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# AMERICAN CHORAL REVIEW



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# AMERICAN CHORAL REVIEW

Winter 1988

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# Ruggieri and Vivaldi
# Two Venetian *Gloria* Settings

by HENRY BURNETT

Almost nothing is known concerning the life and works of Giovanni Maria Ruggieri. His earliest documented works date from 1689 (Venice) with the appearance of his Op. 1 collection of *Dieci Suonate da Camera* for violin, lute, and basso continuo, published under the alluring title of "*Bizzarie armoniche.*" In the foreword to these trio sonatas, Ruggieri described himself as a "*dilettante,*"[1] and from this time to about 1700 he wrote several collections of trio sonatas for the avid musical amateurs of Venice (Op. 1–4). These works are noteworthy in the evolution of the trio sonata especially for their tonal cohesiveness and thematic development.[2] There is no record of his existence past 1715 when he is known to have held the post of *maestro di cappella* in Pesaro.

In addition to his instrumental works, Ruggieri wrote no less than thirteen operas for Venice between 1696 and 1712, where he was also credited with composing one of the first comic operas to be produced in that city — *Elisa* (1711). In the field of sacred music, only a handful of Ruggieri's works have been preserved, all of them in manuscript. The most extensive of these is the *Gloria per due chori* ("9 Sett. 1708 Venezia" appears on the title page).

With regard to this extraordinary work — one of the most original examples of its kind — Ruggieri should be described as an experimenter rather than a "dilettante." Each movement presents a different combination of tone colors and textures, so that instead of the usual complement of arias and duets interspersed with four-part choruses, we get double choruses of infinite variety and orchestration, with only an occasional aria (although soloists abound). Vivaldi, who likewise spent many years in Venice, must have been greatly impressed with the work, for he apparently borrowed the last movement — a fugue on the text "Cum Sancto Spiritu in gloria Dei

[1]It should be remembered that "dilettante" at that time did not carry the same connotation it does today — an amateur musician. Rather, it meant one who was not a professional musician by trade.

[2]See William S. Newman, *The Sonata in the Baroque Era*, 1959, p. 133.

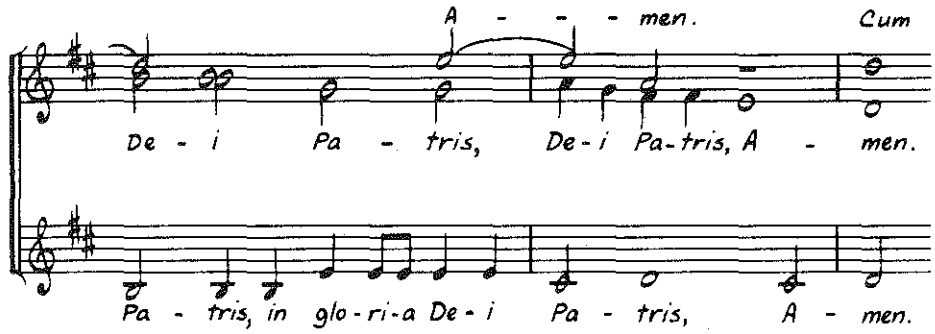
patris. Amen." — for his own *Gloria,* believed to have been composed several years later (*ca.* 1725 has been suggested).[3]

Comparison of both works will immediately show how diverse and original Ruggieri was even when compared to a composer known for his wide variety of instrumental sonorities.

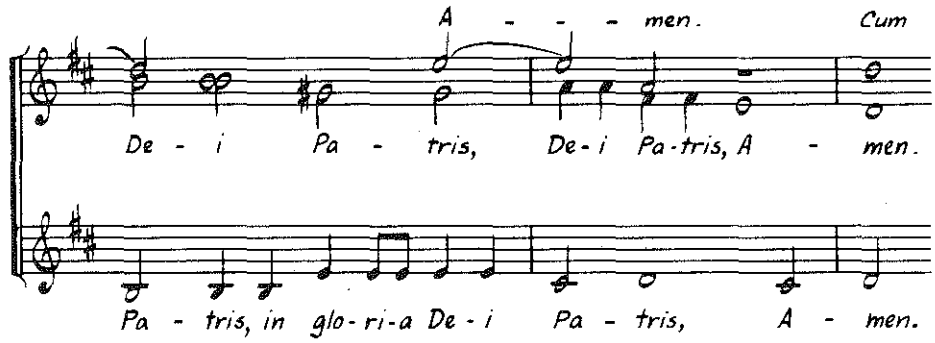
Ruggieri's division of the *Gloria* text might also have influenced Vivaldi's since both works are practically identical in this regard, though the musical settings are quite different. But even this similarity must prove secondary in importance when one considers the last movements of the two works, which are obviously related. While they contain the same thematic material, they nevertheless differ substantially in details. Vivaldi evidently

EXAMPLE 1 (Choral score reduced)

Ruggieri (Chorus I)




Vivaldi



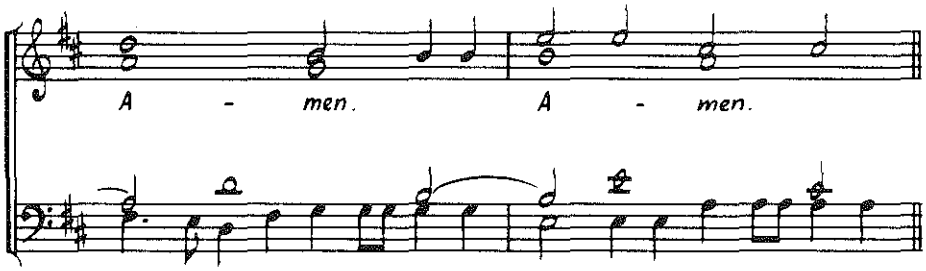

[3]Vivaldi, in fact, wrote two settings of the *Gloria* text, both using the same last movement fugue on the words "Cum Sancto Spiritu . . . ." The Vivaldi work discussed and compared in this text is the one that has been published. The other setting (believed to pre-date this work) remains in manuscript. Both Vivaldi settings, however, were most likely written after Ruggieri's, an assumption based primarily on the extensive changes made by Vivaldi in departing from the original double chorus setting.

arranged Ruggieri's essentially antiphonal texture into one for a single chorus, altering, at the same time, certain harmonic progressions, which he apparently thought weak. One such instance occurs at the opening (see Example 1).

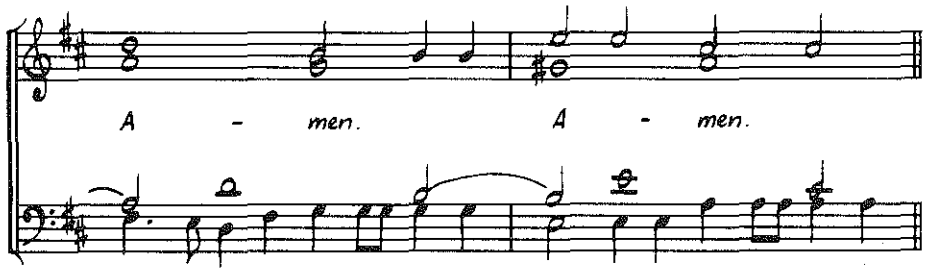
Vivaldi has raised the *g* to *g*-sharp in the alto, creating a secondary dominant. Further, the alto in the next measure descends stepwise in Ruggieri's work, while Vivaldi avoids the implied effect of the seventh. Conversely, Vivaldi is consistent in raising the leading tone to the dominant chord, often rewriting Ruggieri's vocal line (see Example 2 where the change occurs in the alto).

