This Advent moon

SATB divisi, a cappella

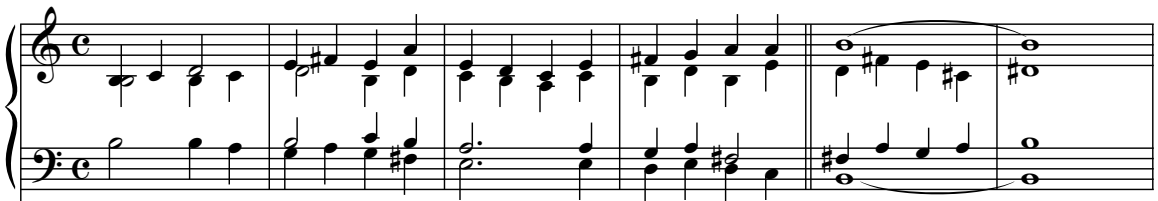
Text: Christina Rossetti (1830-1894)
from the poem *Advent* (1858)

Music: Charles H. Giffen, 2009

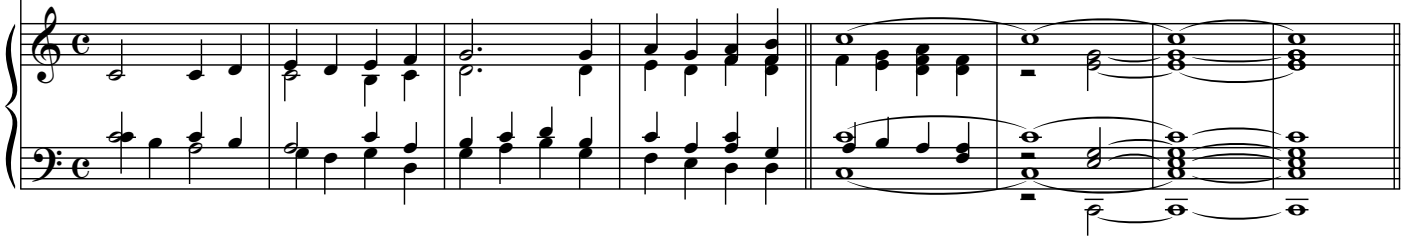
Notes on Musical Structure

A principal compositional device in this piece is the use of strict chromatic inversion. There are two instances of this, in which the music of one section (except for the way cadences are handled) is inverted, note for note, each ascending (or descending) interval replaced by a descending (or ascending) interval of the same size. This requires that the inverted soprano line becomes the bass line, the inverted alto line becomes the tenor line, the inverted tenor line becomes the alto line, and the inverted bass line becomes the soprano line - to preserve the inverted intervalic structure. The opening six bars, when inverted in this fashion, become the final six bars (plus two bars that extend the final chord) - the inversion is strict through the first four bars (disregarding added notes from the 8-part structure in the fourth bar):

Bars 1-6:



Bars 77-84:



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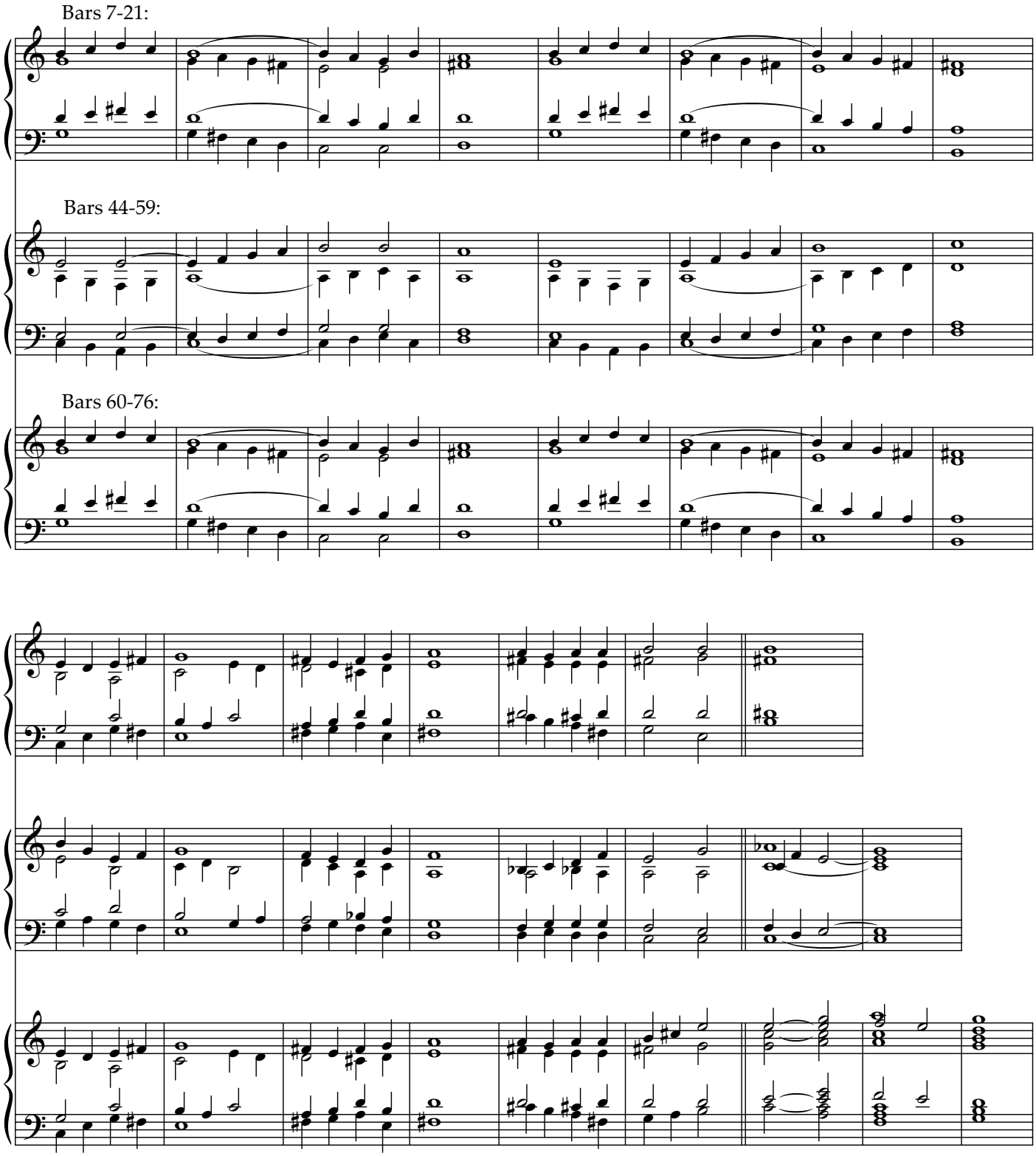
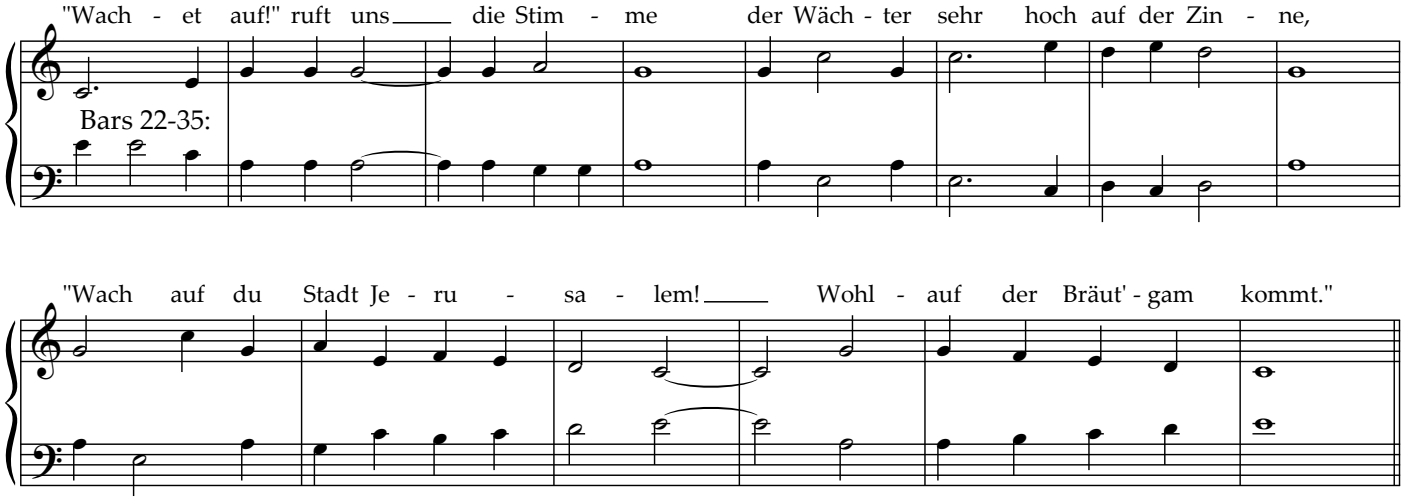
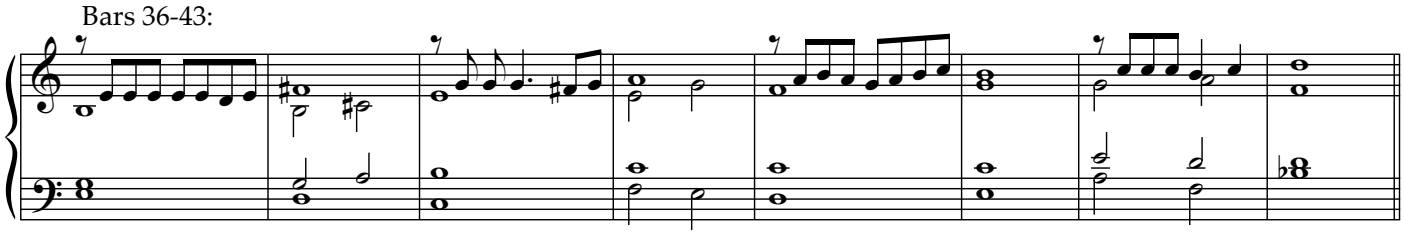
The other strict inversion occurs when bars 7-21 are inverted to form bars 44-59 (there is a one bar extension in the inversion). Immediately after this inversion, the uninverted music returns in bars 60-76 (there is a much longer extension and cadential change beginning in bar 73 to arrive at the musical high point of the piece in bars 74-76):



In bars 22-35 part of the melody of the chorale *"Wachet auf! ruft uns die Stimme"* appears briefly in strict inversion, moving from the alto, to the bass, and finally to the tenor part. The example blow gives the uninverted melody in the treble staff with the inverted form in the bass staff for comparison (of course only the inverted form appears in this work):



The recitative in bars 36-43 consists of four 2 bar phrases in which the melody ascends by a whole step. The contour is essentially the same in all but the third phrase, which is slightly more elaborate:



Finally, a few evident properties of strict inversion:

(1) strict inversion of a major chord becomes a minor chord (and vice-versa),
(2) strict inversion of a major 7th chord is a major 7th chord, and
(3) strict inversion of a minor 7th chord is a minor 7th chord.

Also, although a major 6-4 chord is harmonically somewhat weak (except in passing), a minor 6-4 chord possesses a greater degree of stability; hence, it follow that, when a major chord with the root as the top note is strictly inverted, the result is acceptible.