

W S Lloyd Webber
(1914 – 1982)

Reflections on Various Works and Genres

Meeting Place

Introduction

This cantata was composed in 1964 for solo baritone, SATB choir and organ, and orchestrated in the 1970s by Martyn Williams). With words written by the Rev'd. Bryn Rees on the birth of Christ, it is in three distinct sections entitled 'The Gift', 'The Sorrow of the Refusal' and 'The Joy of Acceptance', respectively. The two outer sections employ the same recurring material, while the middle is quite different in character and more 'progressive' in style, thus creating a unifying or 'cyclic effect (referred to in the first church composition). The work is further unified through the continual use of a rising minor third.

Meeting Place is a 'cyclic' work which involves three melodic motifs and a main theme (known in this essay as the 'Christmas theme') employing a syncopated rhythm (also used cyclically). The first melodic motif consists of a rising 3rd, the second is a 'neighbour-note' motif (AGA), while the third is a rising 5th. These features form the pertinent features of the first section. Set in , a favourite harmonic feature of the composer is the resolution on a F# major chord, otherwise the harmonic language is tonal

Part One - "The Gift"

Listen for:

- a rising minor 3rd (A-C), melodic motif 1, which unifies this work, in the first bar of the short introduction, linking to a neighbour-note structure (AGA) which forms a motif 2
- a triad (FAC) forms melodic motif 3, as the soloist enters with "Canst though by searching ..."
- a rising arpeggio (BDF#B and F#BDF#) employing a syncopated rhythm, creating motif 4, sung by the basses and sopranos on "Higher then heav'n"
- a repetition of the entire opening section

- motif 3 used to present the Annunciation – “Hail Mary! For though hast found favour with God”
- quaver figuration, perhaps suggesting Mary at her spinning wheel, as Stanford did in his G major Evening Service
- motif 1 again in the phrase “Of His Kingdom there shall be no end”
- the mood change with a shift to simple triple time and *Allegro* tempo for the main theme of this section, using the melodic phrase (ABC#DEAA) with an up-beat and dotted rhythm on the words “We sing the Christmas story”
- a return of this main theme, now in B major, rhythmically altered
- soprano and baritone voices in arioso with sustained chords, involving motifs 1 and 2, now in G and D – ending with a melodic climax on “which is Christ the Lord”.
- a codetta to this section using fine choral writing in G, involving a pedal D, independent lines, homophonic-writing, flowing lines, imitation, chromatic harmony (especially flattened mediant chords) – all ending on “The splendour of the Lord/The true Eternal Light!”

Part 2 - ‘The Sorrow of Refusal of the Gift’

Listen for:

- a completely different character and style
- a shift to G minor
- an introduction consisting of march-like material, employing a dotted rhythm, a disjunct bass line involving octaves, numerous chromatic side-steps before returning to the tonic for the soloist entry of “He came unto his own/and His own received Him not” (commencing with the now unifying minor 3rd)
- a bass descending 5th which becomes a new motif in this section
- charming homophonic choral writing in the early twentieth century Anglican style, commencing with the first three notes in conjunct movement, hinting at the main theme of this section
- the choir entering with the march-like material on “The satellites in orbit/Declare the God of space”
- use of the falling 5th motif in the bass

- 3-part men's voices on "Drink to the festive season!
- a remarkable solo voice line for the phrase "Who wants to know Mary's Son?/He's only come to spoil the fun"
- a return of the march-like material for "We still cry 'Merry Christmas'/A time to celebrate;"
- a quasi-recitative section for the words again commencing with the minor 3rd motif, "I am come that they might have life/and have it more abundantly/And they shall come from the east ...", against sustained harmony
- a return of the fine choral writing of this section, ending with material similar to the 'Coventry Carol' and a tierce de picardie.

Part 3 - 'The Jof of Acceptance of the Gift'

Listen for:

- the introduction returned to G, commencing with motif 1
- new melodic in the solo voice ("Now behold wise men from the east ...")
- new material for men's voices, now in F
- an expanded return to the main theme of the work in the chorus ("O wise men bring your learning"), now without the dotted rhythm and in quadruple time
- a final appearance of the solo voice ("Where those who have shall bring their gift/Of gold and frankincense and myrrh"), leading to a dramatic climax using upper register notes
- a final return to the main theme, returned to triple time, in unison voices ("O festival of gladness/O happy Christmas time/The death of gloom and sadness/The birth of joy sublime"), leading to a final hearing of motif 1 with its minor 3rd ("No longer as a stranger/O come, Lord Jesus, come!")
- a final climax on "... But make my heart Thy home" with a flattened submediant leading to the tonic.