

## 11 The Venetian sacred music

JOHN WHENHAM

Monteverdi's appointment in 1613 as *maestro di cappella* of S. Marco, Venice, brought him financial security in a post that also allowed him a good deal of freedom to accept commissions elsewhere, both in and outside the city. His initial salary of three hundred ducats was raised by the Procurators of S. Marco to four hundred in August 1616,<sup>1</sup> making him, in his own words

certainly not rich, but neither am I poor; moreover, I lead a life with a certain security of income until my death, and furthermore I am absolutely sure of always having it on the appointed pay-days, which come every two months without fail. Indeed, if it is the least bit late, they send it to my house [in the chancellery of S. Marco]. Then as regards the *cappella* I do as I wish, since there is the assistant choirmaster . . . and there is no obligation to teach. (Letter of 10 September 1627 to Alessandro Striggio)

Monteverdi's reference here to his assistant choirmaster is a reminder that he was not alone in shouldering the responsibilities of providing music for S. Marco. He inherited, and was later able to appoint, assistants who were not only performers, but also able composers of sacred music – Marc'Antonio Negri (singer and assistant choirmaster from 1612), Alessandro Grandi (singer from 1617, assistant choirmaster from 1620) and Giovanni Rovetta (singer from 1623, assistant choirmaster from 1627). Moreover, S. Marco employed two organists, among whom, again, were able composers – Giovanni Battista Grillo (first organist from 1619), Carlo Fillago (first organist from 1623 to his death in 1644), Francesco Cavalli (singer from 1616, second organist from 1639). Like Monteverdi, their work was not confined to S. Marco. Cavalli had been organist of the great Dominican church of SS Giovanni e Paolo (Fig. 11.2) from 1620 to 1630 and Fillago was organist there from 1631 to 1644, concurrently with his work at S. Marco; Grillo was also organist of the Scuola Grande of San Rocco from 1612 until his death in 1622.<sup>2</sup> During the last decade of Monteverdi's life Rovetta seems to have shouldered some of the responsibilities that might otherwise have fallen to the older composer: he was in charge of the musicians who sang at the installation of Cardinal Cornaro as Patriarch of Venice in 1632, and of the music performed at S. Giorgio Maggiore in 1638 to

[199]

celebrate the birth of the future Louis XIV of France; his *Messa e salmi*, Op. 4 (1639) includes the Mass sung for this occasion, an early example of a Mass published without Sanctus or Agnus Dei. It had earlier been the custom in Venice to sing Masses with shortened settings of the last two movements.<sup>3</sup>

### Motets, Salve Regina settings, the Litany

Before Monteverdi himself saw any of his Venetian church music into print some twenty works by him were published in anthologies issued in Austria and Italy, and more were issued after his death. These works, published between 1615 and 1651, form a rich and substantial body of music too little explored by modern performers, and include almost equal numbers of settings for one, two, and four to six voices respectively. They are mainly motets – settings of texts that were not part of the fixed liturgy of the Church – which were generally sung at Venice during the Offertory and the Elevation of the Host at Mass, and between psalms at Vespers.<sup>4</sup> Motets were specifically called for on the doge's *andata* to the Church of the Redentore on the Giudecca (third Sunday in July), when Low Mass was said by the Prior of the Church's Capuchin community with motets sung at the Offertory and Elevation by singers of S. Marco,<sup>5</sup> and it was motets, as well as 'a certain cantata in praise of the doge' (words and music now lost) that were sung for the annual wedding of Venice to the sea on Ascension Day, when the choir of the Patriarch of Venice, on board the patriarch's *peota*, and the choir of S. Marco, on board the state barge, the *Bucintoro*, sang music in turn.<sup>6</sup>

Some of Monteverdi's motet texts draw freely on psalms, the Song of Songs and other parts of the Bible; other sources include Books of Hours, and even the liturgy itself – 'O beatae viae' (1621<sup>4</sup>) is proper to the Feast of S. Rocco (16 August) and 'Exulta filia Sion' (1629<sup>5</sup>) arranged from the Communion for the Mass at Dawn on Christmas Day. The solo motet 'Ecce sacrum paratum convivium' (1625<sup>2</sup>) is very unusual: it mixes images of the celebration of Mass with the Last Supper, conceived as a Roman feast with guests reclining on couches at table. The exquisite duet 'Sancta Maria, succurre miseris' (1618), which employs the same plain-song as the 1610 'Sonata sopra "Sancta Maria"', draws its text from the Magnificat antiphon at first Vespers on the Commemoration of the Blessed Virgin of Mount Carmel (16 July) in the Roman rite, and it may indeed have been one of the works that Monteverdi performed when he celebrated this feast at the Carmelite Church in Venice in 1627 (see letter of 24 July 1627). (I have not traced the text in the rite of S. Marco.) The

Ex. 11.1 'Cantate Domino' (1615<sup>13</sup>)

Cantus/Tenor  
Can - ta - te, can - ta - te Do - mi - no, Can - ta - te, can - ta - te Do - mi - no, Can -

Cantus/Tenor  
Can - ta - te, can - ta - te Do - mi - no, Can -

Basso continuo

Ex. 11.2 'Currite populi' (1625<sup>2</sup>)

Tenor  
Cur - ri - te, cur - ri - te po - pu - li cur - ri - te, psal - li - te,

Basso continuo

6  
T  
psal - li - te tim - pa - nis psal - li - te, di - ci - te

Bc

10  
T  
di - ci - te vo - ci - bus di - ci - te

Bc

appearance in the text of the petition 'intercede for the devout female sex', however, might also have prompted its use as a more general devotional motet to be sung in convents.

