Music at the Crossroads: A Macro-Analytical View of the First Polyphonic Choral Music for the Synagogue

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Introduction

It is often challenging to analyze any music that is a combination of the distinct styles that music historians and theorists have defined as characteristic of a particular era. Those cutting-edge compositions that cross boundaries resist classification into neat formulae of conventional definitions and symbols. Macro analysis can be an extremely useful tool in these situations. Because of the logical simplicity of its labeling process, as well as the wealth of information to be gained by examination of the use of circle progressions, macro analysis is an excellent method by which the various influences and characteristics upon a composition may be understood. Therefore, this method is employed in the following discussion of a composition that contains elements of both the Renaissance and the baroque.

The Songs of Solomon

Salamon Rossi was a Jewish composer and violinist in the court of Mantua, Italy, in the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries. His name and his music are not well known today, for he was overshadowed by his colleagues Monteverdi, Gastoldi, and other great composers of that time. He was an innovative composer in many respects: his *Primo Libro Madrigali,* published in 1600 was the first published with an optional *chitarrone* tablature; and his second book of madrigals, in 1602, included a basso continuo part, three years before Monteverdi followed suit.[1]

Salamon Rossi also holds a unique place in the history of Jewish music. He did what had not been done in over two thousand years, and after his time would not again be done for over two hundred years: he introduced polyphonic music into the Jewish religious service. His collec-

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1. Joshua Jacobson, "The Choral Music of Salamone Rossi," *American Choral Review* XXX/4, (1988): 7.

tion of thirty-three a cappella motets, entitled *The Songs of Solomon (Hash-irim Asher Lish'Lomo),* were written in l622–23. They were intended for use in the Jewish liturgical service, breaking tradition with the monophonic modal chanting of the liturgy that had been practiced exclusively since ancient times.

"Qadish" (the modern spelling is "Kaddish") is a prayer that is one of the cornerstones of the Jewish religion. In *The Songs of Solomon* Rossi set this prayer twice, once for three voices and once for five. This article focuses on the three-voice setting, which is stylistically more typical of the songs in the collection.

The text was the guiding force behind every aspect of this composition. Rossi, like Monteverdi, was by this time using the *seconda prattica* style of composition, which "makes the words the mistress of the harmony."[2] The harmonic direction and tonal centers, cadences, melody, texture, and form all take shape because of the text.

Although A.Z. Idelsohn described *The Songs of Solomon* as being "entirely in the Italian Renaissance style . . . the same spirit as his secular compositions. . ."[3] Rossi could not, because of the intended use of the motets as part of the service, freely explore some of the other innovations of the *seconda prattica* that he employed in his secular works. In his madrigals and instrumental work he could employ techniques such as the repetition of words or phrases, the use of a solo melodic line with instrumental accompaniment or the use of dissonance and chromaticism to express various emotions. Boldly innovative by their very existence, yet restrained and conservative, Rossi's synagogue pieces stand at the crossroads of the Renaissance and the baroque.

As stated earlier, it is precisely this blend which makes the piece so well-suited to macro analysis, for Rossi's use of the circle progressions clearly illuminates the various influences upon this composition. The circles were a tool to express "the primary harmonic events—such as points of tension, resolution, forward movement and prolongation . . ."[4] and he used this in lieu of the more daring innovations of the day. This can be viewed, in fact, as one of the most interesting structuring devices of this piece, for in some phrases there are many circle progressions, appearing either as single circles or as a longer series, while in other phrases there are virtually none.

Before presenting the full macro analysis of "Qadish," with description of the various musical elements, a chart follows that outlines the structure of the composition based on the five main phrases of the

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2. Howard M. Brown, *Music In The Renaissance* (New York: Prentice Hall, l995): 368.

3. A.Z. Idelsohn, *Jewish Music In Its Historical Development* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., l929): 199.

4. Marilyn Saker, "The Development of Performance Interpretation through Macro Analysis Application," *Musical Insights,* 1 (l997): 42.

