A Musicological Journey

through

Psalm 96

Brian Dukeshier MUMH 502 November 28, 2011 Throughout the history of music from the Renaissance to the Modern era, there have been texts that have been widely used. For example, the Latin mass text has been extensively recomposed by many composers in all of the musical time periods. Another such text which is widely used is *The Holy Bible*. Specifically used from the Scriptures are the Psalms. Psalm 23, Psalm 96, Psalm 98, Psalm 100, and Psalm 150 are some of the most commonly composed Bible texts used by composers throughout all history. The goal in this paper is to take a musicological journey through history while following the text of

Psalm 96 in different genres, countries, and languages by a variety of composers.

Before looking into specific pieces, first look at the text with which we will be dealing. *The Holy Bible* has been translated and sung in many different languages over the centuries, but for sake of comparison, we will look only at pieces using the text from the English, Latin, French, and German languages. The text of Psalm 96 is included in these languages in Appendix A.

Beginning in the Renaissance era, — which is conveniently dated 1500-1600 by many music historians, but is more accurately defined as the final decades of the fifteenth century to the third decade of the seventeenth century — we will look at pieces written by Giovanni Croce (1557-1609) and Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck (1562-1621). Moving forward into the Baroque era, we will look at pieces composed by Georg Friedrich Handel (1685-1759) and Dietrich Buxtehude (1637-1707). Johann Naumann (1741-1801) will be the only composer considered from the Classical era, and finally, Jon Mostad (b. 1942) and Eskil Hemberg (1938-2004) from the Modern era.

When it comes to the musical attributes or characteristics of the Renaissance era, there are some specifics that identify pieces as part of this musical period. These

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¹ Shrock, 17

specifics were involved in the breakdown of the era into three parts. In his book, *Choral Repertoire*, Dennis Shrock gives us the specific characteristics of the three parts of the Renaissance era.

At the beginning of the Renaissance, styles were mainly characterized by long phrases of text and incipient forms of imitative polyphony. By the middle of the era, texts often consisted of only several short phrases, and textures were generally unified by pervasive imitation. At the end of the era, compositional traits were varied: sacred works to Latin texts were generally constructed of alternating passages of imitative polyphony and homophony.²

Giovanni Croce's piece, *Cantate Domino*, falls into the category of the "middle era" Renaissance. This piece is a Latin motet³ written for four unaccompanied voices and employs widespread imitative polyphony. From the beginning motif presented by the sopranos and then entranced by the tenors, altos, and basses respectively, we begin on a journey of imitation by each individual part followed by a duet, sa/tb. There is a brief seven measure section that is very "hymn-like" in its vertical harmonies and structures, bringing a short reprieve of homophony in the midst of a polyphonic piece. Croce also changes the meter from four beats to three before returning to a new motif in a duet between parts. It is interesting to notice the minor tonality in which Croce composed this piece. The majority is in f minor with the exclusion of the d-flat. The sound is modal, specifically Dorian, which is the natural minor scale with a raised sixth. Croce further validates this by notating the key signature of three flats. The piece is consistent in its f minor Dorian until the last five bars of the piece where Croce suddenly changes the a-flat to an a-natural to give us an elongated Picardy third to change the end into F Major. It is

² Shrock, 17-18

³ Defined as a sacred Latin text scored for chorus in an imitative style

definitely a different spin on word painting when taking this joyful text of "singing a new song unto the Lord" and placing it in the Dorian mode while coming to a major tonality fruition on the text "show forth His salvation from day to day." One might say that the text that Croce wanted to emphasize was the fact that man is not joyful to God unless he has His salvation, and thus, he would tell it forth.