EXAMPLE 2

Ruggieri (Chorus I)




Vivaldi



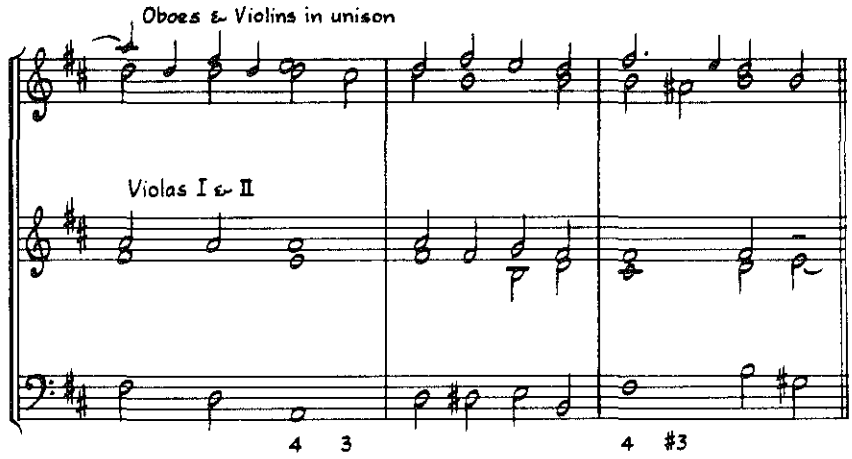

It should be made clear that while Ruggieri prefers a more modal progression towards the dominant, the dominant chord itself is always converted to major before the tonic triad. Even so, the many harmonic changes made by Vivaldi throughout the movement serve to cast both final movements in substantially different colors.

Comparisons of orchestration are equally revealing. Though Vivaldi employs only one orchestra, the instrumentation is basically similar to

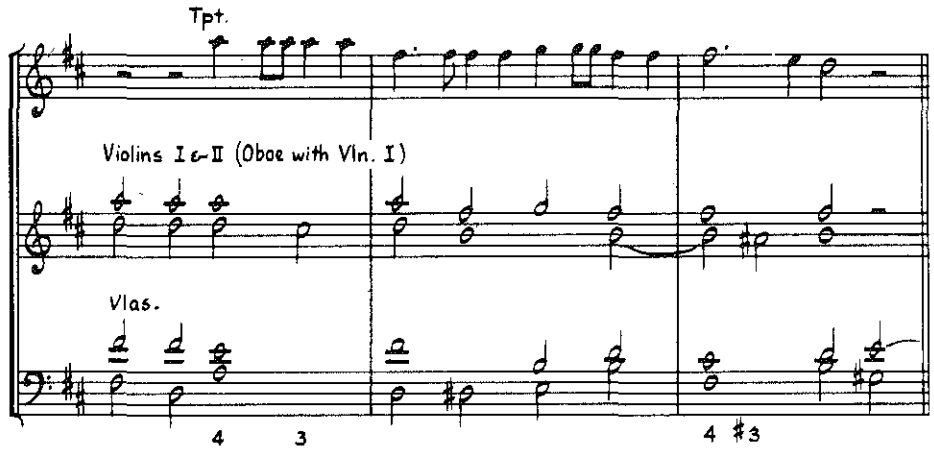
Ruggieri's (oboes and trumpets being used in both). While the trumpet parts would be expected to be similar, it is here — aside from other details in orchestration in general — that startling differences between the two movements become apparent. Ruggieri, using the resources of two orchestras (the trumpets are in unison throughout, while the oboes remain divided) shows much more flexibility in instrumental disposition than Vivaldi. The latter, however, turns what might be considered a handicap into an advantage by enhancing the trumpet line and putting it into service where Ruggieri does not. A striking example occurs towards the close of the chorus where Vivaldi creates a trumpet part that stands out above the choral and instrumental forces, not only in its higher range, but also in its faster moving rhythms outlining the countersubject which is heard first at the outset of the movement (see Example 3).

EXAMPLE 3 (Orchestral score reduced)

Ruggieri (Orchestra I)




Vivaldi



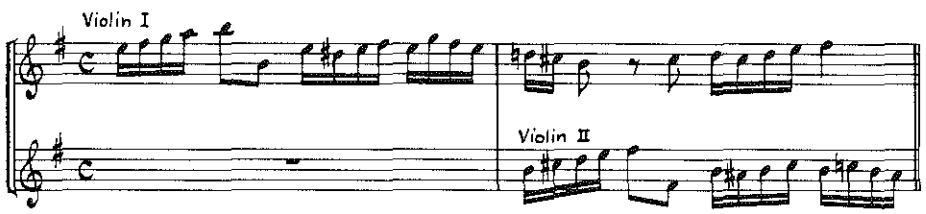
One can easily see that the trumpet part does not account for the only difference in orchestration. Much of the string writing has also been revised. However, Ruggieri's orchestration has its advantages, too. One must remember that the oboes are associated, in the Ruggieri work, with the first chorus and the trumpets with the second. Ruggieri maintains this disposition throughout, hence the reason for their absence in the quoted example. Even with this restriction, Ruggieri has planned a dramatic ending with foresight by introducing the second chorus before both are finally combined. He thereby avails himself of the added trumpet brilliance as part of a progressive climax. Thus, a rather different overall conception can be seen; each is equally effective in its given context.

The remainder of Ruggieri's work is no less interesting, and there are numerous passages than can easily stand comparison with the best of Baroque church compositions. Yet there are certain "crudities" of harmony that might jar the senses for a moment and then be gone. It is difficult to say whether such instances were mere oversights to be corrected at a later date (the manuscript is hastily written), or whether they were actually intended.

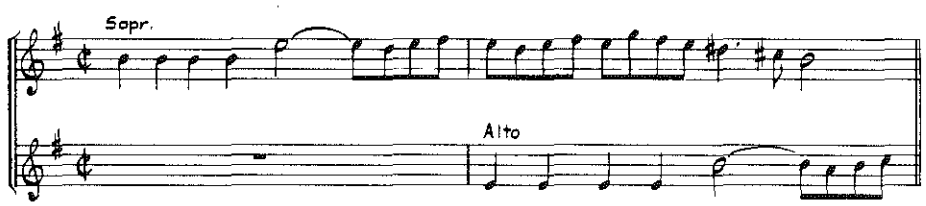
When Vivaldi reviewed the score for use in his own *Gloria* of *ca.,* 1725, harmonic trends had evolved that made his changes seem natural. The strong harmonic direction of the fugal subject in the "Propter magnam gloriam" section of Vivaldi's work, with its implied major dominant close (see Example 4), might well have been derived from Ruggieri's opening violin statement in the same key from the "Domine Fili unigenite" section of the latter's *Gloria,* where Ruggieri maintains a minor dominant ending to his subject.