Sometimes we need to take care to recognise the occasion for which a motet is intended. 'Exultent coeli' (1629<sup>5</sup>) has two verses sandwiched between a five-part chorus of rejoicing and a suave triple-time trio of praise to the Virgin Mary, which begins over the so-called 'Passacaglia' bass (Ex. 11.3). The two verses are, however, proper to two completely different Marian feasts – the Conception (8 December) and the Annunciation (25 March); clearly, then, both verses should not be sung on the same occasion. Other texts can be used for a number of occasions – 'Venite videte martirem' (1645<sup>3</sup>), for the feast of any martyr, and 'Currite populi' (1625<sup>2</sup>) and 'En gratulemur hodie' (1651<sup>2</sup>) in both of which the saint's name is left to be filled in by the performer.

The styles of the motets range from a strophic aria with violins – 'En gratulemur hodie' (1651<sup>2</sup>) – to works like 'Ego flos campi' (1624<sup>2</sup>) and 'Ego dormio' (1625<sup>1</sup>), written throughout in a declamatory style. Some follow Alessandro Grandi's motets by including a final alleluia: for example, 'O beatae vie' (1621<sup>4</sup>) and 'Currite populi' (1625<sup>2</sup>). Many include at least an element of triple-time writing, to suggest singing (Ex. 11.1), or urgency (Ex. 11.2), or just as a beautiful melody in the manner of Venetian arias of the 1620s and 1630s (Ex. 11.3). Occasionally, passages in triple time



prompted by a wave of Marian devotion following the Venetian victory at the Battle of Lepanto (1571), which was declared by Pope Pius V to have been due to the intervention of the Madonna of the Rosary.<sup>7</sup>

Bianchi was also responsible for publishing four technically undemanding, but very attractive, motets by Monteverdi for five and six voices in 1620<sup>3</sup>. Two of them, whether consciously or not, contain reminiscences of music that Monteverdi had written earlier. ‘Cantate Domino’ reuses for the phrase ‘Cantate et exsultate’ music that he had first employed at the end of the madrigal ‘Ecco mormorar l’onde’ (1590), and ‘Domine ne in furore’ the type of close imitation found in ‘Nisi Dominus’ (1610). The other two, very moving settings of essentially the same text – ‘Adoramus te, Christe’ and ‘Christe, adoramus te’, drawn from the Hours of the Cross – are suited to the devotions of Holy Week or for an occasion such as Holy Cross Day, when a relic of the Holy Blood was displayed in S. Marco and Monteverdi had, in his own words, ‘to be ready with a concerted mass, and motets for the entire day’ (letter of 21 April 1618).

#### **The *Selva morale* (1641) and *Messa . . . et salmi* (1650)**

Just as at Mantua, Monteverdi himself published only one collection of sacred music at Venice, the massive *Selva morale e spirituale* of 1641, including spiritual madrigals, music for the Mass, motets, and music for Vespers (psalms, hymns, Magnificats, ‘Salve Regina’ settings).<sup>8</sup> A further major collection of his work, including a Mass, Vespers psalms and the litany, was published posthumously in 1650 in a volume possibly edited by Francesco Cavalli, who contributed a Magnificat setting to the collection. The Mass setting in 1650 (like that of 1641 written in a deliberately conservative style) is fascinating for the way in which Monteverdi generates most of its material from only a few basic ideas – a falling scale and two rising thirds heard at the beginning of the first Kyrie, the inversion of this, and sequences of rising and falling thirds filled in and elaborated with additional melodic and rhythmic figures. Paradoxically, this exercise in tight motivic integration produced from Monteverdi one of his most attractive and engaging compositions.

The evening service of Vespers calls for the singing of five psalms and a hymn specified for each Feast, and the Magnificat. The Vespers psalms published in 1641 are mainly those for the so-called ‘male cursus’ (‘Dixit Dominus’, ‘Confitebor tibi’, ‘Beatus vir’, ‘Laudate pueri’, ‘Laudate Dominum omnes gentes’); the 1650 book balances this by including psalms for the ‘female cursus’ (‘Dixit Dominus’, ‘Laudate pueri’, ‘Laetatus sum’, ‘Nisi Dominus’, ‘Lauda Jerusalem’). For the choirmaster working in the Roman rite, to whom the 1641 and 1650 volumes were probably addressed, the first five psalms in the *Selva* alone provided music for

First Vespers of Apostles and Evangelists, Martyrs and Confessors, and also, for example, for Vespers on Christmas Eve. The idea of a service in which all, or most, of the music is by a single composer may seem an anachronistic idea, the concern of present-day concert promoters and record producers rather than the working musicians of Monteverdi's day. However, on special occasions in Venice, such as the Mass at S. Marco celebrating the end of the plague in 1631, and the celebration of Vespers for St John the Baptist's Day, 24 June 1620, described by Constantijn Huygens, Monteverdi was noted as the sole composer of the music,<sup>9</sup> and as he himself pointed out in a letter on 13 March 1620, he could earn up to fifty ducats for providing two Vespers services and a Mass for patrons outside S. Marco.

