Vivaldi *Gloria in D major RV 589*
SATB choir, SA soli, oboes, trumpets, strings, continuo

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741) is most famous for the many hundreds of concerti he wrote, including *The Four Seasons* and for his two *Gloria* settings, RV 588 and RV 589.

Vivaldi was employed at the Ospitale della Pieta in Venice, a home for female orphans and his duties there included teaching the violin and directing concerts. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Vivaldi was not required to write sacred choral music as part of his duties. However, prolific composer that he was, he produced many works of this nature though few are as regularly performed today as the *Gloria RV 589*.

It is believed that the Gloria settings come from a larger scale work which was used at festive masses and it was conceived as a liturgical setting rather than a concert work though it is generally heard in the concert hall rather than the church these days.

The Gloria text is straight from the Latin Mass. Rather than setting it as a single movement with either some sort of motivic development running through the setting or an underlying cantus firmus giving structural integrity, Vivaldi splits the text into 12 shorter movements.

These notes are a very basic introduction with some comment on each movement. Consider these points as you listen to (and sing) Vivaldi’s *Gloria*.

1  *Gloria in excelsis Deo*

Following a fanfare-like opening with trumpets and oboes flourishing with semiquavers, the choir sings exclusively in homophonic texture. Only four words are used - “Glory to God in the highest” - but these are expressed well with this bold opening.
Listen for the sequential repetition on “Gloria, Gloria, Gloria, Gloria” before a modulation to the relative minor, plus some snaking, chromatic movement. Word setting is mainly syllabic apart from one long melisma on “excelsis”.

2  

_Et in terra pax hominum, bonae voluntatis_

Starting in B minor, this movement is an achingly expressive setting of the words “and on earth peace, good will to men”. Interestingly the choral basses are not doubled by the cello and double bass all the time and have an independent part. Suspensions are used throughout as an expressive device, none more so than the naturalised supertonic (C natural) in the tenor’s first entry. Polyphony texture is used for much of the movement and Vivaldi varies the texture so that the four voice parts are used in a variety of ways eg overlapping of entries, pairing of voices etc. Also listen out for hemiola idea at cadence points. Word setting is mainly syllabic apart from the gorgeous melisma on the final “voluntatis”.
Laudamus te, bendicimus te, adoramus te, glorificamus te

This is a duet for two sopranos. In it the four statements, “We praise thee, we bless thee, we worship thee, we glorify thee” are given a wonderful setting. The two voices imitate each other and work in thirds. “Glorify thee” is given special treatment with a long melisma.

This movement is in a sort of ritornello form with the orchestra playing a recurring pattern in the various keys the singers reach during their episodes. Starting in G, the first section modulates to the dominant, moves to the relative minor and then to the subdominant before coming back to the tonic. It’s almost like a study in how to modulate to related keys! Listen for the beautifully prepared, suspended and resolved dissonances throughout, in both major and minor keys.
4  *Gratias agimus tibi*

Here we have 4 part harmony in homophonic texture and an example of a sort of choral recitative as an expression of the text “We give thanks to Thee”. The setting, in this sense is similar to that of Byrd. The sopranos ascend chromatically and some quite chromatic harmony is used. In E minor, it modulates to the dominant in 6 very short bars.

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5  *Propter magnam gloria*

Vivaldi splits the phrase “We give Thee thanks for Thy great glory” into two phrases and in this movement sets the words “For Thy great glory” as a fugue. In E minor, the sopranos have the subject and are answered with a tonal answer by the altos.

Tenors and basses imitate an octave lower. Once the exposition has finished the movement remains polyphonic and imitative but does not follow a strict fugal pattern of episodes and entries of the subject. “Gloriam” is decorated with melismatic writing and some chromatic movement. It ends with a tierce de picardie.
Domine Deus, Rex caelestis, Deus pater omnipotens
The text reads “Lord God, heavenly king, God the father almighty”. This has a lilting, compound time “sicilienne” feel in 12/8. Scored for solo soprano with an oboe obbligato and continuo, this really has an aria feel. Word setting oscillates between syllabic and melismatic though long melismas are reserved for “parter” meaning “Father”.

The oboe plays in the instrumental ritornelli between vocal entries but also weaves polyphically around the voice as well as working in 3rds/6ths with the soprano. Like Laudamus te, this uses related keys very well. It starts in C, first phrase ends in the dominant, moves to the relative minor before settling on the supertonic (dominant of the dominant) before modulating to the dominant and then back to the tonic. In some respects this could be seen as a very long ii - V - I cadence.

