

# OCR AoS4: Religious music of the Baroque period

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by Jane Werry

## WHY CHOOSE THIS AREA OF STUDY?

The Baroque period in music was long and eventful, and covers the development of both the orchestra and the diatonic tonal system. This makes this AoS the perfect complement to the Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven of AoS1, and together with AoS5 (Programme music 1820-1910) or AoS6 (Innovations in music 1900 to the present day, covered in two earlier *Music Teacher* resources, December 2016 and January 2017) would give students a thorough overview of musical history that would be ideal preparation for a music degree.

If students are thinking of doing the Composing A option, which includes technical exercises, or if you're keen for your students to study Bach chorales, then this AoS also gives all the background to Baroque approaches to harmony and tonality. There is no compulsion, however, to do AoS4 questions in the exam just because students have done Bach chorales for their Composing A technical exercises.

The other, more direct, reason for choosing AoS4 is that it simply covers a wealth of great music. If it is the sort of repertoire that you find exciting, and you think you will be able to enthuse your students with it, then that in itself is reason enough to choose it.

In this resource, I give advice on how to tackle the background to the topic, recommend some online resources, and provide a 'way in' to the music itself, including specific works that could be studied in each sub-genre required by the specification. Where longer pieces such as oratorios are concerned, I pick out some of the most useful sections to study.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

There is a good chunk of historical context that students need to understand before they embark on studying the styles and works involved in this AoS. This includes:

- the Reformation and the religious landscape in Europe at the start of the 17th century.
- the birth of opera at the start of the Baroque period.
- the place of music in religion, including some basic knowledge of liturgy, for example what a mass is.

How much time you devote to this context very much depends on what, if any, prior knowledge students already have. If you work in a church school, or if students have experience of singing in a church choir, some aspects of the required understanding may already be there. However, it is quite likely that you may well need to cover these things from scratch.

### The Reformation, and the place of music in liturgy

Fortunately there are many history resources that are useful in explaining the Reformation, such as this 'crash course' video. Watching this could be set as a homework task, together with writing notes answering the questions:

- What was the Reformation?
- When was it?
- Where was it?
- How did it affect the way people lived?
- Who were the important people and why?
- What effects of the Reformation can still be seen in people's lives today?

It could also be helpful to look at a map, such as this one. Very roughly speaking, there is a north/south divide in Europe, with the northernmost countries being predominantly Protestant and the southern countries remaining Catholic.

One of the crucial effects of the Reformation on religious music was to do with language. Protestant reformers wanted ordinary people to have a better understanding of religion, and so used the local language (the **vernacular**) as the medium for their church services. Catholics continued to use Latin, even though only the most educated people would have had a good understanding of it. This is why, for example, nearly all of Bach's choral music is in German, whereas Gabrieli and Allegri wrote theirs in Latin.

Protestants also wanted the congregation to play a more active part in church services, and so the tradition of hymn-singing developed. Hymns, or **chorales**, were simple melodies with a strophic (verse) structure, often borrowed from the popular songs of the time. These were given religious texts, and they were easy enough that the congregation could join in with the singing.

Other religious music, in both Protestant and Catholic services, was reserved for the choir. In the Middle Ages, **plainchant** (also called plainsong or Gregorian chant) had developed as a way of making the text of church services more audible in a resonant church acoustic, and also of making it more special than ordinary speech. As time went on, harmonies were added, and eventually by the Renaissance period, most church music had a mainly polyphonic texture and was complex enough to warrant being sung by a trained choir. Plainchant was (and still is, in some churches) very much in evidence, either being sung by the clergy to get through the text of the service, or as a musical foundation for polyphonic choral works.

The **mass** was by far the most common service in Protestant and Catholic churches at this time (**eucharist** and **communion** are other terms for the same thing). This is the liturgy that remembers the Last Supper of Christ, and the sharing of bread and wine with the Apostles. The text is always the same, and features sections of words that are very frequently set to music:

- Kyrie eleison (Lord, have mercy)
- Gloria in excelsis Deo (Glory to God in the highest)
- Sanctus (Holy, holy, holy)
- Benedictus (Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord)
- Agnus Dei (Lamb of God)

Occasionally other sections of the liturgy, such as the Credo, may also be set to music. In a Requiem mass (a mass for the dead), there are additional sections that are relevant to the occasion, concerning asking for eternal peace for the dead, and contemplating the Last Judgement and the afterlife.

As well as mass settings, composers would often set specific Biblical texts to suit the time of year. **Motets** and **anthems** are short choral pieces that would be sung at various points in the service to provide some musical variety and offer a moment for contemplation on a suitable religious theme. A **cantata** is a slightly longer piece, usually with a number of different movements, for choir and orchestra. An **oratorio** is a full-length piece that tells a specific Bible story in its entirety, and involves soloists, a chorus and an orchestra. Unlike the other forms encountered in this AoS, an oratorio would not normally be performed as part of a church service, but as a separate event in itself, sometimes not even in a church.