Monteverdi dedicated the *Selva morale* to Eleonora Gonzaga, daughter of Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga of Mantua and widow of the Emperor Ferdinand II, a dedication analogous to that of the other great collection of his old age – the *Madrigali guerrieri, et amorosi* of 1638, which was dedicated to Eleonora's son, the Emperor Ferdinand III. The dedication of the *Selva* combines tributes to both Vienna and Mantua, and Linda Maria Koldau has argued that some, if not all its contents were chosen for publication with Vienna and the empress's chapel in mind: that the opening madrigals, with their *vanitas* theme, reflect Viennese sensibilities, that the book's *stile antico* Mass would have been suitable for Eleonora's private devotions, and that the inclusion of the Lament of Arianna as a sacred *contrafactum* – the *Pianto della Madonna* – at the end of the book was another tribute to Eleonora, for whose brother Francesco's wedding in 1608 *Arianna* was originally written.<sup>10</sup>

The *Selva morale* opens with the group of *vanitas* settings – five settings of Italian 'moral' texts on the transitory nature of love, earthly rank and achievement, even existence itself. The first three are five-part madrigals, two on quite substantial texts by Petrarch, including 'Voi ch'ascoltate in rime sparse il suono', the sonnet with which Petrarch opened his own *Canzoniere*; the third sets a short epigrammatic madrigal by Angelo Grillo, a Benedictine friar and admirer of Monteverdi.<sup>11</sup> The other two settings – 'Spuntava il di' and 'Chi vol che m'innamori?' – are of strophic texts with refrains, scored for three voices.

The first of the madrigals, 'O ciechi', is drawn from Petrarch's *Trionfo della morte*. If the *Selva* is, indeed, the sacred counterpart of the *Madrigali guerrieri ed amorosi* of 1638, then this is the sacred counterpart of its opening madrigal 'Altri canti d'Amor' (Let others sing of Love . . . I sing of Mars) which celebrated Ferdinand III's military prowess and set the programme of the book. 'O ciechi, ciechi' is a reminder of the ultimate futility of power, riches and military conquest. The 'point' of the madrigal makes this clear:

U' sono or le ricchezze? u'	Where now their riches? Where their
son gli onori	honours now?
E le gemme e gli scetri e le	Where now their gems and sceptres, and
corone	their crowns,
E le mitre e i purpurei colori?	Their mitres, and the purple they had
	worn?

The arranger of the text has, in fact, taken these lines out of order: in Petrarch's *trionfo* they appear before the first thirteen lines set by Monteverdi. And if we look at the three lines, not set by Monteverdi, that precede them, we can see that the 'point' is directed clearly at popes and emperors:

Ivi eran quei che fur detti felici,	Here now were they who were called
	fortunate,
pontefici, regnanti, imperadori;	Popes, emperors, and others who had
	ruled;
or sono ignudi, miseri e	Now are they naked, poor, of all bereft.
mendici.	
U' sono or le ricchezze? u' son	Where now their riches? Where their
gli onori	honours now?
...	...

The style of the setting places it firmly with Monteverdi's later compositions and there seems every reason to suppose that, though the other spiritual madrigals may have had their origins in performances at Venice, perhaps in the oratory of the *Primicierius* of S. Marco (Marc'Antonio Cornaro; see Monteverdi's letter of 17 March 1620), this was written specifically as a prologue to the *Selva morale*.

The madrigals are followed by a Mass setting in *stile antico*, a magnificent *concertato* setting of the Gloria for seven voices and instruments, and three *concertato* settings of sections of the Creed – 'Crucifixus', 'Et resurrexit' and 'et iterum venturus est', which can be used, according to their rubrics, as substitutes for the corresponding sections of the complete Mass setting. It is not clear whether the Gloria is also intended as a substitute for its counterpart in the Mass, though there is no reason from a liturgical point of view why it should not be used in this way.