Domine fili ungenite Jesu Christe
“O Lord, the only begotten son, Jesus Christ” is quite often set in a reverential manner as an expression of the incarnation. However this setting is vibrant and full of joy with driving dotted notes, usually “double dotted” as was the style in the early 1700s. Like Byrd, Vivaldi uses paired voices with altos and basses working together in contrary motion, starting in the tonic (F major) before the sopranos and basses repeat their entries up a 5th in the dominant. “Jesu Christe” has a hemiola at the cadence point. Most of the words are set syllabically with the exception of a long melisma on “Jesu”

Domine Deus, Agnus Dei, Filius Patris, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis
After the joyful outburst of Domine fili ungenite, this movement is much more reflective. An alto (possibly countertenor in some recordings) is used in antiphony with the choir. The cello continuo line acts almost as an obbligato as it is very expressive and melodic in its own right. Several motives can be heard
regularly including a long held note on “Do-”, falling semiquavers on “-mi-ne” and an appogiatura-like idea on “De-us”.

The choir usually responds in homophonic texture with “qui tollis peccata mundi” as the alto has the bulk of the text. When the alto sings “have mercy upon us” the choir responds with “Lamb of God”, “Son of the father” etc. There is a lovely I - II7d - Vb - i passage on “have mercy upon us”.

9  *Qui tollis peccata mundi suscipe deprecationem nostram*
This starts a little like *Gratias agimus* with something like choral recitative. The pleading “thou that takest away the sins of the world” is heard again but here, God is asked to “hear our prayer” several times in succession with a rising chromatic melody. The sequential movement adds to the intensity of the prayer. The time change from duple to triple also adds to this feeling though the dance like feel of the fast 3/4 is at odds with the mood of the text. Another hemiola appears at the final cadence point and the tierce de picardie suggests that Vivaldi expects his prayer to be answered.
**Qui sedes ad dexteram patris miserere nobis**

This aria for alto in B minor, in a fast, agitated 3/8, has a real sense of urgency. Listen out for the word painting on “sedes” (sitteth) using a long F# and the sequential circle of 5ths idea. As is so often the case in Baroque triple time movements, there is a hemiola idea near a cadence point. The first section modulates to the dominant (F# minor). The insistent semiquaver movement in the continuo gives driving quality to the music. Each statement of “miserere” is increasingly pleading as an ascending sequence is used. The next modulation is to the sub-dominant (E minor) and thence ot the relative major (D major). Once again the ritornello structure is used and Vivaldi giver a lesson in the use or related keys.

**Quoniam tu solus Sanctus, tu solus Dominus, tu solus altissimus, Jesu Christe**

I’ve always found this an oddity in Vivaldi’s Gloria. We have a return to the music of the very beginning but a highly curtailed version in which, other than homophonic texture which may help emphasise the meaning of the text (“for Thou only art the highest, Thou only art the Lord, Thou only oh Christ”), has no attempt to paint or colour the words musically. It is almost as if Vivaldi has run out of ideas though, in fairness, this brief return to the opening tonality and festivity does lead into the final movement very well.
This final movement is one of joyous affirmation. Vivaldi sets the text as a double fugue. This means that there are two subjects at the same time. The basses have the subject at the start and the sopranos join them on what could be considered the countersubject but, as the fugal exposition continues, we see that the soprano part then turns into a countersubject when the next voice enters.

The altos imitate the basses with a tonal answer (first interval is modified) and the tenors imitate the sopranos. The soprano countersubject adds some suspensions into the harmony. The sopranos take over the original bass subject, the altos and tenors have versions of the soprano countersubject and the basses eventually enter with the alto subject. The dominant is reached at the end of this exposition. As the key is D major and a bright, festal mood is being created, trumpets are heard in an intervening ritornello. The fugue continues with entries based on the subjects and countersubject. The music modulates to the rather odd key of F# major, though this is the dominant of the relative minor. Vivaldi works through another circle of 5ths. The text is repeated many times and the “glory of God the father” is aptly expressed.

Follow up work:-
1 Compare Vivaldi’s vocal writing with Bach’s, considering the following:
   i choral textures
   ii use of soloists
   iii word painting
2 Compare Vivaldi’s setting of the Latin Gloria text with that of Byrd. What are the similarities and differences in approach?
3 Look at some movements in more detail - the melodic shape, harmonic patterns, the way the instruments are used.