A goldmine of information directly relevant to the context of our AoS is to be found in Parts 1 and 2 of Howard Goodall's TV series *The Story of Music*. The second half of Part 1 covers the development of triadic harmony, polyphonic styles, the effect of the Reformation, and the birth of opera. Part 2 covers the development of the orchestra, the importance of dominant-tonic relationships in harmony, Bach's passions and Handel's oratorios. All this is presented in a highly watchable way, with clear explanations and plenty of well-performed musical examples.

## OPERA IN THE EARLY BAROQUE

Why do we need to think about opera when this AoS is concerned with Baroque religious music? Put simply, because it had such a dramatic influence on religious music at the time. The development of opera brought about new forms, such as recitative and aria. It also brought to the fore the notion that music could express the meaning of a text with an intensity that could provoke a real emotional response in the listener.

It is very worthwhile spending some time exploring Monteverdi's opera *L'Orfeo* with your students. It is not the earliest opera, but it is one of the earliest that survive intact. First performed in Mantua in northern Italy in 1607, *L'Orfeo* blends musical ideas old and new for dramatic effect. Choruses, dances, recitatives and arias serve to tell the story in the most entertaining and richly expressive way possible.

Watch the prologue from *L'Orfeo* here. The orchestral players are in costume, which helps to give the impression of what it might have been like to watch one of the first performances, and the lack of realistic acting is likely to reflect how early opera singers performed. The soprano sings recitatives to set the scene, interpolated with an orchestral ritornello.

The duet 'Pur ti miro, pur ti godo' from Monteverdi's later opera *L'incoronazione di Poppea* is also worth a watch, for a number of reasons. Firstly, this is a truly heart-on-its-sleeve love duet, with emotions to the fore in the music – this was something that, at the time, was groundbreaking and highly influential. Secondly, for the fact that heroic opera roles were written for castrati in the Baroque period – here, the role of the Roman emperor Nero is sung by countertenor Phillippe Jaroussky. Castrati also sang the highest vocal parts in the choir of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. The barbaric practice of castrating young boys in the hope that they might achieve musical greatness was abolished in the 19th century. The last Sistine Chapel castrato, Alessandro Moreschi, died in the 1920s. His is the only recording of a real castrato voice.

Compiling a playlist of audio excerpts, and making this available to students via your school's VLE or Spotify, enables students to start familiarising themselves with the music from the start. Real familiarity with the music will make learning the historical facts and musical features that go with them a lot easier.

### Presenting the big picture and the bare facts using a knowledge organiser

It can be very useful, particularly with such a wide-ranging topic, to present students with an overview right at the start of the topic. There is a certain amount of factual knowledge that simply has to be learnt, not least the titles, composers and dates of the pieces studied within the AoS. Presenting this to students at the start enables them to get a handle on what they will be doing, and to begin to form the necessary mental constructs to start linking things together.

A knowledge organiser, together with a playlist, is an immensely effective way of doing this. In no way does this attempt to cover everything that a student needs to know, but it does give an outline that enables students to get a grip on the structure of the topic, the sub-groups of music within the AoS, and key terms.

Aside from outlining the bigger picture of the AoS, the other useful feature of using a knowledge organiser is the ease with which it is possible to create simple, low-stakes knowledge tests. Simply by blanking out a column at a time, you can test students' factual recall. The exam, of course, is about a lot more than just factual recall, but these are the facts that must be firmly embedded in students' long-term memory in order for good essay-writing even to be a possibility. Testing the knowledge frequently is one of the most successful ways in which you can embed it.

Here is a knowledge organiser for AoS4:

