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## SPECYFIKA OBRAZOWOŚCI ARTYSTYCZNEJ W PÓŹNIEJSZYCH MOTETACH ANTONA BRUCKNERA: AKCENTY WYKONAWCZE

**Yuan Zhang**

*aspirant podyplomowych studiów kreatywnych  
Narodowej Akademii Muzycznej Ukrainy imienia P.I. Czajkowskiego  
(Kijów, Ukraina)  
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-1561-9805  
uadgfymb@gmail.com*

**Adnotacja.** W artykule omówiono późne motety duchowe Antona Brucknera w aspekcie religijnego światopoglądu kompozytora. Przez pryzmat chrześcijańskiej świadomości austriackiego polifonisty ukazane są fakty biograficzne i historia powstania chórów kościelnych w latach 1868-1896. W wyniku badań analitycznych ujawniono cechy muzycznej interpretacji symbolicznej treści tekstów kanonicznych motetów z punktu widzenia unikalnego „mistycznego doświadczenia” kompozytora. Udowodniono znaczenie współczesnych badań muzyki duchowej kompozytora w aspekcie filozoficzno-teologicznym i psychologiczno-analitycznym.

**Słowa kluczowe:** motet, muzyka duchowa, sakralne, dramaturgia intonacyjna, przemiana duchowa, doświadczenie mistyczne.

## SPECIFICITY OF ARTISTIC IMAGERY IN ANTON BRUCKNER'S LATE MOTETS: PERFORMING ACCENTS

**Yuan Zhang**

*Postgraduate Student of Creative Graduate School of  
Ukrainian National Tchaikovsky Academy of Music (Kyiv, Ukraine)  
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-1561-9805  
uadgfymb@gmail.com*

**Abstract.** The article examines Anton Bruckner's late spiritual motets in terms of the composer's religious worldview. Biographical facts and the history of the creation of church choirs in 1868–1896 are enlightened through the prism of the Christian consciousness of the Austrian polyphonist. As a result of the analytical research the peculiarities of the musical interpretation of the symbolic content of the canonical texts of the motets from the point of view of the unique “mystical experience” of the composer are revealed. The relevance of the modern study of the composer's spiritual music in the philosophical and theological, psychological and analytical aspects is proved.

**Key words:** motet, spiritual music, sacred, intonation drama, spiritual transformation, mystical experience.

## СПЕЦИФІКА ХУДОЖНЬОЇ ОБРАЗНОСТІ У ПІЗНІХ МОТЕТАХ АНТОНА БРУКНЕРА: ВИКОНАВЧІ АКЦЕНТИ

**Юань Чжан**

*аспірант творчої аспірантури  
Національної музичної академії України імені П.І. Чайковського (Київ, Україна)  
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-1561-9805  
e-mail: uadgfymb@gmail.com*

**Анотація.** У статті розглядаються пізні духовні мотиви Антона Брукнера в аспекті релігійного світогляду композитора. Крізь призму християнської свідомості австрійського поліфоніста висвітлюються біографічні факти та історія створення церковних хорів у 1868–1896 рр. У результаті аналітичного дослідження розкрито особливості музичного трактування символічного змісту канонічних текстів мотивів із погляду унікального «містичного досвіду» композитора. Доведено актуальність сучасного вивчення духовної музики композитора у філософсько-богословському та психологічно-аналітичному аспектах.

**Ключові слова:** мотив, духовна музика, сакральне, інтонаційна драматургія, духовне перетворення, містичний досвід.

**Introduction.** Bruckner has never ceased to amaze for over a hundred years. Against the background of active analytical searches of historians-Bruckner-scholars, united, among other things, through the International Society of Anton Bruckner (*German Internationale Bruckner-Gesellschaft*), today there is a genuine explosion of artistic interest in the church work of the Austrian polyphonist. Bruckner's motes have long become a stable part of the repertoire of a very significant number of choral groups. Since the beginning of the XX century, Bruckner's church choirs have very often performed and recorded various choirs not only in Austria but also in other countries. Among them are: the Munich Bishops' Choir (1931), the vocal ensemble of the Stuttgart Philharmonic (1960), the Church Choir of the Diocese of Linz (1968), the Vienna State Opera Choir (1976), the Cathedral of St. Jadwiga (1980),

