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THE CHURCH MUSIC OF HENRY PURCELL (1659-95):
A STUDY OF HIS ANTHEMS WRITTEN
BETWEEN 1680-85

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PREFACE

This paper will analyze Henry Purcell's church music composed between the years 1680 and 1695. Six anthems will be discussed specifically, demonstrating Purcell's style characteristics and how they enhance the excellence of his traditional manner of writing.
The story of the development of church music is the story of the evolution of musical style in general, touched here by genius, there by showmanship, and elsewhere by dullness.

Henry Purcell (1659-95), one of England's greatest composers, certainly was a genius in the development of church music. His name was accepted abroad as that of a great musician; but, unfortunately, his music seemed misunderstood in many respects because of poor publications, the misconception that in order for music to be "sacred," it had to be performed slowly, and the highly exacting virtuoso solo parts which were often times designed for the abilities of specific individuals.

Purcell was a chorister of the Chapel Royal until his voice broke in 1675, when he was given the unsaid appointment of "keeper, water, sound, repayer, and tuner of the organs, virginals, claviers and recorders." He also did some music-copying for Westminster Abbey. He seems to have been a suitable pupil; he later became the official organ tuner at the Abbey, a composer for the King's violins, and in 1679, the organist for the Abbey. With the latter position, Purcell finished his formal musical training. "His efforts to master all styles of music were to continue to the end of his life, but henceforth he was to be his own teacher." At this point in his life, at the age of twenty, and for five years thereafter, he wrote church music that seems to represent the true essence of his style. After
In this period, Purcell tended to write more music for the stage in order that he might achieve more fame, popularity and fortune; his church music began to lack the excellence of his earlier works.

Purcell wrote anthems in two styles: the full anthem and the verse anthem. The former follows closely the traditional style of writing with little advancement, save its harmonic conception firmly rooted in the tonal system. It is written for full chorus with an occasional introduction of a solo quartet or trio. The latter incorporates various innovations, including lengthy orchestral introductions, solos, trios, sections for full choir and orchestral interludes, inevitably advancing progress. In this style, voices are sung by soloists. Five full anthems and one verse anthem will be discussed in this paper.

"...Purcell had two styles at his disposal: massive choral declamation, and the thick archaic polyphony of his own making." The latter manner, à la Palestrina, characterizes explicitly Purcell's full anthems. They exemplify a close affiliation with the traditional, polyphonic, unaccompanied style of the Renaissance. Superimposed upon this, however, is Purcell's unique treatment of syncopation, crossed dissonances (progressions in which a note in one chord is followed by a chromatic alteration of the same note in a second chord, or the simultaneous sounding in a single chord of a note and its chromatic alteration), appoggiatura (lyrically strong, non-harmonic tone which gives the impression of leaning heavily on the tone into which it finally resolves, by half or whole step), suspensions (the sustaining of one of the notes of a consonant interval while the other note moves so that the first becomes dissonant; this dissonant note then resolves downwards to a consonance), retardations (a device which acts like a suspension, but resolves upwards),
and open fifths at cadence points.5

 Probably Purcell's most profound characteristic is his use of
crossed dissonances, a characteristic which Thomas Tallis (c. 1505-85)
used before him. Countless examples can be cited. The following ex-
ccerpt from "Remember Not, Lord, Our Offences," provides a very clear
example:

Here the G's on the first beat in the soprano part and on the second
beat in the tenor part, change to G's on the fourth beat.

The following illustration shows a simultaneous sounding of a
crossed dissonance, in the same, an F against an F:

The crossed dissonance in this example, from "Lord, how long wilt Thou
be angry," is heard as a diminished octave, rather than as an augmented
prime, as in the previous illustration.
This excerpt, from the same piece, displays a crossed dissonance over a bar-line:

![-crossed dissonance over a bar-line](image)

Crossed dissonances also occur between voices, as in the following example from "Lauda Salvator, 0 Jesu, mit Theil in der Nacht."

![crossed dissonances between voices](image)

The $b$ in the treble part on the second beat and the $c$ on the third beat in the bassoon part are crossed dissonances.

A striking example of crossed dissonances in close imitation occurs in "Hear My Prayer, 0 Lord."

![crossed dissonances in close imitation](image)

The following canonic passage from "Save Me, 0 God," shows an interplay of $G$'s and $G$'s. The clashes occur because of canonic interplay.
Furcell’s uses of the appoggiatura, suspension, and retardation are factors contributing to the pathos which is so characteristic of his music. This illustration from, "I Will Sing Unto the Lord," exhibits a beautiful claim of "prepared appoggiatura" (appoggiature which act like suspensions; the dissonance, however, is not tied over from the previous chord; rather, it is sounded again.)

