Psalm 15 & Psalm 42

by

Heinrich Schütz

SATB
General Use

Heinrich Schütz (1585–1672) composed four-part choral settings for all one hundred and fifty of the biblical Psalms. This admirable collection, first published in 1628, ranges from relatively straightforward settings to strikingly complex. For congregational singing, almost all are too complex. Therefore Schütz's music has rarely appeared in hymnals, in contrast to similar compositions by Schütz's predecessors Claude Goudimel and Louis Bourgeois who have provided numerous hymn tunes.

For choirs and choruses, however, these miniature masterpieces are a treasury. Ensembles of all sizes and degrees of ability can enjoy them, singing in parts or in unison, a cappella or to the accompaniment of organ, winds, or strings. At first the rhythms and harmonies startle us, but surprise soon yields to delight in what seems like inevitability. Each Psalm is a dance—joyous, reflective, or somber in mood, but always patterned and pulsing.

One facet of Schütz's musical genius is his sensitivity to texts. In this adaptation Marian and I have attempted to match English lyrics to Schütz's music as well as Schütz matched his music to the German of his texts. We have exactly duplicated his meter, syllable placement, and rhyme scheme. (Metronome markings are editorial suggestions only.)

The German version of the Psalms that Schütz used, however, is not a translation but a paraphrase, and it takes excessive liberties with the biblical text. We have not simply translated the German, therefore, but rather followed standard English translations of the Psalms, using the Hebrew text as a touchstone. Our diction echoes the King James Version of the Bible, which appeared in 1611.

Additional Schütz Psalms are available in our collection The Psalms of David: 24 Psalms for the Church's Year (Oxford University Press, 2007).

Psalm 15

Psalm 15 is on the difficult end of the Schütz spectrum of complexity. The melody is angular and chromatic, the meters are irregular, the harmonies are kaleidoscopic. The setting's most remarkable feature is the long melisma toward the end. The music undulates downward and through a crunching dissonance at the bottom, thereby accentuating (in this English version) the Psalm's key words "truth," "good," "endure" and "overthrown."

Psalm 42

Located near the middle of the spectrum of difficulty, Psalm 42 expresses longing for God in gently rising and falling phrases. Then the setting descends into a lower register and a minor mode, coinciding with the lament, "For I am mocked continually...." The music recovers major modality to conclude with reference to God as Savior.

Albert Blackwell
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Psalm 15

English adaptation by
Albert and Marian Blackwell

Heinrich Schütz (1585–1672)

Who in thy tent, O God, may dwell? Who may ascend thy holy hill? Who hath no guile upon the tongue, nor unto friends hath evil done, heapeth the pure in high regard, goeth the pure in high regard, goeth the pure in high regard, goeth

Who doth all wickedness discard, holdeth the pure in high regard, goeth the pure in high regard, goeth

Who doth not lend in hope of gain, nor in innocence by bribe profane. All

ever liveth righteously, and whose heart speaketh eth on neighbors no reproach, nor eth from goodness not astray, doth those who make these things their own shall never more be

truth good dure o ful ly. en croach. en al way. en ver thrown.
Psalm 42

As pants the deer for cool-ing streams, my
My tears pour forth, my dai-ly food; my
My heart is heav-ing in my breast; the

thirst-y soul de-sir-eth calm
heart and soul are heav-y, as
rap-ids o-ver-whelm me. I

glades where liv-ing wa-ter gleams, and
God's own face in-spir-eth. When
I cry out to thee, O God: "Why

shall my God ap-pear to me? For I am mocked con-tin-dal-ly: "Where
soul, trust God's de-liv-er-ance; hope yet in God, whose count-e-nance will
soul, re-call God's stead-fast love; trust yet in help from heav'n a-bove; give

is thy God and Sa-vior?"
be thy help for ev-er." praise to God thy Sa-vior.

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