

Baroque Majesty

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Program Notes by Ed Wight, Musicologist

LAUDA JERUSALEM

Today's homage to 'Baroque Majesty' opens with an appropriately dramatic flourish. Monteverdi's *Lauda Jerusalem* begins by juxtaposing a solo line for the tenor section in alternation with full choir and instruments. Such concentrated and heightened expressive power provides one element separating the new Baroque style of the 17th century from the preceding Renaissance era of the 15th and 16th centuries. Monteverdi had just written two operas (*L'Orfeo* in 1607, *Arianna* in 1608) which were "the first to reveal the potential of this then novel genre" (Norton / Grove Encyclopedia), and aspects of that dramatic style continue in this movement from his *Vespro della Beata Virgine* published in 1610. The written-out accompaniment of instrumental bass line (*basso continuo*) provides another new feature of the Baroque era as well. With masterpieces in both late-Renaissance and Early Baroque styles, "Monteverdi can be considered one of the most powerful figures in the history of music" (Norton / Grove).

Living from 1567 to 1643, however, Monteverdi spent half his life in the 16th century. This accounts for his mastery of Renaissance polyphony as well, as *Lauda Jerusalem* draws upon both Renaissance and Baroque elements. The solo opening for the tenor section, though quite dramatic, also draws attention to their vocal part, where Monteverdi planted a plainchant melody. He thus draws upon the centuries-old *cantus firmus* tradition which often features slightly slower rhythmic values than the other parts. Monteverdi then presents alternation between the two 3-voice choirs in late-Renaissance tradition – with the tenor part straddling both groups. They alternate two-bar phrases, then accelerate to single-bar exchanges, before embarking on a long passage in consistent texture for all voices. This leads - after a full cadence and pause – to the return of the full orchestra for the lesser Doxology ("Glory to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost"), a text which typically closed all psalms.

Musicologist Jeffrey Kurtzman writes that "Though largely ignored by Monteverdi scholars...sacred music occupied Monteverdi throughout his life." His first published compositions were sacred motets, and he may have written almost thirty masses for Christmas Eve after moving to Venice. He thought so highly of this 14-movement Vespers setting that he dedicated it to Pope Paul V and travelled to Rome himself to deliver it personally.

MASS in G MINOR, BWV 235

Bach's great *Mass in B Minor*, his only complete setting of the Latin Ordinary Mass, was the longest mass ever written when he finished it in 1749. Never intended as a single unified setting, Bach compiled it over a 25-year period. The Kyrie and Gloria movements first appeared in 1733, in a composition which Bach titled *Missa*. In Lutheran terminology from the early 18th century, that title referred to the first two movements of the Ordinary. Both movements drew on material from earlier cantatas. Bach wrote four more *Missa* compositions (also known as *Missa Brevis*) a few years later in the 1730s, using same principles. Today's *Missa in G minor* thus consists of Kyrie and Gloria movements based in part on three earlier cantatas.

Bach's stylistic maturity in the 1730s not only repays such early borrowings with interest, but increases their utility. The German cantatas celebrate particular events in the church calendar, but their translation into Latin enabled their performance at any time of the church year.

After an orchestral introduction, Bach sets the lively opening Kyrie homophonically, with special emphasis on an elaborate motive in the altos, and (later) sopranos. He sets the central ‘Christe eleison’ text as a fugue based in part on that earlier motive, and the final ‘Kyrie eleison’ text now also appears as a fugue, closing in G Major.

Each of the four *missae* “continue with a symmetrical, five-movement Gloria in which a central aria is framed by two surrounding arias and two choruses” (Oxford Companion to Bach). Bach opens today’s Gloria with an extensive, fugal chorus, followed by a Bass aria on ‘*Gratias agimus tibi*’ in D Minor. He sets the central aria ‘*Domine Fili ungenite*’ as a graceful, triple meter solo for Alto in B-flat Major. An elaborate Tenor aria on ‘*Qui tollis peccata mundi*’ leads to the wonderfully elaborate final chorus on ‘*Cum Sancto Spiritu*’, once again in G Minor, which Bach resolves only in the final cadence to G Major with another Picardy third.

Bach scholars of the 19th and early 20th centuries “were inclined to dismiss these four Lutheran masses because they were mostly parodied from other works” (Oxford Companion). However, they enormously underestimated the quality of his revisions. The New Grove Dictionary writes that Bach’s “transposition of German cantata movements did more than replace German words...In the careful selection of models and the subsequent reworking of musical material, these four masses together with the *Mass in B Minor* amount to a valuable anthology of Bach’s [Latin] vocal writing in music of outstandingly high quality.”

BRANDENBURG CONCERTO No. 5 in D MAJOR, BWV 1050

While employed at Cothen, Bach journeyed to Berlin in 1719 to purchase a harpsichord. While there he met Christian Ludwig, the Margrave of Brandenburg, who maintained an extensive music establishment. He heard Bach play, and invited him to send some compositions. In 1721 Bach sent him an extensive presentation manuscript in beautiful calligraphy - mostly written in his own hand - consisting of six concertos ‘for several instruments.’ Bach scored each concerto differently, and this is the only surviving 18th-century manuscript containing all six of them.

