

## ANALYTICAL ASPECTS OF THE THREE VERSIONS OF *CONFITEBOR TIBI, DOMINE* BY CLAUDIO MONTEVERDI

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**SUMMARY.** This work focuses on the musical analysis of Monteverdi's composition styles in his sacred music. The motets, *Confitebor tibi, Domine* were printed in 1640 in collection of *Selva morale e spirituale*. Even in these rigidly bound works, Monteverdi gives full intensity to the meaning of every word of the text, trying to bring it to life in a vivid and convincing way. These three versions of Psalm 111 present different compositional techniques, through which Monteverdi wishes to emphasize the content of the text.

**Keyword:** Renaissance music, Claudio Monteverdi, motet, sacred music

### Introduction

Monteverdi's work and innovations represent a transitional style between the Renaissance and the Baroque. It was Monteverdi who enlivened the chant of the monody, which until then had only followed the text, with musicality; he intensified the expressiveness of the recitative, gave life to the content of the text, not only through declamation, but also through the musical forms; applied richer harmonies, and gave the orchestra a greater role.

From Monteverdi's sacred works, we can mention three monumental editions. The 1610 edition contains the *Vespro della Beata Vergine* and the *In illo tempore mass*, both composed by Monteverdi in the court service of the Duke Gonzaga of Mantua. The volumes *Selva morale e spirituale*, published in 1640 contain the sacred works of the Venetian years. The third

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edition was published in 1650, *Messa e 4 voci e Salmi*, a 4 voice mass and psalms, published after Monteverdi's death.

The monumental edition of 1640, *Selva morale e spirituale* is the most important anthology of religious works composed by Monteverdi. The collection contains various religious works and it was published between 1640 and 1641 in Venice. This edition was dedicated to Eleonora Gonzaga and supervised by Bartolomeo Magni. This anthology is considered the testament of Monteverdi's sacred work.

The psalm text *Confitebor tibi, Domine* from *Selva morale e spirituale* is one of Monteverdi's seven known texts.<sup>2</sup> *The text, Confitebor* is taken from psalm 111, in the liturgy of San Marco this psalm was used in the Sunday liturgy and on many feasts throughout the year.

Before we start to analyze Monteverdi's sacred works we should mention his concept about the *prima* and *seconda prattica*<sup>3</sup>:

Some features of the first practice: dominance of polyphony, a cappella vocal facture, ensuring the cursivity of the counterpoint, devoid of any fracture, treatment of dissonance, without unprepared leaps, without sudden changes, etc.

The second practice<sup>4</sup> was linked to the musical innovation of the 16th century, and Monteverdi achieves a perfect synthesis between the traditional compositional means common up to his time and new possibilities of expression, such as: the merging of the monodic style with the practice of the choral motet, rhythmic regularity in the writing of the aria, the harmonic organization, the practice of basso continuo, the transition from polyphony to accompanied homophonic melody, unprepared leaps and dissonances, melodic variations and ornamentation, declamations, etc.

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<sup>2</sup> Dixit Dominus; Confitebor tibi, Domine; Beatus vir; Laudate pueri; Laudate dominum; Credidi, propter quod locutus sum; Memento Domine;

<sup>3</sup> The notions *prima* and *seconda prattica* appear in Monteverdi's fifth volume of madrigals (1605), on which occasion the composer formulates a brief response to the attacks of the Bolognese canon Giovanni Artusi. Monteverdi explains that the text/word must be the master of music, not its subject (Schezi Musicali, 1607). The roots of the first practice, the first *prattica* - *stile antico*, can be found in Franco-Flemish composers, and its flowering in Italian composers.

<sup>4</sup> Compared to the first *prattica*, in the *seconda prattica* the music does not reign, but serves the text, the sound is not the master of the music: "L'oratione sia padrona dell' armonia e non serva" – "Oration" [meaning "literary discourse"] is the master of harmony and not its servant". This development of the new style becomes evident in Monteverdi's eight volumes of madrigals. The application of this style to the realm of opera achieves a dramatic intensification.

