

A canticle (from the Latin canticle, "little song") is a hymnlike text derived from one of the books of the Bible other than the Psalms. Generally, these canticles are identified by the Latin incipit of the text. The *Magnificat*, a canticle often called the Song of Mary, is based on the text of St. Luke 1: 46-55. There are twelve verses, although the last two, the *Gloria Patri*, are additions and do not occur in the Holy Bible; they are given in the *Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England*. The Latin and English forms of the text are as follows:

1. Magnificat anima mea Dominum.  
My soul doth magnify the Lord.
2. Et exsultavi spiritus meus in Deo salutari meo.  
And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.
3. Quia respexit humilitatem ancillae suae; ecce enim ex hoc beatam me dicent omnes generationes.  
For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.
4. Quia fecit mihi magna qui potens est: et sanctum nomen ejus.  
For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name.
5. Et misericordia ejus a progenie in progenies timen-tibus eum.  
And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.
6. Fecit potentiam in brachio suo; dispersit superbos mente cordis sui.  
He hath showed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
7. Deposuit potentes de sede, et exaltavit humiles.  
He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.
8. Esurientes implevit bonis: et divites dimisit inanes.  
He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.

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March 1988

## A Survey of Published Magnificats for Treble Voices

by James McCray

9. Suscepit Israel puerum suum, recordatus misericordiae suae.  
He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy.
10. Sicut locutus est ad patres nostros, Abraham et semini ejus in saecula.  
As he spoke to our father, to Abraham, and to his seed forever.
11. Gloria Patri, et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto.  
Glory be to the Father and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost.
12. Sicut erat in principio, et nunc, et semper, et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.  
As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.<sup>1</sup>

Clearly, the majority of musical settings are for mixed voices (SATB), although considerable attention has been given to versions for unison and/or treble voices. Important treble settings include those by Dunstable, Palestrina, Porpora, Michael Haydn, Pinkham, Chihara, and Vaughan Williams.

This current study is not intended to be exhaustive, but is designed to serve as an introduction to Magnificats for treble voices. Over sixty settings for unison and multiple treble voices have been identified, but not all are still available in existing publications. They represent a five-hundred year history, but the firm authenticity of some settings being "only" for treble voices may certainly be questioned. A representative sample of settings from various periods is discussed below and publication information is provided in a list at the end of the article.

The earliest available treble Magnificat setting, other than those in plainchant, is that of John Dunstable (c. 1370-1453), and it is for three voices which lend themselves to an SSA performance. In it the chant is in the upper voice with some elaboration. Most of the verse alternation is between three

voices and duets, with attention given to "faburden" and descant styles. Except for the opening Magnificat intonation, the complete text is in polyphony. Dunstable's use of *tempus perfectum* (triple measure) for the middle verses later became quite common in Magnificat settings, as did the practice of alternating solo and full choir.

Giovanni Palestrina (1525-1594) composed thirty-five different Magnificat settings. His *Magnificat Quarti Toni* (Magnificat in the Fourth Mode) is for equal voices in which there is a narrow range of only thirteen notes. In the fine edition by Paul Boepple, the alternation of verses for plainsong soloist (or small chorus) and polyphonic setting for full choir is maintained. In his preface, Boepple provides an extended discussion of *musica ficta* and other performance practice considerations.<sup>2</sup> Palestrina's setting creates an austere and delicate atmosphere. While the vocal lines are not difficult and tend to be stepwise, the length of this setting with its many melismatic lines may limit its programming. Modern audiences, for example, may find this to be a style too similar throughout, and, therefore, less listenable as a concert setting.

In the Baroque period, Nicola Porpora (1686-1768) taught music at a Venetian orphanage for girls. There were four of these orphanages, and they were renowned for their high musical quality; all had excellent orchestras and choirs. His *Magnificat*, which probably dates from about 1730, has been edited by Ralph Hunter and calls for SSAA and organ, or strings and organ. It has numerous brief sections, many with vocal solos. The music often has coloratura lines that require solid singers. The accompaniment is designed as support for the singers, and is background rather than soloistic. Some ornamentation is indicated for both singers and instrumentalists. This is a major work that has become standard repertoire for advanced women's choirs.