EXAMPLE 4

Ruggieri

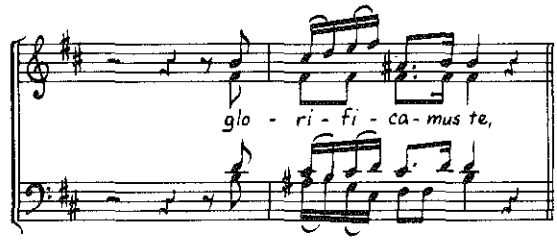



Vivaldi



Ruggieri's score contains several examples of striking pungency; one of the more intriguing examples occurs in the "Laudamus te" (see Example 5).

EXAMPLE 5




Yet the movement of each voice within its own context can easily be explained by principles of part-writing, a fact true of all such examples contained in the work. One might argue that the passage was incorrectly notated, but the second chorus follows immediately with an exact repetition, note for note.

It is these passages that lend a distinctly original and vivacious flavor to Ruggieri's *Gloria,* the historical importance of which lies not only in the fact that it marks the final flowering of the Venetian multi-choral tradition, whose origins date back to the end of the sixteenth century, but also for its undoubted influence on the last composers to uphold that tradition. Yet on its own merits the *Gloria* is a strong musical composition and deserves to be revived and absorbed into present-day church repertories.

The author's performance edition with Latin and English text was published in a vocal score by Walton Music Corporation, Chapel Hill, N.C. Its introduction, from which this article was drawn, contains a highly instructive chart presenting a detailed comparison of Ruggiero's and Vivaldi's works, movement by movement. Instrumental parts are available on rental.

The *American Choral Review* is indebted to the publishers for permission to reprint the music examples.

# *La Betulia Liberata* An Oratorio of the Young Mozart

by JONATHAN ENGLISH

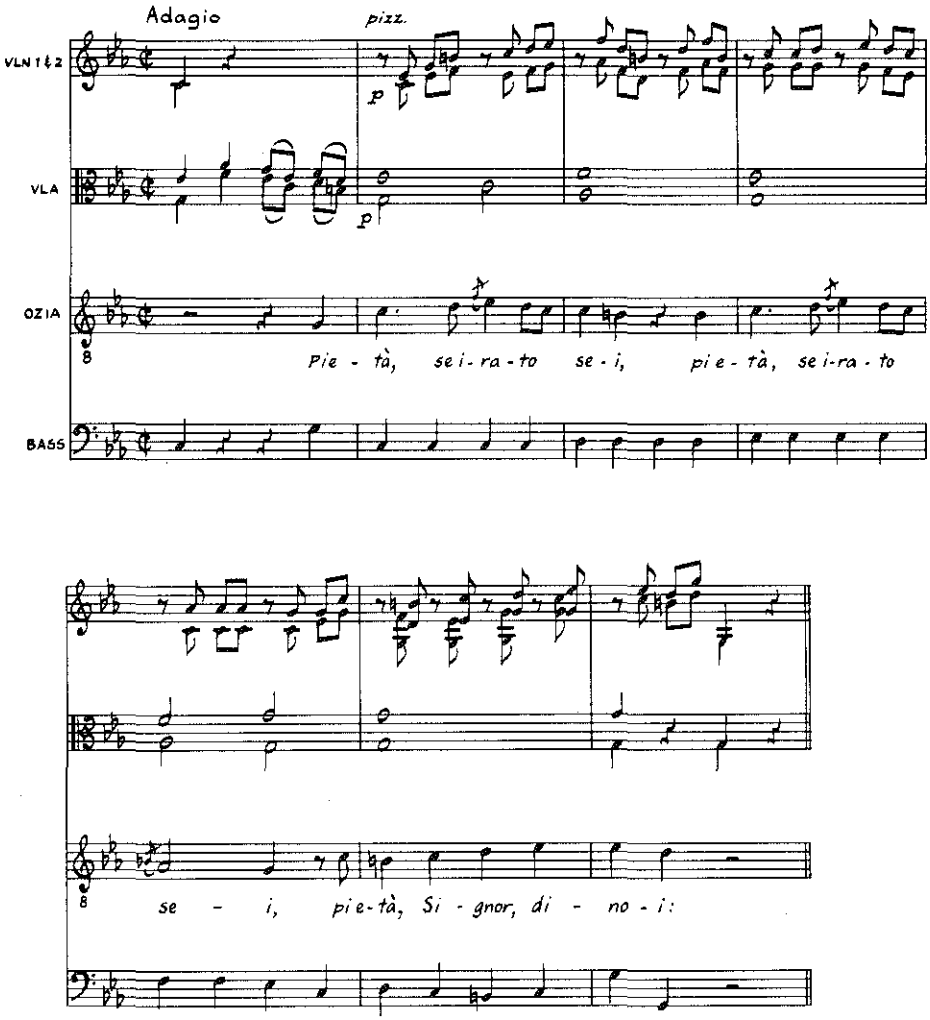
Whereas we have a fairly clear view of Bach's and Handel's choral *oeuvres,* the extent of Haydn's and Mozart's choral writing remains somewhat nebulous to the student of choral music. But the commitment to sacred music is conspicuous from the beginning of the creative careers of both Classic composers, and the choral tradition is immediately apparent in their early works.

Mozart had composed Offertories and Masses in his early Salzburg years, and on the first of his Italian journeys he received a commission that presented him with an initial opportunity to deal with the form of the Italian oratorio. The work, based on a text by Metastasio, tells the heroic Old Testament story (from the Apocrypha) of the liberation of Bethulia, the fortress in southern Galilee, through Judith. While the libretto follows the typical operatic pattern that ruled the form of the Italian oratorio — essentially a sequence of arias — it contains several choral scenes that provided a particular challenge to the young composer. The personages of the libretto are the following: Ozia, Prince of Bethulia; Judith, widow of the King of Judah; Amital, a noble Israelite woman; Achior, Prince of the Ammonites; Cabri and Carmi, chiefs of the city of Bethulia; and a chorus of inhabitants.

Holofernes, the Assyrian general, had the city surrounded and its water supply cut off, hoping to hasten its capture. Ozia reproaches the despondent inhabitants and confirms his decision not to surrender. Amital and Cabri describe the distress of the encircled city and urge the prince to open the gates. Ozia manages to negotiate five days of grace. When Judith hears of this, she comes forward horrified by the decision and chides the Israelites for their weakness and their lack of faith and trust in God. Achior comes from the enemy camp; Holofernes has banished him for having praised the Israelites' courage and the power of their God. Judith asks Ozia to let her leave the city with her maid yet says nothing of her intent. The people, perplexed, exhort the faith and courage of Judith.

The Second Part opens with Ozia and Achior disputing the belief in one God. Ozia, the Jew, tries to convince the Ammonite Achior that there is but one God. Amital is expressing his fear when shouts of "to arms" are heard in the distance. Judith returns and tells how she has succeeded in killing the enemy, and as proof holds up the severed head of Holofernes. Judith's desperate courage persuades Achior to profess a belief in the true God. The Israelites beg forgiveness for their despondency. Cabri reports that the enemy has fled in all directions after finding the body of their commander. A prayer of thanksgiving to God brings the story to a close.

