

NOTES ON 'ECCE SACERDOS MAGNUS' OF ANTON BRUCKNER

In 1885 the sixty years old Anton Bruckner, a truly devoted Roman Catholic, completed his motet 'Ecce sacerdos magnus' for chorus, 3 trombones and organ. It is a work for liturgical use, specifically a sacred composition to accompany the procession of the bishop into the cathedral. The piece is not only harmonically very impressive: the melodic organisation – inspired from plainchant – is also an example of great craftsmanship.

1. Form

First, some remarks on form. The musical form of 'Ecce sacerdos magnus' corresponds with the form of the text (1), which can be described as A–B–C–D–C–E–C.

A: Ecce sacerdos magnus,

B: qui in diébus suis plácuit Deo:

C: Ideo jure jurando fecit illum Dóminus crescere in plebem suam.

D: Benedictiónem ómnium géntium dedit illi, et testaméntum suum confirmávit super caput ejus.

[C: Ideo jure jurando fecit illum Dóminus crescere in plebem suam.]

E: Gloria patri et filio et spiritui sancto. Sicut erat in principio et nunc, Et semper, et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.

[C: Ideo jure jurando fecit illum Dóminus crescere in plebem suam.]

The musical form is also A–B–C–D–C–E–C, which can be characterized as follows:

Section A, bars 1– 9: Homophonic introduction

Section B, bars 10 – 22: Section in fugal style

Section C, bars 23 – 39: Polychoral refrain

Section D, bars 40 – 63: Choral like section

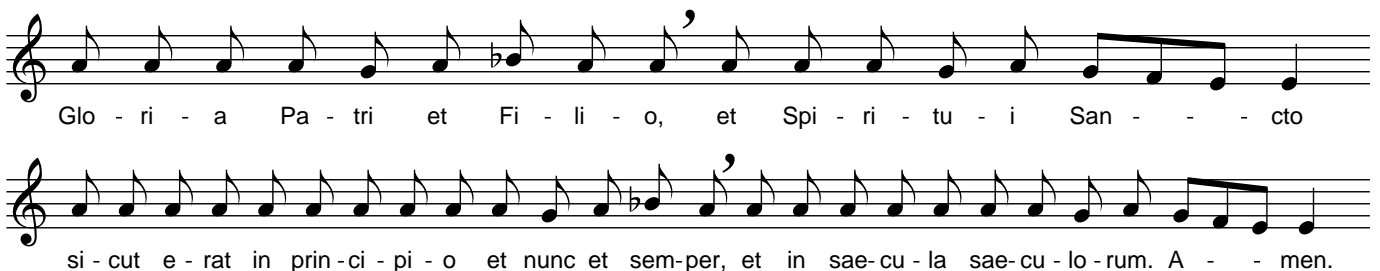
[Section C, bars 64 – 80: Polychoral refrain]

Section E, bars 81– 82: Monophonic plainsong like melody

[Section C, bars 83–99: Polychoral refrain]

2. The plainsong like melody

In 'Ecce sacerdos magnus' there is an unexpected moment, section E (the lesser doxology: Gloria patri etc.). After massive music the following plainsong like melody has to be sung a cappella and unisono:

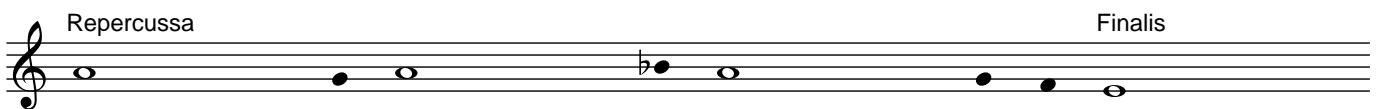


Glo - ri - a Pa - tri et Fi - li - o, et Spi - ri - tu - i San - - - cto

si - cut e - rat in prin - ci - pi - o et nunc et sem - per, et in sae - cu - la sae - cu - lo - rum. A - - - men.