Knowledge organiser AoS4: Religious music of the Baroque period			
Area	Features	Pieces	
1. <b>Italian Catholic tradition</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Venetian <b>concertato</b></li> <li>2. <b>Stile antico</b></li> <li>3. <b>Latin oratorio</b></li> <li>4. <b>Vernacular oratorio</b>, including influence of opera</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Gabrieli: In ecclesiis 1608</li> <li>2. Allegri: Missa Vidi turbam magnam 1640s</li> <li>3. Carissimi: Jephthe 1650</li> <li>4. Alessandro Scarlatti: Sedecia, re di Gerusalemme 1705</li> </ol>	
2. <b>Lutheran Germany</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Chorale</b>, recitative, aria, chorus</li> <li>2. Venetian influence</li> <li>3. <b>Passion music</b></li> <li>4. <b>Cantata</b></li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. JS Bach: St Matthew Passion, 1727</li> <li>2. JS Bach: Cantata 140, Wachet auf, 1731</li> </ol>	
3. <b>Anglican tradition</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Anthem/motet</li> <li>2. English oratorio</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Purcell: Hear My Prayer 1685; O sing unto the Lord 1688</li> <li>2. Handel: Messiah 1741</li> </ol>	
4. <b>French motets</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Grand motet</li> <li>2. Petit motet</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lully: Domine salvum fac Regem, 1703</li> <li>2. Rameau: Quam dilecta tabernacula, 1713</li> </ol>	
Non-musical terms		Musical terms	
1. <b>Anglican</b>	Protestant, Church of England	1. A cappella	Voices unaccompanied
2. <b>Catholic</b>	The Roman Catholic church, ruled by the Pope in Rome	2. Anthem	Anglican choral piece, usually in English
3. <b>Liturgy</b>	The words used in a church service (liturgical, adjective)	3. Aria	Solo song from oratorio, opera or cantata
4. <b>Lutheran</b>	Protestant, following German reformer Martin Luther	4. Cantata	Choral piece with orchestral accompaniment
5. <b>Mass</b>	Communion/eucharist service where bread and wine are shared as in the Last Supper	5. Cantus firmus	A pre-existing melody (usually plainchant) used as the basis for a polyphonic piece
6. <b>Passion</b>	The story leading up to Christ's crucifixion	6. Chorale	Lutheran hymn, sung by choir and congregation
7. <b>Protestant</b>	Not Catholic. Post-Reformation, northern Europe	7. Chorus	Movement from an oratorio or cantata sung by the choir
8. <b>Psalm</b>	A book of verses from the Old Testament	8. Concertato	Venetian style where voices and instruments alternate
9. <b>Reformation</b>	From 1517, a breakaway from the Roman Catholic church in northern Europe	9. Fugue/fugal	Imitative polyphonic piece. Entries of the subject in each part, at different pitches
10. <b>Requiem mass</b>	Mass for the dead	10. Kappellmeister	Person in charge of music at German church or court

<b>11. Sacred</b>	Religious	11. Motet	Choral piece, unaccompanied or accompanied, in Latin or vernacular
<b>12. Secular</b>	Non-religious	12. Obbligato	Instrumental solo countermelody
<b>13. Vernacular</b>	Local language, not Latin	13. Oratorio	Large-scale piece for soloists, chorus and orchestra, telling a (usually Biblical) story
		14. Plainchant	Medieval monophonic chant
		15. Recitative	Musical narration, speech rhythms, minimal accompaniment
		16. Stile antico	'Old-style' polyphony such as by Palestrina

None of the scores of Allegri's masses are available freely online. The best way to obtain a score is direct from the publisher Mapa Mundi, which has editions of many of Allegri's works, and a very good mail-order service.

## THE ITALIAN CATHOLIC TRADITION: THE *PRIMA PRATTICA* AND *SECONDA PRATTICA*

The **prima prattica** is also known as the **stile antico**. This refers to the a cappella, polyphonic music of Renaissance composers such as Palestrina. The style persisted into the Baroque period, particularly in Rome, which was deeply conservative. Gregorio Allegri was one composer who continued to write in the *stile antico* well into the Baroque period. Although Allegri is chiefly remembered nowadays as the composer of the famous Miserere, this is not actually a good example of the *stile antico*, as it is nearly all homophonic. For a good example of Allegri's *prima prattica* music, we need to investigate one of his many mass settings.

The **Missa Vidi turbam magnam** was written in the 1640s to be performed in the Sistine Chapel in Rome, where Allegri was employed as a member of the choir. An investigation of the Kyrie reveals its key musical features:

- Freely imitative texture: compare tenor 1 entry in bar 1 of the Kyrie with soprano 2 entry in bar 5. The shape is similar but not slavishly copied.
- Avoidance of harmonic tritones: the F natural in the bass in bar 3 is there to prevent tritone between the bass and tenor 2. The tritone had long been considered a highly dissonant interval that was to be avoided.
- Overlapping entries: the alto entry in bar 4 overlaps with end of previous phrase.
- Cutting down the number of voices involved in the *Christe eleison* section by using the upper four voices only.
- Syncopation: a good example is the alto part in bar 21.
- Functional harmony: the music is clearly in G major, underpinned by clear dominant-tonic relationships. There is a perfect cadence in D major in bar 8 to establish the dominant key, if only briefly, before hinting at C major in bar 11.
- Dissonances are prepared and resolved in the conventional way: there are many 4-3 suspensions at cadence points. A good example is at the end of the first Kyrie section, where the alto's G is held over the chord change in the middle of bar 18 to create a dissonant 4th above the bass, which then resolves down to the F sharp, the 3rd of chord V.

By contrast, the **seconda prattica** or **stile moderno** was blossoming further north in the early Baroque. Venice was not part of a united Italy until the 19th century, and had a long and proud history as a wealthy and free-thinking trading-post. The intense conservatism of Rome during the Counter-Reformation in the late 16th century simply did not stretch this far north, and as a consequence northern Italy was a hotbed of rapid musical evolution. The development of opera and the appearance of the *stile moderno* were intertwined, and the sacred manifestation of the new style was centred on St Mark's Basilica in Venice. St Mark's is an awe-inspiring building built as the chapel of the Doge (Venice's ruler) during Venice's golden age. The interior is almost entirely covered with gold mosaics, and there are many balconies and galleries.