The seven-part Gloria has intrigued scholars as much as it has attracted performers. It lasts some twelve minutes in performance, requires virtuoso singers and instrumentalists and is conceived as a large-scale structure in five sections which anticipates the sectional Mass settings of the later Baroque.<sup>12</sup> The thrilling figuration with which it begins is brought back both at the end of the first section and at the end of the setting to round off the structure

(Ex. 11.4); and the musical texture encompasses slowly moving harmonies for ‘et in terra pax’ analogous to those of the opening of ‘Or che ’l ciel e la terra’ from the *Madrigali guerrieri*, as well as passages of *concitato* writing, suggesting the power of God, at ‘Domine Deus . . . omnipotens’. Because of the magnificence of this setting, scholars have felt that it must have been written for a special occasion, and their attention has focussed on a Mass celebrated on 21 November 1631 as part of the ceremonies marking the end of the plague that had swept through northern Italy, killing nearly fifty thousand people in Venice alone. The ceremonies culminated in the dedication of the site on which a new church was to be built – the church of Santa Maria della Salute which now dominates the entrance to the Grand Canal (Fig. 9.4). We know that a Mass setting composed by Monteverdi was performed at S. Marco on this occasion, the Gloria and Creed of which involved *trombe squarciate*. For many years it was assumed that these instruments were trombones, leaving open the possibility that the Gloria from the *Selva morale* might indeed have been part of the Mass of Thanksgiving and leading to the ingenious theory that various other items of the *Selva morale* might also have been associated with the foundation of the Salute.<sup>13</sup> However, recent work has shown that *trombe squarciate* were trumpets, not trombones, and suggests that the assumed link between the seven-part Gloria and the Mass of Thanksgiving was essentially wishful thinking.<sup>14</sup> There are, in any case, more regular occasions in the church year when a Gloria of the grandeur of that in the *Selva morale* or, indeed, the double-choir Gloria attributed to Monteverdi in a Neapolitan manuscript (SV307),<sup>15</sup> might be substituted for a simpler setting: the Masses of Christmas and Easter, following the abstinence of Advent and Lent, are cases in point.

The psalms of the *Selva morale* and the 1650 book are not set out, as in Monteverdi’s 1610 publication, to give the impression of complete, unified services. Instead, the books present several settings of various psalms and hymns, two different Magnificats and three settings of the ‘Salve Regina’. From the practical point of view, then, they provided choir-masters with resource books from which they could draw individual settings appropriate to particular feast days.

The styles, techniques and structures that Monteverdi uses in his motets can also be seen, transferred on to a larger canvas, in his psalm settings. Five of the psalms – ‘Beatus vir’ (SV269) and ‘Laudate pueri’ (SV271) from 1641, ‘Laudate pueri’ (SV196), ‘Laetatus sum’ (SV199) and ‘Lauda Jerusalem’ (SV203) from 1650, all of them for five voices – are simply through-composed, with generally continuous imitative textures, little solo writing and cadences ‘escaped’ by allowing one or more voices to initiate a new point of imitation. With their generally restrained





dissonance usage and word-painting ('Lauda Jerusalem' (SV203) is something of an exception in this respect) they are clearly related to the sixteenth-century tradition of motets, though their basic units of notation are the crotchet and quaver, rather than the semibreves and minims that we see in the works that Monteverdi wrote in deliberately 'old' styles.

The most extravagantly madrigalian of all the psalm settings is the six-part 'Nisi Dominus' (SV201) of 1650 in which almost every verbal image is found a musical equivalent: triple time to produce a laboured texture for 'Vanum est vobis' (it is vain for you . . .) contrasted with lines that rise through a seventh for 'ante lucem surgere' (. . . to rise up before dawn); surging semiquaver passages followed by a sequence of harsh dissonances for 'surgite postquam sederitis, qui manducatis panem doloris' (you get up before you have gone to bed, you who eat the bread of misery); rapid rising scales for the 'sagittae in manu potentis' (arrows in the hand of a mighty man). There is even a passage of repeated dominant–tonic chords of a kind found in the *Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda* for the phrase 'non confundetur cum loquetur inimicis suis in porta' (he shall not be confounded when he speaks with his enemies at the gate).

Interestingly, the other setting of 'Nisi Dominus' in 1650 (SV200), for three voices and two violins, contains musical imagery for 'rising up' and the flight of arrows that seem to be initial versions of the ideas worked out more fully in the larger version. In SV200, however, these are preceded by melodies using paired quavers in the style that Monteverdi also used for 'Confitebor tibi' (SV267) in 1641, a setting that he labelled 'alla francese' (in the French manner) and which can be performed either by solo voice and strings or by five voices. There are other parallels between the two settings, including the use in both of an elaborate Italianate solo for the opening of the 'Gloria Patri' before the words 'sicut erat in principio' prompt a return to the (possibly) French melodic style with which the settings began.

Monteverdi's settings of 'Confitebor tibi' present an even greater variety of approaches to the use of aria styles than the motets. The two settings in 1650, for example, have essentially the same music, though in the first case (SV193) only a solo voice is used and in the second (SV194) the music is divided between the two voices, with one occasionally reinforcing the other. The text, punctuated by ritornellos for two violins, is set as variations over a bass whose figuration is itself varied from one statement to another. In the second 1641 setting (SV266) Monteverdi sets a pair of verses for each of the three voices (soprano, tenor, bass) in turn, and then the last three verses for a trio, all over essentially the same bass.

