

Describe and analyse the pieces in the sacred vocal music section, showing how they reflect different ways of writing for church music.

The works in the sacred vocal music section are all written for the Christian religion, some designed to be sung as part of a church service, others have been inspired by religion but are intended to be sung in a concert hall. The works are taken from a wide range of musical styles from Renaissance to Modern. The works I will be analysing are: “O Wilhelme, pastor bone” (Tavener), “In ecclesiis” (Gabrieli), Cantata No.48, movements 1-4 (Bach), “Quoniam tu solus” (Haydn), “Locus iste” (Bruckner), Symphony of psalms, movement 3 (Stravinsky) and “The lamb” (Tavener).

Tavener’s “O Wilhelme, pastor bone” is written for an all male choir, the top two parts sung by boy trebles. Tavener uses a syllabic setting of the text until the last phrase in which he uses a melisma in the upper parts. This is a renaissance piece so there are no dynamics marked. The piece has been constructed so that the 5 parts do not sing at once. This question and answer technique between the upper and lower parts is known as antiphony and can work well when performed in a church as the different parts of the choir are in different parts of the church to give an echo effect. It also means Tavener can wait until bar 10 before showing off his 5 part harmony. Tavener uses a range of textures, with polyphony at the beginning but then a contrasting homophonic texture later when the parts coincide in rhythm and Tavener makes his piece rhythmically interesting by using ties over the bar line. He also uses devices such as imitation and suspensions and false relation to make the harmonies more interesting too. I believe this piece could work well both in church and concert hall as it is fairly short but interesting enough to use in a concert.

Next is “In ecclesiis” By Gabrieli, another renaissance piece written in Latin. It has a rondo structure built around the central sinfonia and the alleluia as the refrain. It is again for all male voices with the distinct counter-tenor voice on top. Gabrieli uses techniques very much recognised at 16th century, such as the combination of solo voices, choir and instrument supported by a continuo, as well as the ostinato bass figure and various types of sequence. There is interesting use of harmonies (for example juxtaposing chords when everyone sings together) and the echo from the church would create a discreet kind of dissonance which is why this piece would be better suited as part of a church service rather than a concert piece. The change in time signatures, contrasting rhythms and sections suggest a slightly more contemporary feel to this piece.

Cantata No.48 by Bach is split into four movements that we will be looking at. A cantata is an extended piece of music for one or more voices with an accompaniment. We see two operatic forms- the recitative and aria- as well as two chorales. This piece has been constructed so that the biblical text is in the first movement (a chorale) so that the sentiments are relevant to the

congregation and therefore the anonymous texts of the recit and the aria are given to soloists.

Movement 1 has a ritornello which is repeated in the first 12 bars. The chorale melody is adapted by the trumpet and oboes which are playing in canon and around this the choir sings the text in a succession of entries, imitating each others parts. The main section ends with a hemiola, a device often found in triple time baroque music. The organist improvises on chords given in the figured bass. Movement 2 has a completely different feel, the text flows at a faster pace reflecting speech and it modulates quickly throughout a number of keys. Some techniques used here are detached melodic fragments which highlight dramatic expression, angular melodic lines, dissonance and modulation. Movement 3 is a chorale played by instruments as well as a four-part choir. Bach uses chromatic harmonisation here and the texture is mainly homophonic. Movement 4 is an aria accompanied by figured bass. He makes sure that the other solo instrument (the oboe) doesn't play whilst the singer is singing.

Haydn's "Quoniam tu solus" is made up of a variety of vocal textures including imitation, fugues, Homophonic and antiphonal textures. The harmony is fairly simple, based around the tonic and dominant chords. Haydn uses short repetitive sequences and suspensions particularly in the top part. I would think that this piece is too short for a concert so it fits in well with a church service with the biblical text clear.

Locus Iste is written by Austrian composer Bruckner. It is a motet to sacred Latin text for an unaccompanied choir. It is a piece performed widely in churches and it is relatively easy for choirs to sing. It contains a mixture of conservative and romantic elements although on face it looks as if it could be renaissance as it's a four-part choir with no big dramatic passages. However some of the techniques used by Bruckner clearly aren't 16th century, for instance the harmony (the tonality from C major to B major), the chromatic sequence leading back to C and the fairly extreme dynamics (ff and pp). The piece has a homophonic texture. At the end, there is a pause for dramatic effect and the basses drop out at bar 21 meaning the root of the chord is gone. This piece is better performed in church services and out of context I don't think it would be as effective.

The symphony of psalms, movement 3 by Stravinsky is the longest piece we have studied and for this reason I think this piece would work well as a concert piece and as Stravinsky famously said "It is not a symphony in which I have included psalms to be sung, it is the singing of the psalms that I am symphonising". Some may say however that the music gets in the way of the understanding of the actual text. The sheer size of the orchestra he uses would make it impractical to be performed within a church service. He chose to use most of the instruments you would find in a full orchestra within, plus a four-part all male choir. In interestingly he doesn't use clarinets, he uses many high and many low pitch sounding instruments and uses the choir to fill in the middle harmonies. Stravinsky uses a variety of timbres and textures within the piece and avoids word painting to set the text on a deeper level. Stravinsky uses

a wide range of dynamic contrasts and is very specific with them (e.g. bar 24). The movement ends with the return of the alleluia chorus one last time and finishes in the plain C major triad.

The final piece is John Tavener's "the lamb". This piece is a sacred song written for four-part choir, the words set to an 18th century poem by William Blake making it suitable for performance in church services as the anthem. There is no time signature, however some bars have a 4/4 feel to them. The opening bar is monophonic using only 4 notes giving the expression on innocence. He uses this opening to construct the rest of the piece, inverting the melody in the soprano part. He also uses a retrograde of bar 3 in bar 4. Tavener uses slow free rhythms that avoid regular patterns, and essentially combines diatonic writing and modality with just one bar of melody.

To conclude, all these sacred vocal pieces are very different and some would suit being performed in a concert hall more than a church. All the composers use various techniques to write for the church such as antiphony which is a very effective device when used in church.