

MASS IN C MAJOR BY FRANZ SCHUBERT. PERFORMANCE LANDMARKS

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Abstract: *The syncretic thinking of vocal-symphonic creation and performance synthesizes three elements with complementary implication at the level of musical expressiveness and architecture: choir, soloists, and orchestra. The composing and performing dramaturgy creates convergence spaces between the three components through: the synchronic performance itself, shaping horizontal and vertical levels of dynamics, generating the expressive image of the entire opus. By subordinating each component to the overall concept – correct intonation and tuning, rhythmic synchronisation, fluidity of tempo and agogic, dynamic dosage and expressivity must be the main objectives of musical performance, as the achievement of a professional concert is the balanced accumulation of all participants in decoding and performing the language of creation. Each performer’s personality must be subordinated to the overall performance concept, and integrated into the conductor’s expressive vision. Lastly, but also first of all, the science of conducting performance must start from a deepened knowledge of the musical essence from the tackled opus, and from the conductor’s ability to coordinate and valorise the entire vocal-instrumental ensemble at its highest potential.*

Key words: *art, choir music, conducting craftsmanship, vocal-instrumental performance, artistic-musical communication*

1. Introduction

A genius musician, contemporary with Beethoven, Weber, Goethe and Heine, **Franz Peter Seraph SCHUBERT** (31.01.1797 Lichtental – 19.01.1828 Vienna) is considered a representative composer of musical Romanticism.

The success of his vocal-symphonic religious creation enjoyed is largely due to a deep knowledge of the genre’s secrets. A choir singer since he was 8 at the parish church of Lichtenthal, a district in Vienna, where he had the church musician Michael Holzer as a conductor, then in the choir

ensemble of the imperial band at St. Augustine’s Church, Schubert assimilated in his musical structure and sensitivity both the technique of vocal art and the naturalness of instrumental accompaniment, specific to sacred music. Like in Bruckner’s case, the consequent and ongoing musical education and practice from the space of sacred music shaped the defining profile and coordinates of the future musician, for the composer’s greatness arises from the science of grasping the forms and from the depth of the experiences during each Sunday mass.

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2. Preliminary traits in the performing approach of the Mass in C major

The surprising fact about this opus is that Schubert left out of the canonised text from *Credo* the fragment in which faith *in unam sanctam catholicam et apostolicam ecclesiam* is declared. Of Romanticist honesty, this deliberate omission sprang from a personal conviction of the author.

As to its substance and form, the *Mass in C major* observes the principles of tradition, but as to its expressiveness, it stands out through a purely Romanticist lyrical trait. The melodic and harmonic expression of choir parts, primordially supporting the liturgical text, is a true demonstration of composer craftsmanship, which defines the unmistakable style of Schubert's creation.

3. Elements of formal structure and performance thinking

Since the debut of the first section, *Kyrie – Andante con motto*, the musical theme is directly presented, the structural-composing dramaturgy is non-formal, the instrumental introduction very brief, followed by the theme dialogue between the soloists' and the choir's quartet. The formal structure scheme is based on the periodical alternation of phrases containing 3 and 4 bars (by conjunction), successively performed by orchestra, soloists and choir.

The melodic themes have dynamism and a jovial expressiveness of the composition – contrary to the gloomy atmosphere, often encountered in the first section of the mass.

The rhythmic, homogeneous structure arises from the inner rhythm of the text – *Kyrie eleison*, and *Christe eleison*.

The image shows a musical score for four voices: Soprano (S.), Alto (A.), Tenor (T.), and Bass (B.). Each staff is marked with 'Solo' and contains the lyrics 'Ky-ri-e e-lei-son, e-lei-son, Ky-ri-e e-lei-son, e-lei-son'. The music is in C major and features a melodic line with some chromatic inflections.

Ex. 1 (pg. 1. bars 4 – 7) [1].