The first of the 1641 'Confitebor' settings (SV265) is the most interesting of all. Here Monteverdi uses a primary group of three solo voices, adding a

further five to produce a full eight-part texture for verses 2 and 6 of the text, the first half of verse 9 and the 'Gloria Patri'. The three soloists sing, for the most part, in triple time and in imitative textures. The full eight-part texture is used as a refrain – a rich harmonic progression in block chords. The reasons for Monteverdi's choice of textures seems largely to be related to the meaning of the text. The sudden emergence of the full texture at verse 2 underlines the phrase 'Magna opera Domini' (Great are the works of the Lord), at verse 9 the phrase 'Sanctum et terribile nomen eius' (holy and fearsome is His name), and at the end of the setting the words 'Gloria Patri' (Glory be to the Father'). Only at verse 6 can the use of the refrain not be explained textually; here it seems to have been used for musical balance in the otherwise long transition between verses 2 and 9.

The use of aria styles and refrains is characteristic of a number of Monteverdi's more extended psalm settings. In the first 'Laudate pueri' setting of 1641 (SV270) Monteverdi builds most of the psalm from just two blocks of material – duple (A) and triple (B). He then alternates the two blocks, allowing B to evolve gradually, while A remains recognisably the same. In refrain structures, the refrains are often either in triple time within a predominantly duple setting or vice versa, as in the first of the 'Lauda Jerusalem' settings in 1650 (SV202). In the otherwise continuous texture of the five-part 'Beatus vir' II (SV269, 1641) the opening phrase of the setting recurs after verses 4, 6 and 9.

In fact, all three settings of 'Beatus vir' employ the initial words as a refrain, perhaps to emphasise the fact that the whole psalm is devoted to the attributes of the 'blessed man who fears the Lord'. The seven-part setting in 1650 (SV195) begins with both duple- and triple-time settings of the refrain. The duple-time version is then brought back after almost every verse (only verses 5–6 and 7–8 are run together without refrain), and both versions round off verse 9. The refrain sometimes overlaps the end of the verse to produce telling textual counterpoints – the blessed man rejoices at the same time as the wicked man perishes in verse 9 of the psalm; and he appears again in the middle of the 'Gloria Patri', producing the phrase 'Beatus vir . . . semper, et in saecula' (Blessed is the man . . . for ever and ever).

The most often performed of the 'Beatus vir' settings is the first of the two in the *Selva morale* (SV268), for six voices and instruments, and here again Monteverdi uses the phrase 'Beatus vir qui timet Dominum', or just 'Beatus vir', as a refrain. The setting as a whole is given an A–B–A<sup>1</sup> structure in which the outer sections are an elaboration of music that Monteverdi originally created for the duet 'Chiome d'oro' (Hair of gold) in the Seventh Book of Madrigals (1619). These outer sections are set over a 'walking bass', with recurring patterns of notes (though not quite a ground bass), and the central section in triple time over yet another

recurring pattern (again, not quite a ground bass). Stylistically, the walking bass and suave triple-time aria writing are typical of Venetian song-books of the 1620s and 1630s and the use of variation patterns here, in the seven-part Gloria, and in the four-note ostinato of the gloriously exuberant setting of 'Laetatus sum' (SV198) in the 1650 collection, with its variety of obbligato instruments (violins, trombone and bassoon), forms the culmination in Monteverdi's work of the process that Massimo Ossi sees as beginning in the Fifth Book of Madrigals (1605).<sup>16</sup>

The four settings of 'Dixit Dominus', two in 1641 (SV263 and 264) and two in 1650 (SV191 and 192) are all for eight voices, the two 1641 settings also calling for two violins and four *viole da braccio* or trombones, ad. lib. The two settings in 1650 are clearly indicated as being for two four-part choirs, and the first, possibly both, of the 1641 settings should also be set out in this way.

Only the second 1650 setting (SV192), marked 'alla breve', with semibreve and minim as its basic note-values, belongs clearly to the tradition of psalm settings for double choir begun at S. Marco by Adrian Willaert. The setting is initiated in plainsong for the first part of verse 1 and then proceeds with the choirs singing one verse each in alternation until the second part of verse 5, where the full eight-part texture is heard for the first time at 'Tu es sacerdos in aeternum' (Thou art a priest for ever). Thereafter, Monteverdi organises the exchanges between the choirs more freely, though ensuring that each is essentially self-sufficient, as prescribed for *cori spezzati* writing by another of his predecessors at S. Marco, Gioseffo Zarlino.<sup>17</sup> David Bryant argued that double-choir settings of this kind were performed with both choirs standing together in the *pulpitum magnum cantorum* (also known as the Bigonzo – the tub), located at the south front of the choir screen (the *iconostasis*) (Fig. 11.1), a location in which the choir certainly sang on some occasions, as reflected in Canaletto's well-known drawing of 1766;<sup>18</sup> more recently, Laura Moretti has suggested that Vespers psalms for double choir were performed with the two choirs standing opposite each other in the two *pergole* (also called the *nicchie*) on the north and south sides of the chancel, just inside the choir screen; there was originally only one of these: a second was constructed at about the time that Willaert introduced double-choir polyphony at S. Marco.<sup>19</sup> In either case, the first choir consisted of soloists while in the second choir parts were doubled.<sup>20</sup>