To examine a piece from the last part of the Renaissance era, we turn to Psalm 96 - Chantez à Dieu by the Dutch composer Sweelinck. Sweelinck composed one hundred and fifty-three Calvinist Psalm settings using French texts written by Clément Marot and Théodore de Béze. Many of the Calvinist Psalm settings were composed for more extensive voicing and often divided into movements.⁴ But Sweelinck's setting of *Psalm* 96 is simply a four part unaccompanied setting using a minute bit of homophony with imitative phrases while employing the French text of verses 1-3. These characteristics would put this piece in the latter part of the Renaissance era. This piece, like the Croce, is written in the Dorian mode — it is in d minor with a key signature of C Major — but Sweelinck doesn't adhere to the raised sixth scale degree to the extent that Croce does. In certain bars, specifically 19, 22, 23, 33, 36, and 37, Sweelinck uses the natural minor sixth as a passing tone or the changing of a diminished chord into a major chord. One thing in the treatment of the text that differs between Croce and Sweelinck is the emphasis of the word "sing", which is translated in these two pieces as "cantate" and "chantez." Croce uses melismatic passages over multiple measures that create a thicker texture of sound, whereas Sweelinck creates crisp clean eight note duets and trios that imitate one another thus creating a much lighter feel and a thinner texture to the sound.

⁴ Shrock, 47

Both pieces are unique in their own right and show the differences between music written by different composers during the same era of music.

Moving through history to the next style period, the Baroque era, we see changes in the style of composing that are constant. We see the use of a continuo in the bass throughout each piece that gives support to the voice parts. This era of music seems to leave the motet feeling and move to anthems and pieces filled with a more grandeur style of writing. These may also include orchestral parts that sometime double the voices while, at other times, giving harmonic support to the voices while giving variety to the accompaniment. The first piece to observe is O Sing unto the Lord (O Singet unserm Gott) by Georg Friedrich Handel. This piece is written with an English text of Psalm 96. Handel wrote eleven Chandos Anthems that generally consisted of six to eight movements that included an instrumental overture or sinfonia, solos, and choruses.⁵ The scoring of the first six anthems reflects the limited resources at the estate; there were no altos and no violas. 6 So follows O Sing unto the Lord, Anthem IV. It is divided into seven small movements. Each movement employs a different medium of voicing and instrumentation. These include: one instrumental, one solo with stb chorus, one tenor solo, one soprano/tenor duet and three stb choruses. The edition by Gottfried Grote and Rudolf Elvers includes the editor's work of creating an alto line by adding new material while also doubling the original tenor line. As we listen and look at the score, we realize the harmonic structures used by Handel are rather simple. When looking at the overall tonality of Anthem IV, the movements are in F Major followed by the relative minor of d, then Bb Major with the relative minor of g following before returning to the original key

⁵ Shrock, 333 ⁶ Shrock, 333

of F Major. The great majority of the individual movement's harmonic tonality is focused on the tonic, supertonic, sub-dominant, and dominant scale degrees. The difference being that the supertonic is used as a secondary dominant making it a major chord instead of minor in most instances. Movement four has some creative word paintings that reflect Handel's focus on the text. He uses a two beat melisma for the words "horribly" and "waves" and then creates a seven beat melisma for the word "mightier" to denote the strength of God which is greater than the sea. The undercurrent of constant sixteenth notes by the accompaniment gives the sense of the never-ending waves that toss about the sea. He also writes this movement in d minor giving it an even greater sense of unrest. Then a total transformation of mood into movement five where Handel takes us into a *larghetto* tempo marking while writing the half note to equal one beat to gain an even greater feeling of awe and worship. Throughout Handel's writing of O Sing unto the Lord, it is evident his focus was on the text and all other compositional devices became secondary. Each movement helps to create the overall atmosphere of what the whole Psalm 96 represents.

Cantate Domino Canticum Novum by Dietrich Buxtehude is written in a different medium than Handel but both were composed during the Baroque era. Bruno Grusnick in his edition of this piece published by Concordia in 1956 writes:

"In this motet, which is constructed in complete accordance with the spirit of a cantata, we have a work revealing Buxtehude's mastery of the art of composing vocal music — mastery comparable to what is seen in similar works by Schütz and Bach. One finds few compositions in which simplicity and greatness spring in like manner from a single basic emotion."