EXAMPLE 1

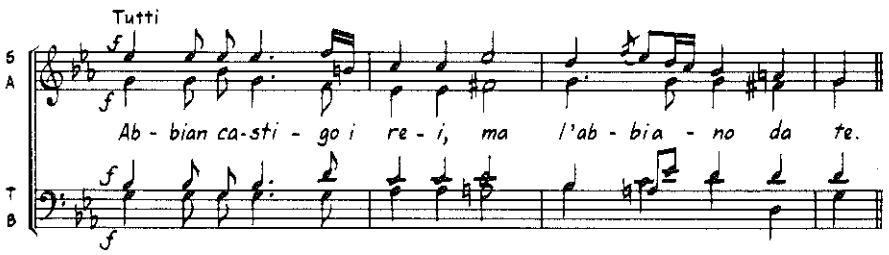


The music of the fifteen-year-old Mozart, beginning with the unusually foreboding tone of the overture, is a wonder. The arias, though typical of their time as accomplished bravura pieces, are filled with noble dramatic characterization, and they are marked by a surprising tendency towards terseness. Instead of using the traditional da capo form, Mozart often repeats only the second half of the opening section. Mozart was to remain ever sensitive to the da capo problem. "It will get far too long," he wrote to his father about a particular repeat called for in the *Idomeneo* libretto (November 24, 1780).

The choral movements, surprisingly easy to perform, are a model of Classic clarity. Not only are they excellent examples of the traditional choral style of the *azione sacra,* but they also offer the most beautiful music of the work. In the first chorus, Ozia and his people offer a prayer to their God in a very moving chorus with solo. Over a bass suggesting a funeral march, the parts of the first and second violins weave chromatic lines which, as the solo part enters, change to a pizzicato accompaniment, while sustained tones in the divided viola parts support the solo voice (Example 1).

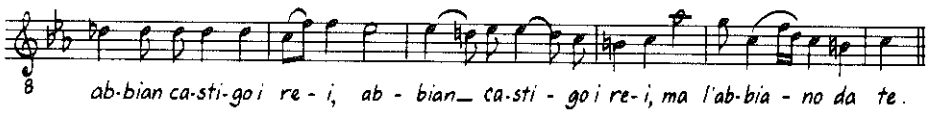
The chorus then enters repeating the last two lines of Ozia's solo.

EXAMPLE 2




The second verse shows a variation of the setting. The first section is repeated, with the solo line expressing the piety of Ozia as he asks for the "wicked to be punished," culminating in the phrase "but punished, Lord, by you."

EXAMPLE 3

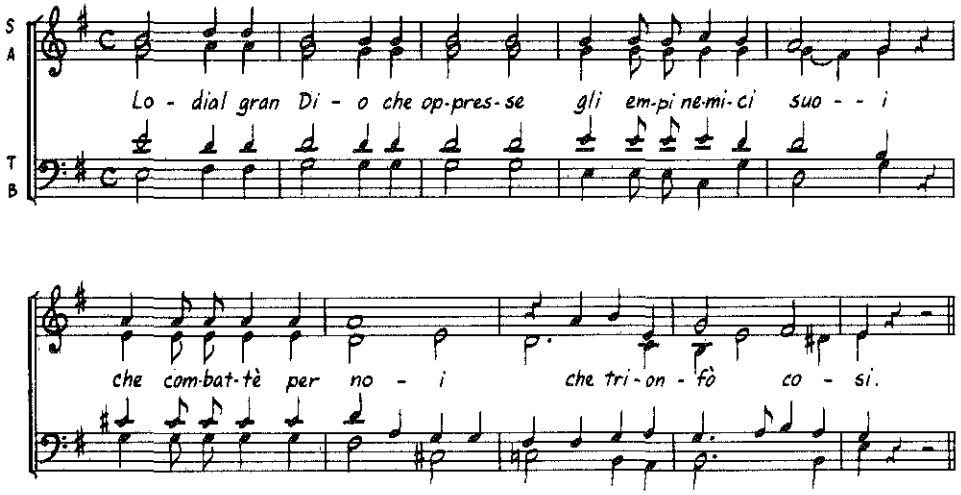



The chorus repeats his words and the movement is solemnly brought to a close.

The concluding chorus to the First Part might be seen as the most traditional of the work, but in the classical Greek sense of tradition: it comments upon the action. In some ways it could stand as a study of recitative turned chorus. Its declamation is supported by an accompaniment that consists of two strongly marked subjects. The elaboration is one of harmony, yet a sense of agitation appears in the melody when the text demands it. The dignified seriousness that Mozart gives this movement, the highly individual accompaniment, and a simple but moving modulation, combine to make the chorus extremely effective.

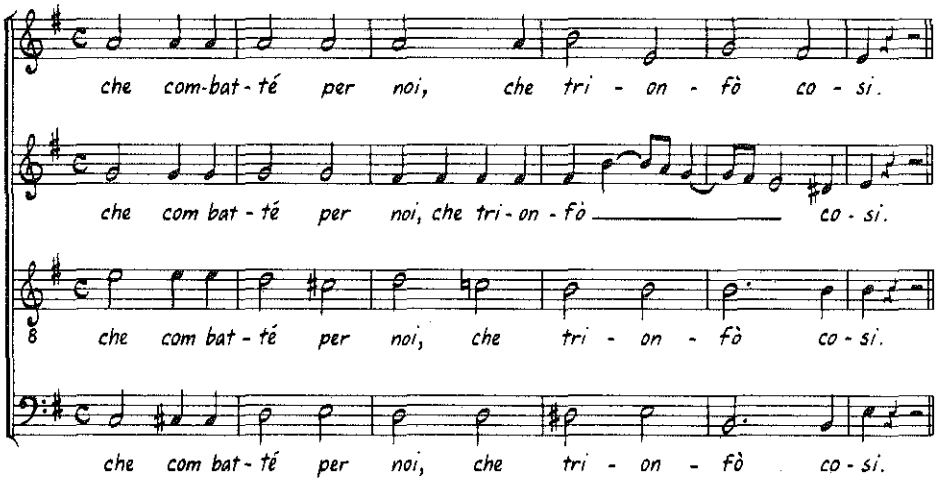
The final chorus is the most intricate movement of the work. Set in rondo form with a concluding section, and divided between solo and choral portions, it conveys a solemn prayer. The people of Bethulia offer their thanks to God, and Judith answers their thanksgiving by exalting their victory. Mozart chose a traditional hymn melody for the refrain. Its use, as has recently been discovered, may have been inspired by a work of Michael Haydn, the younger brother of Joseph Haydn, who, like Mozart, was employed at the court of the Archbishop of Salzburg:

EXAMPLE 4




The setting remains simple, in four parts, yet the subtle variations of harmony and part-writing give this section its dignified character. In the second choral ritornello the alto rises in a gentle cadential elaboration above the soprano, a characteristic touch of Mozartean choral counterpoint:

EXAMPLE 5




In the early sixties, Lee Schaenen conducted a series of staged performances of *La Betulia liberata* in Bern, Switzerland, which gained critical international acclaim. The cast included Eva Tamassu, Klara Barlow, Christine Murphy, Joan Winden, Jakob Keller, Hans Kleber, Anton Knusel, and John Maloy. In the seventies the work was recorded twice, by Carlo Felice Cillario and Vittorio Negri.

