

Schütz *The Christmas Story*
[WEIHNACHTS-HISTORIE] SWV 435
(Novello edition ed. N. Jenkins)

HISTORY

Schütz composed this work towards the end of a long and full life, during which he brought the musical style of Giovanni Gabrieli and other influential Italian composers northwards to the Protestant Courts of Kassel, Dresden and Copenhagen. It was probably first performed on Christmas Day 1660, when he was 75 years of age, at the Elector of Saxony's Court Chapel in Dresden. Four years later the Recitative sections were published without the 8 Intermedia or the Opening and Closing choruses. These were advertised as being available on hire. It was also suggested that an alternative plan could be for performers to interpolate their own motets: *"Moreover he leaves those who may wish to use his music for the Evangelist to adapt these ten concerted pieces (of which the texts are included in these printed copies) to their pleasure and the musical forces at their disposal; or even to have them composed by someone else."*

(Schütz's Notice to the reader, 1664)

This edition is based on the 1664 Recitatives and the UPSALA MSS, which in the absence of other sources have been taken as the Urtext, and are used by the other 20th-century published editions, viz: Eulenberg (1935) edited by Fritz Stein; Schirmer (1949) edited by Arthur Mendel; and Bärenreiter (1955) edited by Friedrich Schöneich. All of these acknowledge the work of :

a) Julius Spitta, who first published the Recitatives (first appearing in print with Schütz's approval in 1664) in his *Sämtliche Werke* Volume IX (Leipzig, 1885-94) ;

b) Arnold Schering, who discovered the instrumental and vocal parts (but no score) for the whole work in a set of MSS in the University Library of Upsala, Sweden in 1908, and who published them in Volume XVII of the Schütz complete works.

The history of this work is further complicated by the discovery of some incomplete variant texts (the Berliner Fassung) by Max Schneider. He described these in 1933 as representing a later stage of composition (c.1671) and showing examples of Schütz's own revisions. This edition indicates where Recitatives were occasionally shortened at cadences in this version. One important piece of material gain from this discovery was 15 bars of the second trombone part in Intermedium 5. The rest of this part has been reconstructed by the present Editor, and differs slightly from the reconstructions of both Schöneich and Mendel. The only extant music for the Opening Chorus is the figured-bass part (which also shows in which bar the voices enter.) In this edition the Editor has been fortunate to be able to include the reconstruction made by Andrew Parrott for the Taverner Consort, Choir and Players, and which they have recorded on the *Veritas*

label. Unlike the reconstruction by Schöneich, which is used in both Eulenberg and Bärenreiter and contains 2 viola parts doubling the 2 trombones, this is more economically scored for 2 violins, 1 viola and Bass instruments (including 1 bassoon.) Thus there is no need for a second viola, since only one is required by the Upsala parts.

EDITORIAL PROCEDURE

KEY

The editor has chosen to follow Arthur Mendel by transposing the work up from the original F major into the more practical G major. Fritz Stein also points out in the foreword to his Urtext edition that "*the low notation of the vocal parts allows us to assume that the choral pitch of the 17th century was considerably higher than it is in our day, and therefore it appears to be historically justifiable to transpose the whole work up by one tone.*" The benefits, which were as true in 1935 as in the late 1990's, are that the resultant tessituras are eminently more practical for today's singers. In Intermedium 5 the low Ds for the Basses in bar 20 now become a slightly more manageable E. In the original key the movements for Altos and Tenors (Intermedia 3 & 4) really require 2 Altos and 1 Tenor, and 2 Tenors and 1 Baritone to sound comfortable at that pitch. In the higher key I feel confident that there will be an Alto in Intermedium 3 with a good bottom G; whilst Intermedium 4 will require the lowest tenor to go down to a manageable bottom D. The soprano soloist (The Angel) will need a high A rather than a G, but will find that this occurs at moments of special climax.

Another gain from this transposition is that the 2 *Violetti* can be played by the 2 violins, since the part is now within their compass. There has been much discussion about Schütz's intentions in writing for the *Violetta*. Praetorius, Schütz's older contemporary, uses the word in 1619 to imply either violin or descant viol. By the end of the century the same term meant a lower pitched instrument playing a middle part, such as a viola or small viola da Gamba. Andrew Parrott uses Tenor Viols on his *Veritas* label recording. In his programme note he explains that viols have a frequent association with celestial music in the Baroque period. As a practicality, however, many performers will doubtless be happy to employ the 2 violins that are required elsewhere in this work when appropriate viols (whether Tenor or Treble) are hard to come by. The editor suggests that a suitable compromise can be achieved by using *muted* violins in these movements.