The concerto genre was only 40 years old by 1720, and Bach drew extensively on its Italian pioneers: Corelli, Torelli, and especially Vivaldi. He then enriched their contributions with greater textural density, more thematic integration between soloists and orchestra, and a wider variety of form – all of which he includes in today’s D Major concerto for flute, violin, and harpsichord. While the other five concertos employ the harpsichord in its typical accompaniment role (part of the *basso continuo*), this D Major concerto is the first by any composer to feature it as a concerto soloist.

After the orchestral introduction (*ritornello*) states the main theme, the solo flute and violin dominate the early sections of the *Allegro* opening movement. All three solo instruments enter with independent material. But in their second appearance, they vary a motive from the orchestral ritornello, typical of Bach’s frequent thematic integration. Also note the frequent passages of imitation between flute and violin, a richer texture than that of Bach’s Italian predecessors. The solo harpsichord figuration gradually becomes more elaborate, until it finally bursts forth in an extensive solo passage near the end of the movement that functions as a written-out cadenza.

Bach originally wrote the second movement as an *Adagio*. But in the revisions for this presentation manuscript he uses the rare designation *Affettuoso* instead, and sets it just for the three soloists. It is the only slow movement of the six ‘Brandenburg’ concertos in *ritornello* form. The harpsichordist knows when each ritornello occurs because Bach writes the *basso continuo* figuration for the left hand for such passages, as he does in all three movements. Still a century before the advent of the independent conductor, Bach expected the harpsichordist to conduct the orchestra in this concerto as well. He bases this gentle movement primarily on two short motives, once again with extensive imitation. And if you want structural richness, look no further than the *Allegro* finale. This lively movement begins as a fugue, encompasses a long middle section similar to a *da capo* aria (beginning and ending in B Minor), and never quite abandons *ritornello* form.

With the exceptional prominence given to the solo harpsichord, a new era is born with this work: it “marks the beginning of the keyboard concerto as a form” (2001 New Grove Dictionary). Widespread manuscript copies of it throughout Germany show that this was the only Brandenburg concerto widely performed after his death. Along with Bach’s later concertos for one or two harpsichords, it also “established the primacy of Germany in the domain of the keyboard concerto” (New Grove). With sons CPE Bach and JC Bach, as well as Mozart, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Schumann, and Brahms on the horizon, that concerto primacy lasted 150 years.

THE KING SHALL REJOICE

Just before his death in 1727, King George I signed an act declaring George Friderich Handel, and others, naturalized British citizens. Handel’s first commission as an English citizen was to write music for the coronation of the King’s son, King George II. Handel wrote four coronation anthems later that year, one for each of the four main divisions of the ceremony, and all were performed during that regal anointing. Music critic John Bawden writes that “There are relatively few pieces of music which in the space of a few bars are capable of evoking the mood of ceremony and patriotism associated with England’s great State occasions...but Handel’s magnificent Coronation Anthems were amongst the earliest to capture the true spirit of such events.”

“*The King Shall Rejoice* is the grandest and most extensive of the anthems” (Bawden). Handel bases it on Psalm 21, and his glorious choral polyphony expands each of the four sentences to a separate movement. The long introduction (ritornello) to the first movement for full orchestra sets the appropriate mood of ceremonial grandeur. Listen for the harmonic surprises of the brief, seven-bar third movement, which links directly to the fugue of the fourth movement (‘Thou hast prevented him’) which also features the return of the trumpet and drums. The exuberant double fugue of the fifth-movement ‘Alleluiah’ corresponds to “the actual crowning section of the coronation service, and matches the occasion perfectly.

ZADOK THE PRIEST

Zadok, whose name means ‘righteous,’ was the legendary High Priest of the First Temple in Jerusalem. He officiated at the anointing of King Solomon. All English coronation ceremonies since the year 973 (King Edgar) include this text of *Zadok the Priest*, which concludes ‘Long live the king. May the King live forever. Alleluia, Amen!’ Handel’s musical setting of it has also been sung at every coronation since he wrote it in 1727. It is both the shortest and - with some uncanny resemblances to the ‘Alleluia’ chorus from *The Messiah* – the most popular of his four coronation anthems.

Handel again opens with a long orchestral ritornello, whose rich, undulating string arpeggios continue once the choir enters. “There is little harmonic surprise, the piece remaining firmly rooted in D Major (the key dictated by old valveless trumpets)” – yet this merely confirms Handel’s power based on “the simplest means” (Aylesbury Choral Society). A quicker section follows dominated by the choir (‘And all the people rejoiced’) displaying a simple homophonic style punctuated by telling silences, producing wonderfully dramatic choral effects. Handel’s homophony continues (“God save the King”) now enlivened by occasional 16th-note choral counterpoint. His special gift for choral writing had already emerged in early oratorios from the previous decade (*Acis & Galatea*, and *Esther*, both from 1718). After making and losing several fortunes in his operas, Handel finally turned permanently in 1742 to a genre which highlighted this strength – the choral-oriented oratorios in English beginning that year with *The Messiah*.