The first setting of 'Dixit Dominus' in 1641 (SV263) and the first of the two 1650 settings (SV191) are related through Monteverdi's extensive reworking of the same material. If we believe that a more complex setting is likely to have been developed from a simpler, then the 1650 setting, which is 259 bars in length in Malipiero's edition and for voices and continuo only, is likely to be the earlier of the two, and the 1641 setting,



Fig. 11.1 S. Marco, the Bigonzo, Iconostasis, Pergola and North Organ Loft

303 bars long and for voices and instruments the later reworking. The entire setting of verses 3 to 7 and the ‘Gloria Patri’ of the 1650 setting (bars 36–146 and 202–59) are reworked in 1641 (bars 93–227 and 245–303) with most of the twenty-four extra bars in 1641 coming from the reworking of verse 3. The relationship between the two settings is disguised on first hearing by the extended new setting of verses 1 and 2 in the 1641 version (ninety-two bars) and the replacement of Psalm Tone 8G, placed prominently in the top line at the opening of 1650, with neutral chanting on one note (in the 1641 setting, we hear the psalm tone only briefly, in the borrowed material of verse 3).

The grandeur, rich scoring, and scale of the two 1641 settings of ‘Dixit Dominus’ (each lasts about nine minutes in performance), are analogous to the large *concertato* settings of the Gloria and Magnificat I (SV281) in the same book, and they seem eminently appropriate for the psalm which begins almost every festal Vespers in the Roman rite, and many in the liturgy of S. Marco. Like the Gloria and Magnificat, they are sectional structures. The first (SV263) is organised mainly in pairs of verses (verse 3 and 8 excepted), the second mainly verse by verse in a fluid juxtaposition of small ensemble and fuller writing. In this latter setting (SV264) the full scorings emphasise the idea of a powerful God, sometimes speaking loudly from Heaven, or exulting (verse 8), or represented as helping to crush the enemies of the psalmist (or, in this context, Venice), as we can hear in verse 2 (‘until I make thine enemies thy footstool’), the second half

of verse 3 ('rule thou in the midst of thine enemies'), and verses 6 and 7, in which a wrathful God smites kings and fills the places with dead bodies. In setting verse 3 Monteverdi uses double counterpoint, so that the phrase 'rule thou' (*dominare*) is placed sometimes above, sometimes in the middle of the texture, surrounded by a contrasting motif for 'in the midst of thine enemies' (*in medio inimicorum tuorum*) (Ex. 11.5).

### Music at S. Marco . . .

In the seventeenth century S. Marco was not the cathedral of Venice, as it is now, but the state church of the Venetian Republic (the seat of the Patriarch of Venice was S. Pietro in Castello at the eastern extremity of the city). As the state church, S. Marco was at the centre of the intermingling of piety with Venetian history and state ceremonial that characterised and reinforced the myth of the Most Serene Republic (see above, Chapter 9). Moreover, because of its antiquity, S. Marco had been allowed to retain its own liturgy – that is, its own ordering of texts for the days of the Church year – even after a uniform Roman rite had been imposed on most other churches following the Council of Trent.<sup>21</sup> The provisions of this liturgy, and the customs of S. Marco which dictated the types of music to be sung at particular services, raise interesting questions when we try to identify the occasions for which Monteverdi's surviving music might have been used there.<sup>22</sup>

Christmas Eve, for which Monteverdi was expected to write a new Mass setting each year (see his letters of 29 December 1616 and 2 February 1634), provides us with a useful case study of the relationship between his surviving music and his work at S. Marco. The services for Christmas Eve at S. Marco were Vespers, Compline, Matins and Mass, and involved both singers and instrumentalists. The way in which these services were celebrated in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries was described by Giovanni Stringa, *maestro di coro* of S. Marco, in his revision of Francesco Sansovino's *Venetia, città nobilissima*, published in 1604.<sup>23</sup> According to Stringa, the doge entered the church about two hours before sunset, and as soon as he arrived Vespers was celebrated 'with the sweetest sounds of voices and instruments . . . by the salaried musicians of the church and by others hired specially to make a greater number, since on that evening they perform [*si canta*] in eight, ten, twelve and sixteen choirs to the wonder and amazement of everyone.'<sup>24</sup>

For Christmas Eve, the customs of S. Marco prescribed the opening of the great golden altarpiece, the *Pala d'oro* (Fig. 9.5), and that the psalms of Vespers should be sung in eight parts by two choirs. The five psalms appointed for Vespers on Christmas Eve were the so-called 'Cinque