The melody is written in the fourth psalm tone or the hypophrygian mode. This church mode can in theory be described as the diatonic scale B–C–D–E–F–G–A–B. However in practice the mode seems to be C–D–E–F–G–A–B–C: the B is in monophony not a stable tone and will find tonal stability in tone C. In the hypophrygian mode the finalis is E and the recitation tone or repercussa is A. The finalis is a point of rest. The repercussa implies action, it has a function comparable to the dominant. The tone C, sometime called 'submodica' (2), has also a function as a musical goal. So, finalis, repercussa and submodica define the structure of a hypophrygian melody. Ina Lohr (3) suggests that the hypophrygian mode has some drive to the dorian mode, which has the same repercussa A and ambitus C–C.

Bruckner's hypophrygian melody can be described as a diminution of a finalis – repercussa structure: a with neighbour tones embellished repetition of repercussa A leads through passing tones G and F to the finalis E. Note the stepwise movement of the melody.



The strange B flat can be seen as a 'fa–super–la', a lowered upper neighbour note, which could occur in the hypophrygian mode (and often in the dorian mode).

This melody in original and retrograde form seems to control the melodic design of 'Ecce sacerdos magnus' (of course, I cannot say if Bruckner composed these melodic relations consciously or unconsciously).

3. Melodic analysis: derivations of the plainsong like melody

Bruckner's hypophrygian melody from section E seems a source of melodic invention:

- Generally, the tone repetition (sometimes in combination with the dotted rhythms) gives all melodies (and thus the complete piece) a clear and consistent shape.
- More in depth, all melodies of soprano and/or alto seem to be derived from the finalis – repercussa diminution.

Now I will show all derivations in order of appearance.

3.1. Section A, bars 1 – 9, soprano: finalis – modified repercussa – finalis



3.2. Section B, bars 10 – 19, 'fugue' subjects

Repercussa

Finalis

Bass, bar 13–16

Alto, bar 15–16

Tenor, bar 17–21

8

Detailed description: This block contains four staves of musical notation. The first staff, labeled 'Repercussa', shows four whole notes on a treble clef staff, with the first note marked 'Finalis'. The second staff, 'Bass, bar 13–16', is on a bass clef staff and shows a melodic line starting with a quarter rest, followed by eighth and quarter notes. The third staff, 'Alto, bar 15–16', is on a treble clef staff and shows a melodic line starting with a quarter rest, followed by quarter notes. The fourth staff, 'Tenor, bar 17–21', is on a treble clef staff and shows a melodic line starting with a quarter rest, followed by quarter notes, with a small '8' below the first note.

The other 'fugue' entries are more or less transposed variants (if not completely free: e.g. bass and tenor, bar 11 and 12).

3.3. Section C, bars 29 – 33, soprano polychoral refrain

Repercussa

Finalis

Soprano, bar 29–33

Detailed description: This block contains two staves of musical notation. The first staff, labeled 'Repercussa', shows four whole notes on a treble clef staff, with the first note marked 'Finalis'. The second staff, 'Soprano, bar 29–33', is on a treble clef staff and shows a melodic line starting with a quarter rest, followed by eighth and quarter notes, with a slur over the final two notes.

3.4. C, bars 33 – 36, soprano polychoral refrain

Repercussa

Finalis

Soprano, bar 33–36

Detailed description: This block contains two staves of musical notation. The first staff, labeled 'Repercussa', shows four whole notes on a treble clef staff, with the first note marked 'Finalis'. The second staff, 'Soprano, bar 33–36', is on a treble clef staff and shows a melodic line starting with a quarter rest, followed by eighth and quarter notes, with a slur over the first two notes and a flat sign below the first note.

3.5. Section D, bars 40 – 43, alto and soprano choral like section

Repercussa Finalis

Alto, bars 40-41 Soprano, bars 42-43

3.6. Section D, bars 55 – 62, alto choral like section

Repercussa Finalis

Alto, bar 55-62

Two melodies have to be described separately: alto, bars 17-22, soprano bars 23-29 and bars 43 – 46. These bars are extended in a consistent way.

