7-23-2009

Missa prolationem

Kurt Knecht

University of Nebraska - Lincoln, kurt@kurtknecht.com

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/musicstudent

Part of the Music Commons
MISSA PROLATIONEM

by

Kurt Knecht

A DOCTORAL DOCUMENT

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

Major: Music

Under the Supervision of Professor Tyler G. White

Lincoln, Nebraska

April, 2009
Missa Prolationem is a setting of the traditional Latin Ordinary mass text that seeks to explore counterpoint in the context of metric problems. Though Ockeghem’s specific contrapuntal techniques were not utilized, his Missa Prolationem served as the original inspiration for this setting of the mass. Each movement attempts to explore a specific problem created by the interaction of the counterpoint and meter. In the Kyrie, contrapuntal passages in multiple meters are both superimposed and juxtaposed. The Gloria includes a triple fugue in which each subject is in a different time signature. The Credo is a series of canons at descending intervals and includes double canons, metric canons, and inversion canons. The Sanctus explores the possibility of cross cutting divergent meters and moods. The Agnus Dei divides the ensemble into various groups and explores non-imitative counterpoint with each group functioning in its own time signature.

In addition to its rigorous formal organization, the Missa Prolationem is a highly expressive work that makes use of the text painting and symbolism which have long been associated with the Western tradition in Mass settings. Included among the techniques utilized are aleatoric sections in the Gloria to express exuberance, a symbolic addition of voices and gradual motion toward unity in the Credo, and the withholding of a unified
time signature until the last measures of the Agnus Dei to emphasize the request for peace in the text.

The work was written with specific performers in mind. Accordingly, the forces include soloists, mixed chorus, string quartet, and organ.
DISSERTATION TITLE

Missa Prolationem

BY

Kurt Knecht

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:

Date

7/20/09

26/5/11

7/20/09

07/20/09

7/13/09

UNIVERSITY OF
Nebraska
Lincoln
Table of Contents

Program notes ..................................................................................................................... vi
Instrumentation .................................................................................................................. xv
Kyrie ....................................................................................................................................1
Gloria .................................................................................................................................20
Credo ..................................................................................................................................50
Sanctus ...............................................................................................................................97
Agnus Dei ..........................................................................................................................115
Introductory comments

In many ways this work is a manifesto for me. Many people are writing beautiful choral music right now. I love it very much, but I have a growing concern about the overwhelming vertical nature of the vast majority of the writing. I wanted to write a large-scale work that would remind people of the beauty of counterpoint. It is an art that, I think, is fading too much in our current musical culture. I don’t want choirs to forget the great rewards that come from preparing contrapuntal works.

I had written a Sanctus some years ago that was getting lonely and longing for some companions. As I began to work on the revision, a conception of a large scale work emerged in my mind. Each movement would confront a specific contrapuntal problem. Because so many of the problems I wanted to confront were dealing with counterpoint in the context of metric issues, I decided to consult Ockeghem’s Missa Prolationem for some ideas and thoughts. Ockeghem’s work is one of the great monuments of the contrapuntal art. Each movement consists of double canons where each vocal part functions in a different time signature (prolation). I never use his specific canonic technique in my mass, but it really is a “mass of time signatures”, so the title seemed to fit. Normally, I don’t like to talk about the technical structure that supports the musical form. To me, it is like mistaking the blue print of a building for the façade. The great question is: to what expressive end are the technical features working? In this case, however, much of the music is motivated by the technical problem being solved.
In the Kyrie, I posed the following problem: Is it possible to write a two part counterpoint in one time signature and combine/contrast it with music in a different time signature. The Kyrie begins with two soloists presenting a modernized Palestrina type idea in 3/4. The idea does include a hemiola in order to foreshadow the approaching conflict. The soloists repeat the idea as an ostinato with the cello entering as a commentator. As the soloists continue the ostinato in 3/4, the choir enters in 4/4. The cello brings the first Kyrie section to a close. The full choir enters a capella introducing the “Christe eleison” text in a largely homophonic presentation in 4/4. This is followed by a canonic presentation of the text in the choir with violin obbligato. In this section, the soloists “interrupt” the 4/4 of the choir and sing in 3/4. The section continues with the choir singing the original homophonic idea (now accompanied) with the soloists interrupting to sing in 3/4. The choir concludes the section a capella. The final Kyrie inverts the structure of the previous Kyrie. The soloists and the lower strings now move in 4/4 while the choir, 1st violin, and organ are in 3/4. The Kyrie concludes with the cello eventually descending to the sustained low D that began the work.
Gloria