Laudate', all of which begin with a form of the word 'laudare' – 'Laudate pueri' (Psalm 112 (*Book of Common Prayer* 113)); 'Laudate Dominum omnes gentes' (Psalm 116/117); 'Lauda anima mea' (Psalm 145/146); 'Laudate Dominum quoniam bonus' (Psalm 146/147: 1–11); 'Lauda Jerusalem' (Psalm 147/147: 12–20). As James Moore has shown, the *Vespero delli cinque Laudate* held a special position in the liturgy of S. Marco and was used for a very large number of major feast days in its annual cycle.<sup>25</sup> Settings of these special psalms survive in publications by Monteverdi's predecessors and successors – Giovanni Croce (1597), Rovetta (1644 and 1662), Cavalli (1675) and Natale Monferrato (1675) – and share several characteristics – all are for eight voices divided into two (self-sufficient) four-part choirs, and their style is simple, with no solo writing even when continuo is used; the choirs change at the ends of verses or at the half-verse; and the settings are 'short psalms', without extensive development of any paragraphs of text. They are, thus, *salmi spezzati* which look back in style and structure to the psalms of Adrian Willaert in the sixteenth century.<sup>26</sup> Monteverdi's surviving sacred music includes only two settings of 'Laudate' psalms – 'Laudate Dominum omnes gentes' SV273 and 274 (both 1641) for eight voices, neither of which is in the requisite style.

The singing of Vespers psalms in eight parts, for two choirs, was not limited to those days at S. Marco for which the *Cinque Laudate* psalms were set, but for all important feasts when the *Pala d'oro* was opened.<sup>27</sup> The implication is that these, too, were sung as *salmi spezzati* and not in the more modern styles found in Monteverdi's surviving work: only his setting of 'Credidi' (SV275, 1641) falls quite clearly into the older category of double-choir setting; 'Memento Domine David' (SV276, 1641) and the second 1650 'Dixit Dominus' (SV192) also belong to the earlier tradition, though the first includes short passages of two-part writing supported by continuo only, and in the second Monteverdi does not simply alternate the two choirs verse by verse, but combines them in a more varied, less predictable series of textures.

For many of the most important feasts of the year, then, it would seem that a restrained, conservative style of double-choir psalm settings was employed at S. Marco, and continued to be employed there well into the seventeenth century. And try as one might to explain away the discrepancy, it is not likely that the more modern *concertato* styles that characterise so many of Monteverdi's surviving psalm settings would have been appropriate for these occasions. There are, however, feast days in the S. Marco calendar for which Monteverdi's settings could have been used, and they include feasts important to Venice which were celebrated in the presence of the doge, and therefore probably involved instruments in addition to the organ.<sup>28</sup> These include First Vespers of S. Lorenzo



Giustiniani (8 January), S. Marco (25 April, when ‘Vespers was sung . . . with the greatest possible solemnity’<sup>29</sup>), S. Antonio di Padova (13 June) and SS Vito and Modesto, all of which call for the first five psalms set in Monteverdi’s 1641 book.<sup>30</sup>

If the psalms for Christmas Eve were sung in eight parts by two choirs, how do we account for the large number of voices and instruments, performing in eight, ten, twelve and sixteen ‘choirs’ as described by Stringa? The answer must be that they performed either large-scale motets or instrumental music, or both, between the psalms, and/or they joined together for the performance of the Magnificat, which forms the climax (though not the end) of Vespers, when the altar is ceremonially censured.<sup>31</sup> Monteverdi’s opulent Magnificat I (SV281, 1641) may have been composed for an occasion such as Christmas Eve Vespers at S. Marco, as may some of his motets.

Immediately after Vespers, Compline was said, without music, and followed by Matins, chanted by the canons and other priests of S. Marco. At the end of Matins, at about two hours after sunset, the celebration of Mass began, and here it must have been that Monteverdi’s involvement was at its greatest. Mass ended, according to Stringa, at about four hours after sunset, lasting, if he is correct, about two hours, which would certainly have allowed time for the performance of a large-scale *concertato* Mass, including a movement like the seven-part Gloria (SV258).

Mass concluded the celebrations of Christmas Eve after some six hours in church. On Christmas Day itself High Mass was celebrated, according to Stringa, ‘with as much solemnity as the Mass of the previous evening’, and, perhaps, with much the same music. After lunch the doge came into church to hear a sermon and then proceeded *in trionfo* to the church of S. Giorgio Maggiore, on the island opposite the ducal palace, to hear Vespers (Fig. 9.3). This service was sung in plainchant by the canons of the church.<sup>32</sup>

We have, in short, little of the music by Monteverdi that might have been sung at S. Marco on a great occasion such as Christmas. And if we are looking to reconstruct a Monteverdian Vespers at S. Marco using his psalm settings we have to look at those feast days that did not, seemingly, call for rather old-fashioned music. S. Marco was, however, only one arena of his activities in Venice and it may be that some of the settings in 1641 and 1650 belong to his work outside the ducal chapel.