Treble voice choirs were common

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in the Classical period. Michael Haydn (1737-1806) was a teacher of young voices, and often composed SSA music for the boys' choir of the Cathedral School in Salzburg. Haydn's 1793 *Magnificat* has been edited by Reinhard G. Pauly for SSA and keyboard. The original accompaniment consisted of strings without violas, two horns, and organ, but Pauly did not publish the orchestral version. The editor has provided an English version in addition to the Latin. This *Magnificat* alternates chorus with solo voices and moves in a somewhat jaunty  $\frac{3}{4}$  meter with delightful instrumental connections between the verses. This setting is quite suitable for a high school women's choir, and is useful for church or concert performances.

The Romantic period did not produce any significant *Magnificat* settings for treble voices, but there were many complete service settings containing *Magnificats* written by twentieth-century British composers in the Romantic idiom.<sup>3</sup> Even today, these versions are used for church services.

George Dyson's unison *Magnificat* of 1924 is typical of "church service settings." He composed three different *Magnificats*, but only the unison setting is useful for treble choirs. It uses piano or organ and is in C minor (the entire service is in the key of C), with the *Gloria Patri* deriving its material from the basic theme. Some chromaticism is used, but this work is considerably more conservative than his earlier setting in D or the later one in F from 1945. Although never intended by Dyson, some of the chord progressions and voicings give a "pop" spirit in places. The vocal range of middle C to the upper Eb makes this accessible to most treble choirs; there are no solos.

Two other similar service-oriented *Magnificats* are by Herbert Sumsion and Arthur Wills. Sumsion's 1953 G Major setting calls for SS and organ, although he indicates that the second soprano line is optional, and much of the singing is in unison. The more recent Wills setting (1984) also uses two-part trebles, but harmonically is more interesting. The second part is often imitative and requires the same range as the first soprano. There are numerous key changes and the keyboard has brief soloistic interjections. This is the only treble setting

by Wills. It is not long, has a charming innocent attractiveness, and would be quite appropriate for concert performances.

The settings by Alan Ridout and Brian Brockless are useful. Brockless's 1962 *Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis* for SSA and organ borrows heavily from the most significant trait of the "gypsy scale." The use of the augmented second gives this scale its distinctive sound.<sup>4</sup> Using A as the starting note, the gypsy scale for this *Magnificat* would be: A B C D-sharp E F G-sharp A. Because Brockless freely alternates the use of the C-natural and C-sharp, the character is somewhat disguised. His setting has rhythmic variety and syncopations within the consistent  $\frac{5}{4}$  meter. The choral music not in unison is usually in parallel thirds with some brief counterpoint in the Gloria. There is an equal balance between the choral and instrumental music, with the organ part noticeably more difficult than the choral music.

Alan Ridout has written three separate *Magnificat* settings that can be performed by treble voices. The *Magnificat in E* (1960) uses organ or piano, and is in unison. It has chant-style singing with repeated notes and no solos. His *Magnificat in C* is for two-part, unaccompanied voices (SA or TB). It is a complete contrast to the other setting in that it is fast, strongly rhythmic, and has great dynamic contrasts. Much of the basic texture is in unison or is treated imitatively. The third setting is titled *Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis of Twelve Notes*. This 1966 version is arranged so that there are four possible ways for performance, and one is with trebles accompanied throughout by organ. The work is treated syllabically without melismas, and there is a definite chant-like quality. At times the melody is chanted on one note in falsobordone style as in measure 12.

Ridout borrows the idea of using all twelve notes of the chromatic scale from the twelve-tone school of composition; however, he does not use them in as strict an organization as other composers. He uses all twelve notes at some point within each section. Many of the notes are repeated within a phrase, and some in several phrases. Only eleven of the notes are used in the melody; the twelfth, B-natural, is used only in the chordal accompaniment. There are

**Example 1. Ridout, *Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis of Twelve Notes*, mm.1-8.**

Voices [Revs]  
My soul doth mag-ni-fy the Lord,  
and my spir-it hath re-joice-ed in God my Sav-iour.  
For he hath re-gard-ed: the low-li-ness of his hand-maid-en.

Organ

no meter signatures, and only four different chords are used. This is for church use, but would make an interesting concert setting.

