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Vivaldi
Gloria in D major
Bach
Magnificat in D major

Lynda Russell
Gillian Fisher
Alison Browne
Ian Partridge
Michael George

The Sixteen
The Symphony of Harmony and Invention
HARRY CHRISTOPHERS
There is no doubt that Bach and Vivaldi are the unrivalled masters of baroque music in Germany and Italy respectively. Combining these two works together on a single disc, one is immediately conscious of the difference between these two composers. Bach is complex; Vivaldi is effective. Both treat us to sumptuous musical colours but, although often similar in their choice of instrumentation, the effects provided are poles apart. Just compare Vivaldi’s Domine Deus, with its exquisitely beautiful oboe accompanying, in a very pastoral way, the soprano voice (played and sung divinely by Sophia McKenna and Lynda Russell respectively) with Bach’s Quia respexit; we have here the same basic instrumentation, the same vocal soloist, but, with the latter, the effect is haunting and daring. Vivaldi at his simplest; Bach, as ever, complex and, at times, downright outrageous in his use of harmony.

It is also the wonderful singing of Lynda Russell that highlights these comparisons. She has so many vocal colours at her disposal, and her sensitivity to the text is always a delight.

In performance, both works make audiences smile wherever we perform, but it is Bach’s final flourish in the Magnificat that is filled with fun and ebullience. Trumpets blazing, and it’s over all too soon, leaving us, musicians and listeners alike, on a real high.

Antonio Vivaldi
Gloria in D major

Although Vivaldi (1678-1741) is recognised today primarily on account of his many fine concertos he was also the composer of some forty-five operas or so and of a significant quantity of church music. Among this second category may be found solo motets, settings of the canticles and psalms and what has become his best-known sacred composition, the Gloria in D major (RV 589). Vivaldi, although a frequent traveller abroad as well as to other Italian cities, was associated during most of his working life with the Ospedale della Pietà, one of four Venetian orphanages for girls. He joined its staff in 1703 as Maestro di violino at which time the Maestro di coro there was Francesco Gasparini, a celebrated teacher and composer. Traditionally, the story goes that owing to a severe illness Gasparini was forced to give up his position at the Pietà which, incidentally, gave him responsibility for instrumentalists as well as singers. However, it seems more likely that illness was just an excuse for the increasing amount of time which Gasparini was spending in Rome staging his operas. Be that as it may, in 1713 Vivaldi took over Gasparini’s responsibility for the provision of new sacred compositions for the Pietà, though not in fact the position of Maestro di coro itself which was eventually awarded in 1719 to a comparative nonentity, Carlo Pietro Grua. During this six-year period Vivaldi, as well as being appointed Maestro de’ concerti (director of instrumental music) at the Pietà, kept it well supplied with sacred music; the present D major setting of the Gloria, one of two which he wrote in this key, probably being among the earliest of them.

Vivaldi’s Gloria is in twelve effectively contrasted movements. Venetian composers, like those at Bologna, were inspired, no doubt partly by the architecture of their churches, to experiment with musical colours and sonorities; Vivaldi’s larger setting of Beatus Vir (RV 597), for instance, derives a particular effect from its recurring antiphonal ritornello. In the Gloria it is the swift changes of mood and kaleidoscope of instrumental and vocal colouring which are, perhaps most striking.

In the first section of the Gloria the four-part choir is supported by a string orchestra with an oboe and a trumpet; the unison opening which emphasises the tonic key in octave intervals is a favourite Vivaldi device by which we can often recognise his style from that of his many gifted Italian contemporaries. In the sequence of solos and choruses which follows, the composer achieves his composite picture not only by affecting changes in texture and colour - he uses an oboe, for example, to accompany the tender 12/8 soprano solo, Domine Deus - but also in his choice of keys; D major and its relative B minor are reserved for the two opening and two closing
numbers. For the remainder of the work Vivaldi takes us through G major, E minor, C major, F major, D minor and A minor. The double fugue chorus Cun Sanchez Spiritu, which ends the work is also present, with slight alterations, in Vivaldi’s other Gloria (RV 588). Its music was an adaptation of a fugue in a Gloria (1708) by a Veronese composer, Giovanni Maria Ruggieri (fl. 1689–1715).