3.7. Section B, alto bars 15 – 22, 'fugue' theme, extended to submodica C

Repercussa Finalis

Alto, bar 15-22

3.8. Section C, soprano bars 23 – 29: repetition B/submodica C + stepwise ascending line to repercussa A

Soprano, bar 23-29

3.9. Section D, soprano bars 43 – 46, dorian stepwise ascent from D' to D''

de - - - it, de - - - it il - - - li

3.10. Conclusion melodic analysis

Knowing that the bars 48 – 55 are merely a transposition of the bars 40 – 47 (a second higher), it will be clear that all soprano and/or alto parts of all sections have an intimate relationship with the plainsong like melody from section E.

4. Harmonic analysis

The musical form is A–B–C–D–C–E–C, which can be harmonically characterized as follows:

Section A, bars 1– 9: chromatic

Section B, bars 10 – 22: diatonic

Section C, bars 23 – 39: chromatic

Section D, bars 40 – 63: diatonic

[Section C, bars 64 – 80: chromatic]

Section E, bars 81– 82: diatonic

[Section C, bars 83–99: chromatic]

Bruckner alternate chromatic sections with the diatonic sections B, D and E. The modern harmonic progressions of section C and in section A are very exciting and worth to analyze.

4.1. Chords as result of addition of intervals.

Until the 17th century 'chords' were viewed as resulting from the addition of intervals to an original part. Functional analysis (with concepts tonic, dominant and subdominant) are not appropriate to analyze medieval and renaissance music. Dahlhaus (4) makes this point very clear when referring to examples from the treatise 'De praeceptis artis musicae', written by the 15th century Guilelmus Monachus. According to Dahlhaus, the chords in the following example can be interpreted as Tp–Dp–Tp–Dp–T–D–T in D minor. However, Guilelmus Monachus writes that the tenor is the cantus firmus and that the other voices have a clearly defined interval relationships to the tenor: the discantus a sixth (except beginning and end), the bass a fifth or third and the alto fourth or third.

So when 'chords' as more or less autonomous entities don't exist and harmonic progressions result from interval thinking, then unexpected major and minor triads can be found. A striking example is Gesualdo's 'Itene, o miei sospiri' (from Il quinto libro di madrigali, 1613), where the exceptional 'chords' arise from colourful alterations.

A musical score for five staves (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass, and Bassoon) in a key with one flat. The Soprano line contains a sequence of notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5. The Bass line contains a sequence of notes: G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3. The intervals between the Soprano and Bass lines are indicated by numbers 3, 3, 5, 3, 3, 5, 3, 8.

The interval relation between soprano and bass is a succession of the intervals third and fifth or octave.

A musical score for two staves (Soprano and Bass) in a key with one flat. The Soprano line contains a sequence of notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5. The Bass line contains a sequence of notes: G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3. The intervals between the Soprano and Bass lines are indicated by numbers 3, 3, 5, 3, 3, 5, 3, 8.

Astonishing is the beginning of Gesualdo's 'Moro lasso' (from Il sesto libro di madrigali, 1613), based on a parallel tenth motion between upper voice and bass.

A musical score for five staves (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass, and Bassoon) in a key with one sharp. The Soprano line contains a sequence of notes: G4, A4, B4, C5. The Bass line contains a sequence of notes: G2, A2, B2, C3. The intervals between the Soprano and Bass lines are indicated by numbers 3, 3, 5, 3, 3, 5, 3, 8.

It seems ridiculous to connect these Gesualdo examples to the music of Bruckner (5). However, describing the harmonic progressions in Gesualdo's music from an interval concept, is at least a source of inspiration when analyzing 'Ecce sacerdos magnus'.

4.2. Harmonic analysis of the refrain.

The intervallic excerpt of the refrain (section C) is as follows (changing pitches to make it more understandable):

The intervallic structure is a 5–8 progression, where the bass has a chain of thirds (e – c, g – e flat, b flat – f sharp) and the soprano a chain of ascending seconds. Bruckner completes this structure with major and minor triads.

