Jeremy Little

jclittle23@gmail.com

**Sicut Locutus Est – from “Magnificat”**

**by J.S. Bach (1685-1750)**

The [Magnificat](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magnificat) in D major, BWV 243, is a major vocal work of Johann Sebastian Bach. It was composed for orchestra, a five-part choir and four or five soloists. The text is the canticle of Mary, mother of Jesus, as told by Luke the Evangelist.

Bach composed an initial version in E flat major in 1723 for Christmas Vespers in Leipzig. He later removed the Christmas-specific texts to make it suitable for year-round performance, as well as transposing it to D major, providing better sonority for the trumpets in particular. The new version, which is the one usually performed, had its premiere at the [Thomaskirche](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._Thomas_Church,_Leipzig) on July 2, 1733, the fourth Sunday after Trinity Sunday, which was the Feast of the Visitation at the time. The Feast was later moved to the end of May.

The work is divided into twelve parts which can be grouped into three movements, each beginning with an aria and completed by the choir in a fugal chorus.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Latin**  Sicut locutus est ad patres nostros, Abraham et semini eius in saecula. | **English**  According to the promise He made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to His descendants forever. |

Take out the piece: Bach, Baroque, St. Luke, Biblical text, big contrast of steps & leaps, promise from God, layered entrances, counterpoint, antecedent/consequent phrases

**Elements of Music**

Rhythm

* Steady and consistent pulse throughout – gives a feeling of constancy and regularity
* Rhythms of theme are consistent throughout – no variation
* Cut time allows relatively simple rhythms to come alive
* Harmonic rhythm is relatively fast: mostly every beat (half note), but many times on the subdivision as well (quarter note) – breathes life into the work, the harmonies are usually familiar, but because they’re changing so fast, energy is created/sustained
* “B” section in m. 41-49, more extended harmonic rhythm changes on half note pulse

Melody

* 2 major statements (antecedent & consequent)
  + Profoundly simple combination of initial serpentine motion, followed by ever larger skips (begins in tonic, ends in dominant)
  + Octave leaps followed by florid stepwise passage resolving to the tonic (IV-V-I)
* Completely diatonic with the exception of the sharp 4 (fi) at end of first section
* Each new voice part enters with this pair of melodic statements, but in the following fashion:
  + Bass – in the tonic (starting on D)
  + Tenor- dominant (starting on A)
  + Alto – tonic
  + Soprano II – dominant
  + Soprano I – dominant
* The combination of large leaps within the diatonic key and stepwise florid motion give each part of the melody a joyful, exuberant feeling, propelling the energy forward toward the eventual resolution

Harmony

* After each voice part has presented its initial melody, the vocal material becomes harmonic and supports the melody
* Mostly alternates between tonic (D) and dominant (A) with standard Baroque chord progressions, generally always ending in some type of IV-V-I cadence
* The most prevalent departure is the V/V (E major chord) when harmonizing the melody beginning in the dominant, however there are occasional V7/IV chords mixed in as well
* At m. 37, the texture and harmony change leading into a sequence: V6 – I6 – V/V – V – V7/ii – ii6 – V6/vi – vi – V – IV – I64 – V – V/IV – V – I

Form

* “A” – m. 1-37 – each vocal part enters with 8 measure theme, layered from B to SI in precise 8 measure increments (m. 1-25) followed by the return of the theme in the alto (m. 25) tenor (m.29) and bass (m.33) with thicker counterpoint
* “B” – m. 37-53 – change to homophonic texture, expanding harmonic/melodic sequences combined with the return of initial melodic fragments; exuberant contrapuntal drive toward final cadence

Timbre

* Vocal ranges are comfortable for each voice part (limited to an octave and a fifth) and do not stay particularly high or low for long
* Vocal tone should be bright, forward, and full, with proper amounts of breath energy to give life to the melody and Latin text

Texture

* Because each voice part enters exactly 8 measures after the previous part, the texture slowly gets thicker, until all 5 voices are singing different melodic and harmonic material beginning at m. 21.
* This gradual thickening of the texture adds to the buildup of excitement and sense of drama: where is this taking us? Who is going to come in next?
* M. 25 the texture thins to 3 voices, then gradually adds voices again to m. 37 – a re-vamping of energy
* M. 37 – change Homophonic texture, then gradually breaks away into more contrapuntal lines, only to re-affirm the homophonic texture at m.49 to the end.