## Analytical aspects

### 1. *Confitebor Primo*

*Confitebor Primo a 3 voci con 5 altre voci ne ripieni (First Confitebor for 3 voices and 5 additional voices)*

*Confitebor Primo* is one of the pieces from which the complete and autonomous choir de tutti has survived; here it is marked *ripieno* (Soprano I, II, Tenore I) and *capella* (Alto I, II, Tenor II, Basso I, II) respectively. The use of these five voices is limited to five tutti passages of only a few bars, while the three solo voices take the main role in the musical act. The parts of the three solo voices and the response of the chorus can be called responsorial style<sup>5</sup>.

In these solo sections, the ternary meter dominates, melodic lines are always treated imitatively.

E.g. 1

The musical score for Claudio Monteverdi's *Confitebor Primo* (measures 1-4) is presented in a multi-staff format. It includes three vocal staves (Soprano, Alto, and Tenor) and four instrumental staves (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Bass). The vocal parts enter with the text "Confitebor tibi Do..." and are followed by a tutti section where the instrumental parts play a rhythmic pattern.

### Claudio Monteverdi – *Confitebor Primo* (m. 1-4)

<sup>5</sup> Alternation solo and tutti



Since it was not intended for obbligato instruments, the addition concertato<sup>6</sup> is missing from the title; however, the instrumental doubling of the *ripieno* may serve to enhance its effect. In the *ripieno* sections the composer uses the imitative technique of voices, and the tutti parts are written homophonically.

In measure 59 we find within the ternary meter an alternation of binary meter sections, which is a common practice in the early baroque era to suggest the widening and acceleration of musical discourse.

According to the text we can distinguish 5 sections:

**Table 1**

<b><i>Confitebor primo from Selva morale e spirituale</i></b>			
<b>Section</b>	<b>Measure/Meter</b>	<b>Text</b>	<b>Distribution/Texture</b>
I – imitation and homophony	ternary	Confitebor tibi, Domine	SII, TI, BI Solo
	binary	Magna opera Domini	SSAATTBB tutti
II – imitation homophony	ternary/binary	Confesio	SII, TI, BI Solo
	binary	Ut det illis	SSAATTBB tutti
III– imitation homophony	ternary/ binary	Fidelia	SII, TI, BI solo
	binary	Sanctum et terribile	SSAATTBB tutti
IV–imitation	binary/ternary	Initium sapientiae timor Domini	SII, TI, BI solo
	binary	Gloria Patri	SSAATTBB tutti
V– imitation, sequence	ternary	Semper gloria	SII, TI, BI solo
	binary	Semper gloria	SSAATTBB tutti

**5 sections of *Confitebor Primo***

<sup>6</sup> One or more solo instruments facing each other, answering to the tutti, with basso continuo. Its origins date back to the Baroque period, but with minor modifications it is still existence today.

In the first and last sections of the solo part we can identify an identical pattern, after the imitation of the solo voices, they lead into the choir entrance through homophonic writing.

Of the three versions of *Confitebor*, Primo is the longest and requires more singers/voices and continuo. The virtuosity and imitation of the soloists, gives the text its flow and expressiveness. The continuo accompaniment is present throughout the piece, bringing an ample and complex harmonization.

## **2. *Confitebor Secondo***

*Confitebor Secondo à 3 voci concertato con due Violini (Second Confitebor for three voices, concertant with two violins)*

The second version of the psalm 111, *Confitebor tibi, Domine* is arranged in six sections. This piece is sung by soloists and omits the choir, but adds obbligato and continuo instruments.

It is written in D and begins with the soprano voice with two verses of psalm, then the tenor with varied musical material from the soprano variation, with identical basso continuo. After the soprano and tenor solo parts, the bass takes over the theme, singing three verses from the psalm, again to the same basso continuo. In this section, Monteverdi inserts recitative parts, going beyond the rules of the Renaissance. The next three psalm verses are sung by three soloists together first imitatively and then with a homophonic texture.

We can notice a stop and change of tempo at *Sanctum*. This insertion represents Monteverdi's conception of the expressiveness of the word *Sanctum*.

