

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

**AUDIO SCRIPT: Episode 9**

Book and lyrics  
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## 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 NINE**

ECHO "IN THE PALACE, IN THE DARK  
THE IMAGE LOVERS WAIT FOR THEIR  
CHANCE"

A.

Megariss sits with Irene in a  
locked room.

Irene is desolate, wrapped in a  
blanket, curled in a chair.

IRENE

Why would you leave it in my pillows?

MEGARIS

Why? Why? What if? You can't accuse me again  
and again of something you say you've forgiven  
me for!

IRENE

But I was thinking about it again and I'm  
realizing that you must have been encouraging  
Constantine to play with it.

MEGARIS

Oh enough! It would have been found whatever.  
You lied on the holy book! Our lady insists on  
the truth, she insists on being seen.

IRENES

But she knew why I lied. I had to lie to be  
chosen.

MEGARIS

...

IRENE

People are dying because it was found, Megaris.  
We let that happen.

MEGARIS

(firmly)

Do you need more syrup?

Irene shrugs.

IRENE

I will. The pain never goes.

MEGARIS

I'll ask the guard if I can go get some more.

Megariss leaves their room.

Walking along she gets worried.  
She can feel someone following  
her.

THE SOUND OF WALKING AND THEN THE  
SOUND OF FOOTSTEPS FOLLOWING AND  
SOMEONE FALLING INTO STEP WITH  
HER.

Aii.

CUT TO STAURAKIOS AND MEGARIS

STAURAKIOS

Hey.

MEGARIS

Who's that? Who's there?

Staurakios appears out of a  
shadow.

STAURAKIOS

It's only me. Staurakios.

MEGARIS

Well what do you want? I'm only allowed out for  
five minutes to get her poppy syrup.

STAURAKIOS

I'm arranging for her son to visit her.

MEGARIS

That's wonderful.

STAURAKIOS

Give her this.

MEGARIS

What is it?

STAURAKIOS

It's paint. That looks like gold...

Megar is looks at the small package  
in Staurakios' hand with total  
suspicion.

STAURAKIOS (CONT'D)

So she can make something for her son. Cyra  
lets him have nothing ~~for himself~~.

\*

MEGARIS

Cyra thinks she's his mother!

STAUAKIOS

I know. And it matters. Irene must be the one  
who teaches him how to say his prayers

Megarıs walks away.

CUT TO LEO

A COUGH echoing alone in a room

And then the SOUND OF CEREMONIAL  
PIPING FROM FAR AWAY COMING NEARER  
AND NEARER AS A PROCESSION  
APPROACHES.

NARRATOR

Through the hallways, the iconoclasts led by  
the Argyros are carrying their own gift to Leo.

B.

The Clasts approach Leo with a new  
CROWN.

THIS IS THE NEW CROWN

CLASTS

THIS IS THE NEW CROWN  
WE HAVE MADE FOR YOU.

ONE CHURCH JEWEL  
REPRESENTING

LEO, DESTROYER  
OF THE OLD GODS.

THIS IS A GREAT DAY  
FOR YOU AND OUR GOD.

THIS IS THE NEW CROWN  
WE HAVE MADE FOR YOU.

LEO, DESTROYER  
OF THE OLD GODS

PHILES

(in the shadows)

THERE WERE NEVER ANY OLD GODS.

ONLY.  
ONE SON.  
BORN OF ONE GOD,  
TO A MOTHER MARY.

CLASTS

THIS IS THE NEW CROWN  
WE HAVE MADE FOR YOU.

ONE CHURCH JEWEL  
REPRESENTING

LEO, DESTROYER  
OF ICONOPHILES

MAY WE WHO HAVE CROWNED YOU  
KEEP YOU IN THE PURPLE NOW.

ALL  
ONE SON BORN  
OF ONE GOD

CLASTS  
A NEW SALVATION  
FOR THE ROMANS!

PHILES  
(in the shadows)  
A CROWN LIKE A PAINTED HALO,  
ONE STOLEN JEWEL

CLASTS  
NOW WE CORRECTLY  
PUT THIS CROWN  
UPON YOUR HEAD.

ALL  
ONE KING IN ONE  
KINGLY BODY  
ON THIS ROMAN  
EARTH.

They wait, as Leo COUGHS and  
COUGHS

Finally he SPITS UP THE SPUTUM  
sitting on his lungs and takes a  
proper breath.

LEO  
Okay, I'm ready.  
Put it on my head.

He winces and CRIES OUT at the  
weight.

LEO (CONT'D)  
That burns, that doesn't feel right.

PHILES  
Suddenly we long for old gods.

Bii.

LADY 1

In Old Rome,  
the chthonic Gods  
lived Underground,

LADY 2

gods of death \*

LADY 3/CYRA

\* and fury.