Expression

* The natural contours and leaps with the melodic line demand a rise and fall of dynamics as well
* All dynamic and expressive markings are editorial, however they are appropriate and should be followed
* There is an overall building of momentum toward the final conclusion

**Heart Statement**

The heart of *Sicut Locutus Est* lies in the layering of the regal, bounding melody and the driving harmonic rhythm which combine to express the joy and confidence in God’s promise to the Isrealites and to humanity.

**Introducing the Piece** – Pick the quote that speaks to you. Think/pair/share2,4, then get in groups and discuss how your life will be different after knowing this quote.

“All that is not eternal is eternally out of date.” C.S. Lewis

“[Eternity is really long, especially near the end](http://thinkexist.com/quotation/eternity_is_really_long-especially_near_the/168473.html).” Woody Allen

“[Forever is composed of nows.](http://thinkexist.com/quotation/forever_is_composed_of_nows/204447.html)” Emily Dickenson

**Skill Outcome**

Students will sing vocal leaps accurately by focusing on breath energy, placement, and advance audiation.

**Strategies**

1. Solfege Audiation game – sing a passage, then eliminate 1 or more notes, can you hear them in your head?
   1. Variations – sound on/off, purposely sing one note wrong
2. Imagery: oreo cookie space, pinwheel, column of air from lotto, ???more
3. Sight read other difficult melodies with leaps: Simple Song, Star Spangled Banner, Lonely Goatherd, There’s a Place for Us
4. Random leap warm ups - both up/down, in/out of sequence

**Assessments**

1. Passages on Digital Voice Recorders
2. Small group rehearsal, evaluate informally within section, ID places for improvement

**Cognitive Outcome**

Students will recognize and define the terms tonic and dominant, antecedent and consequent (consequence) and determine the role each of these terms play within their vocal line.

**Strategies**

1. Quick lesson – I chord and V chord, then ID in score
2. Listening to Mozart “Eine Kline Nachtmusick” and tally I and V chords
3. Compose a warmup using only members of the I and V (extra credit: different key)
4. Discuss the word ‘consequences’ – connotations, implications, how does this discussion inform your singing?

**Affective Outcome**

Students will explore the concept of timelessness (connection to the past, eternity, generations) and their identity or place in our day and age.

**Strategies**

1. Interview a family member about the kind of music they listened to in high school and determine 3 connections to your favorite song now
2. Journal—why is it important to “keep the old ways”
   1. Traditions in your family, from your heritage, customs from your parents/grandparents
   2. What value is in this?
   3. Food traditions at Christmas – tiger meat and oyster stew, watching National Lampoons and Christmas story
3. Ancient examples of cosmetics---more research!!!
   1. <http://itthing.com/8-ancient-inventions-we-still-use-today>
4. How does all of this relate to religious traditions?
5. What will conventions (songs, ideas, people) around now will be talked about in 2111?

**Antecedent/Consequent=Cause and effect**

Musical phrases usually are interrelated, and one such relationship is antecedent/consequent phrases. Antecedent/Consequent phrases always come in groups of two. The first phrase states a musical idea which the second one then resolves. These types of phrases often contain similar rhythmns or harmonies. One example is the famous Fur Elise by Beethoven. The first two phrases of this song are very similar with only minor adjustments. This is an excellent example of an antecedent/consequent phrase.   
  
Source: The New Harvard Musical Dictionary, 4th ed. Editor: Tom Randel Article: Antecedent, Consequence