

WHAT I MEAN BY »LITURGICAL RECITATIVE«

When I say I write recitative in the liturgical tradition, consider myself as embedded within a 2000 year tradition of a certain type of composition, and posit myself as an exponent of its development, it is not because I write music for liturgy. Liturgical music is a major part of my output because the texts are composed to align with the compositional methodologies and techniques that ended up developing through this tradition, but I am not a "church musician." I hold no such post. I am now, and have always been, in my professional life, a fully secular musician.

What I mean by this is to say that I do not compose in the "classical tradition", the "romantic tradition," the "modernist tradition," the "jazz tradition," the "popular tradition," the "gamelan tradition," the "gagaku tradition," etc.

Lachenmann is, as he is more often than not, correct: a composer must have a tradition, one must have some sort of monstrous beast, a weight of unfathomable pressure pushing down, as to find a means of expressing themselves through wrestling with it. I compose according to certain functional and structural forms and genres that occur within the liturgical practice of the Christian churches, without prejudice or favoring one over another unfairly, but with a focus on Western Catholic forms due to an intimate knowledge and love for the liturgical form.

This is an important distinction, because as I offer music to performers the major hurdles come from this apparent disconnect. I first formatted my notational language after manuscripts and rubrics for a specific reason, and I dived into the plainchant styles and traditions of different monastic orders for the same: this musical tradition relies on this stylistic foundation more than just as a notational format. The notation is part of the form: it is essential to the meaning of it.

And I must clarify this because I do not think my formal structure and organization can be understood if viewed in the context of western art music after Monteverdi. This is a decided split in the understanding of how liturgical music functions, especially after the development of a high-baroque/classical liturgical style. It is often

forgotten how reactionary Bruckner's choral music ends up becoming when comparing the *Windhaager Messe* to his motets following his embrace of the Cecilian ideals.

Liturgical form played an important part in the development of western music, and up to the Renaissance you could still point to a link between liturgical and secular music where there was a sense that both forms were developing hand in hand, but by the mid to high Baroque western music split itself off from it, and the tradition was, to some degree, left to the bins of history outside of monastic, and very staunch traditionalist, settings.

In some sense we must return to Monteverdi and rethink where it might restart, because that era still employed the essential structures and forms found in the Gregorian compositions while developing the melodic and harmonic fabric enveloping it. However, that is conjecture for another day. My point here is to discuss and explain what I mean by my position within tradition and my concepts of formal organization.

In my comments on "O Salutaris Hostia," I made note of a series of essential macrostructures that work as the structural exoskeleton for my musical ideas. The most exterior, and generally most important harmonically, melodically, thematically, and emotionally, is the meaning and expression of the Word; yet, to use this as the only structural basis would leave me at madrigal-motet mannerism. Within this shell is a tight, stable core that serves to guide the raw emotional content in a meaningful manner, determined as follows:

Intro - Any voice generates melodic material, which may be indistinguishable from the following section

Chant - Monodic variations of the material/textual expression, often an elaboration of the intro

Inflection - Polyphonic modulation/extension/development of the previous, organic, as if growing from the root

Recit - Cantor expresses the text, without any relationship to the material

Lyrical Coda - Free polyphonic moment, not based upon any previous sections, resolves into a final summation of the material

Outro - Cantor resolves the tension of the coda

I would not say it is strict, the lengths of these sections are left up to the interpretation of the text, but all of these qualities exist formally within my music following "O Salutaris Hostia" to some degree or another.

What I did not explain in this comment at the time is that what

makes this an important formal framework in my practice as a composer of liturgical recitative is its roots in the recitation formula. I developed this method of organizing form by turning to the recitation formula and identifying how it, in such a microscopic scope, constituted a satisfying musical form, one that felt complete and not fragmented.

In a traditional psalm tone formula, the flow of musical events is as so:

Intonation - introductory tones that set up the melodic line to the dominant

Tenor - dominant tone for recitation

Flex - elaboration of tenor, generally downwards

Tenor

Mediant - elaboration of tenor, generally up and down

Tenor

Termination - cadence of tenor, ending in a return to the final tone

In comparing the two, it can be seen where my points of relation and departure are. The intonation and termination, as intoned by the cantor voice, retain their essential introductory and cadential qualities, though I build the need for a cadence with the lyrical coda, which is sort of the florid line of the termination. The chant section takes on the role of a tenor/flex/tenor, and the polyphonic inflection represents a mediant, which, in returning to the cantor's recit, marks a mediant-tenor moment in the music.

This division of sections according to the formula is essential for creating music that represents a certain technique found in liturgy: a formal unity that is universal between all recitations, a certain structure that creates a sense of unity of genre no matter the reciting tones used. It is a genre, not a style, it is like a classical sonata where certain aspects of the musical form are to be highlighted and thus we are to understand the formal underpinnings of what it is, thus we can appreciate the craft of the composition. This is true for all genres of liturgical music. In other forms I have written in, such as gospel recitation in my earlier music, I worked very close in spirit to lesson tones, and at some basic level all of my gospel prologues have the same formal essence to them. Likewise, if I were to write a kyrie or sanctus I would work with a different structural form, one that would be less strict and more through-composed, derived from structures understood in plainchant settings of the same texts. With this in mind I also think it might become much more clear why I tend to not write abstract instrumental music that much anymore, preferring it leave it

as an embellishment partially because it also represents a sort of connection the Monteverdian continuo, which I have been attempting to study and understand beyond the standard assumptions we make about continuo practice in the baroque.

The idea of this musical form constituting a paraphrase or *cantus firmi* technique is part of exploding the formula to a larger scope. The formula itself is meant for recitation of psalm verses, so the scope of the line is short; however, in a larger, through composed piece, there is a need to contrast certain sections of the text with others in various forms to retain some interest for the listener. As I write liturgical music in form, but not necessarily in a liturgical setting, I have a situation where the dramatic arc of the composition is beyond the recitation of a psalm. Therefore, I need to identify a way to create situations in which the experience feels varied, but the content itself represents a unity and self-similarity as to identify each moment with the moment that came before, as if comparing the reciting tones verse by verse.

The consequence of these forms is that the music is inherently short. This is a tradition of musical miniatures; however, these musical miniatures represent parts of a greater musical fabric. Liturgical experience is not necessarily this sense of obvious unity, one we might understand in contemporary music where one piece is meant to exist for 20-30 minutes and make an argument for its cohesion, but a more cyclical or thematic experience that unifies itself through the extra-musical aspects that come to play in the musical fabric. Intertextuality is a big buzzword for postmodernist thought, but there is a semblance of truth in this concept in liturgical practice. All of the readings, lessons, antiphons, etc. all represent points of departure from one another in content, but they also are interconnected in ways that might not always be clear on first glance, but become much more powerful when viewed as a sum total.

The Catholic is the Universal: the fundamental ideological aspects come down to three in one, different aspects that seem contradictory or incompatible, but are in truth the same thing.