With only three ingredients can this fragment be completely understood: melodic line (from 'submodica' to repercutsa), intervallic relation (between upper and lower voice) and triads (major and minor). In addition there is a melodic design in the bass.

These sequence like structures can often be found in romantic music. From the 'Walküre' of Richard Wagner a more complex example. Its reduction tot two lines makes all clear: 3–8–6–5–progression, chromatic descending upper voice, melodic pattern in the bass (third + third + second + second) and (extended) triads.

Reduction

4.3. Harmonic analysis of the introduction.

The less astonishing, however daring introduction is based on the same harmonic principle as in the refrain: an elaborated 5–8 progression between upper and lower voice (for the sake of clarity, I have changed the pitches).

The image shows a musical score for the introduction of 'Ecce Sacerdos magnus' by Anton Bruckner. It is written in 4/4 time and consists of two staves: a treble clef staff (upper voice) and a bass clef staff (lower voice). The upper voice contains a sequence of notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. The lower voice contains a sequence of notes: C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4. Below the lower staff, the intervals between the two voices are indicated by numbers: 5, 5, 8, 5, 8, 5, 8. These numbers represent the interval between the notes in the upper and lower voices for each measure.

Bruckner applied mainly triads to this structure. Below the organ part.

The image shows a musical score for the organ part of 'Ecce Sacerdos magnus' by Anton Bruckner. It is written in 4/4 time and consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The score shows a series of triads in both hands, corresponding to the interval relationships shown in the previous score. The triads are: C major (C-E-G), D major (D-F-A), E major (E-G-B), F major (F-A-C), G major (G-B-D), A major (A-C-E), B major (B-D-F), and C major (C-E-G).

4.4. Conclusion harmonic analysis.

It seems that principles by the renaissance composers Guilielmus Monachus (only known as author of the treatise 'De praeceptis artis musicae', dating perhaps 1480 – 1490) and Gesualdo da Venosa are adequate and easy means to describe harmonic progressions in 'Ecce sacerdos magnus' of the 19th century Anton Bruckner. Via interval relations between bass and some upper voice seem to determine harmonic progressions. In other words, interval thinking in analyzing harmonic progressions is always promising. It could generate information you need to understand harmonic progressions. However, it always generate information that can easily be remembered, which is the best result of the analyzing process!

5. Score and recording.

The score of Bruckner's 'Ecce sacerdos magnus' is attached to this paper. It has been downloaded at www.cpd.org.

Free recordings can be found at <http://jiwa.fm> and via the great Spotify (www.spotify.com)

Footnotes

(1) Translation:

A: Behold a great priest

B: who in his days pleased the Lord:

C: Therefore by an oath the Lord assured him that he would increase him among his people.

D: To him he gave the blessing of all nations and confirmed his covenant upon his head.

C: Therefore by an oath the Lord assured him that he would increase him among his people.

E: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, both now, and always, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

C: Therefore by an oath the Lord assured him that he would increase him among his people.

(2) The submodica is the third or fourth (exceptionally: fifth) below the finalis. The term 'Submodica' is used by Henk van Benthem, music theorist at the Amsterdam Conservatorium. The finalis is called by him 'Modica' and the repercussa 'Supermodica'.

(3) Ina Lohr, *Solmisation und Kirchentonarten* (Basel, 1943).

(4) Carl Dahlhaus: *Untersuchungen über die Entstehung der harmonischen Tonalität* (Kassel, 1968)

(5) It is interesting to see that Gesualdo in his madrigals from Book V and VI alternates between chromatic and diatonic sections!

In loving memory of Barbe Vivien

This paper is written by Reinier Maliepaard, based on notes of Barbe Vivien.

This paper has been typeset with MC Musiceditor 6.0.3 (www.mcmusiceditor.com – www.bestmusicteacher.com)

Ecce Sacerdos

Ecclesiasticus (Ch.43: vs16, 27)

Anton Bruckner

Maestoso

Trombones 1&2

Trombone 3

Soprano

Alto

Tenor

Bass

Organ

fff

fff

fff

fff

fff Pleno

Man. Ped. Man.