text. It is a reduction of the important harmonic events that details the sub-phrases and their cadential patterns. It reveals the importance of the presence or absence of circle progressions. The symbols used are the common macro analysis symbols, with the addition of a dotted bracket indicating important stepwise movement (for example, from F g) which often is associated with modal progressions.
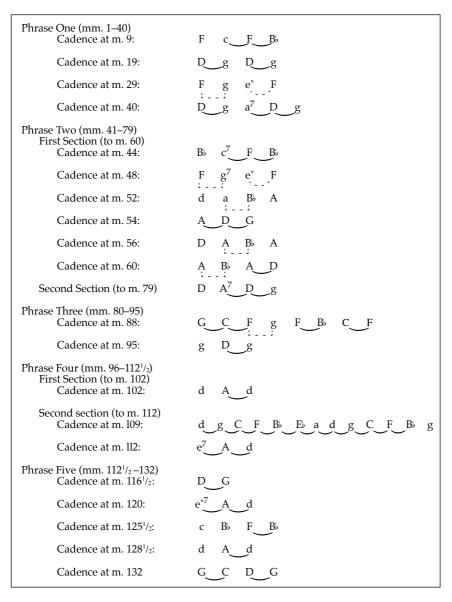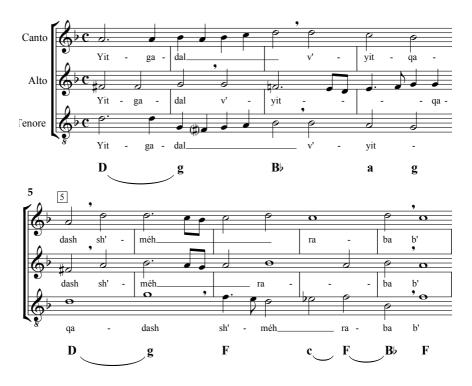

Figure 1. "Qadish One," Important Harmonic Events.

Musical Elements

As is apparent from the chart, the most important pitch in this composition is G. This pitch forms what Jamie Henke calls "a genesis of the present day tonal center."[5] What has also been revealed by the circle progressions is how Rossi handled this situation at the juncture of modality and tonality, and it is this ambiguity through which all the musical elements of this composition may be viewed. Even the opening phrase displays several shifts of tonality, as seen below.
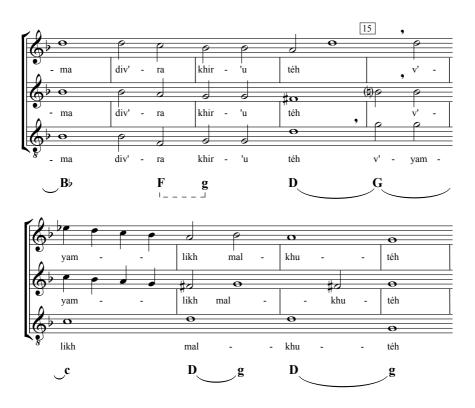

Example 1. "Qadish One," mm. 1–9[6]

When the G shifts back and forth between G major and G minor (excluding the cadence points, at which point it was fairly common to make this shift) there is the feeling that Rossi is enjoying the play between

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5. Jamie L. Henke, "An Historical Survey of the Origins of the Circle: Music and Theory," *Musical Insights* 1, (l997): 11.

6. Musical examples used with permission of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and The Cantor's Assembly.

modality and tonality. At m. 13, for example, the progression from F g is followed by a circle of D G c, which is then followed by the repeated cadence of D g (see example 2).
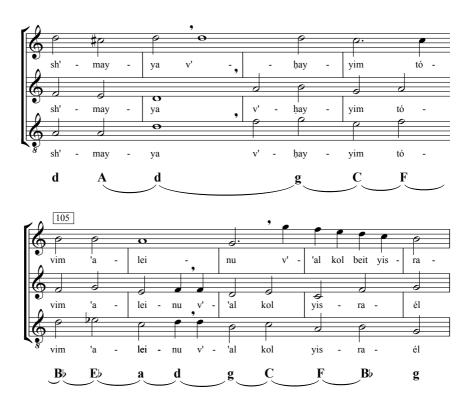

Example 2. "Qadish One," mm. 11–19

The melody is likewise not predictable, primarily because it follows the text so closely. This means that there is no repetition of a melodic motive, as might occur in a secular madrigal with a standardized form of poetry as its text. There are two instances, however, where there is a strong melodic sense. The first occurs at the start of phrase two, m. 41. Here, because the phrase is one of exaltation, it suddenly shifts to triple meter and has a lively dance-like melody. This was ". . . a device used by many composers of Renaissance motets in connection with texts of rejoicing."[7] This more melodic sense continues throughout this section until m. 60, although the meter goes back and forth between triple and duple

7. Joshua Jacobson, "The Choral Music of Salamone Rossi," *American Choral Review,* XXX/4 (1988): 57.

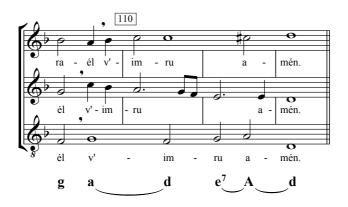time. The circle progressions here are short and basically cadential, leading the four-bar phrase structure.