Opera or Oratorio? *Betulia* is both. Would a performance in English destroy the original? Would a shortened version, or a concert of selections be unthinkable? Every effort would justify the rescue of an unknown masterpiece from oblivion.

# Penderecki's *Polish Requiem* Some Notes on Texture and Form

by DANIEL J. DELISI

Krzysztof Penderecki, who was born in 1933, has contributed significant works to the choral repertoire for close to thirty years. Thirteen of a total of fifteen choral works from this period are major pieces for chorus and orchestra. He has shown a preference for large forms and for sacred texts. The *Polish Requiem* is representative of this pattern.

Like that of many composers of stature, Penderecki's *oeuvre* has undergone a marked evolution. The earliest works to bring him international fame, such as the *Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima* (1960), are considered by the composer himself to be experimental, especially in terms of sonorities. In the large choral-orchestral works from the 1966 *St. Luke Passion* to the 1974 *Magnificat,* the composer explored new approaches to instrumental and vocal sound. In addition, these years show Penderecki's strong interest in vertically conceived sound patterns and musical textures. This interest led him to create some unique and highly expressive effects with choral-orchestral ensembles. After the *Magnificat,* Penderecki began to explore a more lyric and harmonically oriented style. The 1980 *Te Deum* shows triadic (though non-functional) harmonies, traditional methods of tone production, and far fewer of the unusual textures evolved in the composer's earlier works. It is music truly neo-Romantic in style. Against this varied background arose the *Polish Requiem.*

One of Penderecki's most recent works, it was begun in 1980, and some excerpts were heard before the 1984 world premiere of the completed piece. A major work of nearly two hours' duration, it is scored for chorus, large orchestra, and a quartet of soloists. On the whole its character is dark, reflecting the fear and awe of the powerful liturgical text. There are moments of solemn prayer, moments of chaotic agitation (never beyond the composer's firm control), and deeply-felt passages of somber beauty. The composer touches our emotions. Yet, even on first hearing, one is aware of Penderecki's idiomatic writing for chorus, orchestra, and soloists, and his command of traditional musical elements, particularly form and texture.

Penderecki has marshalled art and craft into a powerfully moving musical experience.

Like several of Penderecki's earlier works for chorus and orchestra (*St. Luke Passion, Dies Irae, Utrenja, Magnificat, Te Deum*), the *Polish Requiem* above all conveys the nature of the sacred text. With the text of the Roman Catholic Requiem Mass, the composer has combined both text and melody of the Polish hymn "Święty Boże," and two verses from Psalm 6. The design of the text might be outlined as follows:

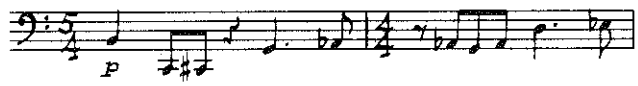
| Text sections of the *Polish Requiem* | Omitted sections of the Roman Catholic Requiem |
|---|---|
| Introit (Requiem aeternum) | |
| Kyrie | |
| | Gradual |
| | Tract |
| Sequence (Dies irae)/ Święty Boże | |
| | Offertory |
| | Sanctus |
| Agnus Dei | |
| Communion (Lux aeterna) | |
| Responsory After Absolution (Libera me) | |
| | In Paradisum |
| Finale (using texts from Święty Boże, Sequence, Offertory, Agnus Dei, Psalm 6) | |

The movements vary greatly in size. The "Dies irae" is the longest, covering over half the full length of the *Requiem*. It is significant that the text of the *Polish Requiem* — unlike those of some earlier works such as the *Dies Irae* — is set to be distinctly heard and understood. The few sections where complexity of texture obscures the words occur mainly in cases where those words had already appeared in clearly perceptible settings.

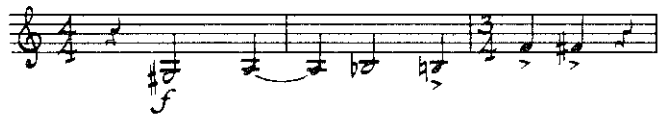
The text provides a formal structure, though the work is by no means through-composed. Structure is also provided through the repetition of musical ideas, either predominantly melodic, harmonic, or rhythmic in nature. Similarly, specific textures and timbres, used in repetition, create structural patterns. Recurring motifs may be quite distinctive, or they may be more generic, appearing in various guises. At times, however, Penderecki quotes an entire passage exactly or with slight changes in orchestration, or with a new text.

The most common structural element in the work is melodic: rising (occasionally falling) chromatic motion of two or more notes, followed by an upward tritone leap. It may appear in any voice or instrument and assume highly varying rhythmic shape, clearly isolated in texture, or enveloped in dense polyphony (Examples 1 and 2).

EXAMPLE 1




EXAMPLE 2




Another unifying element is the texture and timbre of a solo passage for the cellos and basses, frequently involving the melodic motion as shown in Examples 1 and 2 (the entire *Requiem* opens with such a solo). It recurs in every movement except the "Kyrie," which is predominantly *a cappella,* and the "Agnus Dei," which is completely so. Comparable texture occurs when the solo bass voice or the choral basses are doubled by the cellos and basses in passages otherwise kept strictly *a cappella.* Penderecki likes the dark, resonant tone of this combination, and we find it in the "Requiem," "Kyrie," "Dies irae," and "Libera me" sections.

Much of the musical material of the "Libera me" is based on the "Dies irae," and the music of the climactic passage of the *Requiem,* a setting of a portion of the "Offertory" text, is first heard in the "Quid sum miser" section of the "Dies irae."

The contemporary idiom of Penderecki's large-scale works has been eminently successful. One reason for this success is the clear, logical, and controlled use of texture and form.

# Choral Performances

*New York* — The Bach *B Minor Mass* appeared at Avery Fisher Hall like a sudden interruption to Mostly Mozart's usual pleasant, smoothly flowing course. Bach's soberness may have seemed a little removed from the graceful and ingratiating repertory around which most of this summer festival is planned, but the concert hall is still an appropriate place for this great construction. In practical terms, Bach's idealized version of the Latin mass fits neither the Roman nor the Protestant liturgies but exists instead as a summation of all the sacred polyphony before it. Needless to say, it has been an admonishment for what followed.

Helmuth Rilling conducted (for the most part at least) with a moderation that placed its trust in the power of Bach's musical complexities rather than in any aggressively dramatic portrayal of them. The first two numbers of the Gloria did seem to push tempos to the point of breathlessness, but what followed — especially the "Domine Deus" and "Qui sedes" — created eloquent space for its soloists to breathe. The pace of "Cum sancto spiritu," moreover, balanced clarity and forward momentum as well as one could imagine. At the end, there was the chasteness of "Dona nobis pacem" to admire — with its denial of theatrical effect.

