Evening Service in D minor "For Four Means"

William Child (1606-97)

Scoring
Verses ~ 4 Means (4 upper voices)
Chorus ~ MMCtTB (SSATB)
Organ

Edited by Geoffrey Webber (2021)

Evening Service for 4 Means

William Child ed. Geoffrey Webber



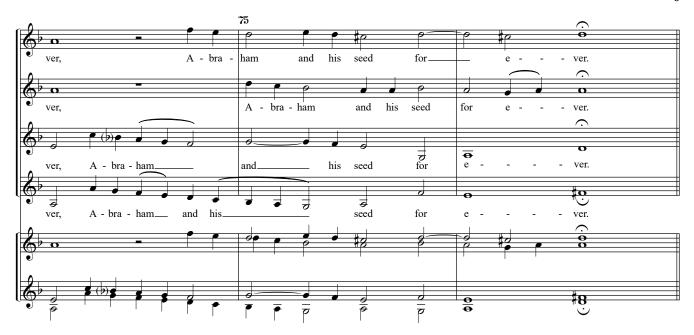


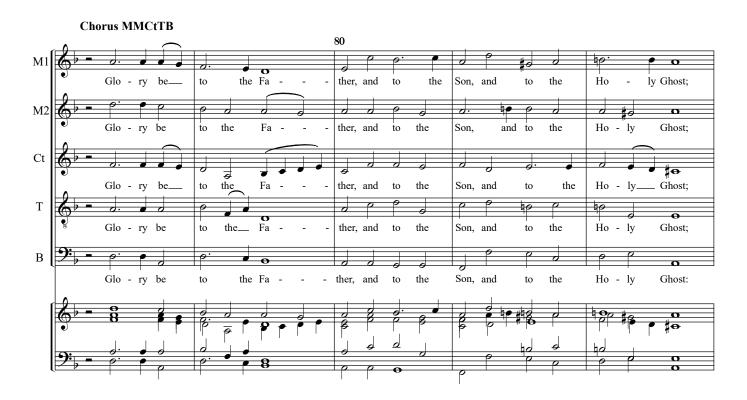
















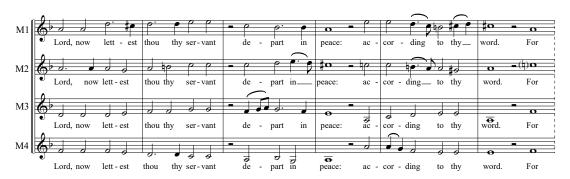








Opening of the Nunc dimittis in Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS 117:



Evening Service for Four Means, William Child

William Child wrote many service settings during his long tenure as Master of the Choristers at St George's Chapel, Windsor during the seventeenth century. Several appear to have been composed during the first decade after the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660, including his Service "for four means". Child had a notably creative attitude towards vocal scoring. His output also includes an eight-part Communion Service and an anthem for 3 bass soloists, *The earth is the Lord's*, but his most celebrated novelty is the Service for four means. The term 'mean', in Latin 'medius', referred to the top part of the regular choral texture, sung by boys. However, the vocal ranges of the four parts composed by Child are in reality two at the normal mean pitch, and two in the countertenor range, i.e. the part normally sung by men. The verses could thus be performed by two means and two countertenors, so why Child chose to label them as four means remains something of a mystery, though the title seems to imply that for this piece only, two boys with low ranges, or perhaps changing voices, were unusually called upon to sing in the countertenor range.

Only one complete source of the vocal parts survives, located in the extensive collection MS 117 in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, copied at St George's Chapel, Windsor mostly before 1683, and which contains a total of 12 service settings by Child. In addition there is an organ score of the work amongst the manuscripts at neighbouring Eton College, and a few individual parts survive amongst partbooks at the Cathedrals of Gloucester and Worcester, all dating from the late seventeenth or early eighteenth centuries. Although the Fitzwilliam source has no organ part, rests are indicated at the start of the Magnificat before the voices begin. However, the Eton organ part (MS 299/i) contains a short introduction for both the Magnificat and Nunc dimittis, written as a bass line with figures. At the start of the Nunc dimittis the Fitzwilliam reading opens in duple time, whereas the Eton organ part as well as the Gloucester parts (MSS 106-7, dating from c.1675) begin in triple time, though with very similar notes. One possible interpretation of this is that the start of the Nunc dimittis was originally composed in triple time, so that the Magnificat and Nunc dimittis began in the same manner as was typical in many service settings of the period, but that a later performance tradition arose (though still within Child's lifetime) of beginning the Nunc dimittis with a slower minim pulse in duple time (conforming to the normal sesquialtera proportional relationship), leading to a greater amount of melodic decoration. Both openings are given in this edition, so performers can choose which one to adopt. (If the Fitzwilliam reading is followed, the organ introduction should be omitted, or an alternative in duple time provided.) There is also another section of the piece which survives in both duple and triple versions: in the passage 'He remembering his mercy...' the Fitzwilliam score maintains the duple time signature through from the previous chorus to 'as he promised', despite the natural grouping of the music being in three at the opening of the verse section. The Eton score again chooses triple time at this point, moving back to duple time for 'as he promised' where the natural grouping reverts to duple patterns.

This edition is inevitably based mainly on the vocally complete Fitzwilliam source, but incorporates the organ introductions and all the triple-time sections as found in the Eton organ book. The vocal parts in bars 62-8 and at the start of the Nunc dimittis (bars 95-103) are thus conjectural based on the skeleton organ part in the Eton source as well as the Fitzwilliam source. The organ parts following the introductions are editorial reductions of the vocal parts. The slurring in the Fitzwilliam MS follows the placement of syllables, and has been completed editorially without comment. Proportional tempo relationships have been suggested between the duple (cut-C) and triple (cut-C3) sections, though the inconsistent notation between the sources in this respect casts some doubt on this interpretation. Editorial accidentals are shown in brackets.

Thanks are due to Keri Dexter for allowing me to consult his transcriptions of the Eton and Gloucester sources. For more information on music at St George's Chapel, Windsor, and Eton College in this period see Keri Dexter, *A Good Quire of Voices. The Provision of Choral Music at St. George's Chapel, Windsor Castle and Eton College, c.1640-1733* (Ashgate, 2002), and on performance practice, see *The Restoration Anthem*, 2 vols, ed. Keri Dexter and Geoffrey Webber (Church Music Society / OUP, 2003 & 2006).

Commentary

Bar 21 M1 minim+minim rest. Bars 23-4 M3 & M4 stop at end of bar 23 (text: 'henceforth'); this version follows the implication of the organ bass note in the Eton source at the start of b. 24. Bar 33 M1 # from Eton. Bar 40 'Slow' in Eton source.

Geoffrey Webber Cambridge, January 2021