The second instance of a strong and decorative melody line is near the end, beginning with the last beat of m. 107. The canto has a stepwise descending line that begins on the highest pitch of the piece, a high G. It stands out as a point of importance, and indeed, the macro analysis verifies that this is the culmination of an extraordinary event in this composition: a circle that progresses through the circle of fifths almost two full times (see example 3).

Example 3. "Qadish One," mm. 101–108.

The texture of this piece, as in the other Hebrew motets, is very predictable. Although Rossi had made use of counterpoint and imitation in his secular madrigals, he had no choice but to make the songs from "Hashirim Asher L'Schlomo" homophonic. It probably helped that "the imitative technique had been under attack for a long time because of its fracturing of a text. . ." [8] Only at the cadences, on phrases such as "v'imru amen" ("say ye, amen"), did Rossi give the voices any kind of indepen-

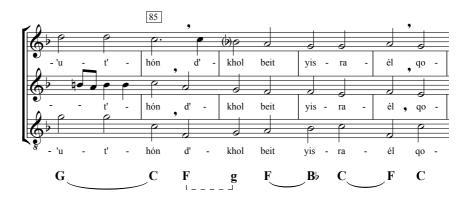dence, for these words were easy to understand in spite of increased imitative texture (see example 4).

Example 4. "Qadish One," mm. 109–112.

It is worthwhile to examine a composition on many levels, from the finest details to the broadest patterns. Calculating for a Golden Mean is one way to get a very large view of the form, and in this case it leads to an interesting observation. The Golden Mean (.617 of the way through the composition) falls at m. 81.4 in this piece, and although not exact, it is certainly very close to where the third phrase starts at m. 80. The total composition could then be divided into two main parts: phrases one and two, and phrases three, four, and five. There are some important differences found between these two parts of the piece: first, the final three phrases are each about fifteen measures in length instead of twenty each, as in the first two sections. Second, the circle progressions show profound changes of harmonic activity in phrases three and four, while phrase five returns to a similar circle structure, as found in phrase one.

Measure 80 marks the beginning of this second major section, and at the first cadence the first long circle progression appears (see example 5), announcing the change and also setting the stage for the previously discussed progression at m. 102.

8. Joel Newman, *Hashim Asher Lish'lomo,* ed. Fritz Rikko (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America in cooperation with the Cantor's Assembly, 1973): 45.

Example 5. "Qadish One," mm. 84–88.

In this collection, however, the final authority is the text, and here is one obvious answer as to why Rossi, consciously or unconsciously, divided "Qadish" mathematically at this point and planned the musical events to support this. Phrases one and two constitute the prayer that is known as the Mourner's Kaddish (the modern spelling), which is recited to honor the memory of the deceased. This, with the addition of the remainder of the text—phrases three, four, and five—is the full Kaddish, a prayer of adoration and supplication that is recited in every service. Therefore, this division of the piece addresses the fundamental importance of the text, and the very purpose for which the composition was created.

Conclusion

The Songs of Solomon are a unique blend of sacred and secular form. They are also an interesting combination of modality and tonality which signaled a major shift in the musical language of the time. It is of great benefit to study this music using macro analysis, in which the circle progressions point the way to important musical events harmonically, melodically, and structurally, and thus "reveals the unifying structural support found at all levels in all tonal compositions."[9] Indeed, macro analysis is a logical method for the comprehensive examination of all music which, like Rossi's composition, lies at the crossroads of historical periods.

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9. Marilyn Saker, "A Theory of Circle of Fifths Progressions and Their Application in the Four Ballades by Frederic Chopin" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin–Madison, l992).

Translation

The following is a translation of the five phrases which comprise this prayer.

Phrase One (mm. 1–40)

Magnified and sanctified be the name of God throughout the world which He hath created according to His will. May He establish His kingdom during the days of your life and during the life of all the house of Israel, speedily, yea, soon; and say ye, Amen. May His great name be blessed for ever and ever.

Phrase Two (mm. 41–79)

Exalted and honored be the name of the Holy One, blessed by He, whose glory transcends, yea, is beyond all praises, hymns and blessings that man can render unto Him; and say ye, Amen.

Phrase Three (mm. 80–95)

May the prayers and supplications of the whole house of Israel be acceptable unto their Father in heaven; and say ye, Amen.

Phrase Four (mm. 96–112)

May there be abundant peace from heaven, and life for us and for all Israel; and say ye, Amen.

Phrase Five (mm. 113–132)

May He who establisheth peace in the heavens, grant peace unto us and unto all Israel; and say ye, Amen.

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