the Dresden Kreuzhor Boys' Choir (1985), the Stuttgart Chamber Choir (1991), the Prague Chamber Choir (1993), the Church of the Holy Bride (London, 1994), the Latvian Radio Choir (1996), the Boys' Choir of Saint Florian Monastery (1997), Malmö Chamber Choir (2004), Tallinn Boys' Choir (2005), Czech Philharmonic Choir (2006), John Aldis Choir (2013) and others. The range of interpretations is extremely wide, but we will deliberately leave aside the problem of interpreting the composer's musical heritage. In our opinion, the quality of the music itself, which today resonates so surprisingly with the key challenges of modern society, deserves paramount attention.

First of all, what attracts to Bruckner? It seems that this is the tension of inner life, which boils in his spiritual music, transforming every second. In the expanded confessional space of the composer's church motets, there are no rules and dogmas. Despite the canonical text, there are no predictable "plot twists" in the music. Signs and symbols of prayer are interpreted much broader than tradition dictates. We find ourselves in the very epicenter of the composer's inner world: each new piece of music is an open and unpredictable personal story of the author. The composer amazes with his freedom to "speak with God". In his music, Bruckner is pacified, defenseless, unrestrained, impatient, frightened, "killed" by a sense of guilt and... invariably inspired. As paradoxical as it may sound, but in the hypostasis of a serving monk, the composer allowed himself the luxury of being frank to the limit. It is in this area that he achieves unprecedented revelations, and music – the intense dynamics of figurative changes.

Using the language of metaphors, we can say that Bruckner's spiritual work is like a door in both directions. On the one hand, church genres have always been the working area of the composer's life, his daily field of duties – relatively speaking, *terra cognita*, but on the other hand, work in the church field has turned for the composer into the regularly earned right to touch another being – *terra incognita*. The sacred presence is not found in the composer's motets either "with a sign" or by order. The phenomenon of the sacred does not at all belong to the categories of a quantitative order, since it is not the sum of individual personality traits and is not the result of joint mental efforts. Sacred experience is always revealed as a *dialogue* – highly subjective in terms of content, duration and intensity of experiences. And this is the *dialogue* that Bruckner made the center of his world.

The music of Bruckner's church motets is a strange thing: it is directly conditioned by the higher thoughts and life circumstances of the composer, but it seems to exist separately from the author's personality. Bruckner's human manifestations can be discussed as much as we would like, but the only measure of the "truthfulness" of his prayer aspirations will be music. The greatest thinker of the XX century Merab Mamardashvili said that there is a very special perception of the world as "not ready", "not planned": "This is the world of human participation, but participation at the limit of human strength, which is the order of the life process other than the order of the current life, when we cannot be constantly in a state of concentration" (Mamardashvili, 2000: 219). The famous phrase of Pascal perfectly illustrates this idea: "*The agony of Christ will last until the end of the world, and all this time we cannot sleep!*". What is meant by "agony"? According to the philosopher, we are talking about a symbolic event in the spiritual or mental life of a person, which cannot be completed: "It cannot be said about it that it happened and is in the past, behind us. No, it is accomplished in such a way that a person must participate in it in a waking manner all the time. Only then is the meaning of this event an active force in a person" (Mamardashvili, 2000: 220). It is precisely about this "wakefulness" that is worth talking about when reflecting on the value of Bruckner's motets.

Thus, *the aim* of the proposed research is to rethink the deep content of the selected late motets of Anton Bruckner in the aspect of the performing interpretation of the ideas of communication with God and living with the mystical experience.

The main *objectives* of the study are predetermined by the aim of the work:

- to look at the spiritual motet of Anton Bruckner in the aspect of the composer's religious vision;
- to enlighten the biographical facts and the history of the creation of the late church choirs of the author through the prism of the Christian worldview of the Austrian polyphonist;
- to reveal the peculiarities of the musical interpretation of the symbolic content of the canonical texts of motets in terms of the unique "mystical experience" of the composer;
- to prove the relevance of modern study of spiritual music of the composer in philosophical, theological and psychological and analytical aspects.