### **. . . and elsewhere in Venice**

We know of several occasions on which Monteverdi served in the Venetian *scuole* and in churches where the Roman rite was used, and to

which the restrictive customs of S. Marco did not apply. On 4 November 1620, and again on 3 and 4 November 1635, he was employed by the Milanese community in Venice to provide music for the Feast of S. Carlo Borromeo, probably in the huge Gothic church of S. Maria Gloriosa dei Frari (letter of 21 October [1620] and Fabbri, *Monteverdi*, p. 233). In 1623 and 1627 he provided music for the Scuola Grande di S. Rocco for its patronal feast day (16 August) (for the location, see Fig. 9.1).<sup>33</sup> On 15 July 1627 (see letter of 24 July 1627),<sup>34</sup> he furnished music for First Vespers of the Blessed Virgin of Mount Carmel at the Carmelite Church (all the psalms for this can be provided from 1650 and some from 1641). And on 23 February 1630 he wrote that he had been ‘taken up with certain ecclesiastical compositions for some of the nuns of San Lorenzo’.

Once certainly, and once probably, Monteverdi was employed by the Florentine community at Venice to provide music for them. The first of these occasions was for the Requiem celebrated at SS Giovanni e Paolo (Fig. 11.2) on 25 May 1621 following the death of Grand Duke Cosimo II, the cost of which was put at around three thousand ducats by the Florentine Resident.<sup>35</sup> The ceremony was described in a booklet written



Fig. 11.2 SS. Giovanni e Paolo, Venice

by Giulio Strozzi, which shows that Monteverdi directed music (now lost) written by himself, Giovanni Battista Grillo and Francesco Usper.<sup>36</sup> Strozzi commented with some admiration on Monteverdi's setting of Psalm 129/130:

A most suave *De profundis* at the Elevation of the Host . . . sung as a dialogue as if by souls standing in the torments of Purgatory and visited by angels, produced admiration for the novelty and excellence of the art.<sup>37</sup>

The text of Psalm 129 is not in dialogue form, so it must have been manipulated by Monteverdi. Though this example is lost, we do have another instance of his turning a text into a dialogue in the third 1641 setting of Psalm 116/117 – 'Laudate Dominum omnes gentes' (SV274). This psalm, which consists of two verses only, plus the 'Gloria Patri', presented composers with a challenge if they were to construct more than a very brief setting. Monteverdi's 1650 setting in a sense avoids the problem: it is, unusually, for solo voice and contrasts ornamented declamation for verse 1 with triple time in verse 2 (recitative and aria, as it were), while the 'Gloria Patri' is set over two short ostinato basses. In the first setting of 1641 (SV272) Monteverdi uses line repetition and contrasts of texture to build a large-scale structure. In SV274, however, he creates a dialogue where none existed: two sopranos, perhaps representing angels, engage in dialogue with the remaining six voices, perhaps representing the people. They urge the people to praise the Lord, but are at first met only by the single word 'quoniam', which, in this context becomes a question – 'because?' (in the sense of 'why?'). Only after the sopranos have answered this, by singing 'Because his mercy is confirmed upon us', do the people respond at greater length, at first seeking further confirmation, and then singing the complete psalm text, led by the 'angels'. The 'Gloria Patri' is then sung by the 'angels', whose voices finally seem to disappear into the distance.

The other occasion on which Monteverdi may have served the Florentine community is the one for which we have an eye-witness account of his performance – the Vespers for the Feast of St John the Baptist heard by Constantijn Huygens on 24 June 1620 at the church of 'SS Giovanni e Lucia' (most probably SS Giovanni e Paolo).<sup>38</sup> There is no known evidence bearing directly on the Feast of S. Giovanni Battista for 1620, but a report of Ippolito Buondalmenti, the Florentine Resident at Venice, written on 23 June 1629, suggests that the Florentine community ('Nazione fiorentino') at Venice regularly celebrated the feast day of S. Giovanni Battista, who was their protector saint, with elaborate church music. Buondalmenti reported that, following the death of Filippo Mannelli, consul of the Florentine community, the whole community

had met and resolved to celebrate the Feast of S. Giovanni Battista with customary solemnity since this greatly enhanced their reputation in the city. Accordingly, solemn First Vespers had been celebrated that day; only one member of the community, the representative of the Lords Guadagni, had opposed the extravagant expenditure involved.<sup>39</sup> The psalms set for both First and Second Vespers of S. Giovanni Battista in the Roman rite are those of the male *cursus*, settings for which are found in both Monteverdi's 1641 and 1650 books, and the hymn for Vespers of the feast – 'Ut queant laxis' – is set in 1641 (SV279a).

In the end, and despite his having served as a church musician at S. Marco for thirty years, Monteverdi's Venetian sacred music poses almost as many questions about place of performance as his 1610 publication. We are, however, left with a body of music that is as rich and inventive as anything that Monteverdi wrote in the secular sphere during his later years. The smaller-scale works cover the gamut from Florentine-style declamation to the song styles and variation structures characteristic of Venetian song-books of the 1620s and 1630s. And the large-scale sectional structures of some of the 'Dixit Dominus' settings, the seven-part Gloria, and the first Magnificat of 1641 set the ground for the development of such settings through the seventeenth and into the eighteenth century.