One of the most important treble voice Magnificat settings is that by Ralph Vaughan Williams. His extended 1932 setting has two versions; one is for orchestra accompaniment and the other for piano with flute. The SSA choral music is syllabic and quite easy. Emphasis is on the contralto soloist who represents the Virgin Mary. She sings the text of the Magnificat while the chorus, using Gabriel's message "Hail Mary, full of grace," sings praise to Mary. It is this highly personal approach to the Magnificat text that makes it a unique setting. The Magnificat begins with an instrumental, chordal ostinato pattern, and these chords and ostinato devices may be seen throughout the work as unifying elements in the compositional matrix. At places the tonality is vague. Vaughan Williams uses chords which, by their basic nature or environment in that section, cause uncertainty as to the real key center. Many key signatures are used and cross-relations abound. This major work is not for church use and was written as a concert setting.

Other British settings of note are those by Hankey, Roe, Shaw, Warren, Arnold, and Burgon. The J. H. Arnold setting, *A Plain Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis in Simplest Terms* (1952), differs from most settings. It uses alternation of material between a "chanter" and a full choir, and there is only one basic phrase in the entire work: it is sung by either the chanter,

the choir, or a combination of the two. Raymond Warren's *Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis* (1960) is built on a series of ground basses. There are separate bass patterns for each movement.

Jazz or "Pop" characteristics can be found in two settings. Lancelot Hankey's 1963 *Magnificat* is in unison with piano. Its jazz style uses rubato,

flatted sevenths, and other characteristics associated with a "blues" mood. Although written as a solo, it would be a fun setting for a choir on a concert, and is published in octavo format. The setting by Betty Roe also dates from 1963, is in unison, and has a pop style. The chord progressions repeated throughout the work follow a I-vi-ii-V pattern and often add "non-chord" tones. This setting has a dance character through rhythmic patterns associated with Latin styles.

**Example 2. Rhythmic pattern of *Magnificat* by Betty Roe.**

The keyboard serves as a background for the vocal music. This setting is easy and could be used as a concert work for young voices.

Erik Routley considers Martin Shaw to be one of the leaders who, during the early part of this century, brought about a change in music

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composed for the church.<sup>5</sup> This concern for some kind of change was evidenced in a small book that Shaw wrote in 1923 entitled *The Principles of Church Music Composition*. In Routley's words it was "a manifesto against Victorian techniques."<sup>6</sup> Shaw composed five Magnificats, but only the 1952 setting in E-flat is for treble voices. There is strong emphasis on melody, use of chant techniques, and modality.

*Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis* (1979) by Geoffrey Burgon uses SA and organ. Burgon has established himself as a writer of significance in England. Since 1963, for example, he has composed over sixty works, and his *Nunc Dimittis*, published with this Magnificat, closed each episode of the famous television series of John Le Carre's *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*. The majority of the Magnificat is in unison. Its haunting themes float above a very busy, driving organ part that is considerably more challenging than the vocal writing. The organ propels the music forward toward the *Gloria Patri*, then changes to a more free style of sustained chords with an organ countermelody answering the voices. This work and several of Burgon's other compositions recently have been recorded on an album titled *Cathedral Music* by Geoffrey Burgon

on Hyperion label. Although his music is less familiar to American choral conductors, he is someone whose music deserves their attention. It has appeal and quality.

There have been numerous treble voice Magnificat settings by American composers. Daniel

ficult, highly dissonant, and moves through rapidly changing uncommon meters with shifting accents (24/16, 10/8, 5/16, etc.). Above the score are suggestions for conducting patterns to accommodate the various meters.

This work may be performed with

**Example 3. Pinkham, *Magnificat*, mm. 57-58.**

8

57 1 Solo Soprano from the Chorus

o - mnes ge-ne-ra-ti-o-nes. by all-gen-er-a-tions.

1 Solo Alto from the Chorus

o - mnes ge-ne-ra-ti-o-nes. by all-gen-er-a-tions.

Chorus: In measure 58 tone cluster between d<sup>4</sup> and c<sup>5</sup>. Alternate with semitone above in given rhythm.

o - mnes ge-ne-ra-ti-o-nes. by all-gen-er-a-tions.

57

dim. ppp

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Pinkham's *Magnificat* for soprano solo, two oboes, two bassoons, and harp is one of the most extensive. This 1969 composition is very dif-

piano accompaniment, although this version tends to be less effective than the one with instrumental accompaniment. The chorus has two- and three-part verses with occasional chords that erupt into tone clusters.

