

HOSANNA TO THE SON OF DAVID

Thomas Weelkes was one of the most important musicians at the end of the 16th and early 17th centuries. He was organist of Chichester Cathedral and seems to have led the authorities a bit of a dance.

While Weelkes was there the Choir of Chichester Cathedral was often in trouble with the authorities for poor behaviour. Weelkes appears to have become an alcoholic. As the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography puts it, "he was not the only disorderly member of the cathedral establishment, though in due course he would become its most celebrated."

In 1609 he was charged with unauthorised absence from Chichester. In 1616 he was reported to the Bishop for being "noted and famed for a comon drunckard [sic] and notorious swearer & blasphemer". The Dean and Chapter dismissed him for being drunk at the organ and using bad language during divine service. He was however reinstated and remained in the post until his death, although his behaviour did not improve; in 1619 Weelkes was again reported to the Bishop:

Dyvers tymes & very often come so disguised eyther from the Taverne or Ale house into the quire as is mucche to be lamented, for in these humoures he will bothe curse & sweare most dreadfully, & so profane the service of God ... and though he hath bene often tymes admonished ... to refrayne theis humors and reforme hym selfe, yett he daylye continuse the same, & is rather worse than better therein. (Wikipedia)

Weelkes is noted for his word painting, lively rhythms, and highly developed sense of form and structure, especially in his madrigals. If you have your Oxford Book of English Madrigals handy find *As Vesta was* (page 27). On pages 28/29 look at the word *ascending* then on pages 31/3 *running down again, two by two, three by three*. For his lively rhythms listen to this selection of Weelkes madrigals especially the first *On the plains, fairy trains*.

Hosanna the the Son of David is one of his most popular anthems. John Morehen suggests that it was for secular use but it is used a lot in worship now, especially at Easter and Christmas.



The text is a hybrid of verses from Matthew and Luke's gospel of the joyful shouts of the crowd on Palm Sunday welcoming Christ into Jerusalem.

Here's the text:

Hosanna to the Son of David.

Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna.

Thou that sittest in the highest heavens

Hosanna in excelsis Deo. (Praise to God in the highest)

The remarkable thing with this piece is that it is almost entirely based on the alternation of two chords - A major and D minor (as printed in this copy).

The structure of the anthem is a sort of double decker sandwich with *Hosanna* as the bread and the longer lines as the tasty fillings. *Hosanna* (a shout of praise or adoration) is a solid, homophonic fanfare every time. At the start *Hosanna* is exclaimed twice, exactly the same except for the tenor part and some part swapping - the two basses swap, 1st soprano with 2nd soprano and 2nd soprano with alto (an octave higher). The tenor part is more ornate ascending the first time and descending the second. The second time (bars 19-21) that *Hosanna* comes it is sung thrice: exactly the same chords as the first time, but each time with more voices added. Finally (bar 33) you have two more exclamations on the same chords followed by a decorated coda (on the same chords) with an ascending motif - the highest God.

To the Son of David (bars 5-11): The word David is the most important word in this phrase; Weelkes gives the first syllable two or more notes to emphasis it. At first the voices work in pairs - S2 with B1 (bar 4), S1 with B2 (bar 5), a with B1 (bar 7); as usual the tenors are more independent spirits!. As we get to the climax of the phrase the Sopranos have some close imitation (bar 8/9). You can follow the harmonic sequence - A bars 5/6, D minor 8/9, A 10/11.

Blessed be the King: this, in my opinion, gentler section starts with the D minor chord in an homophonic statement before going into the more contrapuntal *that cometh in the name of the Lord*. This is the most rhythmically complex section with very close overlapping imitation, portraying the excited bustle of the crowd. Notice how the texture changes at the end of bar 18 with just the higher voices (are the angels joining in here?). *Thou that sittest in the highest heavens*. The subject of this section very simply rises up to the highest point. Imitation is all very orderly and predictable at two beat intervals until all the voices come together in jubilation at bar 29. I look out for the Sopranos at bar 24 - the only leads that are a full octave and the 1st Bass at bar 32 which brings it all together.

In excelsis Deo: All the way through this piece the harmonies move in no more than two bar intervals. Weelkes very cleverly makes the ending remarkable by having three bars of the D minor before the final chord and holding back the word *Deo* 'til the last three bars. Once again he puts a rising motif on *excelsis* (highest). The 2nd sopranos and the 1st Bass combine this time to make the last three bars special.

Dynamically, I like the *Hosannas* to be loud, with the repeats to be more emphatic. The two “fillings” of the sandwich then want to be less loud; the writing has inbuilt crescendo leading into the *Hosannas*. It is very easy to just belt this piece out but by varying the dynamics we can convey the restless movement and excitement of a crowd who are welcoming their saviour.