The problem of the Gloria was simply: is it possible to write a triple fugue in which each subject is in a different time signature? Theoretically, there would be a climactic measure in which all three subjects would occur at the same time. The movement begins with an antiphonal gesture between the organ and the strings. The choir presents an aleatoric “Gloria in excelsis” with soloists ecstatically interjecting over the mass of sound. The final “Deo” occurs on a chord that provides the structural framework of the piece. A short passage of homophony follows for the text “et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis”. The first fugue – in 4/4 – follows on the text “Laudamus te, Benedicimus te, Adoramus te, Glorificamus te.” The fugue concludes on “Gratias agimus tibi” and ends on the same structural chord that concluded the first section. This time, however, the chord is placed over a different bass note. The concluding gesture is repeated for “propter magnam gloriam tuam.” The “structural chord” is heard over both of the bass notes from each concluding section. The second fugue begins on the text “Domine Deus Rex caelestis, Deus pater omnipotens, Jesu Christe.” This fugue is in 6/8 with some strong hemiolas that make it occasionally feel like it is in 3/4. The organ punctuates this fugue by playing little bursts that superimpose a 5/8 meter over the 6/8 of the choral fugue. As the first section of the second fugue winds down, the organ eventually concedes and joins in playing in 6/8 for a moment until
the “structural chord” is achieved. The stabilization is only momentary. The altos restart the 6/8 “Domine Deus” fugue, but now the sopranos begin to sing the “Laudamus Te” fugue in 4/4 at the same time. The organ has returned to 5/8. The juxtaposition of the two fugues is short lived as everyone eventually coalesces around the 6/8 meter to achieve the “structural” chord only to find that it is being presented over yet another bass note. The structural chord now becomes a static harmonic event that is reconfigured in different forms antiphonally between the organ and strings. As this occurs, the soloists sing “Domine Deus, Agnus Dei, Filius Patris” in a beautiful canon at the 2nd. They eventually join to sing “Qui tollis peccata mundi Miserere nobis” in thirds. A seemingly unrelated section follows as the choir lyrically sings “Qui tollis peccata mundi suscipe deprecationem nostram” in 3/4. As the full chorus moves on to sing “qui sedes ad dexteram Patris miserere nobis”, it turns out that what seemed to be unrelated material is of modular construction. As the chorus sings the passage in 3/4, the soloists sing the theme of the “Laudamus te” fugue at the same time in 4/4. This leads immediately into the third fugue in 5/4 on “Quoniam tu solus sanctus, tu solus Dominus”. Before the exposition is complete, vocal parts begin to introduce subjects and counter-subjects from the previous fugues. The passage culminates in a measure in which the tenors and basses sing the subject and counter subject of the 5/4 “Quoniam” fugue, the altos sing the 6/8 subject of the “Domine Deus” fugue, and the sopranos sing the 4/4 subject of the “Laudamus te” fugue – all simultaneously(!). Once the climax is reached, the aleatoric section from the beginning is revisited which leads into the motive that concluded the first two fugues. The “structural” chord that was used to bind the work together is now
revisited and several different bass notes are recapitulated. When the most dissonant one
is reached, it becomes a default “dominant” and resolves to the original tonic.

Credo

In the Credo, I sought to come to terms with the problem of the canon. The
musical canon has long been associated with the Credo because of its association with
canon law. I conceived of a symbolic mirror-like structure to create the contrapuntal
problem that I wanted to solve. A series of canons at descending intervals would
ultimately resolve into a canon at the unison. The following graph illustrates the
structure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Canon interval</th>
<th>Musical Material</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4+</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In order to provide further unity to the work, I derived all the various musical materials from a single source. I created a series of major thirds separated by half steps. A sample set would be C E F A Bb D Eb G Ab C.