Pinkham provides both Latin and English texts for performance, and the sections, while not labeled, are divided into brief movements with different tempi. There are many dramatic effects. Full vocal ranges are employed; this setting will require an advanced choir of singers and is a work for concerts.

Paul Chihara's *Magnificat* (1967) for SSSAAA unaccompanied is unusual. The notes are unstemmed and lack rhythms thereby forming a chant style of repeated, pulsating notes for each phrase. There is an austere mood as the chords are built through delayed entrances, and the conductor's responsibility is to set tempi and cue entrances. The text "Ave Maria" is inserted into the traditional words of Luke, and there is no *Gloria Patri*. The general effect is one of tone clusters that emerge and contract as the voices are added and reduced. Also, *parlando* (speech) is used briefly above singing. The music is not especially difficult, but

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Example 4. Chihara, *Magnificat*, p. 6.

6

Qui - a fe - cit mi - li ma - gna, qui po - tens est, et sanc - tum no - men e - jus.

Gra - ti - a

Et mi - se - ri - cor - di - a e - jus

Et mi - se - ri - cor - di - a e - jus

Et mi - se - ri - cor - di - a e - jus

Et mi - se - ri - cor - di - a e - jus

Et mi - se - ri - cor - di - a e - jus

Et mi - se - ri - cor - di - a e - jus

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many short solo phrases occur throughout. This relatively easy setting could be sung by most average choirs, and has a duration of less than five minutes.

Richard Yardumian's *Magnificat* is for SSAA unaccompanied with an alto solo. This 1966 setting has full vocal ranges with a low tessitura for the second alto; there is some division in all voices. There are several sections and a mixture of homophonic and polyphonic textures.

Other engaging American Magnificats for treble voices are by Emma Lou Diemer, John Duke, Howard Hughes, and Joseph Roff. Diemer's setting uses two parts with some unison singing, and is appropriate for young voices. Duke's unison setting uses organ and has a strong, majestic quality. There are registration suggestions, and often the organ has isolated chords interrupted by rests. It has no *Gloria Patri*, and is for concert use by choir or solo. *Canticle of Mary* by Hughes uses a cantor and either unison choir or congregation with organ. It is for liturgical use, and the phrases are brief, in alternation between the two performing groups. The work consists of "antiphons," which are the Magnificat text, and refrains which include English versions of "Ave Maria," as well as "Alleluias." Roff's setting is also for cantor, congregation, and organ; it, too, employs alternation procedures with the congregation (or women's choir)

will require a sophisticated group for effective performance.

Ned Rorem's 1971 setting for SA or TB unaccompanied is brief and somewhat unassuming. It is published in his *Canticles, English Settings of Seven Liturgical Songs*, and moves in a syllabic, homophonic two-part style with brief rests between verses. The music is usually "tuneful" with some wide melodic skips and dissonances between the parts. There are wide dynamic ranges and moments of gentle tenderness. While not a major work, this setting would be a cogent concert or church setting for singers wanting unusual, but not overly-taxing, repertoire.

The *Magnificat* (1982) of Noel Goemanne is for two equal voices with optional solos and organ or piano; there are brief spots of soprano divisi. The music is usually warm and sensitive with good keyboard support for the voices;

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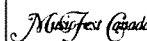
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repeating the verses. The music is simple and tonal with an optional descant at the end. There is no *Gloria Patri*.

### Conclusion

While this survey did not attempt to identify and discuss all Magnificats for treble voices, it has been concerned with a representative group of works from which some conclusions can be drawn. Composers throughout history have set this text for treble voices, but treble most often refers to boys' voices. Compared to other choral genres and other mixed choir Magnificats, these settings tend to be conservative in

harmonic and rhythmic style. The majority of the settings are for church services and usually include a "Gloria Patri." Part of the great interest in the Magnificat can be traced to its role in the Vesper Service of the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran traditions that called for musical settings. There is a preponderance of works with keyboard accompaniment and most are of easy to moderate difficulty. The process of alternating verses between soloist or small group and a larger choir is common. In later periods this became less formal and eventually the alternation was not restricted to verse patterns. Diverse styles have been employed including

jazz, chant, orchestral, as well as styles appropriate to historical periods. Pre-twentieth-century settings were most often in Latin; those in this century tend to be in English with some having both Latin and English versions for performance and some settings add additional words to the text. The largest number of settings are by English composers. Interest in this text by major composers is significant, and many have written multiple versions.