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Magnificat in D Major

Although—compared with the enormous quantity of music he provided for German texts—Bach’s Latin music represents a very small output, it includes two works of the highest distinction. One of these is, of course, the Mass in B minor which occupied Bach’s mind for nearly a quarter of a century. The other is the setting of these is, of course, the Magnificat. The other is the setting of these is, of course, the Magnificat.

Bach was formally installed as Cantor at St Thomas’s School, Leipzig in 1723; and the earliest of such works was the Magnificat. Although—compared with the enormous quantity of music he provided for German texts—Bach’s Latin music represents a very small output, it includes two works of the highest distinction. One of these is, of course, the Magnificat, which text would have been familiar to the congregation, dramatic commentary between the verses was clearly unnecessary. The da capo aria, too, with its often lengthy repeats, would hinder the direct and striking impact of the canticle. It is Bach’s realisation of this which enabled him to write a work of exceptional concision and structural formality.

The orchestra for the D major Magnificat is typical of those of his festive cantatas - three trumpets, drums, two oboes, two flutes, strings and continuo, but, unlike most of the cantatas the choral writing is in five parts (SSATB).

The first of twelve short movements is a sparkling chorus with full orchestra. Movement 2, for the second soprano solo, is scored (by contrast with the opening) for strings and continuo only. Movement 3 is for the first soprano accompanied by an expressive oboe d’amore obbligato with continuo. This is suddenly cut short by Movement 4, the dramatic chorus Omnes generationes. Bach makes effective contrast here by change of rhythm, mood and texture. Movement 5 is a powerful bass aria with continuo, Quia fecit mihi magna. Here Bach presents both lines pictorially, underling the powerful words of the text. Movement 6 is a duet for alto and tenor with two flutes, muted strings and continuo. A noteworthy feature of this section is the descending chromatic bass such as we find in the Crucifixus of the B minor Mass or the chorale-fantasia of Cantata No.78 Jesu, der du meine Seele.

At the centre of the Magnificat is the fugal chorus Fecit potentiam. This dazzling outburst of sound is created by the five-part choir with full orchestra. Movement 8 is a tenor aria with strings and continuo, Deposuit potentes. Like the earlier bass aria this, too, is treated pictorially in its descending semiquaver motifs found in all the parts. Movement 9, Esurientes is an alto solo with two flutes and continuo. In the earlier version Bach used recorders, which sound particularly apt in the original context of this gently reflective music. It is followed by a trio for two sopranos and an alto, Suscepit Israel. The accompaniment in the later version consists of only continuo without violone and bassoon, above which the oboes sound the notes of the ninth psalm-tone, less striking to us than to the congregations of Bach’s day who would immediately have recognised it. Movement 11 is a five-part fugue with continuo. Since the original parts of the manuscript have not survived we cannot be certain of Bach’s intentions here. Often in such a movement each voice part would be reinforced by a stringed or wind instrument. Finally, a threefold Gloria leads us back to the music of the opening movement, and with a resounding Amen, the work is brought to a close.

Nicholas Anderson
VIVALDI

Gloria

(Chorus) - Gloria in excelsis Deo 2.30
(Chorus) - Et in terra pax hominibus 4.53
(Soprano I & II) - Laudamus te 2.12
(Chorus) - Gr atias agimus tibi 0.27
(Chorus) - Propter magnam gloriam 0.53
(Soprano I) - Domine Deus 3.31
(Chorus) - Domine Fili Unigenite 2.10
(Alto & Chorus) - Domine Deus, Agnus Dei 4.09
(Chorus) - Qui tollis peccata mundi 1.04
(Alto) - Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris 2.06
(Chorus) - Quoniam tu solus Sanctus 0.45
(Chorus) - Cum Sancto Spiritu 2.43

