

The *Musicalische Exequien* by Heinrich Schütz is a little-known masterpiece ideally suited for performance by chamber choirs and many church choirs. The title may be somewhat formidable, but the music is full of interest, beauty, and variety, and it provides a wonderful opportunity for using soloists from the choir in various ensembles, contrasting with sections for full choir. The only instrumental requirement is the "basso continuo": organ (or harpsichord) with cello and/or bass. The music is challenging, but the technical demands should be well within the capabilities of most choirs.

The work was commissioned by Schütz's friend and patron Prince Heinrich Posthumus von Reuss (1572-1635) who selected (either by himself, or with assistance from Schütz?) various chorale stanzas and scriptural passages which were both inscribed on his sarcophagus and set to music to be performed "before and after the sermon" at the Prince's funeral service (February 4, 1636). Schütz completed his task before the Prince's death,<sup>1</sup> and according to information supplied by Schütz on the title page, the work may have been performed several times for the Prince during his lifetime.

The *Exequien* is in three movements, each requiring a different arrangement of musical forces, and lasting in total about 35 to 40 minutes in performance. The first movement, subtitled "Concert in Form einer deutschen Begräbnis-Missa" ("Concerto in the Form of a German Funeral Mass"), is for seven soloists ("Favoriti," SSATTBB) and six-part choir ("Capella," SSATTB or SATBarB). It is by far the longest movement of the three, lasting 25 to 30 minutes. The second movement is a double-choir motet (SATB-SATB) and is about 4 to 5 minutes in duration. The final movement is also for double choir, but in the less usual arrangement of SSB soli contrasted to SATTB (or SATBarB) choir, and lasts 6 to 7 minutes.

There are at least three good editions of the work available: (1) Bärenreiter, BA 250, Vol. IV of the *Neue Schütz Ausgabe*, edited by Friedrich Schöneich; (2) Hänssler Verlag, Vol. VIII of the *Stuttgarter Schütz-Ausgabe* (HE 20.279-281 in

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## Form and Style in the *Musicalische Exequien* by Heinrich Schütz

by Larry Cook

the separate performing edition), edited by Günter Graulich and Paul Horn; and (3) G. Schirmer, ed. 2270, edited by Arthur Mendel. The Hänssler and Schirmer editions both have unusually informative introductions. Note-values in the Bärenreiter and Hänssler editions are consistently reduced from the original by half; Mendel, in the Schirmer edition, uses the same reduction in the duple-meter sections, but reduces by eight in the triple-meter portions. Although the Schirmer edition is possibly somewhat over-edited, Mendel's suggestions (particularly in regard to rhythmic grouping) are of considerable assistance to singers unfamiliar with the style. The Hänssler and Schirmer editions both have German and English texts. Bärenreiter has only German text. Because of the intrinsic merit and widespread availability of the Schirmer edition, all subsequent page and measure number references in this article will refer to it.

In the first movement, Schütz notated the voice parts in "A Minor" (Aeolian mode) and the basso continuo in "E Minor," apparently expecting the singers to transpose in this case. The Bärenreiter and Hänssler editions consolidate the use of "E Minor," while the Schirmer edition transposes both voices and instruments to "F-sharp Minor," giving what the editor believed to be a nearer representation of the pitches actually heard by the composer,<sup>2</sup> and resulting in more favorable singing ranges for most modern choirs.

### *1. First movement: Concert in Form einer deutschen Begräbnis-Missa*

Schütz was not indulging in fanciful language when he called the first movement a "Concerto in the form of a Missa [Kyrie and Gloria]." It is, indeed, in two parts corresponding to the "Kyrie" and "Gloria," and each is initiated by a tenor intonation. The first section is a tripartite Kyrie trope, successively addressed (according to German practice) to God the Father, the Son, and the Ho-

ly Spirit. The much longer second section corresponds, somewhat more generally, to the "Gloria." The "concerto" aspects are also important: contrasts between solo ensemble and tutti sections, and some tendency toward virtuosity, especially for the solo voices. Maximum variety is achieved in the solo groupings, featuring short solos as well as duets in equal ranges: S-S (p. 4), T-T (pp. 29-31), B-B (pp. 44-47). There are also contrasts of high and low voices: S-T (pp. 16-20), S-B (pp. 21-24), A-B (pp. 6-8). Other combinations include a trio, SSB (pp. 34-37); a quartet, ATTB (pp. 38-40); and the full complement of soloists, SSATTB, (pp. 10-12, and 59-60).