6

ma - gnus.

ma - gnus. qui in di - e - bus

ec - ce sa - cer - dos ma - gnus. qui in di -

ec - ce sa - cer - dos ma - gnus.

legato sempre

p

p Ped.

12

p *cresc.*

qui in di - e - bus su - - - is. qui in di -

cresc. sempre

su - is, qui in di - e - bus su - is. qui in di - e - bus

cresc. sempre

e - bus su - is. qui in di - e - bus su - is, qui in di -

p *cresc. sempre*

qui in di - e - bus su - is, qui in di - e - bus

cresc. sempre

17

f *cresc.* *ff*

e - bus su - is pla - cu - it De - - - o.

f *cresc.* *ff*

su - is pla - cu - it De - - - o.

f *cresc.* *ff*

e - bus su - is pla - cu - it De - - - o.

f *cresc.* *ff*

su - is pla - cu - it De - - - o.

f *ff* *ff Ped.*

23

ff

ff

ff

ff

ff Pleno

Ped.

I - de-o ju - re - ju - ran - do, I - de-o ju - re - ju - ran - do, I - de-o ju - re - ju - ran - do,

I - de-o ju - re - ju - ran - do, I - de-o ju - re - ju - ran - do, I - de-o ju - re - ju - ran - do,

I - de-o ju - re - ju - ran - do, I - de-o ju - re - ju - ran - do,

I - de-o ju - re - ju - ran - do, I - de-o ju - re - ju - ran - do,

28

cresc. *fff*

cresc. *fff*

cresc. *fff*

cresc. *fff*

cresc. *fff*

cresc. *fff*

ran - do, I - de-o ju - re - ju - ran - do, fe - cit il - lum Do - mi - nus

ran - do, *cresc.* I - de-o ju - re - ju - ran - do, fe - cit il - lum Do - mi - nus

I - de-o ju - re - ju - ran - do, I - de-o ju - re - ju - ran - do, fe - cit il - lum Do - mi - nus

I - de-o ju - re - ju - ran - do, I - de-o ju - re - ju - ran - do, fe - cit il - lum Do - mi - nus

33

cre - sce - re in ple - bem su - am in ple - bem su - am, in ple - bem su - am, in ple - bem
 cre - sce - re in ple - bem su - am in ple - bem su - am, in ple - bem su - am, in ple - bem
 cre - sce - re in ple - bem su - am in ple - bem su - am, in ple - bem su - am, in ple - bem
 cre - sce - re in ple - bem su - am in ple - bem su - am, in ple - bem su - am, in ple - bem

fff *dim. sempre.* *ppp*
fff *dim. sempre.* *ppp*
fff *dim. sempre.* *ppp*
fff *dim. sempre.* *ppp*

fff Pleno
 Ped.

38

su - am. Be - ne - di - cti - o - nem om - ni - um gen - ti - um de - dit,
 su - am. Be - ne - di - cti - o - nem om - ni - um gen - ti - um de - dit,
 su - am. Be - ne - di - cti - o - nem om - ni - um gen - ti - um de - dit,
 su - am. Be - ne - di - cti - o - nem om - ni - um gen - ti - um de - dit,

p *cresc. sempre* *sempre legato*
p *cresc. sempre*
p *cresc. sempre*
p *cresc. sempre*
p *cresc. sempre*

Man.
 Ped.

58 *p*

con - fir - ma - vit su - per - ca - put e - - - jus.

con - fir - ma - vit su - per - ca - put e - - - jus.

con - fir - ma - vit su - per - ca - put e - - - jus.

con - fir - ma - vit su - per - ca - put e - - - jus.



64

ff

ff

ff

ff

ff Pleno

Ped.

