



GLORIA

Antonio Vivaldi

Christmas Cantata

DECEMBER 18, 2022

Featuring the Washington Street Sanctuary Choir

Under the direction of Nicholas Todd Shumate

Gloria

by Antonio Vivaldi
Text Translation

Chorus

Gloria in excelsis Deo;

Glory to God on high;

Chorus

Et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis.

And on earth peace, good will toward men.

Sopranos 1 and 2

Laudamus te, benedicimus te,
adoramus te, glorificamus te.

We praise thee, we bless thee,
we worship thee, we glorify thee.

Chorus

Gratias agimus tibi
propter magnam gloriam tuam.

We give thanks to thee
for thy great glory.

Soprano 1

Domine Deus, rex coelestis,
Deus pater omnipotens;

Lord God, heavenly king,
God the father almighty;

Chorus

Domine fili unigenite, Jesu Christe;

Lord, the only begotten son, Jesus Christ;

Alto and chorus

Domine Deus, agnus Dei, filius patris,
Rex coelestis, Domine Fili unigenite,
qui tollis peccata mundi,
miserere nobis.

Lord God, lamb of God, son of the father,
heavenly king, only begotten son,
thou who takest away the sins of the world, have
mercy upon us.

Chorus

Qui tollis peccata mundi,
suscipe deprecationem nostram.

Thou who takest away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer.

Alto

Qui sedes ad dexteram patris,
miserere nobis.

Thou who sittest at the right hand of
the father, have mercy upon us.

Chorus

Quoniam tu solus sanctus,
tu solus Dominus,
tu solus altissimus, Jesu Christe.

For thou alone art holy,
thou alone art the Lord,
thou alone are most high, Jesus Christ.

Chorus

Cum sancto spiritu,
in gloria Dei patris.
Amen.

With the holy spirit,
in the glory of God the father.
Amen.

Program Notes

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741). Born in Venice in 1678, Antonio Vivaldi was an ordained priest, a virtuosic violinist, and an influential music teacher. The so-called *prete rosso* (Redheaded Priest) was also one of the most inventive and prolific composers of the Baroque era and wrote prodigiously in almost every genre. In addition to some 90 operas, dozens of sacred works, four oratorios, and about 40 secular cantatas, he generated reams of instrumental music, including at least 500 concertos for solo instruments and orchestral groupings. With this massive catalog of concertos, Vivaldi helped establish the structural conventions that continue, 300 years later, to define the form: a three-movement, fast-slow-fast structure, balanced between individual virtuosity and collective unity.

After giving up his pastoral duties late in 1706, at the age of 28, Vivaldi taught violin at a prestigious all-girls orphanage and music school in Venice, the Ospedale della Pietà, where he had been giving lessons for the past three years. Although he eventually retired from full-time teaching so that he could focus on opera commissions elsewhere, he kept supplying the Pietà with new material until about 1729. He spent several months in Mantua and Rome, shepherding his operas through to production, and overseeing still more opera premieres in Vienna and Prague in the early 1730s. After burning bridges in his native Venice and squandering a hefty fortune, he returned to Vienna in 1741. One month after arrival, he succumbed to a gastrointestinal illness and died on July 28, 1741, at age 63. He received a pauper's burial.

Gloria RV 589

Gloria in D major, RV 589, Vivaldi's most significant sacred work, was probably composed sometime after 1713 and before 1717, when Vivaldi retired from full-time teaching at the Ospedale della Pietà. The score was clearly intended for performance by the orphanage's gifted chorus. At this stage of his career, Vivaldi was transitioning from full-time violin master to a composer of both sacred and secular music.

In the Roman Catholic tradition, the Gloria text is a hymn of praise used as the second part of the Ordinary of the Latin Mass, after the Kyrie. It begins with the words of the angels, as recounted in the Gospel of Luke: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will." The score disappeared after Vivaldi's death and was rediscovered in the late 1920s, along with another Gloria in D major that's less famous but almost as good. (He wrote at least three settings of the text, but only two survive.) Since the first modern performance of RV 589, in 1939, this iteration of the Gloria hymn has resonated with audiences in ways that Vivaldi never imagined. At least 100 recordings of it exist, and it has graced several film soundtracks, including the Academy Award-winning *Shine*, about the concert pianist David Helfgott.

Because there were no male choristers at the Pio Ospedale della Pietà, Vivaldi originally scored all the parts for female singers. He supplemented the typical Baroque orchestra of strings and basso continuo (often an organ) with oboe and 30 trumpet. The piece is in twelve sections, each distinguished by a different musical setting. Eight of the numbers are composed for the entire chorus; the remaining four feature soloists, singing either alone or with other performers.

Description

The opening number, “Gloria in excelsis Deo,” establishes the triumphant key of D major with exuberant leaping octaves and momentum-building repetitions. Behind all the bombast, a crackling energy propels the music forward, buffeted by bursts of winds and bright choral flourishes. In contrast, “Et in terra pax hominibus” is smudged with chromatic shadows. Then “Laudamus te,” featuring two sopranos and an instrumental refrain, doles out more lyrical exaltation. After two choral numbers, the solemn “Gratias agimus tibi” and the contrapuntal “Propter magnam gloriam,” the only solo soprano aria unfolds: “Domine Deus, Rex coelestis.” For this slow and rapturous ode to the almighty, the soprano is joined by a solo oboe. The rhythmically tricky seventh number, “Domine Fili unigenite,” goes to the chorus. It’s followed by the sumptuous minor-key Adagio “Domine Deus, Agnus Dei,” for contralto and chorus, the only setting in the cycle where the chorus joins the solo singer, in responsorial style.

After another choral interlude, the fleet and urgent “Qui tollis peccata mundi,” the contralto sings his only true solo, the church aria “Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris.” This piece resurrects material from the first movement and helps prepare listeners for the climactic conclusion. The whole chorus returns for the final two numbers, “Quoniam tu solus sanctus,” a simplified version of the “Gloria in Excelsis,” and “Cum Sancto Spiritu,” which culminates in a majestic double-fugue.

Program notes by René Spencer Saller

Bibliography

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