

GIOVANNI ALBERTO RISTORI: *Messa per il Santissimo Natale* [Musik aus Dresden]. Christoph Koop, ed. Carus Verlag 27.044 (full score).

JOHANN MICHAEL HAYDN: *Missa in honorem Sancti Gotthardi* ("Admonter Messe") MH 530. Armin Kircher, ed. Carus Verlag 54.530 (full score)

Choral directors have long known of the extensive catalog of liturgical music amassed by Carus Verlag, often published in conjunction with fine recordings of the works in question. The Ristori Mass considered here, for example, has already been released as part of a delightful program called "Christmas at the Court of Dresden," and it's particularly important--when it comes to unknown pieces--that performers and music lovers have the opportunity to hear them as well as read them in score. Carus is in the process of making available an extensive series of scores and recordings devoted to sacred music of the Dresden Court in the 18th and 19th centuries. Issues to date include works by Zelenka, W.F. Bach, Antonio Lotti, Johann David Heinichen, Heinrich Schütz (a complete edition), and Johann Adolf Hasse.

Giovanni Alberto Ristori (1692?-1753) worked at exactly the same time as Hasse, Heinichen, and Zelenka, and succeeded the latter to the position of "Church Composer" on Zelenka's death in 1745. His "Christmas Mass" (ca. 1744) is scored for an exceptionally full and festive orchestra: pairs of flutes, oboes, bassoons, horns, and trumpets, with timpani, strings, and continuo. The title comes from the lovely siciliano in 12/8 that Ristori added to the "Cum Sancto Spiritu" fugue that concludes the "Gloria." He also provided a shorter version, without the woodwind-spiced pastoral interlude, for performance at other times of the year, an indication of just how significant the rest of the music must have been to him. This is a major work by any standard, masterfully designed and singularly well balanced between contrapuntal and more tuneful, operatic elements.

The Saxon court of August the Strong, whose Catholic faith conveniently permitted him to become King of Poland, stood out as exceptional in largely protestant North Germany. Church music constituted a major component of Catholic propaganda, and the aristocracy made sure that its very expensive troop of world-class singers, instrumentalists, and composers were kept busy spreading the word. Editor Christoph Koop provides a detailed account of Ristori's career at Dresden, as well as the special features of this particular work. If you haven't heard it, I strongly recommend picking up the "Christmas at the Court of Dresden" CD (Carus 83.169) and giving it a listen. This piece would grace any holiday program and make a welcome change of pace from the usual run of *Messiahs* and *Christmas Oratorios*.



Michael Haydn's Admonter Mass also belongs to an imposing and important series, the projected publication of all thirty Mass settings by the much less famous younger brother of Joseph Haydn. Michael was, arguably, the most important German composer of liturgical music in the second half of the 18th century. The Mozarts, father and son, had some snide things to say about him, probably out of professional jealousy, and once Wolfgang got the boot in Salzburg Haydn stepped

into the breach and filled the post with distinction until his death in 1806. Haydn's Masses are written for a wide range of voices and instruments, depending on the circumstance of composition, from the *Missa Hispanica* for double choir, to the *Missa Sti Hieronymi*, scored for oboes (at least four), trombones, bassoons, organ, and double basses.

The *Missa in honorem Sancti Gotthardi* was composed in 1792 for Abbot Gotthard Kuglmayr and his Admont Abbey in Styria. Kuglmayr was one of those "enlightened" churchmen who fancied the arts, music especially, and evidently bankrupted his establishment in pursuing his passion. At least they had a good time in the process. In addition to the choir and four vocal soloists, the Mass is scored for pairs of oboes and trumpets, with timpani, two violin parts, and continuo (organ, bassoon, cello, and double bass). In the lovely "Agnus Dei" the violins are muted, an effect that Haydn also exploited in his *Missa in honorem Sanctae Ursulae*. Interestingly, despite the work's ample proportions, the vocal writing is tunefully homophonic throughout. There are no fugues and no major contrapuntal episodes, and this makes the Mass a particularly clear embodiment of the new simplicity characteristic of the Classical period.

This does not mean, though, that Haydn was not mindful of musical or liturgical precedent. Indeed, comparing both Mass and other liturgical settings over time offers a unique opportunity to study continuities in composition and performance practice. Sacred music, for example, contributed directly to the formation of the Classical style by giving composers the opportunity to capture the emotions reflected in the text: pleading ("Kyrie," "Qui tollis," "Agnus Dei"), mourning ("Crucifixus"), praise and joy ("Gloria," "Et resurrexit," "Osanna"), and other nuances in terms of the new aesthetic. For example, in his discussion of the origins of what was for him "modern" music, violin pedagogue Pierre Baillot, writing in 1835 noted:

"It was especially toward the end of the last [18th] century that almost all musical conception took on a dramatic aspect; music of the Church was the first to make use of the language of the passions, perhaps in order to combat them better."

It is extremely interesting to see exactly what elements carried over from the earlier, Baroque period. One of these with particular relevance for today's period performance movement is the use of orchestral string vibrato. There were many different ways in which this could be indicated, but the most common included a wavy line: , or a slur and a series of individual dots ("portato") over or under the notes: . These notational symbols generally appear whenever the music expresses sadness, pleading, fear, or trembling, and while some scholars, including occasionally the editors of Carus's editions, maintain that normal pitch vibrato is not involved, the evidence of the scores and of early sources does not support this theory. Just the opposite, in fact.

Thus, if we compare the settings of the "Agnus" from the Ristori and Haydn Masses, composed some half a century apart, we find Ristori writing the following:

A musical score for a string ensemble. The upper staves (Violins I and II, and Violas) feature a dense texture of sixteenth-note patterns, often with slurs and vibrato markings. The lower staves (Cellos and Double Basses) are marked with a 'div.' (divisi) instruction, indicating that the parts are to be divided. The overall texture is highly rhythmic and continuous.

Vocal score for four voices (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass). The lyrics are: "mi - se - re - re no - bis." and "re - re, mi - se - re re no - bis." The score includes a "Tutti" marking above the first two staves. The vocal lines are written in a simple, homophonic style, with long notes and slurs.

Haydn, on the other hand, chooses the other notational option but the timbral result is basically the same:

Musical score for piano and voice. The piano part features a complex, rhythmic accompaniment with dynamic markings of *p* (piano) and *f* (forte). The voice part is marked "Solo" and features the lyrics: "A - gnus De - i, qui tol - lis pec - ca - ta, qui". The piano part includes trills and slurs, and the voice part is written in a simple, homophonic style.

This continuity of practice is very striking. It tells us that, notwithstanding the inevitable variations over time in terms of musical style, instrument construction, and notation, there are certain images and archetypes that remain consistent--not just because liturgical music theoretically embodies unchanging, eternal truth, but because using the same texts to express the same emotions will naturally require the same performance techniques. In other words, the expression of feeling in music in certain circumstances has hardly changed for centuries. This makes further sense when you consider that the basics of violin playing (and using vibrato certainly