The "Gloria" (pp. 10-65) shows a remarkable, near-symmetrical construction. After the tenor intonation, there are sixteen sub-sections beginning with the "Favoriti" on scriptural text and alternating regularly with the "Capella" on chorale stanzas. The full solo ensemble sings together only in the first and last of its sections (Nos. 1 and 15), and in successive fashion at the mid-point (No. 9, pp. 33-40). The choir, each time presenting a different choral stanza, sings different stanzas of the same chorale as its first and last statements (No. 2, pp. 12-16, and No. 16, pp. 61-65). These two choral statements are musically nearly identical, but the latter is appropriately extended and elaborated. The formal structure of the beginning and ending is thus quite clearly established by both the soloists and the choir, but Schütz did not stop there. At the mid-point (No. 9) the entire solo group is employed in a continuous series: alto alone, SSB, tenor alone, ATTB. This section is considerably longer than any of the others, and its importance as the formal center is underscored by the fact that it includes the entire text—and most of the basic musical material—of the second movement (the double-choir motet). Additionally, the chorale which follows, sung by the choir ("Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin"), is the German hymn paraphrase of the text of the *Exe-*


quien's final movement (the *Nunc dimittis*). Thus, in the "Gloria" Schütz achieves a formal structure that symmetrically alternates scripture and chorale. (see Table I).<sup>3</sup>

The musical style is no less interesting than the form. The choral sections are all settings of chorale texts and melodies, ranging from largely homophonic (*Kantional*) style in the three *Kyrie* invocations (pp. 3, 5-6, 8-9), and the settings of two stanzas of "Nun lasst uns Gott dem Herren" (pp. 20-21 and 32-33) which are identical except that the two soprano parts and the two tenor parts are interchanged. At the other extreme are quite elaborate chorale-motets (pp. 12-16, 25-28, 41-44, 48-51, 54-56, 61-65).


A consistent stylistic feature of the choral sections is the use of antiphonal, quasi-polychoral technique within the single six-part choir. This antiphonal aspect is most apparent in the more complex sections, and usually pits the three higher voices against the three lower. But even the more nearly homophonic sections display this tendency as shown by the concealed antiphony in the setting of "erbarm dich" in each of the *Kyrie* responses (pp. 3, 6, and 9).

TABLE I  
FORMAL STRUCTURE IN THE FIRST MOVEMENT  
OF THE *MUSICALISCHE EXEQUIEN*  
Favoriti Capella (SSATTB)