**E.g. 3**

161

Tutti

men - tum su - um. San - ctum et ter - ri - bile, ter - ri - bi - le,

Tutti

men - tum su - um. San - ctum et ter - ri - bile, ter - ri - bi - le,

Tutti

men - tum su - um. San - ctum et ter - ri - bile, ter - ri - bi - le

Tutti

**Claudio Monteverdi – Confitebor secondo (m. 161-171)**

The beginning of the doxology is written in tutti block form, the only time the violinists and soloists sing together, suggesting the glorification of the holy trinity.

**E.g. 4**

8

215

Tutti

sae-cu-lum sae - cu - li. Glo - ri - a Pa - tri et Fi - li - o et Spi - ri -

Tutti

sae-cu-lum sae - cu - li. Glo - ri - a Pa - tri et Fi - li - o et Spi - ri -

Tutti

sae-cu-lum sae - cu - li. Glo - ri - a Pa - tri et Fi - li - o et Spi - ri -

Tutti

**Claudio Monteverdi – Confitebor Secondo (m. 215-224)**

At measure 233 the tutti texture ends and starting with tenor the polyphonic imitation continues until the final cadence (IVb-I.)

The presence of the violin is reminiscent of an instrumental imitation, a dialogue between soloists and violins. In the last section the instrumental movement will become identical to the vocal one (isorhythmic). In each stanza we can observe the alternation of ternary to binary meter. By the presence of the binary meter we can observe a change of tempo, a widening, and the return to the binary meter represents the resumption of tempo.

**Table 2**

<b><i>Confitebor secondo from Selva morale e Spirituale</i></b>			
<b>Section</b>	<b>Measure/Meter</b>	<b>Text</b>	<b>Distribution/Texture</b>
I - solo	ternary	Confitebor tibi, Domine	sopran + 2 violin and continuo
II - solo	ternary	Confesio	tenor + 2 violin and continuo
III - solo	ternary	Memor, memor erit	bas +2 violin and continuo
IV - polyphonical imitation, last 4 measures homophonically	ternary	Fidelia	STB + violin and continuo
V - tutti homophonic	binary/ternary	Sanctum	STB + violin and continuo
VI - homophonic	binary/ternary	Doxologia Gloria Patri	STB + violin and continuo

### **6 sections of *Confitebor Secondo***

### **3. *Confitebor Terzo***

*Confitebor Terzo Alla Francese à 5 voci qual si può concertare si piacerá con Quattro viuole da braccio lasciando la parte del Soprano alla voce sola*

(Third *Confitebor* in French style in 5 voices, which can be performed with 4 concert violas da braccio, singing only the soprano solo part)

The third version of Psalm 111, *Confitebor tibi, Domine* is an adaptable work that can be performed by either a single soloist or five singers in the traditional madrigal style. Although the score is marked *Alla Francese*<sup>7</sup> (in

<sup>7</sup> According to Giulio Cesare Monteverdi (1607), Claudio Monteverdi was the first who introduced this *Alla Francese* mode into the Italian musical compositions.

the French manner<sup>8</sup>), the French character of the music is unclear: the indication could refer either to a declamatory, forward style or to a structure alternating solo and tutti passages. This style can also be called *stile concitato*<sup>9</sup> through affectation and virtuosity Monteverdi emphasizes the meaning of the text.

If we look at the score we can see a relationship between the script and the emotional affect<sup>10</sup>: the ternary measure represents *stile temperato*, and the binary measures express *stile concitato* and *molle*.<sup>11</sup>

The piece is written in C, and is divided into 11 sections corresponding to the verses of the psalm:

**Table 3**

<b><i>Confitebor terzo from Selva morale e Spirituale</i></b>				
<b>Section</b>	<b>Measure/ Meter</b>	<b>Text</b>	<b>Distribution/ Texture</b>	<b>Affection</b>
I - Main theme	Binary	Confitebor tibi, Domine	Solo+ tutti	Molle
II – seconde theme	Binary	Magna opera / Confesio	Duet + tutti	Temperato
III	Ternary	Memoriam	tutti	Temperato
IV –Seconde theme	Binary	Escam dedit	tutti	Molle
V	Ternary	Fidelia	tutti	Temperato
VI	Binary	Facta in veritate	tutti	Temperato
VII	Binary	Sanctum	tutti	Temperato
VIII	Ternary	Laudatio	tutti	Temperato
IX	Binary	Doxology Gloria	solo	Molle +concitato
X – Main theme	Binary	Sicut erat	solo + tutti	Molle
XI- Final cadence	Binary	Amen	tutti	Temperato

**11 sections of *Confitebor Terzo* with affections**

<sup>8</sup> What exactly the term *Alla Francese* refers to is not known. Monteverdi's French style pieces are characterized by alternating solos and tutti, and by singing where the syllables of the text are arranged in pairs of notes.