An example from "Near My Prayer, O Lord," very effectively demonstrates the strength of a "prepared appoggiatura" as it is interwoven into an eight-part polyphonic piece.
The appoggiatura is often used for tone-painting as in the following illustration from "Lord, how long wilt Thou be angry." The text of a portion of this passage is: "...but have mercy upon us, and that soon, for we are come to great misery." It is on the word great that the appoggiatura occurs, signifying the intensity of the misery:

\[ \text{Alto} \]
\[ \text{Tenor} \]
\[ \text{Bass} \]

The retardation is used much less frequently than the suspension and the appoggiatura; however, it is as equally striking as the other two; it occurs most prominently in the remarkably dissonant overture to the anthem, "I will give thanks unto thee, O Lord."\(^7\) The following passage from "Remember me, Lord, on O'errans" shows a good example of this device:

Here, the non-chord members G and E\(^\flat\) resolve upward to the J and F\(^\#\) members second of the G\(^7\) chord on the second beat of the measure.

Purcell enriches many cadential situations by employing appoggiature and/or suspensions. In the following example from "Lord, how long wilt Thou be angry," the cadential dissonance in the two Soprano parts
is achieved essentially by the use of a prepared appoggiatura in the Soprano II, followed by an anticipation.

The cadence in "Save Me, O God" demonstrates the same dissonance in the soprano parts, achieved this time by use of a suspension, while additional passing-tone dissonance occurs in the tenor part.

The following excerpt demonstrates this dissonance in addition to another Purcellian trait — the open fifth at a cadence point:
In addition to the attributes previously mentioned, Purcell's style presents some other features. First of all, he introduces the solo quartet and trio into his full anthems. "Save Me, O God" is a prime example. This technique is an initial step in the development of the verse anthem, which includes both individual solo and ensemble solo sections.

Yet another Purcellian characteristic is crossed voice leading created by imitation at the prime, as in this example from "Lord, how long wilt Thou be angry?"

The second soprano part initiates the first soprano part in the first measure; in the second measure, the second soprano sings higher than the first because of the imitation. The same situation occurs in "Save Me, O God." In this case, a full cadence is evident:

"Save Me, O God" exhibits other Purcellian traits. One is the abrupt change in tonality.
The feeling for the key of C major is altered suddenly by the subsequent E major chord.

Another trait is the sudden appearance of an additional part, in this case from "Save He, O God," a second tenor part in measure twenty-nine. After seven measures, the additional part ceases.

"I Will Sing Unto the Lord" exhibits still another characteristic, Purcell occasionally choosing to treat five-part writing artificially in a double chorus situation. The alto part in measure 42 is

demonstrated.

Purcell often uses syncopated rhythms at cadence points, as in the following illustrations:
In addition, Purcell changes meter during the course of an anthem in order to enhance the syllabication of the text and the phraseology of the line, as well as to create variety. This is evident in "I Will Sing unto the Lord" and "Lord how long wilt Thou be angry."

"Near By Prayer, O Lord" (1680-82), is considered incomplete by many musicologists because Purcell left many blank pages after his final written one, and the final cadence does not exhibit his customary authentic treatment. "It seems quite likely," writes one editor, "that having written it he realized how difficult it would be to match its brilliance, and deliberately wrote no more."

The entire piece is built out of the two phrases (a) and (b) heard at the outset; these phrases are then often inverted:
The effective use of these two motives gives the piece definite coherence.

"I Will Sing unto the Lord" (1672), the only full anthem discussed in this paper that was not composed between 1660-2, seems to foreshadow Purcell's verse anthem, "Be joyful in the Lord Always," completed in 1683. The following excerpt is closely identical to the chorus of "Be joyful in the Lord Always:"

From "I Will Sing unto the Lord"
The elements which are common to both of the above examples are the rhythmic scheme, the chordal style and the melodic contour (i.e. the descent of a third as the melodic line moves from a shorter note value to a longer one.)

"Rejoice in the Lord Always" is one of Purcell's finest and most popular verse anthems. A lengthy introduction and ritornelli are incorporated into the piece. Between the verses which are sung by soloists, the chorus is repeated with varied harmonizations and voice-leading each time.

Purcell's verse anthems have always been the subject of critical debate, the main issue of which is their alleged secularity. The introduction of the instrumental "symphonies" was considered secular in nature since there had been no tradition of instrumental church music in England up to that point.

It has too often been supposed that a secular style means a frivolous style, unsuited to the divine office: whereas it should have been obvious that secular music can, and often is, as sober and dignified as anything written expressly for the church. The whole objective to the innovation was, in fact, based
on a false hypothesis. 30

Inevitably, English church music was being influenced by the rise of the Italian and French operas, and consequently, the dramatic style. In addition, concerning religiosity, "it is impossible to feel that (the verse anthems) are intended solely for the glory of God. They are there also to be noted and approved by man." 31 The Chapel Royal, like the Theatre Royal, provided good music by some of the best musicians in the kingdom—the only source of concert-going that was available.