- KYRIE
1. [T] (Intonation) "Nacket bin ich von Mutterleibe . . ."  
[TB] "Nacket werde ich wiederum dahinfahren . . ."  
"Herr Gott Vater im Himmel, erbarm dich über uns."
- CHRISTE
2. [SS] "Christus ist mein Leben . . . der Welt Sünde trägt"  
"Jesu, Christe, Gottes Sohn, erbarm dich über uns."
- KYRIE
3. [AB] "Leben wir . . . so sind wir des Herren."  
"Herr Gott, heiliger Geist, erbarm dich über uns."
- GLORIA
1. [T] (Intonation) "Also hat Gott die Welt geliebt . . ."  
[SSATTB] "Auf dass alle . . . das ewige Leben haben."
  2. [Nun freut euch, liebe Christen]\* "Er sprach zu seinem lieben Sohn . . . lass sie mit dir leben."
  3. [S<sup>2</sup> - T<sup>2</sup>] "Das Blut Jesu . . . rein von allen Sünden."
  4. [Nun lasst uns Gott dem Herren] "Durch ihn ist uns vergeben . . . O Gott, wie grosse Gaben."
  5. [S<sup>1</sup> - B] "Unser Wandel ist im Himmel . . . verklärten Leibe."
  6. [Ich hab' mein Sach Gott heimgestellt] "Es ist allhier . . . immer im Streit."
  7. [TT] "Wenn eure Sünde gleich blutrot . . . wie Wolle werden."
  8. [Nun lasst uns Gott dem Herren] "Sein Wort, sein Tauf . . . lehrt uns darauf vertrauen."
  9. [A] "Gehe him mein Volk . . ."  
[SSB] "Der gerechten Seelen . . ."  
[T] "Herr, wenn ich nur dich . . ."  
[ATTB] "wenn mir gleich Leib . . . und mein Teil."
  10. [Mit Fried und Freud] "Er ist das Heil . . . der Preis, Ehr, Freud, und Wonne."
  11. [BB] "Unser Leben währet siebenzig Jahr . . . es Müh und Arbeit."
  12. [Ach wie elend] "Ach wie elend ist unser Zeit . . . wenn dirs wohl gelinget."
  13. [T] "Ich weiss, dass mein Erlöser lebt . . . Fleisch Gott sehen."
  14. [Wenn mein Stündlein vorhanden ist] "Weil du vom Tod . . . drum fahr ich hin mit Freuden."
  15. [SSATTB] "Herr, ich lasse dich nicht, du segnest mich denn."
  16. [Nun freut euch, liebe Christen] "Er sprach zu mir . . . da bist du selig worden."
- \*Chorale titles are bracketed; the stanza sung by the choir is in quotation marks.



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There are many interesting variations and contrasts, however, within the basic technique, as the following examples demonstrate: At the beginning (p. 12) and end (p. 16) of "Nun freut euch," the entire choir participates in close imitation of short rhythmic motifs. At the end of "Ich hab mein Sach Gott heimgestellt" (p. 28), after contrasting the higher and lower voices, four parts (S<sup>2</sup>-A-T<sup>2</sup>-B) together initiate the last phrase, which is then imitated in sixths by S<sup>1</sup> and T<sup>1</sup>. In "Es ist das Heil" (p. 43), after eighteen measures of only SSA, the first tenors assume the role of cantor on the brilliant presentation of "Der Preis, Ehr, Freud und Wonne," evoking immediate chordal response and tutti cadence; the idea is repeated almost immediately with the second tenors (or baritones) taking the lead. "Ach wie elend" (pp. 48-51) retains a basic contrast of high and low voices but, because of its more pervasive point-of-imitation style, is in a constant textural state of flux. "Wenn mein Stundlein" (pp. 54-56) generally combines four voices (instead of three) at a time (e.g., SSAT vs. ATTB) with one voice serving double duty, leading to tutti cadences of intense rhythmic independence.

A second consistent feature is the freely changing rhythmic grouping, with rhythmic independence of the separate parts, often in conflict with the implications of the modern barlines. This rhythmic element derives from the delightfully irregular rhythmic organization of the early German chorale (which, in turn, relates to the same sort of rhythmic groupings in plainsong and Renaissance polyphony.) Schütz was not content simply to retain the rhythmic, word-related freedom in the chorale melodies themselves, but lost no opportunity to enliven the music of the other parts as well. (Mendel, in the Schirmer edition, attempts to make these rhythmic features more explicit by frequent editorial changes of meter signature, where possible, and by the use of square brackets to show rhythmic groupings that might otherwise be overlooked.)

The solo sections, while not chorale-based, make constant use of similar rhythmic procedures with meticulous attention to expressive word declamation. As might be expected, the solo sections are

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somewhat more vocally demanding than the choral sections, more Italianate and florid. Nonetheless, the challenges are well within the capabilities of good student soloists, who must combine individual musicianship with ensemble skills, such as in the overlapped short-phrase imitation between the two sopranos (p. 4), and between alto and bass (p. 7). Soprano 2 and Tenor 2 have imitation in longer lines (pp. 16-17) in a small A-B-A structure; such long-line imitation occurs between soprano and bass as well (pp. 21-22). In addition to imitation, Italianate coloratura in parallel thirds and sixths abounds, for example in the soprano-bass duet (pp. 23-24), and in the tenor duet (pp. 29-31), where the writing also contains expressive chains of suspensions.