The harmonic treatment tends, in modulating inflexions, towards the tonal centres related to the fundamental tonality:

$C - G - C - a - C - F/d - G7 - C.$

The imitative polyphony in formal spaces of the size of a phrase conveys dynamism and creates an atmosphere of tonic exuberance by a subtle stratification of the dynamic levels.

The orchestration, made in a figurative-ornamental manner, highlights the inner dynamics of the rhythmic pulsation.

Gloria – Allegro vivace spreads the same atmosphere of tonic dynamism.

The image shows a musical score for four voices, marked 'Allegro vivace'. Each staff contains the lyrics 'Glo-ri-a, Glo-ri-a'. The music is in C major and features a rhythmic pulsation with a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes.

Ex. 2 (pg.7 bars 1 – 4) [1].

The utterly new charm of the melodic themes in Schubert's creation springs from the composer's craftsmanship in rendering the inner sing ability of the poetic text. Of utter simplicity and with motif-like theme structure, the melody construction

sometimes gets the configuration of a recitative through varied repetitions, and gradual or arpeggiated scales. Complementary to the apparent simplicity in the theme structure, the harmonic treatment of voices is superposed, rendering colour and variation to the musical expressiveness.

The choir's or the soloist's isochronal rhythmic evolution is complementarily designed in the dramaturgic space of the opus, through a permanent dialogue between the choir and the solo voices.

The soloist's performing manner follows a unitary formal scheme – simultaneous evolution as a quartet or duet. The dramaturgic variety arises from the soprano solo's intervention, followed by the simultaneous answer of the other solo voices.

The spaces exclusively destined to the orchestra are relatively few, as the permanent dialogue of the choir and soloists is the basis of the drama evolution.

The orchestration – transparent and apparently simple – homogeneously completes the evolution of the choir and soloists.

The mobile dynamic levels, from *f* to *p*, are achieved within the size of the theme phrase, highlighting the nature and musical expressiveness of the text.

The nature of the music in *Credo* – *Allegro* has nothing of the poetic text's gravity. The tempo underwent a gradual acceleration from *Andante con motto* in *Kyrie* to *Allegro* in *Credo*. After listening to the first three movements, one is under the impression that the mass itself is a festive jubilation, and less a liturgical confession of spirituality.

The conductor's performance must avoid the temptation towards entertainment and exuberance, conveying depth and spiritual meaning to the musical expression.

In the first section of *Credo*, the subtle game of chromatisation brings continuous modulating tendencies towards related tonal centres, *C – a*, *G – e*, and in the end of the section it modulates towards the subdominant.

The melodic theme, suggestively structured on the *C major* arpeggio in a descending sequence, bears the same melodic exuberance already encountered in the first two movements.

Ex. 3 (pg. 17 bars 1 – 5) [1].

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The middle section of *Credo*, *Adagio*, brings a tonal (*d minor*), theme and nature contrast, but the inner dramaturgy follows the same evolution structure.

The polyphonic imitation at the descending major seventh between soprano and tenor, and that at the descending minor tenth between alto and base bring a typically Romanticist shade of colour.

The rhythmic-melodic configuration of the orchestral accompaniment, structured through the varied repetition of figurative ornamental cells, achieves a dynamic and nature contrast to the theme presented by the soloists and choir.

Ex. 4 (pg. 21 bars 62 – 66) [1]

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Interesting to notice is the surprising expressive efficiency of modulation in small spaces. The tonal balance tonic-dominant from the section's first part is followed by a predominantly descending chromatisation of the melodic line, which creates subtle modulations, with depressive effects, towards the descending tonalities: *B flat*, *E flat*, *A flat*, and in the end it builds the cadenza on the fundamental tonality's dominant, *C*.

The final section in *Credo* brings the same air of tonic optimism, specific to the first section. The theme structure of the size of a musical phrase is based on suggestive melodic, with rhythm structures springing from the rhythm of the text.

It is interesting to note that Schubert achieves a variational architectural model in the theme structure of all movements, where the rhythm is determined by the text, the melody advances gradually or in arpeggios, and harmonic contrast emerges in the relationship *dominant – tonic* or *tonic – dominant*.