EDITORIAL MARKINGS

The existing parts of the Concerted numbers contain very few tempo indications. The terms *Presto* and *Adagio* occurring in the 3 Intermedia for the Angel must surely imply something rather different to their normal 20th-century tempo markings. The Editor suggests that the performer should infer *Piu Mosso* from the term *Presto*, and *Meno Mosso* from the term *Adagio*.

All editorial markings (e.g. tempi, dynamics, & extra figures for the figured-bass) are given within curved brackets. Some skeletal decoration for the Evangelist has been included in cue-size notation at major cadences. Performers should feel free to use this or other "period" decorations of their own.

The English text has been placed on top of the original German, but only essential (and very minor) modifications have been made to the original underlay of the syllables. The editor has endeavoured to retain as much of the Authorised Text of the Gospels of St. Matthew and St Luke as possible.

FIGURED BASS

The figured bass has been realised in an economical way. Although given entirely in long notes, there is evidence that the continuo players of the day did not play in a seamless stream of sound, but were in a position to abbreviate some chords. By the time of Bach's *St Matthew Passion* (1729 & 1736) we find the notation in the autograph score differing from that of the parts; the inference being that a convention existed for indicating chord-changes by filling the bars with minims and semibreves, and tying them over until the next change of chord. In performance practice the players would be more flexible about playing long or short chords. In addition, there is scope at several cadences for the keyboard part to be elaborated. Schütz himself observed in his *Resurrection Story* (1623) that occasional "*leuffe oder passaggi*" (runs or passage-work) were an essential ingredient of the keyboard accompaniment to this style of recitative. The editor has filled out the right hand of such passages, but these are by no means definitive. He has also indicated where long notes may be shortened; but, by retaining the original notation in cue-size notes, allows the performers to make their own choices.

INSTRUMENTATION

The 2 *violetti* have been discussed above. The other instruments required are 2 *violins*, 1 *viola* (see the paragraph entitled HISTORY above for the reason that two are no longer needed), 1 cello or *viola da gamba*, 2 flutes or *recorders*, 1 *bassoon*, 2 clarini (trumpets) or *cornetts*, 2 high trombones or *sackbuts*, and *organ*. An "original-instrument" performance would require all of the instruments in italics. To this list could be added some optional continuo instruments : *violone* and *theorbo* are mentioned in the 1664 edition and in the Upsala parts as alternative or additional components to the Continuo section. A *violone* or Double-bass could be of assistance on the bass line of the opening and closing movements, as well as in Intermedia 2 & 5 (and 3a if played). A *theorbo*, though not essential, could be used in performances where Tenor or Treble viols have been chosen for Intermedia 1, 7 & 8, since the Upsala MSS of Intermedium 1 includes a figured bass marked "*Theorba*" in addition to the ones for organ. So, it is possible to conjecture that one instrument accompanied the quiet rocking motif in 3/2 rhythm, and the other accompanied the faster 4/4 section. By inference, this could also be applied to Intermedia 7 & 8.

CONCLUSION

The Upsala parts are full of curious anomalies and mistakes: it has been suggested that they were compiled for a particular performance, and therefore do not necessarily represent Schütz's actual part-writing. There are 6 instrumental lines plus continuo in the closing chorus, while the original caption indicates "*cum 4 instrumentis*", and the list published in the original Evangelist's part mentions "*5 Instrumental Stimmen*." Mendel suggests that these extant parts reveal an anonymous Capellmeister taking up Schütz's invitation to suit the orchestra to the occasion, and making rather a hash of the 2 trombone parts in particular. Until a better and more complete set of parts emerges (as the

Berlin Fassung did) we will have to make do with these, with their parallel 5ths and octaves, their lacunae and their curious doublings..... Following up on Schütz's very liberal suggestion, quoted above, the Editor has taken the opportunity of introducing a further Intermedium (Intermedium 3a, movement 8a) in order to give the sopranos a moment of their own. Not wishing to introduce a non-Biblical text, he has chosen the 4-part *Alleluia* from the *Kleine Geistliche Konzerte* SWV 328 (originally for 2 sopranos and 2 tenors). It is introduced into the narrative at the conclusion of the Nativity sequence and prior to the Presentation in the Temple. However, it may be easily omitted by passing from the last bar of movement 8 to the first bar of 8b.

Finally, where there are differences between the 3 published sources mentioned earlier, I have indicated these variations within the music, in case this edition should ever be used in conjunction with others.

Neil Jenkins, Hove, 1997