Text-painting is prominent throughout; as only one example, the bass duet (pp. 44-45) has a descending line to "Unser Leben währet siebenzig Jahr" ("Our life lasts but seventy years") which contrasts to the upward leaps of fourths and fifths on the word "hoch" ("high") in the next phrase. Later, on the line "so ist es Müh und Arbeit" ("So is it labor and sorrow," pp. 46-47), the textual idea is intensified by the use of rests breaking up the melodic line (the

rhetorical figure *abruptio*). This line is first echoed, then imitated, with one voice filling in the other's rests.

In summary, with its soloistic opportunities and choral counterpoint, this first movement is an exquisitely crafted combination of diverse musical elements which is ingratiating both to performers and listeners.

*II. Motet: Herr wenn ich nur dich habe ("Lord, whom have I but Thee")*

The second movement, a setting of Psalm 73:25-26 for two equal SATB choirs, is in many ways typical of Schütz's polychoral technique. As with motet style in general, each textual phrase has its own melodic idea which is imitated in all (or most) parts before proceeding to the next textual and musical phrase. Schütz takes great care in constructing overlapping continuity with each change from one choir to the other; only near the mid-point (p. 73, meas. 21) is there a strong tutti cadence. Schütz was always imaginative, never perfunctory, in his use of sequential intensifications, and he had an idiosyncratic insistence (here and elsewhere) on nearly always maintaining some degree of rhythmic independence of parts within each choir.

Of particular interest is the relationship between the setting of the same text in this and the preceding movement. The first phrase of the second movement is sung twice by each choir, first in barely overlapped succession, then in a kind of block stretto. The phrase is derived from the tenor solo of the first movement (pp. 37-38) where it is also sung twice, with the same interior repetition, and in nearly identical rhythmic and melodic shape.

The next phrase, "so frage ich nichts nach Himmel und Erden" ("and there is nothing upon earth that I desire besides Thee"), is likewise from the tenor solo of the first movement, and again retains the basic rhythmic and melodic configuration. In the double-choir motet, however, Schütz greatly extends and develops the idea with various ornamental figures and sequential repetitions.

The third phrase, "Wenn mir gleich Leib und Seele verschmacht" ("my flesh and my heart may fail"), comes from the ATTB solo ensemble of the first movement (pp. 38-40), but Schütz treats the material quite freely. The repeated-note figure in thirds, imitated in thirds against a descending bass line, is transformed in the second movement from a major triad to minor, and from two parts against two, to three against one—the one being the bass line which assumes a more chromatic, expressive aspect.

In the ensuing text, Schütz divides the line as he set it in the first movement into two parts, and adds a syllable to each; thus, it becomes "so bist du *doch* Gott," and "allezeit meines Herzens Trost und mein Teil." Having clearly established the relationship to the first movement, he also departs from close adherence to previous material in order to exploit more fully the double-choir possibilities with echoes, sequences, and brilliant tutti's.

*III. Canticum B. Simeonis: "Herr, nun lässest du deinen Diener"*

Schütz had the following to say about the third movement, included in the "Instructions" published with the music:

1. It must be noted that this concerto has two choirs, and each choir has its separate words. The first choir has five voices and recites the words of Simeon: "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant." The second choir, of three voices, has two

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sopranos and a baritone or high bass, and sings the following words, and more; "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord." With the device of the second choir, the author hopes to introduce and represent to some extent the joy of the disembodied blessed souls in Heaven in the company of the heavenly spirits and holy angels.

2. The first choir should be located next to the organ, but the second choir should be elsewhere at a distance—or in the manner one feels most advisable.

