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GEORGE J. BUELOW

A SCHÜTZ READER

Documents on Performance Practice

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German Requiem

Princely patronage offered Schütz the opportunity for writing works in larger scoring, even under the most deprived circumstances of the times of war; and traditionally the occasion of a memorial service was marked by elaborate music, though — as befitting the nature of the occasion — kept essentially within the confines of the capella style.

The Requiem for Prince Heinrich of Reuss, ruler of a small Saxon principality, was dedicated to a patron of the arts with whom Schütz had been associated for many years in close personal friendship. In the custom of the time, the Prince himself had given careful thought to the arrangements for the service. He had chosen the Scripture text for his funeral sermon and had it engraved on the sarcophagus in which he was to be buried. On either side of this text were added "all those sayings from Holy Writ and those versus of the Christian hymns" that had held a special meaning for him.

Thus Schütz's texts for the work were fully prepared, and it is of great musical interest how consciously he applied a mixture of the old and modern styles to them. He composed the Psalm verse on which the sermon was based in the time-honored manner of the antiphonal motet for double chorus. But the other text portions were set as elaborate sacred concertos in which various groups of solo voices alternate with the full choral sound.

The first movement, in which several Protestant chorales are interspersed in remarkably free rhythmic treatment, is cast in the form of a Mass setting, with the German *Kyrie* providing a choral framework for the initial solo portions. But the final movement, the *Nunc dimittis* — the customary concluding canticle of Vespers — is treated by Schütz in a form that clearly unfolds the new resources of the dramatic style. In moving response to the incipit and opening choral section, the voices of two seraphim join with the voice of the departed in Heaven.

As Arthur Mendel had pointed out in his edition of the work, the title page of the original edition tells us a good deal about its nature and origin:

Musical Exequies
 As they were Observed at the Grand Funeral Ceremonies
 in Christian memory
 of the Late Honored
 Prince Heinrich
 the Younger and Eldest Reuss/Lord of Plauen/
 Member of the Council of His Imperial Roman Majesty
 in Gertz/Cranichfeldt/Gera/Schleitz/Lobenstein/etc.
 on the Fourth day of February last in Gera/before and
 after the Funeral Sermon/and in Accordance with the
 Wishes often Expressed by his late Highness during his Life-time
 sung to a Soft and Concealed Organ
 for 6, 8, or more voices
 and
 with accompanying *Basso Continuo* in two copies
 the one for the Organ, the other for the Conductor or the Violone
 Together with a Detailed List of the Musical Contents of this Little Work
 and Instructions for the Necessary Arrangements, Addressed to the
 Gracious Reader
 Humbly set to Music, by Command, in final Commemoration
 and published in print by
 Heinrich Schütz — Electoral Saxon Kapellmeister
 Printed in Dresden by Wolf Seyffert in the Year
 1636

≡TEXT≡

In this little musical work there are only three pieces or Concerti:

1. *All those sayings from Holy Writ and those verses of the Christian hymns which His late Highness during his lifetime secretly had inscribed on the cover and on both sides and at the head and foot of his sarcophagus, gathered together in a Concerto and arranged in the form of a German mass, like the Latin Kyrie, Christe, Kyrie Eleison; Gloria in Excelsis; Et in terra pax; &c.*

2. *The words which His late Highness had chosen as the text for his funeral sermon: "Lord, if I but thee may have," etc.*

3. *The Song of Simeon, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace," etc., which His late Highness had chosen for his burial. In the course of which a separate choir is introduced, singing different words: "Blessed are the dead," etc. There follow then the Instructions for the Necessary Arrangements for each Concerto.*

I.

*Arrangements for the Concerto or German Requiem Mass:
Naked came I out of my mother's womb.*

1. *This Concerto, arranged after the manner of a Latin or German mass, is really for six concerted voices, or for six singers with organ, namely two sopranos, one alto, two tenors, and one bass.*

2. *In the alto part, however, there will be found in two verses a bass part as well (at times when the alto is silent), which is intended to enhance the variety of the Concerto and accordingly must also be sung along with the rest.*

3. *From these six concertato parts six other parts can be copied out (from the point where the word Capella occurs [each time] to the next little line) and with these a second choir or Capella can be set up and introduced along with the first.*

4. *The Bassus continuus, which is to be used to play on the organ the chords I wish in this work, I have transposed down a fourth, for the benefit of the singers, although I am not unconscious of the fact that it would fall more naturally for the organ down a fifth, and perhaps would thus be in a way more useful to the unpracticed organist.*

5. *Since I have had to bring together into one Corpus the verses of German hymns belonging to all sorts of modes, I hope understanding musicians will forgive me for occasionally transgressing the limits of the Ninth Mode in order to follow these hymn melodies.*

6. *Anyone who should take a liking to this work of mine could make use of it not badly at times in place of a German Missa, perhaps on the Feast of the Purification, or on the XVI Sunday after Trinity.*

II.

