Ein Feste Burg

‘A Mighty Fortress is Our God’

Movements 1 (Chorale Fantasia), 2 (Aria & Chorale) & 8 (Closing Chorale)

J. S. Bach 1723



Points of interest:

* The reformation in Germany
* The Lutheran Tradition
* The teachings of Martin Luther
* Renaissance Polyphony
* The development of the German Mass
* The sacred musical cycle

**Most commonly used time signatures**

**4/4 - 4 crotchet beats in a bar.**

**3/4 - 3 crotchet beats in a bar.**

**2/4 - 2 crotchet beats in a bar.**

**6/8 – 6 quaver beats in a bar.**

Vocal Music

Set Work 1

**Harmony & Tonality**

* The harmony is functional throughout

(based around D major).

* Diatonic harmony is used.
* Modulations are made to related keys (Via perfect cadences).
* Most chords appear in root position or first inversion.
* Dominant 7th chords are used to spice up the harmony.
* Suspensions are used to blur the harmony.

**Melody**

* Melodic ideas are based around the Cantus Firmus (original hymn melody)
* Four part vocal lines are doubled by instrumentalists.
* The melody is developed through imitation.
* Melisma is used on important words.
* The closing cantata is syllabic in setting.
* Virtuosic vocal lines feature.
* Melody lines are treated heterophonically when doubled on instruments.
* Melodic lines are mainly conjunct.

**Structure**

* Ein Feste Burg is in 8 movements based upon the structure of the Mass.
* Movement 1: Chorale Through- Composed following a fugal structure.
* Movement 2: In two sections – Aria and Chorale.
* Movement 8: Strophic form, following the verses of the hymn tune.
* All movements are based around the original Cantus Firmus.

**Social & Historical Context**

**Sonority**

**Texture**

**Rhythm, Metre & Tempo**

* J.S. Bach was cantor at the Thomaskirke in Leipzig.
* The music is based on the Lutheran Mass and contains only a Kyrie and Gloria.
* Music was composed for each week of the liturgical calendar.
* Professional musicians were hired from the University of Leipzig.
* Solo singers were also professional and were needed due to the complexity of the music.
* The text was sung in German.
* The instrumental resources used include: flutes, oboes, bassoons, trumpets, timpani & continuo (harpsichord) & strings.
* Voices are doubled by instrumentalists.
* Timpani are used to punctuate cadence points.
* Brass instruments are used as a special feature often to represent the glory of God.
* The double bass doubles the continuo line.
* Virtuosic vocal lines cover a wide tessitura.
* In the first two movements the setting is contrapuntal (polyphonic)
* The final movement is homophonic.
* Instruments double the voices, often creating a heterophonic texture.
* Imitation is used to develop melodic lines.
* 2 & 3 part textures are used in movements 1 & 2.
* Fugue and counterpoint are used throughout the first two movements.
* Pedal notes are common.
* Each movement is in simple quadruple time (4/2 movement 1 and 4/4 movements 2 & 8).
* Simple rhythms are used (mainly crotchets and quavers), although dotted rhythms create interest.
* Semiquavers are used in the virtuosic passages.
* Musical flourishes are created by the use of demi-semiquavers.
* Syncopation is used to add rhythmic interest.
* An anacrusis is used in Movement 8.

Wider listening: Perotin *– Viderunt Omnes,* Lassus – *Lagrime Di San Pietro,* Buxtehude – *Chorale Preludes,* Handel – *The Messiah*.