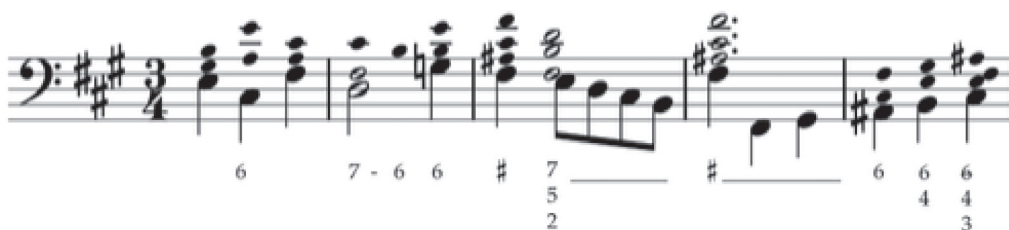
As our example of a typical early Baroque *stile moderno* piece, we will look at Giovanni Gabrieli's motet **In ecclesiis**, written for St Mark's in 1608. A free score is available online.

Giovanni Gabrieli's uncle Andrea Gabrieli also worked at St Mark's Basilica in Venice, and invented the **polychoral style** to make use of all the balconies in the building – he would use different groups of singers and instrumentalists in different places to achieve an impressive 'surround-sound' effect. Having different choirs in different places is also called **cori spezzati**.

**Stile concertato** refers to early 17th-century pieces using **voices, instruments and continuo**. It literally means 'in a concerted style'.

Other useful terms for students to learn at this point include the following:

- **Monody** is when there is a solo voice with continuo.
- **Continuo** is short for **basso continuo** (continuous bassline) – played by a cello (usually) and a chord instrument (**harpichord, organ or lute**, or a combination of these) – exactly which instruments would play was flexible and depended on available players, but continuo always consists of a bassline with chords.
- The harpsichord, organ or lute would play from a bassline, sometimes with numbers (figures) underneath that show what notes to play. Here the harmonies implied by the figures are shown in small notes. This is **figured bass**.



*In ecclesiis* is in **rondo form**, where the **ritornello** (returning section) is the **alleluia**:

Section	Bar	Features
A	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Solo with continuo = <b>monody</b>.</li> <li>• The tonality is <b>A minor</b> – all the C sharps are <b>Picardy 3rds</b>.</li> <li>• The ostinato that starts in the continuo at bar 3 is a typical <b>seconda prattica</b> feature.</li> <li>• Text in italics = repetition of words – would have been blank in original manuscript.</li> </ul>
B	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change to triple time significant because three is a number associated with God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit).</li> <li>• Point of imitation between alto 1 and tenor around bars 10-11 is a feature borrowed from <b>prima prattica</b>.</li> </ul>
C	13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Monodic texture</b>.</li> <li>• Sequences (in vocal line) and syncopation are a <b>seconda prattica</b> feature.</li> <li>• Syncopation also = joyful.</li> </ul>
B	25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Same as last alleluia, just a different soloist.</li> </ul>
SINFONIA	31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sinfonia literally means <b>sounding together</b>. The instrumental writing is <b>idiomatic</b> (ie suits the instruments, would be difficult to sing!).</li> <li>• <b>Dotted rhythms</b> and <b>false relations</b> are typical <b>seconda prattica</b> features.</li> <li>• The augmented chord in bar 31 is characteristically bold.</li> </ul>
D	39	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vocal duet with instruments.</li> <li>• Lots of false relations.</li> <li>• <b>Canonic imitation</b> in the voices bar 50.</li> <li>• Around bar 57 the texture is more of a call and response, and is quite virtuosic for the voices and cornetts, with the cornetts imitating the vocal semiquavers.</li> <li>• Surprising B flat chord at bar 57, does not change key though!</li> </ul>
B	62	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vocal duet, chorus and instruments heard together for the first time.</li> <li>• The chords at the start of this section look like cadences in different keys: this is just an example of the approach to tonality common at the time – Gabrieli is thinking in the <b>Aeolian mode</b> (white notes A-A), and in modal harmony it is common to have cadences onto any degree of the scale.</li> <li>• The countertenor solo has new melody to alleluia tune.</li> </ul>

Because *In ecclesiis* was for many years a set work on the Edexcel syllabus, there are many very good resources for it. The best is undoubtedly fellow *Music Teacher* resource writer Simon Rushby's excellent revision video, available here.

Students are unlikely to be familiar with the cornett, and will find it interesting to watch the video demonstration here.