Two late motets by A. Bruckner, contrasting in character of musical imagery and dramatic conception, were selected as *the material* of the research: *Locus iste* (This place), WAB 23 (1869) and *Vexilla regis* (The royal banner), WAB 51 (1892).

*The research methodology* is of a complex character. It is based on a combination of principles of culturological, semantic and historical and musicological analysis, which allow to reveal more deeply the genre and style specifics of A. Bruckner's choral work. To solve the research tasks set in the work, the methods of historical and philosophical analysis, holistic analysis of a piece of music, as well as the method of psychoanalytic analysis, allowing to reveal the essence of the phenomenon of "mystical experience" were used.

Scientific novelty lies in the discovery of modern analytical approaches to the choral heritage of A. Bruckner and new performance accents in the interpretation of late spiritual motets of the composer.

**Presenting the main material.** Researchers attribute the compositions of 1868–1896, created in Vienna, to the late period of A. Bruckner's work. Among them, it is worth highlighting, first of all, the antiphon *Tota pulchra es Maria* for tenor, six-part choir and organ (1878), gradual *Os justi* (1879), motet *Christus factus est* (1879, 1884)<sup>1</sup>, motet *Ecce sacerdos magnus* for mixed choir, three trombones and organ (1885), motet *Virga Jesse* (1885).

<sup>1</sup> It was in Vienna that the composer twice took this text as the basis of the composition: in 1879 an eight-part motet was written, and in 1884 (May, after the *Seventh Symphony* and *Te Deum*) a four-part motet was written.

The composer dedicated the last two works to God, adding an abbreviation “O. A. M. D. G.”<sup>2</sup>. The following year, 1886, A. Bruckner harmonized one of the four so-called Marian antiphons<sup>3</sup>. *Ave regina caelorum*, to which composers of previous epochs often turned<sup>4</sup>. Although the above-mentioned compositions were created for order, A. Bruckner chose the liturgical texts independently and treated their musical embodiment “with his inherent diligence, clearly aware of the responsibility before God”, say researchers (Drobysch, 2021: 153).

The last composition in the genre of small church choir is *Vexilla Regis*. The hymn was composed in March 1892 for the church choir of St. Florian “Pure Hearts”. The first concert performance took place in Vienna on April 3, 1898 by the Men’s Choral Society. D. Lokotyanova interprets the creation of a choir with just such a text at the end of his career as a kind of sign, symbol, because the opening lines of *Vexilla Regis* say:

*Vexilla regis prodeunt:  
Fulget crucis mysterium  
Quo carne carnis conditor,  
Suspensus est patibulo...*

(The Royal Banner forward goes  
The mystic Cross refulgent glows:  
Where He, in Flesh, flesh who made,  
Upon the Tree of pain is laid...)

“Bruckner likened his creative work to the way of the cross, and he took that for granted to the very end to the Glory of God”, the researcher points out (Lokotyanova, 2018: 48).

Historians have the same opinion that the late church choirs of Bruckner (1868–1896) represent an organic synthesis of musical and stylistic devices of different eras. Among the most important linguistic elements used by the composer, musicologists name Baroque rhetorical figures, Bach’s polyphony, modal system, Renaissance melodies, canonical text and Medieval chant: “We can say that the style of mature church compositions of the master has absorbed a wide alloy of expressive musical means that embraced the centuries-old tradition of European culture – from archaic medieval to late romantic” (Lokotyanova, 2018: 136).

To justify the provisions proposed in the article, it is advisable to turn to two, contrasting in musical content, samples of Anton Bruckner’s late motet work – *Locus iste* (This place), WAB 23 (1869) and *Vexilla regis* (The royal banner), WAB 51 (1892). In the context of the designated problem, the named opuses form two poles, conventionally. If in *Locus iste* a person is offered the role of an admiring observer, whose spiritual task is to calm down his momentary thoughts and listen to beauty, then in *Vexilla regis* the listener/performer is prepared for the role of an active builder, almost a pilgrim. However, it should be immediately stipulated that we will not compare both motets, otherwise analytical exercises will lead us to the next quantitative indicators, the list of which in no way contributes to penetration into the essence of the sacred space of these compositions. Our task is to capture the moment of transition to another plane of the spiritual “plot” of the choirs. Only by defining the line dividing the time into *before* and *after*, it will be possible, through the found “signs”, to recreate the probable contours of Bruckner’s prayer as an intimate dialogue with God.

