER DO THE SAME AGAIN

SO MUCH IS TIMING, SO MUCH IS LUCK,  
BUT EVERY NOW AND THEN, IRENE,  
WE MUST BE FASTER THAN TIME ITSELF.

NOTHING WILL EVER BE LIKE THIS AGAIN,  
NOTHING WILL EVER BE SO OPPORTUNE,

HERE IS THE POSSIBLE,  
A GAP OPEN IN THE STORY,  
FIRE AN ARROW FAST,  
CLAIM YOUR NEW GROUND!

IRENE  
I KNOW WHAT YOU WANT TO DO,  
BUT IS THAT HOW I WANT TO RULE?

STAUAKIOS  
THIS GAP WILL CLOSE SO QUICK,  
WE'LL NEVER DO THE SAME AGAIN.

IRENE  
WE'LL NEVER DO THE SAME AGAIN?

STAUAKIOS AND IRENE  
WE'LL NEVER DO THE SAME AGAIN.

IRENE  
BUT NOW \*

STAUAKIOS  
\* WE'RE WALKING OUTSIDE OF EDEN

STAUAKIOS (CONT'D)  
[INTO THE UNKNOWN]

IRENE  
[A WOMAN ON THE THRONE]

STAUAKIOS  
YOU'LL RULE

IRENE  
I'LL RULE

IRENE AND STAUAKIOS  
YOU'LL RULE AND YOU'LL RULE WELL

STAUAKIOS  
I PROMISE WE'LL NEVER DO THIS AGAIN,  
BUT BEARDED MEN  
ARE BEARDED MEN

IRENE  
SO WE'LL DO NOW  
WHAT WE'LL NEVER DO AGAIN

STAUAKIOS  
GOING OUTSIDE OF EDEN

IRENE  
[EVEN THOUGH MY HEART HAS DOUBTS]

STAUAKIOS  
[EVEN THOUGH YOU LOVE YOUR SON]

IRENE  
I CAN CHOOSE WHAT VIOLENCE  
I MUST DO.

B.

CUT TO THE PURPLE ROOM

IRENE (CONT'D)  
Forty days in,  
of course,  
a cabal of men,  
call for my brother in law  
to be Regent instead of me.  
Men with muscles  
pressing in on me, when  
I need my eyes looking  
outwards to threats  
on our borders.

STOURAKIOS  
Pushing in on you,  
pushing in on me,  
  
outside of Eden,  
why should these men  
have their say?

IRENE  
Anger  
sears my heart  
  
A fire  
comes out my mouth.

CLASTS  
We call for  
an Emperor  
to raise her son  
to power.

IRENE (CONT'D)  
I burn with rage  
at the stupidity of these men,  
who do not understand  
that now is not the time  
for an internal squabble.  
  
I see my son's eyes on me.  
I pray to my Lady  
and she says,  
  
"Eve  
take your hand  
and remake Adam"

CONSTANTINE VI

These men are my family...

CLASTS

(shocked whisper)

She takes  
them  
to the  
purple room.

The Philes stamp with their hands.

IRENE

I take  
them  
to the purple  
room.

I call for  
the knife.

MEGARIS

(to Constantine VI)

Call out to her!  
Tell her you don't want this done,  
a Mother has to serve her son.

Constantine VI tries but he has no  
voice loud enough.

CONSTANTINE VI

There's nothing I can say.  
Even Cyra knows...

her brothers, my uncles,  
all these men...

IRENE

I see  
their bodies  
change before  
my eyes.

I make them  
less.  
I make them  
more.

I say what  
they can be  
in my world.

IRENE (CONT'D)

I have these men  
these rivals,  
(MORE)

IRENE (CONT'D)

these dangerous  
bodies, beaten  
and tonsured  
and exiled.

The hand stamp ends.

I become  
purple.

MEGARIS

Constantine,  
close your eyes!

Megariss pulls Constantine VI to  
the side.

SOUNDSCAPE/SOUND OF A BACCHANAL:  
The Philes start to dance, Irene  
joins them, a WILD DANCE that  
settles back down...

.... into a courtly ceremonial.

Then stills to nothing.

CYRA

Don't stop here.  
Look at her small son.  
What happens  
to him now?

NARRATOR

In seventeen years,  
it is written that

Irene has her men thrust  
a stake into Constantine's eye.

They're going to gouge out  
one eye and then the next.

Constantine VI puts his hands over  
his face, over his eyes feeling  
them gone.

Everyone else watching,  
sick to their stomach,  
imagining their eyes  
being put out.

He dies a few days later,  
knowing his mother  
did that to him.

CYRA

But .  
Still.

I still want her power,  
I still want to be her!/  
/

Cyra covers her mouth in shock at  
what she just admitted.

STAUAKIOS

/You, you, Cyra  
you disappear  
now. Never spoken  
of again.

IRENE

I take my husband's  
death crown,  
add extra pearls  
and walk through the city  
to give it back  
to the church.