Section	Bar	Features
E	68	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Melisma</b> for 'Deus' (God) emphasises important words.</li> <li>• Duet with continuo.</li> <li>• Syncopation bar 81 – a <b>seconda prattica</b> feature.</li> <li>• Change of metre and syncopation bar 85 for 'vivifica nos' (enliven us) is good example of the <b>word painting</b> that was at the heart of the <i>stile moderno</i>.</li> </ul>
B	95	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Same as first B section, except for countermelody.</li> <li>• Orchestration trimmed back to just the continuo, to increase the impact when the full ensemble comes back in.</li> </ul>
F	102	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Into triple time for 'Deus' (God).</li> <li>• <b>Juxtaposition</b> of seemingly unrelated chords (F major and D major) in bar 102: this has a surprising effect caused by F natural/F sharp false relation. However, the chords have a note in common – a <b>binding note</b>. This happens again in bar 103 – G/E.</li> <li>• Lots of examples in this section of bold harmony and word-painting typical of <i>seconda prattica</i>.</li> </ul>

A good essay question to set for students after they have studied these two works would be this:

- Describe the features of the *prima prattica* and *seconda prattica*, as demonstrated in two works by early Baroque composers.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ORATORIO

This Area of Study covers oratorios from Catholic Italy, Lutheran Germany and Protestant England, so a good way to tackle this is to look at a selection in chronological order. A representative sample is as follows:

- Carissimi: Jephthe, 1650
- Alessandro Scarlatti: Sedecia, re di Gerusalemme, 1705
- JS Bach: St Matthew Passion, 1727
- Handel: Messiah, 1741

### Early Italian oratorios in Latin and the vernacular

#### CARISSIMI'S JEPHTE

Giacomo Carissimi worked as an organist and choirmaster in churches in Rome throughout his life. While he was remarkably lacking in ambition – he did not even publish any of his compositions – he was at the forefront of the development of the oratorio. The Congregation of the Oratory was an organisation that sought to provide religious education for ordinary people through sermons in the vernacular and dramatisations of Bible stories. The Oratory was the prayer hall where the groups met, and soon the musical Bible stories that took place there took on its name. These borrowed the ideas of recitative and monody from opera, but without costumes and stage action. Opera was becoming so fashionable that the inclusion of operatic features made oratorios popular with audiences, particularly during Lent, when performances of opera were not allowed.

The story of Jephthe (Jephthah in English) is taken from the Old Testament book of Judges. In it, Jephthe swears that if he is successful in defeating the Ammonites in battle, he will sacrifice the first thing that greets him upon his return home. Unfortunately for all concerned, Jephthe is greeted by his only daughter, and she is sacrificed – not killed, but not allowed to marry, which would result in her death from shame, as to die childless was to be denied the opportunity to give birth to the Messiah.

The music of *Jephthe* includes several features that became standard in later Baroque oratorios. One of the soloists takes the role of narrator, with others taking on the roles of various characters in the story. The story moves on through the recitatives, with the choruses providing a commentary on the action. There are also more lyrical ariosos, where musical ideas more complex than those in recitatives are used, but there are no arias as such: this not only sets early oratorios apart from later examples by Bach and Handel, but makes them much shorter – performances of *Jephthe* last a mere 30 minutes.

Here are some examples that illustrate the key musical features of Carissimi's *Jephte*:

- There is no orchestral accompaniment, only continuo.
- Joyful choruses, for example 'Cantemus omnes Domino' celebrating Jephte's victory, have simple, syllabic, homophonic setting of the words in a major key, with primary harmony.
- Minor keys, and more dissonance and chromaticism, are used in mournful sections, for example the daughter's arioso 'Plorate colles'. Here, there is much use of 4-3 suspensions to convey a feeling of anguish.
- The setting is mostly syllabic. Where melismas are used, this is to provide word-painting, for example on the word 'ululate' (wailing) and 'resonate'.
- In the 'Plorate colles' arioso, the use of an echo chorus shows the influence of *stile moderno* composers such as Monteverdi and Gabrieli.
- In the final chorus 'Plorate, filii Israel', repeated descending patterns and suspensions are used to convey weeping and lamenting.

### ALESSANDRO SCARLATTI'S *SEDECIA, RE DI GERUSALEMME*

Alessandro Scarlatti's vernacular oratorio *Sedecia, re di Gerusalemme* is a good example of an oratorio in Italian, rather than Latin. Scarlatti is known principally as an opera composer, and did not write many oratorios. It is not necessary to look at *Sedecia* in any significant detail, as in the exam it is only likely that candidates will use it as an example of a vernacular oratorio, and quote a few of its distinguishing characteristics. This is fortunate, seeing as how the only score available on the internet is a manuscript that is not particularly legible for student use. It will suffice for students to be aurally familiar with the music, and know the following:

- The text is in Italian, rather than Latin.
- There is no narrator: each of the soloists fulfils a role in the story.
- The music sounds exactly like that of Scarlatti's operas.
- 'Caldo sangue' is an example of a da capo aria, a form very popular in the late Baroque. This consists of an ABA structure, where the B section has a different mood and key, and where the performer adds expressive ornaments in the repeat of the A section.