One of the most famous choral miniatures by Anton Bruckner is the gradual *Locus iste*, which has become the first “Viennese” spiritual composition of the author. The motet was written for the monastery choir of the native St. Florian cathedral and performed a month before the premiere of the Second Mass in E minor<sup>5</sup>. The verbal text of the hymn (translated by A. Drobysch – “this place, created by God, is a priceless mystery”) refers to the prayer of the Old Testament

<sup>2</sup> The abbreviation stands for “Omnia ad maiorem Dei gloriam”, which means “all to the greater glory of God” and is the motto of the Jesuit order.

<sup>3</sup> Marian antiphons are four hymns of Catholic and Orthodox liturgy dedicated to the Mother of God, including the *Alma Redemptoris mater* (Blessed Mother of the Savior), *Ave regina caelorum* (Rejoice, Queen of Heaven), and *Regina caeli* (Queen of Heaven) and *Salve Regina* (Rejoice, Queen).

<sup>4</sup> The text is found in the works of composers of the Renaissance: Guillaume Dufai (approx. 1400–1474), Jacob Obrecht (1457 or 1458–1505), Cristobal de Morales (1500–1553), Tomas Luis de Victoria (1548–1611), Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (1525/1526–1594), Orlando di Lasso (around 1532–1594), Francesco Soriano (1548–1621), the Italian composer Carlo Gesualdo (1566–1613) and others.

<sup>5</sup> Recordings:

The first recording of Bruckner’s *Locus iste* occurred in the beginning of the 20th century: Karl Luze, Chor der Kaiserlichen Hofmusikkapelle – 78 rpm gramophone disc G.C./HMV 44762, c. 1907 (no sample of it currently available)

Over 200 recordings of Bruckner’s *Locus iste* include:

Matthew Best, Corydon Singers, Bruckner: Motets – CD: Hyperion CD A66062, 1982.

Philippe Herreweghe, la Chapelle Royale/Collegium Vocale, Ensemble Musique Oblique, Bruckner: Messe en mi mineur; Motets – CD: Harmonia Mundi France HMC 901322, 1989.

Frieder Bernius, Kammerchor Stuttgart, Bruckner: Mass in E minor; Ave Maria; Christus factus est; Locus iste; Virga Jesse – CD: Sony CL SK 48037, 1991.

John Eliot Gardiner, Monteverdi Choir, Bruckner: Mass No. 1; Motets – CD: DG 459 674–2, 1998.

Dan-Olof Stenlund, Malmö Kammarkör, Bruckner: Ausgewählte Werke – CD: Malmö Kammarkör MKKCD 051, 2004.

Petr Fiala, Tschechischer Philharmonischer Chor Brno, Anton Bruckner: Motets – CD: MDG 322 1422-2, 2006.

Ulf Samuelsson, Ungdomskören OPQ, Under höga valv – CD: Olaus Petri Församling OPCD001, 2006.

Michael Stenov, Cantores Carmeli, Benefizkonzert Karmelitenkirche Linz – CD/DVD issued by the choir, 2006, and on YouTube.

Stephen Layton, Polyphony Choir, Bruckner: Mass in E minor & Motets – CD: Hyperion CDA 67629, 2007.

Erwin Ortner, Arnold Schoenberg Chor, Anton Bruckner: Tantum ergo – CD: ASC Edition 3, issue of the choir, 2008.

Otto Kargl, Domkantorei St. Pölten, Bruckner: Messe E-Moll, CD: ORF CD 3174, 2013.

