



The RUSSICA™ Transliteration System (for Russian and Church Slavonic)

The text in Musica Russica editions appears in modern Cyrillic characters and in phonetic transliteration. The RUSSICA™ transliteration system has been designed specifically with singing in mind, since none of the systems currently used to transliterate Russian succeed in accurately transmitting the sound of the language. Languages widely familiar to singers — Latin, Italian, German, and English — have been used as points of departure. Equivalents in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) have been supplied wherever possible.

VOWELS

Russian and Church Slavonic vowels are pure, without diphthongs, as in Latin or Italian:

Cyrillic	Transliteration	English Key Word	IPA Symbol
а	a	father	[a]
е, ѣ, э	e	bet	[E]
и, і	i	meet	[i]
о	o	obey	[o]
о (unstressed)	ǒ	sofa	[0]
у	u	food	[u]
ы	ï	dip	[ï]

The vowels ю and я following consonants are transliterated as *iû* and *iâ*, respectively. In reality it is the consonant preceding the vowel that is softened by the fleeting *i* [j] sound (see PALATALIZED CONSONANTS below). The vowels е (ѣ), ю, and я at the beginning of words or following another vowel are transliterated as *ye*, *yu*, and *ya*, respectively. The letter *y* in transliteration always represents a semi-vowel, blended with a vowel, as in *yet* or *toy*; it never sounds alone as in *copy* or *cry*.

CONSONANTS

Consonants are pronounced as in Latin or English, with the following restrictions and exceptions:

Cyrillic	Transliteration	English Key Word or Explanation	IPA Symbol
г	g	get	[g]
г (initial)	gh	voiced; no exact English equivalent; distinguish from “ <u>h</u> ” below	[V]
ж	zh	treasure	[Z]
й	y	always blended with a vowel as in <i>yet</i> , <i>toy</i> ; never sounds alone as in <i>copy</i> , <i>cry</i>	[j]
р	r	always rolled	[r]
с	s	set	[s]
х	<u>h</u>	aspirated, as in German <i>Bach</i> ; no exact English equivalent	[x]
ц	ts	lets	[ts]
ч	ch	chop	[tʃ]
ш	sh	shop	[ʃ]
щ	shch	fresh cheese	[ʃtʃ]

PALATALIZED (SOFT) CONSONANTS

Consonants followed by the vowels е, ю, or я are always softened (palatalized) by blending them with a fleeting sound of y ([j]). Consonants are also softened when followed by the “soft sign” (ь). The symbol used to designate soft consonants in transliteration is the *tilde* (~), which is similarly used in Spanish: e.g., cañon. The following examples illustrate the occurrence of soft consonant sounds in English:

Transliteration	English Equivalent	IPA Symbol
ḃ	abuse	[bʲ]
ḋ	bid you	[dʲ]
ḥ	million; Italian <i>gli</i>	[ʎ]
ḿ	amuse	[mʲ]
ṅ	canyon	[ŋʲ]
ḑ	pure	[pʲ]
ṛ	merriest (British)	[rʲ]
ṭ	bit you (said rapidly)	[tʲ]
ṽ	review	[vʲ]

The soft consonants *ḃ* and *ḋ* do not have exact equivalents in English; the necessary sound can be obtained by blending the fleeting y sound with the consonant.

APOSTROPHE OF SEPARATION

An apostrophe (') between a consonant and a vowel indicates that the vowel should be articulated with a glottal attack, instead of being linked to the consonant.

An apostrophe between two consonants such as *s* and *h*, for example, indicates that the two sounds are to be pronounced individually, not as the consonant combination *sh*.

CHURCH SLAVONIC VERSUS MODERN RUSSIAN PRONUNCIATION

The language of the Russian Orthodox liturgy is not modern Russian, but Church Slavonic. Its pronunciation underwent a gradual evolution over the past ten centuries, assuming its present form sometime in the late seventeenth century. Generally speaking, Church Slavonic is pronounced even more phonetically than modern Russian, as the following points indicate:

- (1) The adjectival ending *-ago* in masculine and neuter genitive and accusative singular is pronounced as written, rather than as “-ovo” (“-avo”) as in modern Russian.
- (2) The pronouns *yego*, *tvoyego*, *moyego*, etc., are pronounced as written, rather than as “yevo,” “tvoyevo,” “moyevo.”
- (3) The unstressed vowel *o* is pronounced “o,” rather than as a schwa as in modern Russian.
- (4) The initial consonant *g* (transliterated as *gh*) is voiced with a slightly guttural sound, rather than remaining hard as in modern Russian.
- (5) The verb endings *-yesh*, *-yet*, and *-yem* in second and third person singular and first person plural are pronounced as written, rather than as “-yosh,” “-yot,” and “-yom” as in modern Russian.

A NOTE ABOUT ACCENTED VOWELS

To clarify the textual stresses accent marks have been placed over the appropriate vowels in the transliteration. Unlike accent marks in some other languages (e. g., French), the marks in the Russica™ transliteration system do not change the character of the vowel in any way: an accented “e,” for example, has exactly the same sound (shape, vocal placement, etc.) as an unaccented “e.”