The Credo begins with the choir singing in canons at the octave and unison. The strings accompany with a metric canon in augmentation. Violin 2 and Viola then play an inversion canon at the octave as a transition. A new accompanimental figure starts, and the choir sings “Et in unum Dominum” as a double canon at the interval of a 7th. The section concludes, and “Deum de Deo” is sung a cappella by the choir as a double canon at the 6th. The short passage that begins with “genitum non factum” remains at the 6th and includes a musical motive that is manipulated by inversion canon and and metric diminution. It’s somewhat difficult to describe in words, but basically the motive that the altos sing at “genitum” is sung “upside down” by the basses at the same time with the sopranos entering a few beats later singing the same music “upside down” and twice as fast a 6th higher. The tenors then sing “consubstantialem Patri”, the sopranos invert it and sing it twice as fast a 6th higher, the altos invert it, and the basses invert the alto part and sing it twice as fast a 6th higher. The next section, beginning with “qui propter nos homine” begins a canon at the 5th between the tenors and altos. The sopranos and basses punctuate the canon with staccato prayers that repeat the text in canon, but not at strict intervals. At “et incarnates est” the music begins to build to a climax. It is canonic, but I allowed some intervallic freedom for expressive purposes. The “crucifixus” is sung by soloists who present the text in a double inversion canon at the tritone. A canon at the unison in the strings is presented over an organ pedal tone as a transition to the “resurrection”. The “et resurrexit” itself follows the same sort of effect with the choir
singing a strict 4 part canon at the 4th. The “et ascendit” follows with the choir singing a rather unique construction. The basses begin with the tenors following in a strict canon at the 4th one measure later. The altos then sing in strict canon at the 4th above the tenors, but they enter two measures after the tenor entrance instead of one measure. The sopranos unify the section by singing an unrelated melody over the underlying canons. The section climaxes, and the material from the canon at the 5th returns with a slight rhythmic variation. The tenors and the altos present the same musical material as before on the “Et in Spiritus Sanctus” text, but this time it is in canon at the 3rd instead of the 5th. The sopranos and bases, again, punctuate with staccato prayers that lead into a freer section. The material from the canon at the 7th now reappears for “et in unam sanctam”, but with the canon occurring at the 2nd instead of the 7th. Having traversed the intervals and returned to the unison, it was important to make to textual/structural references to further unify the work. The “et exspecto ressurectionem” in the third article of the creed utilizes the same musical “resurrection” as the “et resurrexit” from the second article. When the “Amen” is finally achieved, the original canon sung at the unison/octave that began the piece is repeated, but this time in major.

Sanctus

The Sanctus is much less contrapuntal, but deals with contrapuntal issues in the context of some mild metric modulations and tempo juxtapositions. The movement begins with a lovely soprano solo over some clustery, suspended harmonies in the organ. The choir sings the “Pleni sunt coeli” in a new tempo and time signature utilizing a canon
in very close metric spacing so that cluster type harmonies appear and then quickly vanish. The full choir then enters in free imitative counterpoint in a dance-like 6/8. The dance is suddenly interrupted with the material related to the original soprano solo in 4/4 in a completely different mood and tempo. The solo concludes in short order and the choir reasserts its 6/8 dance. When the choir and the soloist finally sing at the same time, the choir enters singing the “Hosanna in excelsis” in an ecstatic 7/8 with the soloist singing over the top and the strings and organ punctuating with strong chords. The section concludes with the choir singing some of the sopranos lyrical material but in the context of the swinging 6/8 dance.

Agnus Dei

The only way that I could conceive of resolving all the issues presented in the preceding movements was to write a movement of non-imitative counterpoint in which each musical idea would function in a different time signature. In many ways this is the movement that owes most to the Ockeghem *Missa Prolationem* even though it doesn’t use his canonic procedures.