I - de-o ju - re - ju - ran - do, I - de-o ju - re - ju - ran - do,

I - de-o ju - re - ju - ran - do, I - de-o ju - re - ju - ran - do,

I - de-o ju - re - ju - ran - do, I - de-o ju - re - ju - ran - do,

I - de-o ju - re - ju - ran - do, I - de-o ju - re - ju - ran - do,

68

I - de - o ju - re - ju - ran - do, I - de - o ju - re - ju - ran - do,
 I - de - o ju - re - ju - ran - do, I - de - o ju - re - ju - ran - do,
 ran - do, I - de - o ju - re - ju - ran - do, I - de - o ju - re - ju - ran - do,
 ran - do, I - de - o ju - re - ju - ran - do, I - de - o ju - re - ju - ran - do,



72

fe - cit il - lum Do - mi - nus cre - sce - re in ple - bem su - am in ple - bem su - am, in ple - bem
 fe - cit il - lum Do - mi - nus cre - sce - re in ple - bem su - am in ple - bem su - am, in ple - bem
 fe - cit il - lum Do - mi - nus cre - sce - re in ple - bem su - am in ple - bem su - am, in ple - bem
 fe - cit il - lum Do - mi - nus cre - sce - re in ple - bem su - am in ple - bem su - am, in ple - bem

fff Pleno
Ped.

77

p dim.

ppp

p dim.

ppp

ppp

ppp

su - - - am, in ple - bem su - - - am.

su - - - am, in ple - bem su - - - am.

su - - - am, in ple - bem su - - - am.

su - - - am, in ple - bem su - - - am.

81 [Choral]

Glo - ri - a Pa - tri et Fi - li - o, et Spi - ri - tu - i San - cto.

Glo - ri - a Pa - tri et Fi - li - o, et Spi - ri - tu - i San - cto.

Glo - ri - a Pa - tri et Fi - li - o, et Spi - ri - tu - i San - cto.

Glo - ri - a Pa - tri et Fi - li - o, et Spi - ri - tu - i San - cto.

82

si - cut e - rat in prin - ci - pi - o et nunc et sem - per, et in sae - cu - la sae - cu - lo - rum. A - men.

si - cut e - rat in prin - ci - pi - o et nunc et sem - per, et in sae - cu - la sae - cu - lo - rum. A - men.

si - cut e - rat in prin - ci - pi - o et nunc et sem - per, et in sae - cu - la sae - cu - lo - rum. A - men.

si - cut e - rat in prin - ci - pi - o et nunc et sem - per, et in sae - cu - la sae - cu - lo - rum. A - men.

83

ff

ff

ff

ff

ff Pleno

Ped.

I - de-o ju - re - ju - ran - do, I - de-o ju - re - ju - ran - do,
 I - de-o ju - re - ju - ran - do, I - de-o ju - re - ju - ran - do,
 I - de-o ju - re - ju - ran - do, I - de-o ju - re - ju -
 I - de-o ju - re - ju - ran - do, I - de-o ju - re - ju -

87

cresc.

fff

fff

fff

cresc.

fff

fff

fff

cresc.

fff

I - de-o ju - re - ju - ran - do, I - de-o ju - re - ju - ran - do,
 I - de-o ju - re - ju - ran - do, I - de-o ju - re - ju - ran - do,
 ran - do, I - de-o ju - re - ju - ran - do, I - de-o ju - re - ju - ran - do
 ran - do, I - de-o ju - re - ju - ran - do, I - de-o ju - re - ju - ran - do,

91

fe - cit il - lum Do - mi - nus cre - sce - re in ple - bem su - am in ple - bem

fe - cit il - lum Do - mi - nus cre - sce - re in ple - bem su - am in ple - bem

fe - cit il - lum Do - mi - nus cre - sce - re in ple - bem su - am in ple - bem

fe - cit il - lum Do - mi - nus cre - sce - re in ple - bem su - am in ple - bem

fff Pleno

Ped.

95

p dim. *ppp*

p dim. *ppp*

dim.sempre. *ppp*

su - am, in ple - bem su - - am, in ple - bem su - - am.

dim.sempre. *ppp*

su - am, in ple - bem su - - am, in ple - bem su - - am.

dim.sempre. *ppp*

su - am, in ple - bem su - - am, in ple - bem su - - am.

dim.sempre. *ppp*

su - am, in ple - bem su - - am, in ple - bem su - - am.