### Published Magnificats for Treble Voices

*Unison Choir Accompanied by Organ or Piano*

Arnold, J. H. *A Plain Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis in Simplest Terms*. London: Oxford University Press, 1952.

Bairstow, Edward. *Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis in E-flat*. London: Oxford University Press, 1923.

Cockshot, Gerald. *Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis in C Minor*. London: Novello (Publication date unknown).

Coleman, Henry. *Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis in F*. London: Stainer and Bell, 1930.

Cook, John. *Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis in G*. London: Novello, 1952.

Dickenson, Peter. *Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis*. London: Novello (Publication date unknown).

Duke, John. *Magnificat*. Boston: Boston Music Co., 1970.

Dyson, George. *Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis in C*. London: Stainer and Bell, 1911.

Floyd, Alfred Ernest. *Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis in C*. London: Stainer and Bell, 1911.

Hankey, Lancelot. *Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis*. London: Josef Weinberger, 1963.

Harker, A. Clifford. *Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis in D*. London: Novello, 1951.

Hull, R. H. *Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis in G*. London: Stainer and Bell, 1927.

Hughes, Howard. *Canticle of Mary*. Chicago: G.I.A. Publications, 1982.

Roe, Betty. *Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis*. London: Josef Weinberger, 1963.

Roff, Joseph. *Magnificat: My Being Proclaims*. Chicago: G.I.A. Publications (Publication date unknown).

Steward, C. Hylton. *Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis in C*. London: Oxford University Press, 1932.

Thiman, Eric Harding. *Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis in G*. London: Novello (Publication date unknown).

Wadely, Frederick William. *Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis in E-flat*. London: Novello, 1941.

Warren, Raymond. *Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis*. London: Novello, 1960.

*SA, SSA, SSAA Choir Accompanied by Organ or Piano*

Adkins, J. E. *Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis in G*. London: Stainer and Bell (Publication date unknown).

Brockless, Brian. *Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis*. London: Novello, 1962.

Burgon, Geoffrey. *Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis*. London: J. & W. Chester, 1981.

Chappell, Herbert. *Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis in G*. London: Novello (Publication date unknown).

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C-50	5.66	2.70	2.33	1.90	1.70	1.65	1.60	1.55	1.50
C-60	5.95	3.02	2.54	2.11	1.91	1.86	1.81	1.76	1.71
C-70	6.71	3.70	2.79	2.36	2.16	2.11	2.06	2.01	1.96
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Cole, Hugo. *Magnificat in G. London: Novello, 1957.*

\_\_\_\_\_. *Magnificat for SSAA.* London: Novello (Publication date unknown).

Daymond, E. R. *Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis in G.* London: Stainer and Bell (Publication date unknown).

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>. *Liber usualis, with Introductions and Rubrics in English.* Ed. Benedictines of Solemes. (Tournai: Desclee, 1959), 207.

<sup>2</sup>. Giovanni Palestrina, *Magnificat in the Fourth Mode*, "Introductory Note," by Paul Boepple. (Bryn Mawr, Pa.: Theodore Presser Co., 1941).

<sup>3</sup>. The Evening Service includes two basic canticles, Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis, and their alternatives are Psalms, Cantate Domino, and Deus misereatur. The Magnificat and

Nunc Dimittis are often published together and may share thematic content.

<sup>4</sup>. According to Willi Apel, the gypsy scale has two augmented seconds which occur between the third and fourth and the sixth and seventh degrees of the scale. See "Scale," *Harvard Dictionary of Music* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), 662-63, for further discussion.

<sup>5</sup>. Erik Routley, *Twentieth Century Church Music.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 51.

<sup>6</sup>. *Ibid.*, 52.

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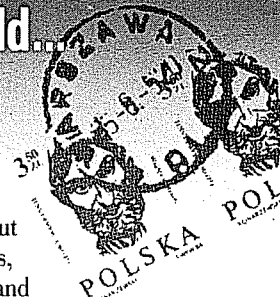


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