While greatly affected by secular styles and devices, Purcell's church music is not frivolous or superficial, even though it lies far from the reserved expression of his predecessors. Religiosity in music will vary from individual to individual, and, consequently, the issue of secularity can only be founded on personal opinion.

The secularity question concerning Purcell's religious music can be applied in reverse—that is, his secular music can also provide religious connotations. The final chorus in his opera, Dido and Aeneas, with its polyphonic texture and intense pathos, is deeply reverential. In fact, it seems evident that whenever pathos is the underlying ingredient, as in Purcell's full anthems ("Save Us, O God," "Lord how long wilt Thou be angry," etc.), Purcell is at his finest.

J. A. Westrup wrote:

As a boy (Purcell) must have sung church music of all kinds, old and new, and formed an indelible impression of conflicting styles. The old music evidently appealed to his strongly, since he wrote a number of full anthems in the polyphonic tradition. Those all belong to the earlier part of Dido, but as time went on it was impossible for him to remain content with old formulas. He had to develop a style based on the new methods that were already beginning to dominate English music. To us, admiring the
texture of the old masters, the change may seem unfortunate. To him it would have seemed a natural, and obvious step forward. 32

Between 1669 and 1695, Purcell had broken with the old style in order to keep up with the musical advancements that were going on around him. The full mastery of the new style was necessarily a slow and laborious process for him.

In 1694, one year before his death, Purcell composed a Te Deum and Jubilate in the developing verse-anthem style. This magnificent work for five-part chorus, solo voices, strings, trumpets, and organ was "made for St. Cecilia's Day, 1694", for performance by the Musical Society. After 1743, however, the Te Deum was seldom performed because

Handel's superior knowledge and use of instruments, and more polished melody, and indeed, the novelty of his productions, which will always turn the public scale, took such full possession of the nation's favour, that Purcell's Te Deum and Jubilate, is now only performed occasionally, as an antique curiosity, even in this country. 33

Thus, even one year before his death, Purcell had a long way to go before he could master the new style. He died at the age of thirty-six before he was able to do so.

Until recently, Purcell's style was stereotyped on the basis of his latest works. Today, however, according to Ianfred Bukofzer, an opposing opinion seems to predominate. However, Bukofzer gives no specific evidence concerning what it is about Purcell's earlier compositions that gives them such strength. The writer of this paper maintains that it is through his unique treatment of accented non-chord tones, other dissonances, syncopation, polyphonic writing, and the underlying pathos, as cited in this paper, characteristics found commonly in his earlier works (the full anthems) but seldom in his later works (the verse anthems).
that Purcell's stylistic excellence is made evident.

The five full anthems discussed here very effectively exhibit the above-mentioned characteristics which are prevalent in most of Purcell's writing in the traditional style. The verse anthem which was discussed, "Rejoice in the Lord Always," and the Do Deum and Jubilate, rarely incorporate these elements; therefore, they lack the excellence of the full anthems.

Roger North writes:

"(Purcell) began to show his great skill before the reform of musick, "al Italliam," and while he was warm in pursuit of it, "yad...."

The genius of Henry Purcell, then, lies in his perfection of the "stile antico." His later works, despite their lack of musical excellence, were to be the foundations on which subsequent great composers, i.e., Handel and J. S. Bach, would develop their own accomplishments in the new style, just as Purcell had developed his in the old.
FOOTNOTES


6 "Remember Not, Lord, Our Offences," Hollywood: Walton Music Corp., mm. 3 and 4

7 "Lord, how long wilt Thou be angry," New York: Arista Music Co., m. 7

8 Ibid., mm. 25 and 26

9 Ibid., mm. 43 and 44


11 "Save Me, O God," Moseler Verlag Wolfenbuttel, m. 61

12 "I Will Sing Unto the Lord," New York: H. W. Gray, m. 42,43.

13 "Hear My Prayer, O Lord," mm. 11-12

14 "Lord, how long wilt Thou be angry," m. 21

15 Bukofzer, p. 215.

16 "Remember Not, Lord, Our Offences," mm. 27-28

17 "Lord, how long wilt Thou be angry," m. 10
FOOTNOTES, continued

18 "Save Me, O God," mm. 5.
19 "Hear My Prayer, O Lord," mm. 33, 34
20 "Lord, how long wilt Thou be angry," mm. 26-27.
21 "Save Me, O God," mm. 6
22 Ibid., m. 10
23 "I Will Sing Unto the Lord," mm. 42-45
24 "Lord, how long wilt Thou be angry," m. 45.
25 "Save Me, O God," mm. 24-26
27 Ibid., mm. 1-8
28 "I Will Sing Unto the Lord," mm. 28-35
29 "Rejoice in the Lord Always," New York: H. W. Gray., mm. 55-62
31 Ibid., pp. 207-8
32 Ibid., p. 202
33 Arundell, Dennis, Henry Purcell, London; Oxford University Press, 1927, p. 55.
34 Bukofzer, p. 218
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