⁷ Grusnick's forward to the German edition

This piece is written in the Baroque seconda prattica style as it follows the historical characteristics set forth by music historians: the words govern the music thus allowing dissonance that previously was unacceptable,8 varied rhythms and expressive word painting,⁹ and vertically conceived textures and scoring for soloists and chorus with independent basso continuo accompaniment. 10 Shrock also goes on to say that Buxtehude's cantatas were actually vocal concertos but because of his lack of exposure to secular music, he termed it a cantata in the score which over time has become a sacred genre associated with Protestant services. 11 This piece best reflects the excitement of the text of any piece we have looked at thus far. The texture is light and crisp in the A section with a quick tempo, added to dramatically with large melismas for each voice part on the word "cantate." This leads us into soli by a bass and a soprano. The grandeur experienced in measures 205-213 is unique in that Buxtehude writes in e minor, the relative key to the overall tonality of G Major throughout, to create a mood of glory and awe of the three aspects of the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. In measure 212 we see Buxtehude "stepping out of the harmonic box of prima prattica" where he uses a major second and then a minor second dissonance before resolving. This was a new technique used in the seconda prattica and the first real instance in this piece. Even though both of these pieces were written during the Baroque era, we see how these two composers each treated the Psalm 96 text differently.

Moving to the Classical era, *Der 96 Psalm, Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied*, written by Johann Naumann, is a perfect example of the characteristics we expect to hear.

⁸ Randel, 654

⁹ Shrock, 270

¹⁰ Shrock glossary definition, 769

¹¹ Shrock, 270

The Classical era came about as a reaction against the thick contrapuntal and ornamental textures of the Baroque. 12 The Classic style is characterized by clarity, balance, and restraint.¹³ The composers of the Classical era endeavored to create an interesting listening experience for the audience without "overwhelming" them with musical aspects that were unfamiliar to their ears. 14 Naumann's piece does just that. Der 96 Psalm, Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied has a clean harmonic structure that is carefully balanced between the voice parts and the accompanying instruments while keeping all parts under watchful control. This piece has a homophonic texture that is prevalent with a contrasting use of counterpoint to create an interesting quality to the overall piece. Anyone listening could easily close his eyes and be transported back to a classical ball at a romantic German estate. The feeling set forth at the very beginning of this piece is one of joyfulness. Written in D Major, the first movement consistently repeats "singet derm Herrn ein neues Lied" or "Sing to God a new song" between different combinations of vocal parts polyphonically and then becomes harmonically vertical on the text "alle welt." This continues to measure 44. The excitement of this opening movement is created mostly by the energy produced by the instrumentalists. Naumann writes quick sixteenth and thirty-second notes in the strings that help keep the forward motion in the eighth notes passages of the voices. At measure 45, there are the beginnings of a "false" canon with new thematic material that does not transpire into a full blown canon. When the sopranos come in with the new theme at measure 59, Naumann repeats the text "singet dem Herrn" an extra time with accents in the soprano line to give a subtle reminder that even while blessing the Lord, this Psalm is about singing to the Lord.

¹² Shrock, 355 ¹³ Stolba, 300 ¹⁴ Stolba, 300

The second movement is written in the dominant key of A Major that shifts to b minor in the *Adagio* section while employing soprano and bass soloists. The passages and tessitura denote the use of a light, lyrical soprano. The bass/baritone solo uses a call and response technique with the full choir. Again Naumann uses crisp, quick rhythms in the accompaniment to keep that light feel of the classical period. No large, thick chords are present in this work, just light, airy passages. There is a much needed change in the second half of this movement marked by Naumann as *Adagio*. The rhythm changes to dotted eighth, sixteenth note patterns and the tonality moves from major to minor. This gives a decisive mood change but also enables the pulse to continue through the slower *adagio* tempo. From measures 102 to the end, Naumann gives some great dynamic changes. He notates a *forte* for the first initial text and then a *piano* as "es fürchte ihn alle Welt" is repeated each time, until it culminates into a resounding *forte* to end the movement.

Movement three brings us back to a major tonality and quicker note passages while using a tenor soloist for the duration. This solo is very lyrical as would be expected in this era. As we see in many classical period pieces, there is a pattern that is repeated. We see that compositional device used in this movement at measures 61-66. The tenor sings a long melisma that proceeds downward by steps and then leaps up the octave before coming down again.