PHILES

Do you know  
what they found in Thrace,  
digging in the dirt?

CLASTS

A coffin,  
a dead man's body,  
no omen of good.

PHILES (SOLO)

That coffin was saintly,  
on its lid it said  
"the sun will look on me again  
in Holy Irene's reign".

PHILES 1

Irene sends soldiers to fight  
the Arab Al-Khabir

PHILES

and she wins,

PHILES 2,3

so now we know  
icons don't steal your strength.

Constantine VI sneers quietly.  
Irene sees.

(MORE)

AWAY

IRENE  
WARM JOY BURNING COLD AWAY  
I WATCH MY SON  
AND SEE

COLD PAIN,

THE SNEER OF AN  
OLD MAN'S FACE;

BUT HOW DOES  
A SAINT  
LOOK UPON  
HER CHILD?

GAZING FAR AWAY,

FAR AWAY,

SHE HOLDS OUT  
FRAGILE HANDS.

HE SEES  
THE STATUE HAS NO  
HUMAN  
HEART.

BUT HOW  
SHOULD A CHILD  
LOOK UPON A SAINT?

MY SON LOOKS AWAY,

LOOKS AWAY,

I LET MY TIRED EYES CLOSE.

I FEEL MY HANDS.  
WHAT HAVE THEY DONE?

I AM HOLY. I AM HOLY.

STILLED, STILLED FOR THE CALL,

I AM JUST,

MY HEART  
CAN'T BLEED.

LOOK ON ME  
AND WHAT I DO.

I AM HOLY, I AM HOLY,

I AM  
THE EMPRESS

IRENE.

Bii.

She looks up and sees Megaris on  
the edge of the group.

MEGARIS

Send me home now,  
Irene Sarantapechos.

I want out of this chorus.

IRENE

No no. Cyra is gone. You're Constantine's nurse  
now/

MEGARIS

/who could be his nurse now? In this madness?/

STAUAKIOS

/What madness? This is done, this will never  
happen again! Now \*

IRENE AND PHILES

\* we're outside of Eden \*

STAUAKIOS

\* something new is growing now, can't you feel  
it? We're at peace again.

STAUAKIOS AND PHILES

Irene will rule

IRENE AND STAUAKIOS

and rule well.

IRENE

(to Megaris)

All I'll do now is care for him.

MEGARIS

I hope that's what I hear.

That one day Constantine  
gets to rule,

I'll pray to my Lady  
that I'm just blind,

and I can't see  
this future she lets you see...

A foot stamp over Megaris's final words. The Philes start to sing.

CLOSING CHANT

PHILES  
I LOOK ON MY LADY AND  
LOVE COMES OUT HER EYES.

CLASTS  
AN ICON.

PHILES  
THERE SHE LIVES  
CLOSE IN THE PAINT  
AND GOLD.

CLASTS  
A THING SEEN \*

PHILES  
HELPING ME  
SEE THINGS I CANNOT SEE.

CLASTS  
\* IN A FALLING WORLD.

PHILES  
MY LORD  
IS MY LADY  
IS MY LORD.

I LOOK ON MY LADY AND  
LOVE COMES OUT HER EYES.

CLASTS  
AN IDOL.

PHILES  
THERE SHE LIVES  
CLOSE IN THE PAINT  
AND GOLD.

CLASTS  
IMAGES I MUST NOT SEE \*

PHILES  
MY LORD  
IS MY LADY  
IS MY LORD.

CLASTS  
\* IN A FALLEN WORLD.

PHILES

HANG GOD'S SON,  
AND MEN AND WOMEN  
HIGH IN BEAUTY ON THE WALLS.  
THIS EMPRESS LOVES  
HER GOLDEN LADY UP ABOVE YOU ALL.

PHILES AND CLASTS

IN THE PAINT ARE MAGIC VOICES.  
IN HER EYES \*

PHILES (SOLO)

\* ARE MAGIC WORDS.

The PHILES sing their magical  
VOWEL SOUNDS again.

PHILES (CONT'D)

IN MY WORLD I HOLD HIM DEAR.

CLASTS

I HOLD HIM OUT THIS WORLD  
SO DEAR.

PHILES

I HOLD HIM DEAR  
THROUGHOUT THE FIGHT.

CLASTS

I HOLD HIM DEAR.

PHILES

I HOLD HIM DEAR.

PHILES (CONT'D)

I LOOK ON MY LADY AND  
LOVE COMES OUT HER EYES.

CLASTS

AN ICON.

PHILES

THERE SHE LIVES  
CLOSE IN THE PAINT  
AND GOLD.

CLASTS

A THING SEEN \*

PHILES

HELPING ME  
SEE THINGS I CANNOT SEE.

CLASTS

\* IN A FALLING WORLD.

PHILES

MY LORD  
IS MY LADY  
IS MY LORD.

The final words are sung in  
tandem, like a finishing Amen.

CLASTS

[AN I-DOL.]

PHILES

[AN I-CON.]

**END OF AUDIO EPISODE TWELVE**