LADY 1

Gods living  
in mud and lead

LADY 3/CYRA

Cold faces  
dripping with  
water, unblinking,  
looking at our  
hot desires.

LADY 2

Called  
by humans  
in need of  
magic.

LADY 3/CYRA

In Old Rome  
all the universe  
was connected  
by magic.

LADY 1

In Old Rome  
a woman  
had magic  
to survive.

LADY 2

In New Rome,  
the old Gods  
are said  
to be destroyed.

LADY 3/CYRA

Irene  
longs \*

LADY 2

\* for magic  
to save her.



CYRA  
To cast  
spells \*

MEGARIS  
\* instead  
of prayers.

LADY 1  
No.

LADY 2  
All she looks  
for is a new icon.

LADIES 2,3/CYRA  
Somehow.

LADIES  
Called by love.

CYRA  
We fear her.  
Hidden. Alone.  
Living in  
the cold. Sequestered  
in the Palace.

CUT TO IRENE AND MEGARIS

Back in the locked room, Megaris  
is resisting HANDING OVER THE  
PACKAGE.

MEGARIS  
Why open it now?

IRENE  
I can use it.

MEGARIS  
But Constantine is coming...

Irene puts down the package in her  
lap unopened.

IRENE  
You're right. Constantine is coming....

MEGARIS  
I'll go see.

She smiles at Megaris, who leaves  
the room. THE DOOR CLOSES.

LADIES

She's opening it....

Irene OPENS THE PACKAGE.

IRENE

LOOK ON ME

LOOK.  
LOOK.  
LOOK ON ME.

I'M A  
PEARL IN  
A SHELL  
THAT'S CLOSED

TIGHT.

TRAPPED  
IN MY  
ROOMS.

UNTOUCHED,  
UNSEEN.

MY SON  
GROWS UP.

FATHERED,  
NOT MOTHERED.

I DON'T  
SEE HIM  
ENOUGH TO  
BELIEVE  
HE'S STILL  
MINE.

LOOK.  
LOOK.  
LOOK  
ON ME.

AN IMAGE  
IS AN OBJECT  
AND AN EYE  
SPEAKING.

OTHER PEOPLE'S  
EYES DECIDE  
IF I'M A THING  
ALIVE.  
I MISS  
MY ICON.

I MISS  
MY LADY.

BUT  
I WONDER.

IS SHE  
REALLY GONE?

LOOK.  
LOOK.  
LOOK AT  
THE THINGS  
IN MY  
ROOM.

THE THINGS  
I LOOK AT  
DANCE WITH ME  
TO BE SEEN.

WOOD  
AND GOLD  
SILK  
AND JEWELS.

CLOSE  
MY EYES  
THEY ARE  
GONE.

OPEN MY EYES  
LOOK HARD.  
IS SHE IN  
THE AIR  
UNSEEN?

LOOK,  
LOOK,  
WOOD  
CARVED  
IN THE DARK  
IN SECRET  
STARTS TO FEEL  
HALF ALIVE.

PAINTED WITH  
SMUGGLED GOLD  
I CALL HER  
BACK INTO  
LIFE.

AN ICON  
MADE BY FAITH  
AND HOPE.

AN ICON  
TO SAVE ME.

LOOK.  
LOOK.

LIKE MAGIC  
I GIVE  
MYSELF  
BACK  
AN ICON.

A LADY  
MADE  
BY MY  
CALLING.

A DANGEROUS  
THING.

A NEEDED  
THING

A MAGIC  
STIRRING  
IN THE UNIVERSE.

IRENE  
SARANTAPECHOS  
WON'T STAY  
HIDDEN IN  
THE DARK!

AN ICON  
HEARS  
HER  
PRAYERS  
AGAIN.

AND GOD  
MY PRAYERS  
ARE VICIOUS!

PAIN  
CALLING  
OUT FOR  
FREEDOM  
AND REVENGE/

Suddenly IRENE stops singing.

Silence. She looks at her new icon  
thinking.

Biii.

IRENE (CONT'D)

/But  
I think of  
my son,  
Constantine.

So small.  
Cold and  
fragile  
in his shell.

NARRATOR

Constantine  
cracks that shell  
and marries  
a bride you choose.

IRENE

Who hears  
his prayers?  
Who keeps  
him safe?

Taken  
away from  
his Mother's  
arms?

NARRATOR

He divorces  
his wife and marries  
his mistress. He sends  
his own daughters  
into exile far away.

He locks  
his own daughters

like his mother  
into dark rooms.

Careful what  
you're about  
to do.

IRENE

(to the ICON.)

I can't  
keep you  
for myself!

IRENE (CONT'D)

Help me  
keep him safe.

NARRATOR

Keep yourself  
safe.