This performance's blend of old and new ways of listening probably puzzled some and seemed quite natural to others. Mr. Rilling, after the eighteenth-century fashion, adopts sharply defined small phrases within bigger ones, so that long climactic buildups are often sacrificed to the detail of the moment. These almost pointillistic divisions made the opening Kyrie uncomfortably self-conscious, but later, in the "Incarnatus est," such fineness created a kind of motionless beauty that one recalls well after the performance is done.

The Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra brings modern instruments to Bach, and their creamy textures and brilliance in this bright hall, I'm afraid, created an illusion of long legato Romantic phrasing, despite Mr. Rilling's attempts to the contrary. The trumpet players — Neil Balm and Lee Soper — handled Bach's high-altitude writing with a nice security; the other major solos passed between Paul Ingrahm (horn), Scott Goff (flute), Charles Haupt (violin) and the evening's two oboists (Leonard Arner and Jane Cochran).

Mr. Rilling's four soloists, all American, were excellent — Sylvia McNair and Scot Weir, the soprano and tenor in Bach's wonderful "Domine Deus"; Jan Opalach, the bass for the "Quoniam," and Jane Bunnell, a steady and musical mezzo-soprano who was reticent — almost to a fault — in the Mass's climactic "Agnus Dei." Splendid too were the New York Choral Artists, whose modest size (about twelve on a part) and flexibility gave clear shape to the conductor's reverently modest musical style.

— Bernard Holland



*Boston* — In 1943 the first Pulitzer Prize in music went to a choral work, William Schuman's *A Free Song.* Three years later the prestigious award went to Leo Sowerby's cantata *Canticle of the Sun.* Since then, until 1987, the Prize has gone to symphonic works, operas, string quartets, and electronic music, and not to choral music. Last year, however, to the composer's delight and astonishment, the award went to John Harbison's *The Flight Into Egypt,* a thirteen-minute "sacred ricercar" for chorus, soprano and baritone soloists, and chamber orchestra.

The work is a Christmas cantata composed on a commission from the Cantata Singers, a Boston choral ensemble of which Harbison had been music director for seven seasons beginning in 1969. The music of Bach and Schütz that Harbison conducted then became a significant influence on his own work. David Hoose, the current music director of the Cantata Singers, was anxious to begin a series of commissions, and Harbison was an obvious choice to lead off; when the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities declined to fund the project, the Cantata Singers raised the money themselves.

The subject of the piece, the flight of Joseph, Mary, and the infant Jesus into Egypt, came at the suggestion of another Boston friend and colleague, Craig Smith, director of the ambitious musical program at Emmanuel Church; Harbison has been actively involved in Emmanuel's weekly series of Bach cantata performances, and Smith led the world premiere of Harbison's Violin Concerto at a concert of the Emmanuel Chamber Orchestra. Smith urged Harbison to consider some of the darker aspects of the Christmas season that are often overlooked: we sometimes overlook the ways in which Christmas emphasizes need, anxiety, and isolation; the plight of the homeless and the slaughter of innocents are unfortunately issues that are still with us.

In an interview after the announcement of the Pulitzer Prize, Harbison said, "This work represents an aspect of Boston's musical life I have been

involved with for a long time, that part of the community that rehearses and performs sacred music of every era with tremendous understanding and devotion. That has been a central part of my musical life, and one of the things I am glad about is that the Prize has gone to a kind and aspect of music that are not a mainstream element these days. I'm also pleased that this occasion will bring renewed attention to the theme of the piece, the darker side of Christmas, and the realities of urban life that we are too eager to overlook."

The Cantata Singers under the direction of David Hoose gave the first performance of *The Flight into Egypt* in Jordan Hall on November 22, 1986; the soloists were soprano Lorraine Hunt and baritone John Osborne. During the Christmas season a year later it was performed with the same soloists under Smith's direction at Emmanuel Church.

The text comes from Matthew III, verses 13–23 in the King James Version. Harbison sets the verses in the direct, almost ritualistic way he used in the solo cantata *Samuel Chapter* (which can be heard on a Nonesuch recording); the manner derives from Schütz and Stravinsky. The verses create the work's form — the baritone soloist is the narrator; the soprano voices the utterances of the angel; and the chorus sings the words of the prophets. Each of these elements has its own characteristic musical manner and instrumental accompaniment, and the instrumental resources (2 oboes, English horn, bassoon, 3 trombones, chamber organ and strings) are typical of Bach's cantatas using trombone.

All of the music grows out of the keening, oriental-sounding opening oboe solo that grows into a woodwind quartet. The choral writing is contrapuntal, with an increasing density of moments of crisis. The composer has taken pains to assure that the text is always audible and the accompaniment carves it in relief.

In a note prepared for later performances of *The Flight into Egypt*, Harbison writes, "In this piece the subject matter gave rise to musical techniques: a frequent reliance on points of imitation, and the derivation of most of the music from the short motifs stated at the outset. These are metaphors for the pre-ordained inevitable aspect of the story. The harmony is more freely ordered, in the interest of a more flexible and compassionate rendering of the details of the narrative. The most expressive element in the piece is the continuity, which fuses the narrative into one continuous impression, both abstract and highly colored."

In performance the style seems an individual and powerful assimilation of the "irreconcilable" manners of Stravinsky and of Schoenberg; one can also hear Harbison's understanding of the achievement of Roger Sessions's *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*. Most of all, the music reveals how the impersonal code of ritual is also an expression and reflection

of the most powerful emotions. The end is full of mingled anger, heartbreak, compassion, and promise (the closing words are the prophets' promise that the child "shall be called a Nazarene"), and there is no conciliation among them, because there cannot be.

— Richard Dyer

* * *

Lorna Cooke deVaron's name has been prominent in the world of American choral music for over forty years, ever since Harrison Keller first invited her to join the faculty of New England Conservatory. Her mandate, fulfilled beyond anyone's most adventurous surmise, was to build the choral department into something that could rank without equivocation with the other performing departments of the school. She has been at the center of the renaissance of choral music, choral conducting, and choral composition in this country, has commissioned, or been the dedicatee of, many now frequently performed works by distinguished composers (for example, Daniel Pinkham's *Christmas Cantata* of 1957), and has been an inspiration to legions of students, singers, conductors, and composers whose work has been enriched by her professionalism and taste.

Ranking high among her many achievements are the numerous foreign tours on which she has taken the Conservatory's choruses. Recently they formed the first American group to tour Bulgaria since before the Second World War, a trip which they extended with a visit to Romania, where American choral music was featured prominently.

The programs — and Lorna deVaron has called choosing a good program "half the battle" — featured American compositions ranging in date and style from the Bay Psalm Book and the Sacred Harp through works from the American music theater by Copland (excerpts from *The Tender Land*) Gershwin (excerpts from *Porgy and Bess*), and Bernstein (from *The Lark*), the Gershwin works being especially appropriate in this anniversary year. The novelty of an American chorus in one of the economically sounder but politically more "closed" of the Eastern Block countries resulted in tremendous enthusiasm for both the singing of the New England Conservatory chorus and its willingness to part with copies of choral music, extras of which had been brought along for this express purpose! Concerts were given in Russe (on the Danube near the Romanian border); at the Black Sea resort town of Primorsko, where this was the only Western group at an Eastern Block arts festival; Plodiv, an ancient university town of Roman foundation; and, finally, in the capital Sofia, at the Conservatory, where Estonians in the audience, according to Estonian

tradition, showered the chorus with flowers at the conclusion of the concert.