### JS Bach's St Matthew Passion

This is a huge work, in length, musical weight and historical stature. It would be lovely to study all of it in depth – and to do so would be extremely rewarding – but time probably dictates that you are selective in which sections your students explore in any detail. My selection of representative sections is designed to give an overview of the work as a whole, and is as follows:

- **No. 1: Chorus** 'Kommt, ihr Töchter'
- **No. 21: Chorale** 'Erkenne mich, mein Hüter' (Passion chorale setting 1)
- **No. 25: Arioso** (tenor) with interwoven chorale 'O Schmerz'
- **No. 33: Aria** with chorus (soprano & alto) 'So ist mein Jesus nun gefangen', followed by chorus 'Sind Blitze, sind Donner'
- **No. 34: Recitative** 'Und siehe'
- **No. 47: Aria** (alto) 'Erbarme dich'
- **No. 63: Chorale** 'O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden' (Passion chorale setting 4)
- **No. 72: Chorale** 'Wenn ich einmal soll scheiden' (Passion chorale setting 5)
- **No. 78: final chorus** 'Wir setzen uns'

The numbers here are from the Novello vocal score. Other editions may have different numbering.

The Passion is the story of the events leading up to Christ's crucifixion. Musical settings of the Passion had a long history, even in Bach's time. In the Middle Ages, there was a tradition of Passion plays in Europe, for example those still staged in Oberammergau in Bavaria. When plainchant was developed, the Passion story was customarily told through music on Good Friday in chant, and this musical setting developed in the 15th century to include choruses, with plainchant sung by singers representing the Evangelist and Christ. In the 16th century, motet Passions featured unaccompanied choir and no solos: these died out with advent of opera, and musical Passions inspired by opera flourished, simply because the operatic influence was much more exciting for audiences.

Bach wrote his St Matthew Passion using text from the gospel of St Matthew and lyrics by the librettist Picander, for the Good Friday service at St Thomas's Church in Leipzig, where he was Kappellmeister. The narrator is the tenor soloist, the Evangelist, who tells the story through recitative. Jesus is a bass soloist. Other soloists take other parts or sing arias that provide a commentary on the events. The chorus plays various roles, from the baying rabble to more symbolic, off-stage commentary.



Here is a commentary on the sections I've selected above:

Number	Title	Forces used	Description
No. 1	Chorus: 'Kommt, ihr Töchter'	Double choir, two orchestras and a separate children's chorus. In the first performance, these would have been placed separately within the church, using two organ lofts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In 12/8 time, the rhythmic style is similar to a siciliana, demonstrating how Bach was influenced by dance styles.</li> <li>In ritornello form, with much dialogue between the two choirs, although much of the material in the episodes is based on that of the ritornello.</li> <li>The children's chorus sings a chorale melody, which is in G major throughout, even though this is sometimes in conflict with the prevailing minor key of the other music.</li> </ul>
No. 21	Chorale: 'Erkenne mich, mein Hüter'	Chorus I and II.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The melody was originally a popular song.</li> <li>The chorales served the purpose of involving the congregation in the music, and everyone would join in with singing the melody.</li> <li>This is the first of five appearances of this chorale.</li> <li>The major/minor conflict seen in the opening chorus are present here, too, with the phrases alternating between major and minor keys.</li> </ul>
No. 25	Arioso (tenor) with chorale: 'O Schmerz'	Tenor solo, chorus, organ continuo, strings, flutes and oboe da caccia (an instrument similar to a cor anglais).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Here, the tenor soloist (a different one from the one playing the role of the Evangelist) plays the part of Peter.</li> <li>In the recitative prior to this, Christ has foretold Peter's betrayal.</li> <li>The semiquavers in the continuo at the start echo the throbbing heart of the text.</li> <li>As with all of the recitatives, upward leaps in the melody emphasise important words, although because this is an arioso the orchestral part is more substantial than in a recitative, with a distinctive three-note 'grief' motif.</li> <li>The tenor's high tessitura contrasts with the low, deflated tessitura of the chorus in the interwoven chorale.</li> </ul>
No. 33	Aria with chorus (soprano & alto): 'So ist mein Jesus nun gefangen'	Soprano and alto solos, chorus and orchestra.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This is not a da capo aria, as to repeat the opening section would interrupt the flow of the story.</li> <li>At the start, there is no bass, with the viola playing the lowest line – this 'bassetto' texture is intended to create an innocent, heaven-bound mood.</li> <li>The soprano and alto parts are interspersed with interjections from the chorus; not in this case with a chorale melody, but with a commentary on the action.</li> <li>The chorus 'Sind Blitze' that follows the duet is an example of Bach's mastery of counterpoint and musical organisation. The tonal structure is palindromic, with rapid entries of the theme in B minor, E minor, A major, D major, G major, D major, A minor, E minor and B minor. Once the central G major section is reached, the two choruses are split antiphonally in a way not dissimilar to the Venetian <i>cori spezzati</i> style.</li> <li>There are long melismas in the bass that do an excellent job of word-painting 'donner' (thunder).</li> </ul>

