

JOHANN JOSEPH FUX

(ca. 1660–1741)

Plaudite, sonat tuba K 165

Notes on the work

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NOTES ON THE WORK

Johann Joseph Fux, “Plaudite, sonat tuba” (K 165)

Classification and Context

The motet “Plaudite, sonat tuba”, intended for the Roman Catholic liturgy, represents in terms of typology the pendant to the Protestant cantata; both genres have the setting of free or liturgical texts as arias, recitatives and choruses in common.¹ However, there are differences in function, and hence in length. In the Catholic liturgy, the motet takes the place of a single item in the proper – in Vienna, usually the offertory, as the other parts of the proper were performed instrumentally or in plainchant – whereas a polyphonic ordinary remained the main portion of the service. By contrast, in the Protestant liturgy the cantata occupies a larger space, as German congregational hymns had taken the place of the proper. Fux’s motet “Plaudite, sonat tuba” was intended for an Eastertide high mass, as can be seen from the texts and the addition to the title: “De Resurrectione Domini”.

The memoranda on the cover of K 165 record two performances on April 1, 1736 and April 19, 1740. Its composition, however, can be assumed to have been much earlier, because the copyist was active at the Viennese court until ca. 1716; furthermore, Fux had stopped composing in the 1730s because of his gout.² In 1736, the motet was heard on Easter Sunday; in 1740, on Easter Tuesday. In Vienna, Easter was celebrated as a high feast over three days, with solemn masses accompanied by trumpets and tympani. The *Wienerische Diarium* for April 19, 1740 reports an “ordinary divine service in the public imperial court chapel, with the highest dignitaries again in attendance” for both morning and evening.³

K 165 is a purely solo motet for tenor, opposite whom the soloistically treated trumpet appears in concertante style. The strings, on the other hand, are not used as soloists, but only as a group. The final movement is for the soloist as well; Fux in this instance foregoes an increase in dynamics through four-part choral writing.

In his scoring, Fux strives for such varied combinations as are allowed by the available instruments (tenor, trumpet, 2 violins, viola, basses with violoncello, organ and bassoon): tenor and trumpet in the opening movement, string accompaniment in the *accompagnato* recitatives as well as in the second aria (“Dum exaltat”), plain continuo accompaniment in the third aria (“O peccator”), and finally, in the “Alleluia”, the entire orchestra.

The Text

The motet’s text, consisting as usual partly of prose (for recitatives), partly of verse (for arias), takes for its theme the joy of Easter, in view of the triumph of life over death in the resurrection of Christ. In the process, several Bible texts (or at least, allusions to texts that are used or sung in the Easter liturgy, e.g. “Rex gloriae”) are connected with appropriate poetic images (cross, hell, triumphal arch, light, phoenix). Significantly, rhetorical elements directed at the listener (“plaudite [...] o gentes”, “mortales”, “audite”, “o peccator, gaude”) recall the style of a sermon. These commands also receive extra emphasis in Fux’s musical setting. Fitting the occasion, the music reacts especially to happy keywords like “victory”, “conquer”, “joy” and “good news” with tone painting, in this case at the words “plaudite”, “sonat”, “gaudia”, “debellata”, “Rex gloriae”, “victoriae” and “triumphales”. The raising of the gates of heaven (“elevamini”) receives pictorial musical support in the form of upward melismatic figuration and rising accidentals.

1 Concerning the offertory motet resp. the solo motet, see Rudolf Walter, “Bemerkungen zu den Kompositionen von Johann Joseph Fux zum *Offertorium*”, in *Johann Joseph Fux and the music of the Austro-Italian Baroque*, ed. Harry White, Cambridge: Scholar Press, 1992, pp. 231–261 and Camillo Schoenbaum, “Die ‘Opella ecclesiastica’ des Joseph Anton Planicky (1691?–1732), eine Studie zur Geschichte der katholischen Solomotette im Mittel- und Hochbarock”, in *Acta Musicologica* 25, 1/3 (Jan.–Sep. 1953), pp. 39–79.

2 Information concerning the copyist and the dating can be found in the description of sources in the Critical Commentary.

3 *Wienerisches Diarium* no. 32, April 20, 1740, [p. 355](#).

The Music

Fux manages the interactions between instruments and voice in various ways, as can be seen in his handling not just of themes, but of the structure of the movements as well. The unusually pronounced cooperation and opposition between the instrumental and vocal sides has its origin in the contents of the text, especially in the repeated invitations to make gladness audible; in constant alternation, the parts compete in their rejoicing, and thus intensify those invitations to the listeners. The continuo-aria “O peccator”, where the roles are clearly divided and the voice line predominates, is a conscious exception. Whereas the outer movements turn to a larger community, the third aria is aimed quasi at every individual personally within that community – in the second part even towards the sinner, being directly addressed as “tu”.

The arias are restricted to the da capo form, with the A and B sections showing musical affinities, and the necessary contrast being achieved by the use of harmonically more distant degrees of the scale (keys on the IIIth or VIth degree) or a reduced scoring (“Alleluia”). The first aria, where an accompagnato recitative follows the A section, is an exception; this accompagnato framed by the “Plaudite” functions as a stand-in for the B section. Fux sets off the text sections of the recitative, which describe the battle for the conquest over death, with a change of tempo to Allegro. Virtuoso melismas, as well as abrupt shifts of harmony, guide the attention to the central concepts “est debellata” and “irae furentes”.

In the second aria, the strings function with their blaring tone-repetitions as proxies for the trumpet, which in the region of A minor would have been of limited use due to its restricted repertory of notes. The keywords “gloriae”, “aeternales” and “victoriae” each trigger a unisono string fanfare that fills the space between the verses. In the following recitative, the focus lies with the core message emerging at the end: “resurrexit”. The incomprehensible fact of the resurrection is already reaffirmed in the text’s demand for another hearing of the word (“audite: resurrexit”), which is highlighted in the music by a caesura and slower declamation.

The third aria in triple time realizes the joyful mood of the text in more reserved fashion. Sighing figures create a close correlation between “gaude” and “moriendo”; the call to joy is more inward, as a reflection of its origin, and thus in contrast to the exaltation of the appeals in the first and last movements.

In the closing “Alleluia”, trumpet, strings and voice combine in diverse ways, with the solo voice working as a link between the different instrumental groups. It imitates the main trumpet theme, with its signal-like leap of a fourth and its brilliant runs of sixteenth notes, as well as the triplet figures in the strings. The interval of the fourth, split off from the trumpet’s theme, becomes a purely instrumental accompaniment- and filler-figure.

In his motet “Plaudite, sonat tuba”, Fux fully exploits the spectrum of textual content engaging the musical means at his disposal, and creates a dramaturgical, almost opera-like structural whole through the use of variations in scoring and compositional technique. The trumpet, idiomatically employed but never slipping into empty virtuosity, proclaims the highly festive nature of the Easter holiday, and is at the same time a symbol of its triumphal celebration in Vienna with quite secular traits, including artillery salvos, as upon the occasion of a military victory.

Ramona Hocker, Alexander Rausch (“The text”), 2016
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