

Performance Issues of Gloria

by John Rutter

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Summary

The article acquaints the reader with the composition Gloria by the English composer John Rutter and his own experience with its performance.

My interest in the work of John Rutter is the result of research that is carried out at our University in Bydgoszcz on "Choral music of east and west cultures", which I am the head of. Two years ago, I presented a topic about J. Rutter's *Requiem* at a symposium in Usti nad Labem. The works of this composer are in the repertoire of the Academic Choir of the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun (Poland), which I have been managing for 15 years. I would like to interest you, familiarize with the work of this English composer and encourage you to include these songs in the repertoire of your bands. Due to the small performance apparatus, because some vocal-instrumental works are also developed for chamber orchestra, the costs of performing these works are not high.

John Rutter composed *Gloria* for choir, brass band and organ in 1974. The history of the creation of this song is associated with the activities of Mel Olson, one of the better-known American conductors. In 1969 he founded the vocal ensemble The Voices in Omaha, which later adopted the name Master Singers. J. Rutter dedicated a few other works to this group, including Psalm 23 *The Lord is my Shepard*, which was also included in 1982 by the composer in his *Requiem*. This song was Rutter's first major foreign order.

Mel Olson ordered the hymn *Gloria* in 1974 for his newly formed band. Rutter arranged the voices of his composition in line with Olson's expectations, who wanted the

technical difficulties of this composition to be adapted to the capabilities of his band at the time. Specification of expectations, as one can guess analysing *Gloria* phrases, was not too complicated. Therefore, thanks to this amateur bands can currently perform the song. John Rutter in his statements emphasizes that Mel Olson had a great impact on the creation of the song: ... Much of the credit must go to Mel Olson ... because, in telling me what he was looking for in a new choral work, he was telling me what thousands of other choral directors were looking for too."

The premiere of this work sounded on May 5, 1974 in Omaha, Nebraska (USA). The orchestra cast during the premiere concert of the so-called Brass, constituted:

- a group of four trumpets,
- two tenor trombones,
- bass trombone,
- tube,
- cauldrons and other percussion instruments (2 or 3 players)
- organs

Instrumentation for orchestra:

- 2.2.2.2.–4.3.3.1
- Timpani, percussion, harp
- Strings

The duration of this song is about 17 minutes.

The first recording was made by the composer himself in 1984, with his band Cambridge Singers, with the participation of the Philip Jones Brass Ensemble and organist



John Scott. Over time, a more elaborated, alternative version for choir and symphony orchestra was created. It premiered in 1976. The orchestra version was recorded at Winchester Cathedral on January 2, 2001 by the Polyphony choir, Brass group Wallace Collection, the City of London orchestra and organist Andrew Lumsden conducted by Stephen Layton.

The Old Christian hymn *Gloria* is one of the six permanent parts of the Latin Mass (introduced in the second century by Pope Telephorus). It is a liturgical part of the Catholic Mass and services, among others Lutheran church. It follows *Kyrie Eleison*.

Part One. Allegro vivace – “*Gloria in excelsis Deo*”

The first part is “*Gloria in excelsis Deo*” (Glory to God in the highest), a song of angels during the Annunciation for shepherds. The text is taken from the Gospel of St. Luke (Lk 2:14). (Picture 1)

<i>Gloria in excelsis Deo</i> <i>Et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis.</i> <i>Laudamus Te, benedicimus Te, adoramus Te, glorificamus Te.</i> <i>Gratias agimus Tibi</i> <i>propter magnam gloriam Tuam</i>	<i>Glory to God in the highest</i> <i>and on earth peace, good will to all people.</i> <i>We praise you, we bless you, we worship you, we glorify you, we give thanks to you</i> <i>for your great glory.</i>
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This part is marked at Allegro vivace. It begins with a fanfare of wind instruments, both in the brass and symphonic versions. The choral parts are also arranged in fanfare, which emphasizes the solemn character.

Fugato. The chorus voices appearing after the fragment softened by the organ part are harmonically melodious. Voices gather strength uniting musically in unison. The construction of the choral part (bars 185–200) clearly shows references to the

traditions of religious choral singing, where *Gloria in Excelsis* was a dialogical singing performed by two groups. Thanks to this (bars 203–227), the choir, with its imitative singing, gives the whole prayer joyful elation, even dance, and most importantly, it is a credible message of content *Propter magnam gloriam Tuam*. (Picture 2)

Thanks to the connection of the text with the event of Jesus’ birth, this song can be included in Christmas concerts. (Picture 3)

Part Two. Andante – “*Domine Deus*”

<i>Domine Deus, Rex coelestis,</i> <i>Deus Pater omnipotens.</i> <i>Domine Fili Unigenite,</i> <i>Iesu Christe,</i> <i>Domine Deus,</i> <i>Agnus Dei,</i> <i>Filius Patris:</i> <i>Qui tollis peccata mundi</i> <i>miserere nobis;</i> <i>Qui tollis peccata mundi</i> <i>suscipe deprecationem nostram,</i> <i>Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris</i> <i>miserere nobis.</i>	<i>Lord God, heavenly King,</i> <i>O God almighty Father.</i> <i>Only Begotten Son,</i> <i>Lord Jesus Christ,</i> <i>Lord God, Lamb of God,</i> <i>Son of the Father,</i> <i>you take away the sins of the world,</i> <i>have mercy on us;</i> <i>you take away the sins of the world,</i> <i>receive our prayer;</i> <i>you are seated at the right hand of the Father,</i> <i>have mercy on us.</i>
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The words are in their meaning a message of important intentions “asking for mercy and hearing prayers.” However, there is no symbolism of anxiety or fear. In my opinion, this is a fragment of the song so typical of Rutter’s style. He himself repeatedly emphasizes his fascinations with Gabriel Faure or Gustav Mahler. In this part of the song, the score radiates a noticeable warmth. Not only melodies are pleasant to the ear, but also the energetics of harmonic compounds in the constructed rhythmic layer typical for Rutter. It is marked at the

tempo of Andante. The movement of voices in the score is gentle on the background of ostinato organ accompaniment. (Picture 4) Gregorian singing is a great forming element here. It emphasizes the meaning of the text and, arranged in a very convincingly manner, allows performers to express a specific contemplative character. The singing of individual voices blends harmoniously with the organ background. (Picture 5)