3. If one were to write out an additional copy or two of the second choir parts and place the groups in various locations according to the opportunities afforded by the church, the author believes it would considerably increase the effect of the work.<sup>4</sup>

The solo trio sings its opening "Selig sind die Toten" ("Blessed are the dead") phrase three times, separated by phrases from the full choir, and each time in some variation (order of entries, pitch level, etc.) of the ostinato-like phrase. Schütz marked nearly every phrase for both the trio and choir with either "fortiter" (forte) or "submissee" (piano), and in the trio's ensuing text, "und ihre Werke folgen ihnen nach," he uses the forte-piano contrasts to symbolic advantage: the trio sings the phrase *forte* and then, to suggest "their works following after them," repeats it *piano*. A somewhat longer central section (9 measures) features the trio alone on the text "Sie sind in der Hand des Herren, und keine Qual rühret sie an" ("They are in the hand of the Lord, and no grief troubles them"). There is another brief reference here to the first movement: compare the soprano 1 parts of pp. 34-35, meas. 252-254, and p. 101, meas. 81-83. The trio ends with a

final statement of the "Selig sind die Toten" phrase.

The five-part *Capella* (SATTB) sings the German translation of the *Nunc dimittis* in separated phrases, each phrase bridged by the trio. The choral scoring, with varied amounts of contrapuntal and harmonic complexity, results in an unusually rich choral timbre. Motivic imitation and the quasi-polychoral treatment of the type employed in the first movement is also prominent here. The choir is usually marked *fortiter* when alone, and *submissee* as the solo trio enters.

Although this final movement does not share the symmetrical aspect of the "Gloria," it has a similarly rounded form, delineated by the opening and closing theme of the solo trio, the distinctly contrasting central section, and the overlapping alternation between soli and tutti. Finally, the last phrase of the *Capella* ("und zum Preis deines Volks"), led by the first tenors, clearly recalls the music to the similar text ("der Preis, Ehr, Freud," p. 43) of the first movement.

The *Musicalische Exequien*, Op. 7



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(SWV 279-281), was published in 1636, after Schütz had already published the early *Italian Madrigals* (1611-12), the polychoral *Psalms of David* (1619), the *Resurrection History* (1623), the intensely chromatic, Monteverdian *Cantiones sacrae* (1625), and the Latin-texted first volume of the *Symphoniae sacrae* (1629). Still to come were the two volumes of the soloistic *Kleine geistliche Konzerte* (1636, 1639), the second and third volumes of the

*Symphoniae sacrae* (1647 and 1650, these with German texts), the retrospective *Geistliche Chormusik* (1648), and the *Passions*. The *Exequien* thus stands near the midpoint of Schütz's production, and it presents a perfect fusion of all the diverse elements from which Schütz drew in forming his own musical language: Italian and German, *prima prattica* and *seconda prattica*. The magnificent *Musicalische Exequien* completely transcends its original

function, resulting in a work wonderfully appropriate for concert or service music.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Gustav Adolf Trumppf, "Die 'Musicalischen Exequien' von Heinrich Schütz," *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 123 (1962): 120-123, suggests the work was completed between Dec. 9, 1633, and Feb. 11, 1634; such an early date is disputed by Martin Gregor-Dellin, *Heinrich Schütz: Sein Leben, sein Werk, seine Zeit* (Munich: Piper, 1984), 216-217.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Mendel, "Pitch in the 16th and Early 17th Centuries, Parts II and III," *Musical Quarterly* 34/1-2 (June-July, 1948): 199-221; 336-357.

<sup>3</sup> This essay concentrates on musical aspects of style and form. For two excellent studies of the theological implications of the textual juxtapositions, see Friedrich Schöneich, "Zum Aufbau des Gloria-Teils in Schützens Musicalischen Exequien," *Musik und Kirche* 20 (1950): 182-190; and Gerhard Mittring, "Totendienst und Christuspredigt: Zum Text der Musicalischen Exequien von H. Schütz," *Musik als Lobgesang: Festschrift für Wilhelm Ehmann* (Darmstadt: Tonkunst Verlag Karl Merseburger, 1964), 43-63.

<sup>4</sup> Translation by Larry Cook.

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