<sup>9</sup> Animated, agitated, energetic style, it is present in the Madrigale guerrieri et amorosi (8th volume)

<sup>10</sup> Monteverdi's musical mindset is defined by three basic emotional affects: anger in the *concitato* style, soft emotion in the *molle* style, and humility and modesty in the *temperato* style.

<sup>11</sup> Roberts, Kimberly Ann, *The selected sacred solo vocal motets of Claudio Monteverdi including Confitebor tibi, Domine* Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, 2007, pp. 17

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The first section starts with the first theme, sung by the soprano solo, and the chorus repeats the theme with homophonic writing. Throughout the piece the binary meter predominates, and in some verses (*Memoriam, Fidelio, Laudatio*) Monteverdi changes the binary meter to ternary to indicate a slower, more delicate tempo, which represents the expressiveness of the quoted text.

E.g. 5

**Claudio Monteverdi – Confitebor Terzo (m. 31-38)**

In the *Confitebor*'s interpretation, the *alla francese* style yields to the segment *Sanctum et terribile nomen eius* (verse 9), the speed and expressiveness of the sixteenth's values reminds us of Monteverdi's Tankred and Clorinda's<sup>12</sup> combative style. The words *Sanctum* are written

<sup>12</sup> Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda of 1624

with long note values, suggesting a halt in the musical act, but is followed with a passage of sixteenth notes on the word *et terribile* suggesting a stirring.

## E.g. 6

**Claudio Monteverdi – Confitebor Terzo (m. 84-96)**

The most virtuosic section is the beginning of the doxology – before the return of the theme – sung by solo soprano. This passage contains rhythmic and ornamental challenges. As far as vocal technique is concerned these challenges occur on the vowels *ah* and *oh* so can be easily achieved. In the section of *Sicut erat in principio et nunc et semper*, the main theme returns, also sung by the soprano, and the chorus repeats with homophonic texture until the final cadence (V – I), *Amen*.

## Conclusion

We can observe in each piece the alternation of binary and ternary measures at the end of each section, these alternations have a widening and accelerating role in the development of the musical act.

Another similarity between the three versions is the treatment of the text “*Sanctum, et terribile*”. In the *Primo* version the text is sung with the tutti choir in binary meter, and the soloist anticipate with the word *Sancto*. In *Secondo* the word *Sancto* is written with long note values and represents *the* stop and the meaning of the word, and *et terribile* indicates the resumption of the original tempo. In *Terzo* is also written in binary meter, with long note values, *et terribile* with shorter and faster values, brings the feeling of setting and widening.

**Table 4**

	<b>Confitebor Primo</b>	<b>Confitebor Secondo</b>	<b>Confitebor Terzo</b>
Distribution	Ripieno: SST Capella:AATBB Continuo	STB  Violino I-II Continuo	SSATB SSATB Continuo
Indicațion	Ripieni	Concertato	Alla Francese
Duration	8 min	6 min	7 min
Meter	Ternary/Binary	Ternary/Binary	Binary/Ternary
Tonality	G	D	C

### Summary of the three versions of *Confitebor tibi, Domini*

The three pieces *Confitebor tibi, Domine* din *Selva morale e spiritualea* were considered modern pieces in Monteverdi’s time, because he introduces in sacred music, at the same time and in the church the accompanied monody (soloist) with elements of virtuosity, elegant and expressive melodies. It is very interesting the indications on which the pieces are titled: *Ripieno*, *Concertato*, *Alla Francese*, by these words are indicated the way how the pieces should be performed.

In Monteverdi’s pieces the instruments and the basso continuo take an important part in the development of the musical act. Through these novelties he leads musical art towards a new performance, towards the Baroque era.

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