There is some difficulty in the next fragment. Solo phrases for higher voices appear. It is good to leave them for the soloist to perform. I think a larger cast would be too strong for such a delicate musical texture. A reserved chamber cast will be a more credible illustration of this prayer. (Picture 6)

Part Three Vivace e ritmico – “Quoniam tu solus sanctus”

<i>Quoniam Tu solus Sanctus, Tu solus Dominus, Tu solus Altissimus, Iesu Christe, Cum Sancto Spiritu in gloria Dei Patris. Amen.</i>	<i>For You alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen</i>
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It is labelled Vivace e ritmico. In fact, rhythm plays a key role here. Some difficulties will certainly be caused by odd rhythm groups and variable, irregular metre. This final part is the climax of the whole work. Musically, it refers to the phrases from the beginning of the song; in places, one gets the impression that it is a symbolic ‘awakening’ after prayer contemplation in the previous part. After a few initial phrases that introduce a somewhat chaotic situation in the choral voices, the fugue *Cum Sancto Spiritu* appears. (Picture 7)

In this part of the work, it will be most difficult to achieve executive precision. For amateur choirs not only rhythm but also harmonic,

seemingly dissonant thematic narrative of choral voices, pose many difficulties. The situation was completely different in the case of the fugato from the first part, in which the appearing imitations harmonized with each other. The whole ends with the fast tempo of the accompanying orchestra to the finale sung by the choir – Amen.

Arrangement for the choir is very interesting and at the same time is not breakneck for voices in the use of scale. Of course, the rhythmicity of the choral texture is very varied in places (especially in the fugue in the third part) but an efficient singer, not only a professional one, certainly can overcome it. (Picture 8)

The song has been recorded several times and has been successful for years. Both professionals and secular bands perform it. Due to its joyful nature and relatively short duration for a song from the group of the so-called great vocal and instrumental forms it is often included in the concert program. The Academic Choir of the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń under my direction performed *Gloria* many times, both in organ and in symphonic versions.

The composition is popular among mixed choirs. In recent years, however, one can notice a trend that prefers high boys’ voices as well as alto parts sung by men. Indeed and with conviction, one can admit that such a composition gives a pleasant tone to the choral sound of early music.

Pictorial attachment

Picture 1

41

CHORUS

S. A. T. B.

Glo - ri - a in ex - cel - sis De - o,

2

Organ

f

Brass

Timp.

48

Glo - ri - a

Organ

Picture 2

184

ALTOS and BASSES

9

Pro - pter ma - gnam glo - ri - am

9

Brass

f marc.

Picture 3

202 S. 10

A. *mp poco a poco cresc.*
Glo - ri - a

T. *p poco a poco cresc.*
Glo - ri - a in ex - cel - sis

B. *p poco a poco cresc.*
Glo - ri - a in ex - cel - sis De - o, in ex -

Picture 4

13 TENORS and BASSES

17 *pp legato* *cresc.*
Do-mi - ne De - us, Rex cae - le - stis,

21 ALTOS *p legato*
De - us Pa - ter om - ni - po - tens.

TENORS *p legato*

18

77 SOPRANO SOLO *molto legato e tranquillo* (♩=76 sempre)

Qui tol - lis pec - ca - ta

Qui tol - lis pec -

Qui tol - lis pec - ca - ta

Qui

18

ff

Picture 5

82 SOPRANO SOLO
p espress.

mi - se - re - re, mi - se - re - re no bis.

mun - di, Qui

- ca - ta, mun - di, Qui tol -

Org. tol - lis Qui

88 SOPRANO and ALTO SOLI
mp espress.

sus - ci - pe

tol - lis pec - ca - ta mun - di, Qui tol - lis pec - ca - ta, - lis pec - ca - ta mun - di, tol - lis pec - ca - ta mun - di,

Picture 6

59 *mf leggero e ritmico*

Cum sancto Spi - ri - tu in glo - ri - a De - i Pa - tris, A - men, a -

- men, a - men, a - men, a - men, a -

64 *mf leggero e ritmico*

Cum sancto Spi - ri - tu in glo - ri - a De - i

- men, a - men, a - men, a - men, a -

- men, a - men, a - men, a - men, a -

Picture 7

Picture 8

23

37 BASSES *mp*

Quo-ni - am tu so - lus san-ctus, quoni - am tu so - lus san-ctus.

41 TENORS and BASSES *mp cresc.*

Tu so - lus Do-mi-nus, tu so-lus al-tis-si-mus, Je-su Chri - ste, Je-su Chri - ste, *stacc.*

45 *mf cresc.* S. Je - su Chri - ste, *f*

A. *f*

T. *f*

B. *mf cresc.* *f*

mf *f* *mp* *f* *mf*

S. D. *tr.* *ffp cresc.*

Résumé

Příspěvek seznamuje čtenáře se skladbou Gloria anglického skladatele Johna Ruttera a vlastními zkušenostmi s jejím prováděním.

Klíčová slova: anglický skladatel John Rutter, skladba Gloria, sborová tvorba.

Keywords: English composer John Rutter, composition Gloria, Choral music.

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