Philipp Ahmann, MDR Rundfunkchor Leipzig, Anton Bruckner & Michael Haydn – Motets – SACD: Pentatone PTC 5186 868, 2021 ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Locus\\_iste\\_\(Bruckner\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Locus_iste_(Bruckner))).

of King Solomon: “That your Eyes may be opened to this temple day and night, to the place of which you said that You would put Your Name there, to hear the prayer that Your servant will pray in this place” (Drobysch, 2021: 142).

The reference to such a text is symbolic. It is known that A. Bruckner, as a child, as a student of the monastery school, was in the Cathedral of St. Florian, daily contemplated his majestic interior, heard the powerful sound of the organ. Extremely bright, inspired music of a small (48 bars) gradual immediately evokes a state of peace, immerses in the atmosphere of the divine. Perhaps that is why some musicologists consider *Locus iste* to be the best of Bruckner’s spiritual compositions.

The composition has a clearly defined three-part reprise form with an extended reprise. The syllabic style, the smoothness of the voice, the absence of dissonant consonances and sharp tonal shifts – these are the characteristic features of church music, which were promoted by supporters of the dominant at that time Cecilian movement. The main method of development is sequence. Thus, the first chapter uses an ascending inaccurate sequence (*locus iste a Deo factus est*, b. 1–8), with which the composer emphasized God’s greatness and holiness. The second chapter (b. 12–29): free imitation is used, the affirmative sound of the sequence in which the bass leads as if “the voice of the high priest”; the word *sacramentum* is emphasized by a prefix and a descending fifth. In addition, the composer distinguishes the words *irreprehensibilis est* (“without complaint”) by dynamic contrast (*fortissimo* – *pianissimo*), chromatically “sliding” intonations in the tenor (again, the sequence and canonical introduction of voices), dotted with a strong syllable. A. Bruckner emphasized that the place of God’s presence is, firstly, sacred, and secondly, “shrouded” in a mystery, perhaps the mystery of His revelation. The reprise is extended by a deviation in D minor and immediately in E minor, it ends on the *forte* and after a pause on the *pianissimo* in a rhythmic expansion a coda sounds – *a Deo factus est*. Slow motion, a minimum of dynamics – such means reproduce the dissolution in God’s presence.

In the last years of his life, when the composer’s health deteriorated sharply, he continued to work. According to N. Savitskaya, during this period “creative work becomes self-hyperbole, it significantly increases the vital resources and capabilities of the body, but requires self-discipline, maximum effort and all spiritual abilities, wise perception of one’s only and unique life as the highest inviolability” (Savitskaya, 2008: 149–150). In 1891, A. Bruckner began to work on the Ninth Symphony, which, as it is known, he has not completed. But the following year, the artist wrote a hymn for the choir of his native St. Florian *Vexilla regis*<sup>6</sup> (according to the Christian poet and priest of the VI century Venantius Fortunatus)<sup>7</sup>, which, in accordance with the church tradition, was performed during Lent, on the eve of Easter<sup>8</sup>. According to the text (glorifying the cross on which Christ was crucified to give freedom and forgiveness of sins to people), A. Bruckner emphasized the path “from death to life” at the end of each stanza and thus showed the incomprehensible meaning of Christ’s sacrifice<sup>9</sup>.

Contrary to the natural process of existence, there is some kind of human life in *another* – “not an everyday mode of existence”, said M. Mamardashvili. In other words, according to the scientist, there is a certain structuring of life manifestations, which is carried out by a human being from within his daily natural life, “and to the extent that it is carried out, it is endowed with a different order – we are talking about a state of concentration of all human forces” (Mamardashvili, 2000: 224). Can it be argued that Bruckner in his motets is approaching the designated level of concentration of human emotional resources? And to what extent does the quality of the musical imagery of motets correlate with the author’s understanding of his mission as a serving composer?

<sup>6</sup> *Vexilla regis prodeunt* (often known in English translation as *The Royal Banner forward goes*) is a Latin hymn in long metre by the Christian poet and saint Venantius Fortunatus, Bishop of Poitiers. It takes its title from its incipit. In modern English usage, it is sung to a variety of tunes, although the original plainsong melody is the most common variant.

