

27. G. Gabrieli In Ecclesiis (For Unit 6: Further Musical Understanding)

Background Information and Performance Circumstances

Giovanni Gabrieli was born in Venice in 1555 and died in 1612. He was one of a line of major musical figures to serve as organist of St. Mark's Cathedral, Venice, taking up his position there in 1585. Previous holders of the post included Adrian Willaert (c1480-1562) and Giovanni's uncle, Andrea Gabrieli (c1510-86), and he was succeeded by Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643).

The music originating at St. Mark's often had special characteristics. An instrumental ensemble was established there in 1568, and it often participated on equal terms with vocal performers. The architecture of St Mark's, with its various separate galleries for the different groups of performers, encouraged the development of polychoral textures (i.e. composition for contrasting, spatially separated groups) and the exploitation of antiphony (See also Sonata pian e' forte by Gabrieli [NAM 14]). Giovanni, like his uncle, studied in Munich, and was also open to many of the newer techniques developed in the final years of the 16th century, known as Seconda Prattica, which was more characteristic of the early Baroque than the Renaissance:

- The use of the basso continuo.
- Increased use of chromaticism.
- More elaborate writing for solo voices.
- More idiomatic writing for instruments.
- A tendency to write more homophonically than contrapuntally.

Many of these aspects are evident in *In Ecclesiis*. For another example of Gabrieli's approach, see also *Timor et tremor*.

The date of composition of 'In Ecclesiis' is uncertain but it was published posthumously in 1615 in *Symphonie Sacrae*.

Performing Forces and their handling

In Ecclesiis is scored for two four-part choral groups, one of which was for soloists, instrumental ensemble for six players and basso continuo, realised on organ and perhaps also with plucked string instrument, such as the lute or theorbo. The first choral group is scored for countertenor, alto, tenor and bass, its soloistic qualities shown by the florid nature of the writing. The interaction of one or more groups of instruments or voices was known as "stile concertato" and was prominent in Venice during the late 16th and early 17th centuries particularly by Andrea and Giovanni Gabrieli.

The other choral group consists of two alto parts, tenor and bass. Its texture is mainly chordal, though a few bars have a more polyphonic character. Apart from the final section, this group is restricted to a seven-bar refrain repeated between the various solo and instrumental sections.

The instrumental group consists of three cornetts, a *violino* (in reality a viola because of the range of the part) and two trombones. This was an innovative combination showing mixed forces of strings and brass. The cornett, not to be confused with the later brass cornet, consisted of a slightly bent tube made of wood, with six finger holes and cup-shaped mouthpiece. It was relatively quiet compared with modern brass instruments.

The instrumental ensemble is first heard at bar 31 in a short section for instruments only. Thereafter it plays with the voices except for a passage from bar 68 to bar 101, a duet for countertenor and baritone soloist and choral refrain, accompanied by organ only.

There were two organs in St Mark's at this time. The larger of them had only nine stops, a remarkably small number by comparison with organs in large churches in other continental countries, particularly in northern Europe. These nine stops included a 16-foot stop, giving a sound an octave lower than the notes played, two 8-foot, giving a unison sound, and five stops at higher pitches.

The composer provides only the bass line for the organ part, and so the organist would have to provide a suitable harmonisation. (In other words, the realisation in NAM is merely an editorial suggestion.) For the first thirty bars of *In Ecclesiis*, the continuo instruments are the only accompaniment.

Texture

The texture of this music is highly varied, involving monody (the early Baroque texture of melody and continuo accompaniment), polyphony, with some imitative counterpoint, homophony and antiphony. The refrain in particular is subject to many ingenious variations in textural composition.

Bars

1-5	Monody: Countertenor solo with organ continuo.
6-12	Countertenor solo in antiphony with initially homophonic chorus II, giving way to imitation from bar 10.
13-24	Monody: baritone solo with organ continuo.
25-31	Baritone solo in antiphony with homophonic chorus II, then imitation from b. 29.
31-39	6-part instrumental ensemble with continuo; begins homophonically but becomes more contrapuntal, with imitation.
39-61	Alto and tenor duet, with freely contrapuntal 6-part instrumental and continuo accompaniment.
62-68	Refrain now scored for alto and tenor solo with chorus II, 6-part instrumental and continuo accompaniment.
68-94	Countertenor and baritone solo with organ continuo.
95-101	Countertenor and Baritone solo with Chorus II and organ continuo.
102-129	Chorus I (soloists), Chorus II, 6-part instrumental and continuo tutti: Chordal passages at bars 102-3. Increasingly polyphonic, with two canons combined at b. 114: (i) between chorus alto and tenor (ii) between soloists

Structure

The overall structure of the piece is rondo-like, with a refrain between each section and an instrumental sinfonia interpolated after the second refrain.

It may be summarized as A-B-C-B-Sinfonia-D-B-E-B-F-B with extension.

The refrains are subject to variation in use of resources. This elaborate structure has far outgrown the typical format of the sixteenth-century motet and points the way instead to the baroque cantata with its succession of short movements.