Potentiating the dramatic expressiveness is achieved through the same technique of permanent and varied modulation towards some of the farthest tonal centres: *C – G – c – A flat – b flat – c – B flat – g sharp – A – A flat – G...*

Ex. 5 (pg. 23 bars 83 – 90) [1]

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The section's formal structure, designed on the classical pattern – theme exposition, development and theme re-exposition – is based on the classical principle of the quadrature in the construction and periodicity of musical phrases.

In the entire opus, the soprano's vocal weaving is mainly placed in the high register. This situation may cause accuracy problems in the intonation, support and expressiveness. That is why the anticipated vocal training of the choir ensemble for an easy and ample sound emission in the high register is carried out through exercises for making the body and voice more elastic, approaching the technique of correct sound impostation and amplification in the resonating organs.

Compared to *Kyrie* and *Gloria*, *Credo* brings a distinct air in the musical dramaturgy, both at the level of the composition structure and of the musical expression.

Sanctus includes two contrasting sections – *Adagio* and *Allegro vivace*. The lineal isochronal nature of the first section's theme gradually unfolds between the tonal centre of the tonic and dominant. The theme model resembles the one in *Gloria*.

Ex. 6 (pg. 29 bars 8 – 15) [1].

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The form of the period has the same structural scheme of the conjunct quadrature (4 + 3).

Changing the harmony in the succession of each bar (*C – a – F – d – G7*) is followed toward the end of the section by a

subtle chromatisation, preparing the semi-cadenza.

The motif cell, ostentatiously repeated in the orchestration of the 1st and 2nd violins on the arpeggio elements of the approached tonal centres, creates the idea of perpetual motion through their downbeat and upbeat placement.

The second section in *Sanctus* is contrasting through its tempo and nature. The theme exposition of the soprano soloist is followed by the choir’s response in the same thematic manner. The fixed dynamics in the repeated expositions of the choir renders expressiveness to the performance.

Benedictus – Andante is destined to the soprano soloist.

The soloist’s melodic line weaving, discretely accompanied by the orchestral quartet, is placed in the high register of the compass. Interval leaps of an instrumental manner, and frequent changes of register require a supple vocal technique and a good breath support from the soloist.

In the end of the movement, the jubilation *Osanna in excelsis* from *Sanctus* is repeated.

Andante
Solo
ppp
S. Be-ne - di - ctus, qui ve - nit, qui ve - nit in no - mi - ne Do - mi - ni, be - ne - di - ctus, qui ve - nit in no - mi - ne Do - mi - ni. Do - mi - ni.

Ex. 7 (pg. 31 bars 9 – 25) [1].

In the frequent changes of performing expressiveness, emerged in the last two sections, the conductor must carefully dose both the dynamic and tempo levels in order to convey homogeneity and fluency to the musical performance.

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Agnus Dei includes two contrasting sections – *Adagio* and *Allegro vivace*.

The movement’s first section imposes a sober atmosphere ever since the beginning. The polyphonic imitation in *stretto* at a descending major seventh between soprano and tenor follows the same structural model come across in *Kyrie*, as well. Schubert’s option for the interval of seventh (second) in the construction of the polyphonic weaving is interesting.

Adagio
Solo
p
S. A - gnus De - i, a - gnus De - i, qui tol - lis pec - ca - ta mun - di, mi - se - re - re no - bis.
A. mi - se - re - re no - bis.
T. Solo
p
A - gnus De - i, qui tol - lis pec - ca - ta mun - di, mi - se - re - re no - bis.
B. p
mi - se - re - re no - bis.

Ex. 8 (pg. 33 bars 3 – 7) [1].

The section’s dramaturgic concision can be noticed from the economy of the

thematic means used: theme motif – its ascending sequenced repetition – cadenza

ornamentation and inner harmonic semi-cadenza, brought by the whole ensemble.

The three successive reprises in the first section have the following harmonic trajectory:

$$C - d; d - F; F - G.$$

The theme's alternating placement in different registers (high – medium – high) conveys balance to the musical syntax.