<sup>7</sup> *Venantius Honorius Clementianus Fortunatus* (c. 530–600/609 AD; French: Venance Fortunat) was a Latin poet and hymnographer in the Merovingian Court, and a bishop of the Early Church. He has been venerated as Saint Venantius Fortunatus since the Middle Ages.

<sup>8</sup> The hymn was first sung in the procession (November 19, 569) when a relic of the True Cross, sent by Byzantine Emperor Justin II from the East at the request of St. Radegunda, was carried in great pomp from Tours to her monastery of Saint-Croix at Poitiers. Its original processional use is commemorated in the Roman Missal on Good Friday, when the Blessed Sacrament is carried in procession from the High Altar to the Repository. Its principal use however, is in the Divine Office, the Roman Breviary assigning it to Vespers from the Saturday before Passion Sunday daily to Maundy Thursday, and to Vespers of feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (September 14), and in pre-Vatican II breviary also for the feast of the Finding (May 3), and of the Triumph of the Holy Cross (July 16).

<sup>9</sup> Recordings:

The first recording of Bruckner’s *Vexilla regis* occurred in 1931: Ferdinand Habel with the Choir of the St. Stephans-Dom, Vienna (78 rpm: Christschall 130A)

A selection among the about 40 recordings:

Eugen Jochum, Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra & Choir, Bruckner: Symphony No. 7, Psalm 150, Motets – LP: DG 139137/8, 1966.

Matthew Best, Corydon Singers, Bruckner: Motets – CD: Hyperion CDA66062, 1982.

Philippe Herreweghe, la Chapelle Royale/Collegium Vocale, Ensemble Musique Oblique, Bruckner: Messe en mi mineur; Motets – CD: Harmonia Mundi France HMC 901322, 1989.

Uwe Gronostay, Netherlands Chamber Choir, Bruckner/Reger – CD: Globe GLO 5160, 1995.

Magnar Mangersnes, Domchor Bergen, Bruckner: Motets – CD: Simax PSC 9037, 1996.

Dan-Olof Stenlund, Malmö Kammarkör, Bruckner: Ausgewählte Werke – CD: Malmö Kammarkör MKKCD 051, 2004.

Petr Fiala, Tschechischer Philharmonischer Chor Brno, Anton Bruckner: Motets – CD: MDG 322 1422-2, 2006.

Philipp Ahmann, MDR Rundfunkchor Leipzig, Anton Bruckner & Michael Haydn – Motets – SACD: Pentatone PTC 5186 868, 2021.

The large majority of the recordings are using the older score. Only a few recent recordings are using the score of the current edition of the Gesamtausgabe:

Hans-Christoph Rademann, NDR Chor Hamburg, Anton Bruckner: Ave Maria – Carus 83.151, 2000.

Erwin Ortner, Arnold Schoenberg Chor, Anton Bruckner: Tantum ergo – CD: ASC Edition 3, issue of the choir, 2008.

Philipp von Steinäcker, Vocalensemble Musica Saeculorum, Bruckner: Pange lingua – Motetten – CD: Fra Bernardo FB 1501271, 2015.

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vexilla\\_regis\\_\(Bruckner\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vexilla_regis_(Bruckner))).

At the stage of choosing and comprehending the text for a new composition (no matter what this choice was dictated in the context of real-life events), the composer seemed to program the path of his future “meeting with God”. From the cornerstone words-supports of prayer, clothed with the living flesh of Bruckner’s prayer aspiration, the skeleton of the mighty tree of the composer’s spiritual thought was formed. At the same time, it is important to distinguish between external and internal factors that led to the birth of a particular composition. If external motives include objective events that formed the history of the creation of a motet (timed to coincide with the days of the church calendar, private orders, various kinds of celebrations, pre-ordained initiations, etc.), then internal motives include invisible spiritual goals that Bruckner set to himself. For the composer, each new opus was not just a fact of creative realization or professional self-affirmation, and not even just an act of church service, but, above all, *a matrix* of a new spiritual level – another leap towards the desired reunification with God. But is it so easy to always keep in touch with the sacred world? Who among us can boast of the stability of this connection? That is why each Bruckner’s motet is unique, it is about the *current* moment for the composer. In fact, analyzing Bruckner’s church motets, we are talking about the reconstruction of the composer’s mystical experience through his music. In this sense, we, the descendants, were lucky, because unlike the overwhelming majority of monks living on the planet, we have a musical “diary” of the author’s spiritual endeavors.