1-5 Bars 1 – 3 present the first important melodic shape – a phrase in the countertenor solo falling from A to E, or from tonic to dominant (though when using these terms it should be noted that there is still a strong modal element here rather than a clear cut use of major and minor modes).

Bars 3 – 5: two short 'answering' phrases falling from higher dominant to tonic.

6-12 Refrain. Bars 6 – 10: two 2-bar phrases in $\frac{3}{4}$ time, Chorus 2 leading with countertenor soloist having overlapping two-bar antiphonal response.

Bars 10 – 12: return to $\frac{4}{2}$ time; soloist has a stepwise falling phrase, supported by a more polyphonic texture, with tenors imitating sopranos.

13-24 Bars 13 – 17: Baritone soloist has two 2-bar phrases which taken together have the same melodic shape as bars 3-4, though using longer notes.

Bars 17 – 18: a new, more rhythmic, rising figure (note that its rhythmic pattern is anticipated in the basso continuo half a bar earlier).

Bars 18 – 19: rising sequence of preceding figure.

Bars 19 – 20: contrasting 1-bar figure.



There is much imitative writing for the two solo voice parts, accompanied here by just the organ continuo and 'vivificamus nos' ('grant us life').

- 95-101 Refrain (now with countertenor and baritone soloists and just organ continuo).
- 102-118 All forces used together for the first time. Initially imposing block chords, latterly dense counterpoint and florid solo parts over a dominant pedal in bars 115-117.
- 119-129 Refrain (now for full ensemble, with repetitions of the second, more polyphonic section of the refrain and an additional 'Alleluia' based on the opening bars, so providing a plagal cadence after the many preceding perfect cadences).

Tonality

The general tonality of the piece is A minor but most cadences end with a major chord (i.e. Tierce de Picardie on tonic chords) and there are strong (Aeolian) modal elements in the melodic lines. There are transitory references to other key centres, usually defined by perfect cadences.

Notice the following features:

- The fleeting sequential shifts through C and D majors in the Alleluia sections of the refrain.
- Shift to C (bar 14).
- Shift to G (bar 17).
- Shift to E minor with imperfect cadences (bars 19-21).
- Passing references to G minor (bars 43 and 46).
- The more distant key of B minor is heard in bars 48-49.
- Some ambiguity created by sets of unrelated chords showing tertiary

progressions, i.e., F major/D (bar 102), G major/E major (b. 103) B flat/G major (b. 108), G major/E major (b.109).

- Dominant pedal in A minor (bb. 115-117) leading to A major chord 118.
- Plagal cadence at close.

Harmony

The range of chords used in this piece is almost exclusively confined to I, IV and V in root position or first inversion, with occasional use of the supertonic chord or VIIb. Much use is made of suspensions, consonant fourths and passing notes to create points of tension. In a few places, there are examples of secondary sevenths and, even more rarely, one or two other dissonances.

Note that the use of II^{7b} at bar 3⁴ may be editorial, although a similar chord is produced by the movement of the parts in bar 33⁴.

Other points to note in the harmony are:

- The surprising use of 6/4s, with no preparation or resolution of the fourth, at bar 6³.
- The switch from major to minor after a perfect cadence, e.g. bar 34².
- The surprising augmented chord with secondary seventh at bar 31³, or perhaps it better understood as A major with a dissonant F natural above, anticipating the chord of D minor that follows.
- The juxtaposition of unrelated root position triads, with bass notes moving by thirds (bars 102-3 and 108-9).
- The unprepared dominant sevenths in bars 104, 105, 110, 111 and 113.
- Variable harmonic rhythm, with chord changes fastest in homophonic passages such as the refrain, and slowest during dense contrapuntal sections.
- The dominant pedal note at bar 115.
- The circle of 5ths at bar 17.
- The false relations between the F and F# at bar 102.

Melody

The basic melodic shapes that Gabrieli employs are often not far removed from melodic lines characteristic of 16th century polyphony, with sometimes a hint of

type of composition (instrumental pieces for keyboard or ensemble). It seems here that for a moment Gabrieli was adopting a more secular approach.

Text and Word-setting

The text appears to be anonymous and in all probability was a compilation, either by the composer or perhaps by one of the clergy with whom he worked at St Mark's. It would have been suitable for a festival connected with an ecclesiastical building, for example a Patronal Festival, although it could just as well have been for general use.

There are a number of notable features:

- The chorus is restricted to singing the word 'Alleluia', except for 'Deus adiutor noster in Aeternum' ('God is our helper for evermore') at bars 102-118, the climax of the work.
- The main part of the text is sung by the soloists, perhaps for the sake of clarity.
- The word-setting generally respects the natural stresses of the Latin language, with accented syllables falling on the stronger beats, e.g. bars 17-19 ('dominationis'), bars 41-46 ('salutari') and b. 51 ('auxilium').
- There is a mixture of syllabic and melismatic writing, with long melismas being applied to Alleluias in the refrain and in more florid solo passages.
- The text does not offer many opportunities for word-painting but it is nonetheless clear that the composer matches his musical ideas to the words with the intention of projecting their emotional force, e.g. the lengthy notes for 'Deus' at b. 102, the change to triple time and the use of melisma on 'vivifica nos' (bars 85-91).

Bibliography

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