The rhythm division and chromatisation in the section's semi-cadenza create an expressive tension, released in the second section of the movement.

The melodic theme, presented in parallel advancement, at a tenth's distance, by the solo voices (*soprano* and *tenor*), the

dramaturgic succession of the movements, the alternating architectural structure of the solo, choir and orchestra cues, the dynamic flexibility of the movement continues in the same composing vision also encountered in the previous movements.

The unitary and homogeneous nature of the composition, the exposition clarity and the quintessence of thematic treatment, the discretion of orchestral thinking are defining attributes of the opus and, at the same time, of Schubert's entire creation.

Zweites Benedictus – Moderato, for choir and orchestra only, has two sections.

Placing the musical dramaturgy on the same tonal centre, but in homonymous tonalities, *a – A*, brings a change in the nature of the musical expression.

Moderato

The image shows a musical score for four voices: Soprano (S.), Alto (A.), Tenor (T.), and Bass (B.). The tempo is marked 'Moderato'. The lyrics are: 'Be - ne - di - ctus qui ve - nit in no - mi - ne Do - mi - ni.' The score consists of two systems of four staves each. The first system shows the vocal lines with lyrics. The second system shows the vocal lines with lyrics, but the lyrics are partially obscured by the musical notation.

Ex. 9 (pg. 39 bars 5 – 12) [1].

What is new in this movement, as compared to the first *Benedictus*?

- two thematic entities, presented in the same tonality – the first, discreet (according to the genre's spiritual expression), and the second, overflowing, in a typically Romanticist stylistic atmosphere;
- a consistent density of the thematic and orchestral labour;
- a diversification of the ways of achieving polyphonic imitation through

successive and simultaneous concatenation of all voices;

- the same diversified harmonic treatment, with discreet and fluent modulation inflexions;
- a progressive increase of the musical expression from the first section's discreet nature to the apotheosis in the second section.

nuance subtlety of Schubert's themes can only be compared with Mozart's creation.

The counterpoint art was not the composer's strength, but the craftsmanship of his harmonic science was genial. The ability of the modulation technique in small spaces and at tonalities far apart, in a unique and characteristic game of tonalities, renders colour and dynamism to the musical dramaturgy structure.

The original and personal composition synthesis between the genial melody and the modulation technique, on the background of subtle dynamic expressiveness, makes Schubert's works be of high quality.

As for musical architecture, Schubert expressed himself convincingly in the space of miniature forms, having the *lied* as a structural model, genre in which he composed excellent works.

The intensity of experiences, of a rare depth, the warmth of expressiveness, the melodic finesse as well as the capacity to create an inner drama and poetic-sentimental conjuring in small spaces are attributes that descend from the formal dramaturgy of the *lied*.

Unfortunately, elaborating large forms according to the *lied*'s composition typology did not lead to the results expected; the weaving's density, the lyrical intensity, the balance of musical tension

did not reach the dimensions required by the forms' grandeur. On the level of the genial achievement of miniature forms, one could perhaps find a resemblance with the works of Edvard Grieg.

Even if Schubert did not have an important contribution to the renewal of sacred music, he still remains an incontestable master of melody and harmonic modulation.

As in the case of Mozart or Pergolesi, Schubert lived too little in order to convey the entire dimension of his talent to posterity through his works.

Starting from the anticipated knowledge of macro- and microstructure elements specific to Schubert's creation, the study approach of the *Mass in C major* must pursue the expression of the score's message of ideas, as truly as possible.

References

1. Schubert, F.: *Messe C-Dur*, für Soli, Chor, Orchester und Orgel, *Opus 48 D 452*, Edition Breitkopf & Härtel, Wiesbaden, Nr. 4866.
Appendix: Zweite Bearbeitung des Benedictus, D 961
Violine I, Violine II, Violoncello, Kontrabass, Orgel (Oboe I-II, Klarinette in C I-II, Trompete in C I-II, Pauken in G, c – ad libitum)