

Monteverdi's Gloria for 8 voices M 30

Unpick the final cadence, learning about the Tierce de Picardie on the way

You need your score to refer to

1. Tierce de Picardie

If you've got really stuck into these materials, you may have a burning question. The Gloria is in A minor but it ends on a grand A major chord. What's going on?

First, check out the last bar of the Gloria to be sure you understand it is an A major chord. An A major chord is made out of A, C# and E. Found all of those?

Composers well before Monteverdi's time felt that ending a piece on a minor chord didn't quite work. The music didn't seem properly finished. Maybe even a reflective piece shouldn't sound sad at the end. The solution was easy – make it a major chord instead. Lots of pieces in minor keys from the 16th century onwards end with the major chord. This is called a Tierce de Picardie.

You know from Activity 23 that just one note is different between a minor and a major chord. It's the middle note – the third. In the major chord it is one semitone higher than in the minor chord.

That's the the "Tierce" comes from – the third. You can research on the internet to find out more. No one is sure about the "Picardie" bit. Did it originate in Picardy, or maybe the raised (sharpened) third was felt to be piquant?

Look through your score and check the type of chord each section ends on. (The score we're using at Bridge Singers marks ends of sections with a double bar line). There are 10 sections in the piece. Find the 4 places where the last chord isn't an A major chord. Of those 4, find the one that is a D major chord. The other three just have the note A.

Each of these endings (apart from the As only ones) are Tierces de Picardie. You can tell that the music just before them is in A minor because the Cs aren't C#s. You are very aware of this if you have one of the parts where you sing C natural in one bar and then, two bars later, C#.

2. The final cadence

This is a masterpiece of controlled discord!. The second half of bar 246 shows you that the music is in A minor – there are lots of As, C naturals and Es. Then you are launched into bar 247. Wow – just look at all the clashes.

Take it crotchet beat by crotchet beat.

Beat 1. If you ignore Alto 2, this is a straightforward E major chord (the dominant of A). There are Es and G#s and Bs. OK Tenor 2 is doing its little flourish, but it's all within the E chord. Those Alto 2s, though. Hanging onto the A they sang at the end of bar 246, even though two other parts are singing G#s, and two are singing Bs. Alto 2 is squished between the Soprano Bs and the Alto 1 G#. A super clash to kick off the bar.

Beat 2. Alto 2 still hangs onto A – and they've pulled Alto 1 up to join them. Soprano 2 still has a B and Tenor 2 has landed on B as well. Tenor 1 sticks on G#s for half a beat, then moves up to A. Soprano 1 is heading away from the mayhem, with its C clashing with the Bs.

Beat 3 comes as a bit of a relief. The only discord now is a straightforward suspension provided by Alto 1 hanging onto A instead of moving to the G#s that the rest of the E major chord expects. And, phew, finally on **beat 4**, it's just E major chord notes.

Throughout, the basses serenely sing E. They've got the note that is in both the A and the E chords, as the parts above battle it out.