**Conclusions.** The mystical experience of man, so richly and vividly captured in Bruckner’s later church motets, is unique, since there is no single path to God. In the palette of various colors of life, a person each time looks for a new “clue” in order to live a moment of unity and sacred revelation. A disarming feature of Bruckner’s music is the multiplicity of “starting points” in sacred life – in Bruckner’s compositions, *dialogue* is possible in any life situation, which is why the polyphonist’s work is distinguished by such “stability” of the spiritual core. Bruckner, on the one hand, is not afraid of his “shadow”, and on the other hand, he is not engaged in humiliation. He simply and humbly “gives” himself to God. Hence such a “murderous” sincerity in his music. The composer brings out the most intimate moments of his inner life for everyone to see. Such a disarming honesty is worth learning for anyone trying to transcend themselves.

In different times and spaces, following Bruckner, we are passionately trying to open the way to some kind of universal community. Reflections on the essence of the musical imagery of Anton Bruckner’s later motets, with their colossal potential for soul transformation, suggest that the composer’s mission of the Austrian organist is similar to the asceticism of ancient Christian monks-theologians. The search for spiritual unity with the universe inspired the greatest thinkers of Christian history – Aurelius Augustine, Symeon the New Theologian, Theophan the Recluse, each of whom boldly and openly shared their personal religious experience – unique, difficult, painful, but always transforming the very foundations of the spiritual world. In a similar way, Bruckner’s spiritual heritage should be viewed as a unique mystical experience, which each time is re-lived and recreated thanks to the deep – fundamentally personal – penetration of the performer-interpreter into the sacred mystery.

In modern performing practice, the special demand for Bruckner’s church motets attracts attention. Bruckner’s motets are permeated by the search for a certain universal spiritual center, so their value today is incredibly high. There are a number of names of world-famous choral conductors who are actively appealing to Bruckner’s legacy: John Eliot Gardiner, Nigel Short, Nigel Short, Hans-Christoph Rademann, Stephen Layton, Erwin Ortner, Otto Kargl, Philipp Ahmann.

The Tenebrae Choir is a professional English vocal ensemble founded in 2001 by singer and songwriter Nigel Short. The ensemble began its activity with the performance of N. Short’s author’s composition “Herod’s Dream”. Musicians prefer theatrical performances in religious buildings with extensive use of stage movements and atmospheric lighting. In his interpretation of *Locus iste* and *Vexilla regis*, N. Short adheres to a strict church style (which is also facilitated by the external entourage of the performance). However, we cannot speak of “academic” liturgical singing: it is not a service, but a concert performance, equally possible both in the church and on the stage. In our opinion, the performing versions of the motets presented in the article are convincing and as close as possible to the author’s idea. All key characters of the text are sustained and intoned. The dynamic profile of the whole is marked by extreme thoughtfulness and caution. And the main thing is to understand the essence of the problem.

In conclusion, we would like to offer a simple analogy that will help to see Bruckner’s motets from a different side. Everyone is familiar with the traditional concept of the law of a hierarchical world order in the form of a triangle directed upward. We collect all the strength of the soul to find and hear God – to reach the spiritual peak. But if you try to mentally turn the triangle upside down and at the same time open the corners of the shape, then a conditional base will appear at the top, and it is as if two face-arms, open to the sky, “stretch” towards it. The Divine is everything around, and there is much more of *It* than a person. It is immeasurable, but one has to push off the ground in order to go beyond the limits of one’s capabilities and feel “the world of human participation <...> at the limit of human strength” (Mamardashvili, 2000: 220). Probably, this is how the Seagull named Jonathan saw infinity in the immortal work of Richard Bach. And this is how infinity sounds in the spiritual motets of Anton Bruckner...

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