The final movement is marked with a tempo marking of *allegro giusto* bringing the piece back into the original key of D Major. This tempo marking must be followed in order for the extremely long melismatic passages to be properly interpreted. Again, Naumann writes the accompaniment with sixteenth notes. This movement has two

sections that have fugal elements in them. This begins in measure 62 and continues through measure 117. The theme is introduced by one voice part and then followed by each of the other three parts, thus bringing the theme to the foreground each time. In measure 117, the polyphony ends and the piece culminates into a feeling of grandeur using vertical homophonic harmony to envelope all parts together in a grand finish.

Moving forward to the Modern eras or twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the changes are evident in the use of certain compositional devices, treatment of the text, and prominence of dissonance. In the pieces discussed in this period, the changes will be recognizable. All these changes greatly add to the ambiance of this text from Psalm 96 and fall in line with what music historians classify as twentieth century music.

O Sing to the Lord by the Norwegian composer, Jon Mostad, is a perfect example of a modern piece where the composer uses techniques somewhat foreign or rarely composed to the previous musical eras. The pervading techniques apparent in this piece are dissonance, off-beat rhythms that create a "bell-tone" for the listener, some outrageous vocal spans, detailed articulations and overly detailed dynamic contrasts. The composer writes, "The overall impression of sections with single syllables marcato should be that of a melodic line across the parts, at the same time sounding as moving chords. In contrast to these marcato sections are the phrases of coherent text horizontally in one part. These phrases are sung legato." Right from the first measure, the composer's notes make perfect sense. The technique of using chords broken up between voice parts to act as moving chords creates an overall exciting quality of the text. The text "sing to the Lord" is first composed with this technique. The first twenty-three measures use only three chords — FM9 \rightarrow AbM9 \rightarrow EbM9. These chords are used only

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¹⁵ Mostad, 3

for the text "sing to the Lord, bless His name." The boldness of the M9 chord is used throughout this piece giving the listener a sense of anticipation. It seems to never resolve to a clear harmonic chord. Mostad's attempt at word painting is evident in measure 34 when he broadens and keeps the harmonic structure vertical to enhance the text "for great is the Lord and greatly to be praised" before bringing back the broken chords in the SAT voices while adding the *legato* countermelody in the basses. This styling of using the two melodies alone or simultaneously continues through the rest of this piece. There are moments of emphatic assertion when the text reads "but the Lord made the heavens" and all eight voices sing in ff unison. This is a powerful compositional device that Mostad uses carefully and deliberately to create the mood he desires to emphasis the text. In measure 66, Mostad has recapitulated the "great is the Lord" broken chords and increased the dynamic to piu f and suddenly puts a fermata on the barline before repeating one last time "great is the Lord" at p. The effectiveness of this subito p in emphasizing the text one final time is powerful. It brings all parts together for one last statement. Mostad's use of intervallic patterns by six voices in measures 93-98 creates the feeling of "tremble" as the text denotes. He accomplishes the same purpose with the same device in measures 125-131 to create the roaring sea. Throughout O Sing to the Lord, it seems that the focus of Mostad's writing is on the amazing harmonic structures and patterns he uses and his abundant use of dissonance. But there is no doubt to the observant listener that the text was prominent in Mostad's thinking as he composed this great energetic piece.

One of the compositional devices that are prevalent in the modern era is the use of dissonance. The Swedish composer Eskil Hemberg rivals even the greatest use of dissonance in his work *Psalmus XCVI – Cantate Domino canticum novum, Opus 77*.