After the climatic Sanctus, I felt that an instrumental meditation would be necessary to provide the right sort of space and time for the mood that I wanted to create. Accordingly, the movement begins with the 2\textsuperscript{nd} violin, viola, and cello. Each instrument moves in its own rhythm. The Violin plays in dotted quarters in a 12/8. The Viola plays in quarters in a 3/2. The Cello plays in half notes in a 4/2. Each instrument also receives a specific musical pattern that compliments the polyrhythmic structure. The result is a meditative effect that is punctuated by special moments of simultaneity and silence. As
each instrument works through its own pattern, we eventually arrive at the same point where we started. At this point, the instruments repeat their patterns, and the soloist enters singing in 6/4 over the competing time signatures. When the soloist finishes, the organ enters playing in 8\textsuperscript{th} notes in a 3/4 time signature. The full choir enters for the second presentation of the text. The basses and tenors combine to sing in the 4/2 pattern that the Cello introduced. The altos sing in the 6/4 pattern that the Viola introduced. The sopranos sing in something that is partly the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Violin’s 12/8 and partly the soloist’s 6/4. As the section continues, the organ introduces yet another layer of rhythmic complexity by playing triplet figures in a 2/2 time signature. As the section continues, the choir and strings all jump to new time signatures to create more forward motion. The sopranos sing in 3/2, the altos in 6/4, the tenors and basses in 12/8. After a climax, the original meditation returns, but the 2/2 triplets of the organ are retained as the soloists once again sings in 6/4 over the underlying material. The movement continues by juxtaposing all of the preceding time signatures at once with a soprano solo soaring of the top in half notes and a mezzo singing in 12/8. Still searching for peace, the texture thins with an ascending figure in the choir where the bases sing in 3/4, the tenors in 3/2, the altos in 12/8, and the sopranos in a displaced 6/4. The strings punctuate the passage with harmonics that all enter in their own time signatures as well. This again allows for surprising simultaneities and silences. Eventually, the choir agrees to sing together in a brief moment of homophony before the soloists and instrumentalists conclude with rhythmic juxtapositions. The choir sings a final “pacem” in a homophonous 6/4, and the instruments respond in kind.
Missa Prolationem

for

Soprano solo
Mezzo-soprano solo
SATB chorus
Organ
String Quartet

(approximate length 35 minutes)

Kurt Knecht
Kyrie

Kurt Knecht

Poignantly \( \frac{\text{mp}}{\text{s}} \) = 80

Soprano Solo

Mezzo Solo

Soprano

Alto

Tenor

Bass

Organ

Violin 1

Violin 2

Viola

Cello

©2008
Kyrie
Kyrie
Kyrie
Kyrie

sop solo

mek solo

S

A

T

B

Org

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla

Vlc

soloist sing as if in 3/4

Ky-rie, ky-rie, ky-rie,

Ky-rie, ky-rie, ky-rie,

\textit{Kyrie e leison}

\textit{Kyrie e leison}

\textit{Kyrie e leison}

\textit{Kyrie e leison}

\textit{Kyrie e leison}

\textit{Kyrie e leison}

\textit{Kyrie e leison}

\textit{Kyrie e leison}

\textit{Kyrie e leison}

\textit{Kyrie e leison}

\textit{Kyrie e leison}

\textit{Kyrie e leison}

\textit{Kyrie e leison}

\textit{Kyrie e leison}

\textit{Kyrie e leison}

\textit{Kyrie e leison}

\textit{Kyrie e leison}

\textit{Kyrie e leison
Kyrie
Kyrie
Kyrie

sop solo

mez solo

S

A

T

B

Org

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.
Kyrie
Kyrie

sop solo

mez solo

S

A

T

B

Org

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.
Kyrie
Kyrie
Kyrie

sop solo

mez solo

S

A

T

B

Org

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.

soloist sing as if in 4/4
Kyrie
Kyrie
Kyrie
* Each singer randomly repeats the pattern entering whenever he/she wishes.
Gloria

Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
Gloria

Sop solo

Met solo

Soprano

Mezzo

Tenor

Bass

Organ

Violin 1

Violin 2

Viola

Violoncello

Soprano solo

Mezzo solo

\text{Slower} \quad q = 90

\text{accel.}
Gloria

Allegro (M.M. \( \frac{3}{8} \times 120 \))
Gloria

A - dori - mu - te. Glo - ri - fi - ca - mos - te

Lau - da - mu - te. Be - ne - di - ci - mu - no

Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
Gloria
Gloria

sop solo

mez solo

S

A

T

B

Org

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.
Gloria
Gloria
Gloria
Gloria
Gloria
Gloria