Total playing time 55.09

J. S. BACH

Magnificat

(Chorus) - Magnificat anima mea 2.52
(Soprano II) - Et exultavit 2.23
(Soprano I) - Quia respi xit 2.12
(Chorus) - Omnes generationes 1.11
(Bass) - Quia fecit mihi magna 2.10
(Alto & Tenor) - Et misericordia 3.36
(Chorus) - Fecit potentiam 1.51
(Tenor) - Deposuit potentes 1.59
(Alto) - E surientes 2.55
(Chorus) - Suscepit Israel 2.08
(Chorus) - Sicut locutus est 1.32
(Chorus) - Gloria 2.22

Total playing time 55.09

SOLOISTS

SOPRANO  Lynda Russell, Gillian Fisher
ALTO  Alison Browner
TENOR  Ian Partridge
BASS  Michael George

THE SIXTEEN

SOPRANO  Fiona Clarke, Sophie Daneman, Ruth Dean, Carys Lane, Rebecca Outram, Alison Smart
ALTO  Michael Lees, Philip Newton, Christopher Royall, Caroline Trevor
TENOR  Andrew Carwood, Philip Daggett, Neil MacKenzie, David Roy
BASS  Simon Birchall, Roger Cleverdon, Robert Evans, Timothy Jones

THE SYMPHONY OF HARMONY AND INVENTION

VIOLIN  David Woodcock (leader), William Thorp, Theresa Caudle, Marc Ashley Cooper, James Ellis, Helen Orsler, Jean Paterson, Claire Sansom

VIOLA  Jane Compton, David Brooker
CELLO  Richard Campbell, Imogen Seth-Smith
BASS  Timothy Lyons
FLUTE  Rachel Beckett, Utako Ikeda
OBOE  Sophia McKenna, Cherry Forbes
BASSOON  Sally Jackson
TRUMPET  Crispian Steele-Perkins, David Blackadder, William O’Sullivan
SACKBUT  Susan Addison, Paul Nieman
TIMPANI  John Chimes
ORGAN  Laurence Cummings
HARP  Celia Harper
THEORBO  Robin Jeffrey
Propter magnam gloriam tuam. For your great glory.

Domine Deus, Rex coelestis, Deus Pater omnipotens. Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father.

Domine Fili Unigenite, Jesu Christe. Only-begotten Son, Lord Jesus Christ.

Domine Deus, Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis. Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us.

Qui tollis peccata mundi, Suscipe deprecationem nostram. You who takes away the sins of the world, receive our prayer.
Magnificat anima mea Dominum (Chorus)

Magnificat anima mea Dominum
My soul glorifies the Lord

Et exsultavit (Aria - Soprano II)

Et exsultavit spiritus meus
and my spirit has rejoiced

Quia respexit (Aria - Soprano I)

Quia respexit
Because he has looked

Omnes generationes (Chorus)

Omnes generationes.
All generations.
Suscepit Israel puerum suum, recordatus misericordiae suae; He protects Israel his servant, remembering his mercy;

Sicut locutus est ad patres nostros, Abraham et semini eius in saecula. as he promised to our fathers, to Abraham and his children for ever.

Gloria Patri, gloria Filio, gloria et Spiritui Sancto; sicut erat in principio, et nunc et semper, et in saecula saeculorum. Amen. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Quia fecit mihi magna qui potens est, et sanctum nomen eius. For he has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

Et misericordia a progenie in progenies timentibus eum. And his mercy lasts from age to age for those who fear him.

Fecit potentiam in bracchio suo; dispersit superbos mente cordis sui. He has put forth his arm in strength; he has scattered the proud-hearted.

Deposuit potentes de sede et exaltavit humiles. He has cast the mighty from their thrones and raised up the lowly.

Esurientes implevit bonis et divites dimisit inanes. He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.
The Sixteen

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BBC RADIO 3

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The Sixteen are Associate Artists of London’s South Bank Centre and also well known as the “The Voices of Classic FM”. The Sixteen’s own CD label CORO now releases most of the group’s recordings.

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Recording Engineer: Antony Howell
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