This piece was commissioned for The Choir of Westminster Abbey. From the opening triplet figure, which encompasses the notes C-D-E-F-G, the pairings of chords and intervals a second apart begin. The first of the rarely heard resolutions of this dissonance happens in measure 6 with the text "terra" where the tension is released onto an A Major root position chord. This pattern of strong dissonance for long periods of time creates a spirit of cacophony and a resolution is seldom found throughout the piece. Even at the end, Hemberg concludes this joyous psalm with an A Major chord in the men versus a G Major chord in the women. This piece has a never-ending uneasiness which does not adequately portray the emotion the psalm writer was experiencing. The strong dissonance throughout does not fit the text "sing unto the Lord a new song." Even at typical cadence points, he rarely gives a final euphonious chord. It almost always includes a M7 or Dim7 in the chord that shows this cadence point is not the end. The rhythmic varieties in this piece in some ways resemble the ancient chant. The text is most important and the rhythms tend to follow the natural inflections and accents of the text. Harmonically challenging, this piece uses some patterns that would aid in the learning and retaining of the individual parts. Written in a rough ABA form, the return of the A section is harmonically identical with a few rhythmic changes to help fit with the new text. As with the Mostad piece, Hemberg also finds a stage on which to use the compositional device of unison singing. In this case, he does so using the text "judicabit populous in aequitate" translated "He will judge the people with equity." Hence the feeling is now given of total equality among all people who will be judged fairly by God. This is accomplished by using a strong unison without even a hint of dissonance.

This study of Psalm 96 and the way it has been treated by composers throughout different musical time periods is in no way complete. It has barely scratched the surface of the many pieces composed over the centuries. There are numerous more works, many of which can be seen in Appendix B. From Renaissance to Modern, from tonalities of major to minor, from sounds of euphony to cacophony, from concert stage to cathedral, and from countries around the world, Psalm 96 has been composed many different ways in many different mediums that are, in many ways, unique to their individual countries and eras.

APPENDIX A

LATIN **ENGLISH**

Psalmus 96

Cantate Domino canticum novum, cantate Domino omnis terra. Cantate Domino benedicite nomini ejus annunciate de die in diem salutare ejus. Annunciate inter gentes gloriam ejus in omnibus populis mirabilia ejus. Quoniam magnus Dominus et laudabilis nimis, terribilis est super omnes deos; quoniam omnes dii gentium daemonia, Dominus autem caelos fecit

Confessio et pulchritude in conspecto ejus, sanctimonia et magnificentia in sanctificationem ejus.

Afferte Domino patriae gentium, afferte Domino gloriam et honorem.

Afferte Domino gloriam nomini ejus, tollite hostias et introit in atria ejus. Adorate Dominum in atrio sancto eius. commoveatur a facie eius universa terra Dicite in gentibus, quia Dominus regnavit, etenim correxit orbem terrae, qui non commovebitur; judicabit populous in aequitate.

Laetentur caeli et exultet terra, commoveatur mare et plenitude ejus. Gaudebunt campi et Omnia quae in eis sunt, tunc exultabunt Omnia ligna svlvarum.

a facia domini, quia venit, quoniam venit judicare terram. Judicabit orbem terrae in aequitate, et populous in veritate sua.

Psalm 96

O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peo-

For great is the Lord and greatly to be

praised; he is to be revered above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the Lord made the heavens. Honor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. Ascribe to the Lord, O families of peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts. Worship the Lord in holy splendor; tremble before him, all the earth. Say among the nations, "The Lord is king! The world is firmly established, it shall never be moved. He will judge the peoples with equity." Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it. Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord; for he is coming,

for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with his truth.

FRENCH GERMAN

Psalm 96

Chantez à Dieu Chanson nouvelle, Chantez, ô terr' universelle, Chantez, ô terre et son Nom bénissez, Et de jour en jour annoncez, Są délivrance solemnelle.

