

O Lord, open my lips and my mouth will
declare Thy praise.

Many, O LORD my God, are the wonders
which You have done.

My tongue shall sing aloud; my tongue
shall declare Thy praise,

Psalm 51:15, Psalm 35:28, Psalm 40:5

The Latin text in the Tallis setting tells of the apostles declaring the wonders of God in different languages (or 'tongues') on the Day Of Pentecost. This reflection brings the account into the first person, using a variety of musical languages.

In the incipit, the soloist should follow the melodic outline as written. However, the soloist has permission to further embellish, and slightly flatten the third degree of the scale as in jazz/gospel/spirituals. Likewise, the first choral response, which should have a freedom of expression in keeping with the church of the American Deep South, hence the 'Hallelujah' version of the word (which is later 'Alleluia').

The long Alleluias at bar 49, subsequently bar 62, represent the 'declaring of the wonders in different tongues' and, while the syllable is part of the word 'Alleluia', the short phrases should sound speech-like: it would be useful to be thinking of appropriate spoken phrases to help shape the musical phrases.

Each of the seven parts is based on a different scale:

Soprano 1: Ionian/Major
Soprano 2: Aeolian/Natural Minor
Alto: Major Pentatonic
Tenor 1: Arabic
Tenor 2: Lydian
Baritone: Hungarian
Bass: Mixolydian

Again, follow the notes as written, but be mindful of cultures which use the various scales and feel free to bring character to the part (for example, Lydian is also one of the Indian ragas; Pentatonic is used in African-American spirituals as well as in Eastern music, so the singers can choose a brighter Eastern sound, or darker African American, or even both). As with music of the Renaissance, the superimposition of different modes creates a subtle harmonic tension, when major third and minor thirds coincide.

Ken Burton,
February 2021

Duration: c. 4.5 minutes

To Suzi Digby OBE and Ora

Many are the Wonders

Reflection on Tallis' 'Loquebantur'

Psalm 51:15
Psalm 35:28
Psalm 40:5

Ken Burton
(b. 1970)

SOLO

with emotion, in free time

Tenor Solo