Arrangements for the Motet: "Lord, if I but thee may have."

It is in eight parts, for two equal choirs, and can also be arranged and performed without the organ if desired.

III.

*Arrangements for the Song of Simeon:
"Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace."*

1. *It must be known that this Concerto has two choirs, each choir with its own words. The First Choir has five voices and recites the words of Simeon: "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant . . ." The Second Choir has three voices, two sopranos and a baritone or high bass, and sings the following words, and others: "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord." By means of this invention, that is, by means of the Second Choir, the author has wished to suggest to some degree the joy of the disembodied souls of the blessed in heaven, in the company of the heavenly spirits and holy angels.*

2. *The First Choir should be close to the organ, while the Second is in the distance — or however it seems best on each occasion to arrange them.*

3. *Anyone who wishes to make one or two copies of this Second Choir and set up such groups at various places in the church would, the author hopes, increase the effect of the work not a little.*

There is also a page of instructions for the player of the Violone (bass viol).

For the Violone or the big Bass Fiddle a few suggestions, added in place of an appendix, because space was left over:

That the Violone or the big bass fiddle is the most convenient, agreeable, and best instrument to go with the concertato voices (when the latter are sung to the sole accompaniment of a quiet organ), and is a particular ornament of concerted music when it is rightly employed — this is not only shown by its effect, but also confirmed by the example of the most famous musicians in Europe, who nowadays everywhere use this instrument in their arrangements of this sort. For this reason it seems not unwise to include in these publications of concerted musical pieces, along with the Basso Continuo for the organ, another copy in addition for the Violone, and to add

it to this issue. And this has been done in the present work, and I have decided to hold to this practice in the other editions which, please God, I shall publish in the near future.

Now although for the aforementioned Violone one could set up and publish a separate bass part specially designed for that instrument, and not just issue another copy of the bass for the organ, yet in order to save money we have contented ourselves with this extra copy. And we trust to those who have learned to play this foundation instrument to know how to treat everything with a sharp ear and keen understanding. Nevertheless, for the sake of the inexperienced I have desired to include three short reminders concerning the discretion with which the Violone may be played from this extra copy of the organ bass:

(1) Where an alto or tenor clef is marked, the Violone can play along, though always in the low register, that is, an octave below; for example, in a passage for trio, consisting of two sopranos and alto, the Violone can play the alto part an octave lower with good effect. But the following should be observed:

(2) When these high parts, whether they be soprano, alto, or tenor, are introduced successively in imitation, the Violone should not play until the bass enters.

(3) It must also be specially observed that when a single bass voice or two or more bass voices are singing, the Violone should not play, since the vocal bass carries the foundation anyway, and the Violone with identical chords or unisons creates a disagreeable harmony. But this and other things that might be said will be learned from listening and experience.

Symphoniae Sacrae II

The personal isolation in which Schütz found himself after losing his wife was aggravated by artistic isolation. Again and again we find indications in the documents of the time that the war years had made it impossible to maintain even a minimum of the performance forces with whose direction he was charged. For these reasons he repeatedly asked for leaves, and a few years after returning from his second stay in Venice, he left for the first of several sojourns in Copenhagen where the musical establishment of the Danish court offered him a wide field of activity.

Between these journeys he issued the first of his three collections of *Symphoniae Sacrae* for solo voices and instruments. While Book I of the *Symphoniae Sacrae* still uses the traditional Latin, Book II appeared with German texts; and the *Symphoniae Sacrae* eventually found their counterpart in his collections of *Kleine Geistliche Konzerte* which, in distinction to the *Symphoniae Sacrae*, were scored for solo voices with continuo accompaniment only. The collections of "sacred symphonies" and "sacred concertos" represent milestones in the development of the German Protestant cantata.

Schütz's extensive communication "to the benevolent reader" at the beginning of his *Symphoniae sacrae*, Book II (Dresden, 1647), tells us little about actual performance problems of the collection but a great deal about the origins and stylistic spirit of the music. Most of the individual pieces in this collection were composed while Schütz lived for the second time in Copenhagen, during the years 1642-1644 (the work is dedicated to the Crown Prince of Denmark). The preface displays Schütz's pride in his spreading fame, especially based on the earlier set of sacred symphonies written and published in Venice in 1629. Clearly, the composer meant to capitalize on this fame as he suggests, by publishing a second collection with the same title, but in place of Latin texts, setting his "German mother-tongue."

In a subtle way, the volume is also meant as a testimony to Monteverdi, with whom Schütz became acquainted during his second trip to Venice in 1629, and whose musical achievements form a distinctive musical foundation for this and other works by Schütz. The *Symphoniae Sacrae II* are modern, Italianate, small vocal concertos, of a general type very much in vogue in Venice in the first half of the seventeenth century. Schütz says that though the modern Italian manner was not well known in Germany, it was