Psalm 96

Singet dem HERRN ein neues Lied; singet dem HERRN alle Welt! Singet dem HERRN und lobet Seinen Namen; verkündiget von Tag zu Tage sein Heil! Erzählet unter den Heiden seine Ehre, unter allen Völkern seine Wunder! Denn der HERR ist groß und hoch Zu loben, wunderbarlich über alle Götter. Denn alle Götter der Völker sind Götzen, aber der HERR hat den Himmel gemacht. Es stehet herrlich und prächtig vor Ihm und gehet gewaltiglich und Löblich zu in seinem Heiligtum. Ihr Völker, bringet her dem HERRN, bringet her dem HERRN Ehre und Macht! Bringet her dem HERRN die Ehre Seines Namens; bringet Geschenke und kommt in seine Vorhöfe! Betet an den HERRN in heiligem Schmuck; es fürchte ihn alle Welt! Saget unter den Heiden, daß der HERR König sei und habe sein Reich, soweit die Welt ist, bereitet, daß es bleiben soll, und richtet die Völker recht. Der Himmel freue sich, und Erde sei fröhlich; das Meer brause, und was drinnen ist; Das Feld sei fröhlich und alles, was darauf ist; und lasset rühmen alle Bäume im Welde vor dem HERRN; denn er kommt, denn er kommt, zu richten das Erdreich. Er wird den Erdboden richten mit Gerechtigkeit und die Völker mit seiner Wahrheit.

Appendix B

					tonality		
<u>title</u>	composer	<u>voicing</u>	<u>text</u>	<u>Instrumentation</u>	<u>center</u>	genre	comments
Cantate Domino	Hassler	satb	latin	organ playing parts	D Major	Renaissance motet	homophonic harm., few melismatic sections
Cantate Domino	Croce	satb	latin	a cappella	f minor F Major	Renaissance motet	imitative polyphony
Psalm 96	Sweelinck	satb	french	a cappella	e minor E Major	Renaissance Psalm	imitative phrase, some homophony
Cantate Domino	Monteverdi	ssattb	latin	organ/continuo	D Major	Baroque	seconda practica
Cantate Domino	Scheidt	sattb	latin	tpt, 4 violas, 3 tmbs, 4 bassoons, basso continuo	G Major	Baroque	
Cantate Domino canticum novum	Schütz	satb/satb	Latin/german	Basso continuo	G minor	Baroque anthem	Double choir or eight solo voices
Singt, o singt dem Herrn	Purcell	satb chorus, satb soli	german	2 vlns, vla, cello, bass/continuo	F Major	Baroque anthem	
O Singet unserm Gott	Handel	stb chours, st soli	german	2 ob, bassoon, 2 vlns, basso continuo	F Major, BbMajor, d minor, g minor	Baroque anthem	1 orchestral, 1 solo w/chorus, 1 t solo, 1 st duet, 3 chorus
Cantate Domino canticum novum	Buxtehude	ssb chorus, ssb soli	latin	organ/continuo	G Major	Baroque cantata/motet	
Nr. 75. Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied	Hammerschmidt	satb chorus, satb soli	german	basso continuo	g minor Picardy 3rd	Baroque motet	concertato fashion (vocal concerto); secondo practica

Taramo 96	Polynesian	satb chorus, st soli	-	a cappella	-	Chant	sing and response anthem
Shiru Ladonai (Psalm 96)	Jewish	chorus, solo	hebrew	a cappella	-	Hebrew anthem	sing and response anthem
Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied	Naumann	satb chorus, satb	german	cl, tmpi, tpt, 2 vlns, vla, continuo	D Major, A Major, bminor, G Major, d Major	Classical	fugal section [polyphony], vertical harmonies
PsalmKonzert	Zimmermann	ssatb, children, b	english	3 tpts., vibraphone, string bass	F Major	Modern	Psalm in jazz idiom called "international folklore"; movt. 1 of work
Cantate Domino	Rutter	satb	latin/english	a cappella	G Major, b minor	Modern	movt. 5 of larger work
2 Psalms - No. 1 "O Sing to the Lord"	Mostad	ssaattbb	english	a cappella	Multi	Modern	Part 1 of <i>Two Psalms</i>
Psalm 96, Op. 77 "Cantate Domino canticum"	Hemberg	6-8 parts	latin	a cappella	Multi	Modern	
Let the Heavens Rejoice	Udell	satb	english	2 C tpts, 2 f hns, 2 tmbs,tba, timp, perc, organ	C Major, etc.	Modern	
Psalm 96	Bass	satb	english	Orchestra or piano	C Major, etc.	Modern	
Psalm 96	Bannister	satb chorus, stb soli	english	Orchestra and organ	Multi	Modern	

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