

About the Harpsichord

Many of you may have noticed that a large piece of red and gilded furniture arrived in the sanctuary about two weeks ago. This is a harpsichord, the principal keyboard instrument (along with the organ) of the Baroque period. This instrument was patterned by Frank Hubbard, who along with William Dowd may be considered the most important figure in the rebirth of interest in the harpsichord in America, and a strong member of the early music movement. Among other historical models, including Italian, Flemish, and German harpsichords, clavichords, and a Viennese fortepiano, he developed a harpsichord based on an instrument made in 1769 by the French maker Taskin, having measured and studied several originals throughout Europe. Hubbard harpsichords continues to make instruments and kits of very high quality. The Boston Symphony owns and frequently uses a harpsichord made by the Hubbard shop, and there are literally hundreds of recordings made on their instruments.

The Taskin-model harpsichord has come to be called the "French Double," is the most versatile of the various patterns, and is appropriate for most any baroque music and a fair amount of modern music written for the instrument. Much like an organ, the two keyboards are called manuals and the three sets of strings (which are plucked with feather-like quills) are referred to as "eight foot" and "four foot" pitch. Each manual has an 8' set of strings; the lower has a 4' as well. The two manuals can be coupled to sound together, and the sets of strings can be turned on and off with hand stops. In addition, the lower manual's strings can be muted by felt to produce a sound much like a lute. This is called a *buff* stop.

This particular instrument was originally sold as a kit and assembled in 1976 by Christopher Queen in Southborough. In 2006, it returned to the Hubbard shop in Framingham where it was restored for me by Hendrik Broekman, Frank Hubbard's apprentice and successor.

Thomas Dawkins, *organist/choir director*

Music Notes

Prelude and Offertory: J.S. Bach: Concerto in D, BWV 972,
after Vivaldi, RV 230

Music: Antonio Vivaldi: *Gloria* in D, RV 589

- I. Gloria in excelsis Deo
- II. Et in terra pax hominibus
- III. Laudamus te (*soprano I/soprano II*)
- IV. Gratias agimus tibi
- V. Propter magnam gloriam tuam
- VI. Domine Deus, Rex Cælestis (*soprano I*)
- VII. Domine Fili unigenite
- VIII. Domine Deus, Agnus Dei (*alto/chorus*)
- IX. Qui tollis peccata mundi
- X. Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris (*alto*)
- XI. Quoniam tu solus sanctus
- XII. Cum sancto spiritu

Alice von Loesecke, *soprano I*
Sharon Schmidt, *soprano II*
Melissa Marteney, *alto*

Steve Keville, *trumpet*
Nancy Burdine, *oboe*
Sue Stone, *violin I*
Sarah Collins, *violin II*
Bruce Kinmonth, *viola*
Carol Steele, *violoncello*

Antonio Vivaldi was born in Venice in 1678 and died in Vienna in 1741. In 1703, he was ordained to the Church, and owing to a family trait of red hair was nicknamed *Il Prete Rosso* (The Red Priest). In 1704, he began to work as an instrumental teacher and composer at the *Ospedale della Pietà*, a convent, orphanage, and music school for girls. In 1713, the chorus master, Francesco Gasparini, had to leave due to poor health and Vivaldi took over the position. Over the next six years, he composed most of his 75 sacred works, including four oratorios.

The *Gloria* is set for mixed choir and string orchestra with oboe and trumpet. At the time, some women were trained to sing tenor and even baritone range since men were not allowed to sing in the same choir as women. The first performances would have to have been slightly

modified so that the bass part was within reach of the lower women's voices. As far as the possibility of using male singers, at the *Ospedale* the segregation of the sexes was taken one step further than in an ordinary church and the choir was hidden from the view of the audience by a screen; the records show that while male babies were accepted at the orphanage, they were all sent to other institutions at a very young age, so there would have been no male singers nor players. The solo parts are for younger women, two sopranos and an alto.

Because the text to the opening movements *Gloria in excelsis Deo, et in terra pax hominibus bonæ voluntatis* (Glory to God in the highest, and on Earth peace, good will towards men) is from Luke 2:14, the angels' announcement of the Nativity, the piece is frequently performed at Christmas. The remaining text was written in Greek in the second century for the Orthodox tradition and translated into Latin by St. Hilary of Poitiers while in exile around 356. It was introduced into the ordinary of the Catholic Mass in the fifth century and is also called the Great Doxology when it is recited separately.

The *Gloria* is in twelve movements. The outer movements have the largest orchestra, with trumpet and oboe, while most of the inner movements have just the strings and keyboard. The center aria for soprano is accompanied by the keyboard and oboe alone, though Vivaldi specifies that a solo violin can be used instead. As in much Baroque music, the keyboard and bass instrument play throughout. The chords played by the keyboardist in this piece are not written out — rather they are in a shorthand of the period called "figured bass," which is a system of numbers and symbols that shows which chords should be played above a given bass line — leaving the precise execution of these chords to the performer's discretion. The modern equivalent of this is the jazz "lead sheet" where the melody is written out but the chords are indicated by their names printed above the line. The practice of having a bass instrument (usually 'cello and bass, sometimes bassoon) and an instrument capable of playing chords (a keyboard such as harpsichord or organ, but sometimes harp or lute) provide the framework of the piece is called *basso continuo*.

Musicologists have discovered in recent years that the final movement *Cum sancto spiritu* is not by Vivaldi, rather it is an adaptation by Vivaldi of a work by Giovanni Maria Ruggieri, a Venetian composer who wrote a

Gloria in 1708. This kind of musical borrowing was extremely common in the Renaissance and Baroque eras and should not be considered a weakness of the composer; Handel was known to have borrowed a great deal from others as well as from his own works. Many composers like Vivaldi had to work on several pieces at a time, often at great speed, and if ideas did not come in sufficient time, going elsewhere for inspiration was not at all frowned upon; if Ruggieri knew that Vivaldi adapted one of his works, he would likely have been very flattered rather than insulted. Continuing the tradition of borrowing and arranging, J.S. Bach adapted several of Vivaldi's string concerti for keyboard; I will play one in D Major for today's prelude and offertory.

*Gloria in excelsis Deo
et in terra pax hominibus
bonæ voluntatis.*

Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to men
of good will.

*Laudamus te, benedicimus te,
adoramus te, glorificamus te,
gratias agimus tibi
propter magnam gloriam tuam.
Domine Deus, Rex cælestis,
Deus Pater omnipotens.*

We praise You, we bless You,
we adore You, we glorify You,
we give You thanks
for Your great glory.
Lord God, heavenly King,
God, the Father Almighty.

*Domine Fili unigenite,
Jesu Christe, Domine Deus,
Agnus Dei, Filius Patris,
qui tollis peccata mundi,
miserere nobis;
qui tollis peccata mundi,
suscipe deprecationem nostram;
Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris,

miserere nobis.*

Only begotten Son of God,
Jesus Christ, Lord God,
Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
who takes away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us;
who takes away the sin of the world,
receive our prayer;
Who sits at the right hand
[of the Father,
have mercy on us.

*Quoniam tu solus Sanctus,
tu solus Dominus, tu solus
Altissimus, Jesu Christe,
cum Sancto Spiritu
in gloria Dei Patris.
Amen.*

For You alone are the Holy One,
You alone are the Lord, You alone
Jesus Christ, are the Most High,
together with the Holy Spirit
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.