Number	Title	Forces used	Description
No. 34	Recitative: 'Und siehe'	Tenor (Evangelist) and bass (Christ) with continuo and strings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This is a good example of how Bach uses <i>recitativo secco</i> ('dry recitative') for the Evangelist, with a characteristic rising interval at the start.</li> <li>The dry chords turn to sustained string chords when Christ sings: this persists throughout the work and acts as a musical halo.</li> <li>The only time Christ's halo is missing is much later in the story, when he speaks his final words on the cross.</li> <li>There is an interesting tonal twist at the end: Christ finishes with a perfect cadence in A major, and the Evangelist continues his narration in C sharp minor: an unexpected modulation, but one that Bach uses quite frequently.</li> </ul>
No. 47	Aria (alto): 'Erbarme dich'	Alto solo with orchestra and violin obbligato.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The violin obbligato is used in arias connected to Judas' betrayal and Peter's denial.</li> <li>Here, Peter's denial has just happened, in the previous recitative.</li> <li>The alto has the most introspective arias.</li> <li>This one is not da capo, although the introduction is repeated at the end.</li> </ul>
No. 63	Chorale: 'O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden'	Chorus I and II.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At this point in the action, Christ has just been crowned with thorns.</li> <li>This time, the Passion chorale is set in a much higher key to create a feeling of anguish, and there are more passing notes and chromatic chords than when we first encountered this melody.</li> </ul>
No. 72	Chorale: 'Wenn ich einmal soll scheiden'	Chorus I and II.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Now completely reharmonised in the Phrygian mode, the chorale is lower in pitch, with even more chromaticism.</li> <li>This is sung immediately following Christ's death, and provides a suitably sombre commentary.</li> </ul>
No. 78	Final chorus: 'Wir setzen uns'	Chorus I and II, orchestra.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Another ternary-form chorus finishes the Passion.</li> <li>This one again demonstrates the influence of dance rhythms, with a 3/4 sarabande style.</li> <li>Melodic and harmonic 7ths are much in evidence, for example the major 7th between the soprano and the orchestral bass in bar 14, and the rising minor 7th in the melody in bar 16.</li> <li>'Weeping' pairs of descending quavers are featured throughout in vocal and orchestral parts.</li> <li>The final chord has a pungent major 7th appoggiatura to complete the overall effect of mourning.</li> </ul>

## Handel's *Messiah*

Handel's *Messiah* uses text from the King James Bible to tell the story of Christ from his birth through to his resurrection. Unlike all of the other oratorios we have explored, the soloists in *Messiah* do not play any dramatic parts. Instead, they provide a combination of narration and commentary on events. It was written at a time when Italian opera was declining in popularity in England, and audiences were beginning to favour English-language dramas. Handel had already composed several successful oratorios in English before *Messiah*, and although the response to the first performance was somewhat muted, it became popular quite quickly afterwards and has been performed frequently ever since.

As with the St Matthew Passion, it is necessary to be rather selective when investigating *Messiah* in more detail, simply because it is such a substantial work. My selection is as follows:

- **No. 6: Aria** (alto) 'But who may abide the day of his coming?'
- **Nos. 14-16: Recitatives** (soprano) 'There were shepherds abiding in the field'
- **No. 25: Chorus** 'And with his stripes'
- **No. 26: Chorus** 'All we like sheep have gone astray'

The numbering here is from the New Novello Watkins Shaw edition.

- **No. 47: Recitative** (bass) 'Behold, I tell you a mystery'
- **No. 48: Aria** (bass) 'The trumpet shall sound'

Here is a commentary on the sections I've selected above:

Number	Title	Description
No. 6	Aria (alto) 'But who may abide the day of his coming?'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A-B-A-B structure, where A is slow and B is fast.</li> <li>• The keys of the four sections are D minor-F major-D minor-D minor, with the slow sections in 3/8 and the fast ones in 4/4.</li> <li>• This aria was a later addition to the score and was written for a male alto.</li> <li>• The faster sections feature <b>coloratura</b> as word-painting to represent fire.</li> <li>• As with many of Handel's arias, there is a momentary adagio at the end, with a cadenza for the vocalist.</li> </ul>
Nos. 14-16	Recitatives (soprano) 'There were shepherds'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These recitatives are interesting to compare with Bach's recitatives in the St Matthew Passion.</li> <li>• None of them employs the strict <i>recitativo secco</i> of the Evangelist's recits: 14a and 15 have held string chords (a parallel could be made to Christ's 'halo' in the Matthew Passion), while 14b and 16 are good examples of <i>recitativo accompagnato</i>.</li> <li>• These have a more metrical feel (as opposed to being governed strictly by speech-rhythms) with semiquaver movement in the strings to set the mood for the sudden appearance of the angels.</li> <li>• No.16 ends with <b>dominant preparation</b> for the next chorus, as do many of Bach's recitatives.</li> </ul>
No. 25	Chorus 'And with his stripes'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This is a good example of a fugal approach in one of Handel's choruses: it is one of the most complete fugues in <i>Messiah</i>, although there are many instances of fugal passages.</li> <li>• The <b>fugue subject</b> is heard in the soprano, with the <b>answer</b> in the alto, while the soprano continues with the <b>counter-subject</b>.</li> <li>• The second entry of the subject is in the tenor, and the second answer is in the bass.</li> <li>• Once students can recognise the subject, answer and counter-subject, it is relatively easy to spot how these are used in the rest of the chorus: there is very little other material.</li> <li>• The fugue comes to rest on a C major chord: again, this is dominant preparation for the F major of the next chorus.</li> </ul>
No. 26	Chorus 'All we like sheep have gone astray'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are five main ideas in this chorus: a homophonic, syllabic one for 'all we like sheep'; melismatic ones for 'have gone astray' and 'we have turned'; a descending octave leap as an alternative setting of 'we have turned'; and one with repeated notes for 'ev'ry one to his own way'.</li> <li>• Seeing how Handel combines these ideas, with different combinations of voices, is a masterclass in how to vary texture.</li> <li>• The final section is adagio and in a minor key to represent the iniquity of man, and characteristic Handelian double-dotted rhythms.</li> </ul>
No. 47	Recitative (bass) 'Behold, I tell you a mystery'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A short recitative, but one that can have magical impact in the hands of a good performer.</li> <li>• There is much word-painting: the change to a diminished 7th chord on 'sleep', resolving to A7 on 'chang'd', with the introduction of fanfare-like figures as a presage of the trumpet in the following aria.</li> <li>• Ends on an A major chord to provide dominant preparation for the D major aria.</li> </ul>
No. 48	Aria (bass) 'The trumpet shall sound'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In D major, to fit with the natural D trumpets used in all of the grand, celebratory movements.</li> <li>• There are long melismas to emphasise the words 'raised' and 'changed'.</li> <li>• It is a da capo aria (although the long trumpet introduction is omitted on the repeat).</li> <li>• The B section is in the relative minor and does not include the trumpet.</li> </ul>

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# ENGLISH AND FRENCH ANTHEMS AND MOTETS

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Anthems and motets are similar in that they are shorter pieces for choir, set to a sacred text, often a psalm. They may be accompanied or unaccompanied, and in Latin or the vernacular. The word anthem, however, is usually only used to describe choral pieces with an English text.

We will look briefly at two anthems by Purcell to see the characteristics of the two main types of Baroque anthem. Firstly, **'Hear My Prayer'** is probably a fragment of a larger, unfinished piece, and sets one verse of Psalm 102. Written for eight-part unaccompanied chorus, it is considered one of the supreme examples of Purcell's genius for word-setting: a masterpiece in miniature. The setting is mainly syllabic, except for a characteristic chromatic figure on 'crying': the intensity of the word-painting is derived entirely from skilful manipulation of dissonance, texture and tessitura, coming to a climax four bars before the end. 'Hear My Prayer' is an example of a **full anthem**, because it is written for full choir throughout.

Secondly, **'O Sing Unto the Lord'** is an example of a **verse anthem**. This type of anthem alternates solo passages with those for full choir, and became very fashionable in England after the Restoration of Charles II in 1660. This anthem sets text from Psalm 96, and is likely to have been composed for a special occasion, as it features strings. Short sections for solo voices alternate with choruses. There is always great sensitivity to the text, with keys, textures, tempos, and use of syllabic or melismatic settings always showing close attention to the meaning.

French motets also fall into two distinct categories: the **petit motet** and the **grand motet**. The *grand motet* was developed in the royal chapel at Versailles, and included solo voices, chorus and large orchestral forces. Rameau's **'Quam dilecta tabernacula'** is an example of a *grand motet* from 1713. The first part of the text is introduced by a solo voice, as was customary in *grands motets*, and the multi-sectional setting of Psalm 83 that follows shows the influence of Rameau's copious operatic output. There is a mixture of lyrical sections and complex counterpoint.

The *petit motet* featured solo voices and continuo, perhaps with a small number of solo instruments. It was also smaller in terms of the amount of text that was set, usually with one movement, and overall much shorter than a *grand motet*. Lully's **'Domine salvum fac Regem'** was customarily performed at Versailles whenever the French King attended Mass. Written for three high voices and continuo, it is a simple but melodic syllabic setting lasting less than two minutes.