While in Sofia, the conductor convinced the organizers of the trip to take the chorus up to a small fourteenth-century monastery in the Vitosha Mountains, where the members spontaneously broke into singing some spirituals and gospel songs, the priests and nuns leaving their work to hear this music which was so foreign to them. The chorus also included a set of Brahms part-songs and an early Renaissance group on their programs because the audiences in Eastern Europe might have considered it unthinkable not to include music from those periods in a choral concert. Remarks were offered by musicians in Sofia about the wide range of musical styles the chorus demonstrated. "We truly felt that we were fulfilling the role of cultural ambassadors through our music and post-concert visits in Bulgaria, and we were delighted to bring to them, for the first time in perhaps a century, an American choir," the conductor said upon returning. The tour was arranged through Friendship Ambassadors, and audience members in Bulgaria, which has a strong choral tradition similar to that of the Russian Orthodox Church, said they could scarcely recall ever having heard an American chorus.

Lorna Cooke deVaron will retire from New England Conservatory at the end of this academic year, though one can hardly imagine that her activity as a conductor will cease on account of this. Two programs were planned in Boston to mark the occasion: the first, the *B Minor Mass* of Bach, and the other, as a reprise of her very first concert given at the Conservatory in 1947, Schubert's *Mass in G,* Poulenc's *Mass in G,* Hindemith's *Six Chansons,* and Copland's *In the Beginning.* Could one imagine a concert given today with three major works all composed within the preceding decade, yet still vital forty years hence?

— David Francis Urrows

*Millburn, New Jersey* — Obscurity rarely befalls a piece of music, or any work of art, by accident. There are cogent reasons why most scores get taken up to the attic or out to the dustbin. The most common reason is the most obvious: they weren't much good in the first place. That there's little sense in reviving a work that has even less to say to posterity than it did to its contemporaries is a point few would argue.

This hasn't always been true, of course. The nineteenth century ignored all music save its own with such parochial rigor that the musicologists of this century have had a field day rediscovering lost glories of the Renaissance, Baroque, and Classical periods.

However, with a new century on the horizon, it is becoming clear that the archeologists of sound are reaching the point of diminishing returns. It seems that all or most of the treasure has already been excavated. Now the archeologists find their role sadly reduced. Either they turn up utilitarian items and attempt to pass them off as purest diamond, or they instruct performers how to re-create the sound of a Haydn symphony as it was heard in Haydn's day — which is, of course, both impossible and absurd.

All of this serves to place in context the significance of the achievement of the Summit Chorale and the Chorus of Music in taking down from the dusty attic a genuine treasure — Mendelssohn's *Die Erste Walpurgisnacht* ("The First Walpurgis Night") — and performing it with all the fire and nobility and proto-Wagnerian drama its composer intended.

One would hardly expect a composer of Mendelssohn's stature to have surprises in store, but *Die Erste Walpurgisnacht* turned out to be a double surprise: First, that a work as splendid as this would ever have become obscure, and second, that "a strong argument could be made for it as Mendelssohn's best choral work . . . certainly his most original, and the closest thing he wrote to the operatic style," in the view of Garyth Nair, the conductor.

This listener thoroughly agreed with Nair's assessment despite a long-standing indifference to a great part of the *oeuvre* of Mendelssohn. Mendelssohn started out full of fire and ingenuity and ended up conventional. In light of this, *Die Erste Walpurgisnacht* can only be reckoned as a major find.

Goethe's poem turns the table on cultural stereotypes: The Christians are depicted as superstitious oppressors and the Germanic Druids as noble and spiritually elevated victims. If one is to believe Goethe, all that went on in celebration of the Druidic feast of Beltane was "praise for the Father of All" and innocent sacrifice for "the purification of hearts." No mention is made of the central rite of this spring festival — a sexual free-for-all.

The entire score ranges from the excellent to the sensational, with only one area of weakness, the chorus *Hilf, ach hilf mir, Kriegsgeselle.* This depiction of Christian panic in the face of demonic horrors falls flat, both dramatically and musically. One suspects that panic and horror lay beyond the pale of Mendelssohn's emotional world.

This weakness is more than offset by the success of the work as a whole, and by numbers that are surely among the most striking the composer ever wrote: The furtive, ominous, conspiratorial *Kommt! Kommt mit Zacken und mit Gabeln* that leads into the explosion of excitement that is the Chorus of Druids (Allegro molto), on much the same text, and the magnificence and sublimity of the baritone recitative *So weit gebracht dass*

*wir bei Nacht* and of the choruses *Du kannst zwar heut' und manche Zeit* and *Die Flamme reinigt sich vom Rauch.*

The soloists performed stalwartly, although William Sharp stood out by having the most and the better of the music, as well as the most impressive voice.

As for the chorus, one could have nothing but the highest praise. There were points during the Mendelssohn when one felt certain these singers had reached the limit of their collective potential, that the maximum in color, expression and dynamics (whether soft or loud) had been achieved. Then they proceeded to double the effect. The chorus sang not only notes and words, but the *meaning* of the notes and the words.

The Colonial Symphony played very well, sometimes brilliantly, in a less than gracious acoustical ambience. It was noteworthy that aside from the Hebrides overture, this was a program of little-known music that nonetheless attracted a capacity audience.

— Michael Redmond

*Costa Mesa, California* — The Pacific Chorale conducted by John Alexander recently presented "A Coronation Festival," an all-British program of choral music by Elgar, Handel, Parry, and Walton. This concert marked the final of the Chorale's 1986–87 series in the new Orange County Performing Arts Center, as well as the first concert heard there by this reviewer.

The hall itself is worthy of some comment. The acoustical situation is very positive overall. There seems to be an ambience to the acoustic that is very favorable to a large chorus and orchestra at full volume. However, the space seems less hospitable on the lower end of the dynamic range, allowing less response for *mezzo piano* down to *pianissimo.* It also seems to dampen the efforts of vocal soloists. Voices that have easily filled the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion in Los Angeles under like circumstances struggled mightily to get above the combined musical forces, some without success.

The evening's program was flanked by Sir Edward Elgar's arrangement of *God Save the Queen* and the American version of the melody set, of course, to the words, "My Country 'Tis of Thee." Three coronation anthems by George Frideric Handel — *Zadok the Priest, The King Shall Rejoice,* and *My Heart is Inditing* — comprised the main portion of the first half of the concert. In some ways these represented the most disappointing singing of the evening. The problem essentially lay in the size of the performing forces — over one hundred singers with a large non-Baroque

size orchestra did not allow a brilliance and clarity in the sound essential for this kind of music. Occasionally, concertino effects were used with a smaller corpus of singers and players, which immediately exposed the needed texture and clarity.

Tempos were brisk which allowed the performers to maintain some quality of Baroque spirit, but it appeared that tempos were altogether too fast to allow the choral coloratura to be sung with much buoyancy or precision. These anthems (with the exception of *My Heart is Inditing*) were in general securely sung, but missed the mark on some matters of style.