Qui tollis peccata mundi
miiserere nobis
Gloria
Gloria

sop solo

mez solo

S

A

T

B

Org

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vlc.
Gloria

Allegro (M.M. \( \frac{4}{4} \) q. 120)

\( \text{Quo si am tu sol us suntus, Tu sol us Dominus} \)

\( \text{Tu sol us al ti si us} \)
Gloria

sop solo

mez solo

S

A

T

B

Org

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.
Gloria
Gloria
Gloria

sop solo

mez solo

S

A

T

B

Org

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.
Gloria
* Voices should begin entering with a single tenor, alto, and bass. Gradually add voices. The entire choir should be included by m.6
Credo

De-um Pa-trum om-ni-po-tens-fu-cem-eo-li-et
tem fac-to-reem eos-li-et-terae, vi-si-bi-li-un
em-ni-un,
tem om-ni-po-tens-fu-cem-eo-li-et-terae, vi-si-bi-li-

Org

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla

Vlc
Credo
Credo
Credo

Et ex Patris natus ante omni saeculo.

Et ex Patris natus ante omni saeculo.

Et ex Patris natus ante omni saeculo.

Et ex Patris natus ante omni saeculo.
Credo

S

A

T

B

Org

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.
Credo
Credo

\textit{Genitum non factum, con-substantialem Patri per quem...}

\textit{Genitum non factum, con-substantialem Patri per quem...}

\textit{Genitum non factum, con-substantialem Patri per quem...}

\textit{Genitum non factum, con-substantialem Patri per quem...}
Credo

S

A

T

B

Org

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.

omnia facta sunt;

per quem omnia facta sunt;

per quem omnia facta sunt;

quia omnia facta sunt;

fac ta sunt;

fac ta sunt;

fac ta sunt;

fac ta sunt;

Credo
Credo
Credo
Credo

V

AT

B

Org

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.
Credo

S

A

T

B

Org

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.
Credo
Credo
Credo
Credo
Credo
Credo

S

A

T

B

Org

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.
Credo
Credo

Pater noster, qui es in caelo, sanctificati
Benedictus
Sanctorum
Dona eis requiem et amnesiam

S
A
T
B
Org
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla
Violin

---

Credo
Credo
Credo
Credo

Soprano

Alto

Tenor

Bass

Organ

Violin 1

Violin 2

Viola

Violone

Et in Spiritum Sanctum
Credo
Credo
Credo

S  
Vesun quem ex Patre procedit;

A  
Sanctum quem ex Patre procedit;

T  
qui ex Patre procedit;

B  
et vitam invenit quem ex Patre procedit;

Org  

Vln. 1  

Vln. 2  

Vla  

Vlc  

Credo

Qui cum Patre et Filio sancto a doro

S

A

T

B

Org

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla

Vlc
Credo
Credo
Credo
Credo
Credo

S

vi - tum ven - tu - ri sae - cu - li, sae - cu - li.

A

or - an et vi - tum ven - tu - ri sae - cu - li, sae - cu - li.

T


B


Org

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla

Vlc
Credo
Credo
Sanctus
Sanctus
Sanctus
Sanctus
Sanctus
Sanctus
Sanctus
Sanctus
Sanctus
Sanctus
Sanctus
Agnus Dei

Kurt Knecht

Peacefully $\frac{1}{4}=60$

©2008
Agnus Dei

mez solo

mez solo
Agnus Dei

mez solo

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.

mez solo

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.

mez solo

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.

mez solo

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.
Agnus Dei
Agnus Dei
Vln. 1 | Vln. 2 | Vla. | Vlc. | Org.
Agnus Dei
Agnus Dei

De iis qui tollis pecuniam

S

A

T

B

Org

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.
Agnus Dei

dimisere nos

misere nos

misere nos

Org

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.
mez sol

Ag

us

De

i

qui

ul

la

pa

c

mun

di.

mez sol

Agnus Dei
Agnus Dei
Agnus Dei
Agnus Dei

do na no bis pa cum
do na no bis pa cum

do na no bis pa cum

do na no bis pa cum

Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
Agnus Dei

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.

Org.
Agnus Dei

mez solo

V

S

A

T

B

Org

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.