Other works included Parry's *I Was Glad . . .* in the choral-orchestral version, the *Coronation Te Deum* by William Walton, and the seldom-heard *Coronation Ode* by Elgar. Here the Chorale achieved a beautiful tone, usually clear articulation, and a general musicianship of a very high standard considering the clear majority of non-professional singers.

The Parry and Walton were effective, particularly the latter with its beautiful unaccompanied choral passage of "divisi" men's and women's voices. Where the performances fell short was in a certain tendency of Alexander to conduct rather inflexible tempi, thereby losing some of the expressiveness of the so-called "grand style" of nineteenth-century English music. Several opportunities for altering tempi and dynamics at points of climax and respose were missed during these works and the *Coronation Ode.*

The latter Elgar work was composed after the much more extended *Dream of Gerontius* for the coronation of Edward VII in 1902. It is a work both pompous and maudlin, but, nevertheless, was the clear favorite of this particular audience. It certainly left the listener with a musical statement brimming over with intense patriotism (and even imperialism!). Admittedly, it is difficult to resist the cumulative effect of its eight movements capped by the stirring melody "Land of Hope and Glory" the origins of which came from Elgar's first Pomp and Circumstance March.

— Gary McKercher

*Erratum*

The end of the first paragraph on page 47 of the 1987 Summer/Fall issue of the *American Choral Review* should read: "increased from 128 to 134." We regret the error.

# Recent Scores

ANGEBRANNDT, BETSY JO. *A Promise is a Promise.* 2-part treble voices, piano. Shawnee Press, Delaware Water Gap, Pa. (6 p., .45)

BRICUSSE, LESLIE, and ANTHONY NEWLEY. *Stop the World — I Want to Get Off.* Arr. by Lou Hayward. A choral montage for SATB, piano (opt. guitar, bass, and drums). Shawnee Press, Delaware Water Gap, Pa. (vocal score 20 p., $1.25; set of opt. rhythm parts $3.50)

CALDARA, ANTONIO. *Dies Irae.* For soloists, chorus, instruments (violin I, II; viola; cello I; continuo (organ) and bass (cello II and/or contrabass). Edited by Istvan Homolya. Latin text. Bärenreiter (Magnamusic-Baton, St. Louis, Mo). (full score 72 p., $19.25; vocal score, choral score, and intrumental parts available separately)

FOX, CHARLES. *Ready to Take a Chance Again.* Arr. by Hawley Ades. SATB, piano (opt. string bass, guitar, drums). Shawnee Press, Delaware Water Gap, Pa. (8 p., .50; set of parts for sale; also for SSA)

GOEMANNE, NOEL. *God, Who Stretched the Spangled Heavens.* Concertato for SATB, organ, congregation (opt. flute, cantor). Based on the hymn *Holy Manna* from *Southern Harmony* (1835). G.I.A. Publications, Chicago, Ill. (7 p., .50)

HAAS, DAVID. *Glory to God.* Choir, congregation, C instrument, guitar, piano. Piano part by Jeanne Cotter. G.I.A. Publications, Chicago, Ill. (11 p., .90)

HAGEMANN, PHILIP. *Four Songs from Twelfth Night.* TTBB, piano. Oxford University Press, New York & Oxford. (30 p., $3.50)

ISELE, DAVID CLARK. *Psalms for the Church Year.* (16 pieces) SATB, congregation, organ. G.I.A. Publications, Chicago, Ill. (56 p., $3.50)

KADERAVEK, MILAN. *Veni Creator Spiritus.* SATB. G.I.A. Publications, Chicago, Ill. (4 p., .40)

KREUTZ, ROBERT E. *Rise, O Lord.* SABaritone. G.I.A. Publications, Chicago, Ill. (3 p., .40)

LEDGER, PHILIP, arr. *Two Carols* (*Silent Night* — Grüber; *Christmas Night* — English Traditional). SATB, organ. Oxford University Press. (11 p., $1.20)

MATHIAS, WILLIAM. *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men.* SATB, orchestra. Mathias's Op. 91, No. 2. Oxford University Press, Oxford. (vocal score 24 p., no price given; orchestra score and parts on rental)

McCABE, JOHN. *Motet.* On words of James Clarence Mangan. SSAATTBB. Duration c. 10 minutes. Novello, Sevenoaks, Kent. (32 p., $2.60)

OLSON, LYNN FREEMAN. *The "Hot Dog" Fugue* (on an American street-rhyme). (This is a 2-voice fugue; voices are needed for each part; piano.) Carl Fischer, New York. (8 p., .40)

RAZEY, DON, arr. *The Kings of the Orient.* SATB, piano or organ (opt. guitar, percussion instruments ("The arranger has provided chords for guitar and one possibility for accompaniment with percussion instruments [castanets, tambourine], but encourages each group to respond to the music, experimenting with castanets, tambourine, cowbell, maracas, bongos, etc. in devising its own ideas."). Text also given as a poem in Spanish (*Los Reyes de Oriente*). Puerto Rican Epiphany Carol. Carl Fischer, New York. (11 p., .45)

RIDOUT, GODFREY, arr. *Ah! Si Mon Moine Voulait Danser!* Traditional French Canadian. Unison children's voices, keyboard. Gordon V. Thompson Music (Oxford University Press). (6 p., .85)

ROFF, JOSEPH. *Hide Not Thy Face From Me.* SATB, organ. G.I.A. Publications, Chicago, Ill. (7 p., .50)

ROREM, NED. *Virelai.* Words by Chaucer. SATB. Boosey & Hawkes, New York. (4 p., .30)

SCHÜTZ, HEINRICH. *One Thing I Ask of the Lord* (*Kleine geistliche Konzerte*). Two medium voices, keyboard. Text in English and German. Edited and arranged by Don McAfee. McAfee Music Corporation, New York. (7 p., .50)

SHAW, MARTIN. *God's Grandeur.* SATB, organ. Roberton Publications, Aylesbury, Bucks, England. (15 p. 32 pence)

——. *Come Rejoicing.* Anthem for Christmas. S and T soli, SATB, organ. Robertson Publications, Aylesbury, Bucks, England. (6 p. 24 pence)

TALLIS, THOMAS. *Dum transisset Sabbatum.* Easter Respond. Transcribed and edited by Richard Abram. Motet for SATT (or baritone) B, (opt. organ). (Editorial notes pp. 11–12) Novello. (12 p., no price given)

WILLCOCKS, JONATHAN. *Riddle of the World.* T and Baritone soli, SATB, orchestra. Text from Shakespeare, Milton, etc., compiled by Paul Hicks. Duration c. 28 minutes. Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York. (vocal score 39., $8.95; orchestra score and parts on rental)

——. *Thou, O God, art praised in Sion.* Psalm 65. SATB, organ. Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York. (20 p., no price given)

WILLIAMS, FRANCES. *In Bethlehem's Lowly Manger.* SAB, organ or piano, (opt. descant). Harold Flammer, Delaware Watergap, Pa. (8 p., .45)

WILSON, C.R., arr. *An Old English Carol.* Old English ballad tune adapted by F.W. Sternfeld. SATB. Oxford University Press, London. Editor's note on p. 3. (3 p., .50)

— Richard Jackson

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