

WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 11 February 2024
7.30pm

Bach and his own plagiarism

The Sixteen

Harry Christophers director	Sarah Sexton violin, leader	Imogen Seth-Smith cello
Grace Davidson soprano	Sarah Moffatt violin I	Carina Cosgrave violone
Alexandra Kidgell soprano	Ellen O'Dell violin I	Katy Bircher flute
Daniel Collins alto	Daniel Edgar violin II	Eva Caballero flute
Rebecca Leggett alto	Jean Paterson violin II	Alexandra Bellamy oboe
Jeremy Budd tenor	Nia Lewis violin II	Bethan White oboe
Mark Dobell tenor	Martin Kelly viola	Sally Jackson bassoon
Ben Davies bass	Stefanie Heichelheim viola	Neil Brough trumpet
Eamonn Dougan bass	Joseph Crouch cello	Alastair Ross organ

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) Halt im Gedächtnis Jesum Christ BWV67 (1724)
Mass in A BWV234 (?1738)
Interval
Siehe zu, dass deine Gottesfurcht BWV179 (1723)
Mass in G BWV236 (?1738-9)



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Bach and his own plagiarism

JS Bach was an inveterate self-plagiarist. If that statement sounds derogatory, we should remember that our judgment now doesn't necessarily reflect how Bach and his contemporaries felt about their musical (self-)borrowings. Plagiarism today tends to carry strongly negative connotations of dishonestly appropriating pre-existing ideas. But as an early modern Lutheran believer, Bach may have conceived of the process of musical invention in quite different terms from ours. Even in the midst of an ever-advancing scientific revolution, early 18th-century orthodox Lutheranism still held on to a fundamental belief in the God-given order and beauty of creation; and it was within that all-encompassing divine order that any human activity unfolded. In this sense, Bach's music was less created *ex nihilo*, as the later notion of Romantic genius would have it, than discovered within the fabric of that unfathomably rich God-given cosmos. Bach's musical inventions explored the beauties of that cosmos in many different ways, but those beauties were both already there and inexhaustible. Re-using his existing music in new formulations thus offered a way of maximising the potential of any given invention, revealing yet more facets of that beauty of God's world in musical sound.

So when Bach re-used some of his cantata movements from the 1720s for his Mass settings in the late 1730s, in some ways this was simply a matter of redeploying previous musical inventions in novel ways to further amplify the praise of God. But there may have been a more practical purpose as well. Both cantatas in today's programme were written in Bach's first year as Thomaskantor (1723-4). Because their librettos were tied to specific bible readings, both were limited to particular occasions in the annual liturgical cycle; and once they had been heard on that occasion, they would have to be shelved for another year (if they were to be revived at all). The Mass settings, on the other hand, could be used much more regularly across the liturgical year. By importing some of his cantata music into these Mass settings, therefore, Bach may have hoped to ensure that this music enjoyed a wider distribution and perhaps a longer afterlife. This certainly appears to have been one of the motivations for assembling his crowning Mass composition, the B minor Mass (BWV233), in the final years of his life: in that piece, Bach looked back over three decades of his compositional activity to draw different moments from more occasional pieces together into the more lasting form of the traditional Mass setting. The two Masses in our programme are on a much smaller scale than the colossal B minor Mass: they only set the opening two sections of the Mass ordinary (*Kyrie* and *Gloria*), whereas the B minor Mass includes the remaining sections (*Credo*, *Sanctus*, *Agnus Dei*) as well. But again, in this short form, these two Masses would have potentially been much more useful as regular service music.

Cantata 67 treats themes of doubt and faith, based on the Gospel narrative of Jesus appearing to the disciples after his death. This is an uneasy, anxious piece in which

steadfastness of faith is challenged in text and music: in the first aria, the somewhat overwrought tenor line, interspersed with rests, vocalises the 'strife and war' that believers feel in their hearts despite their knowledge of Jesus's resurrection. The promised peace only arrives in the penultimate movement, where a run of agitated figuration in the ensemble is repeatedly interrupted by the bass (embodying Jesus) with the words 'Peace be unto you'. Only right at the end does the ensemble join in with the calming pastoral lilt of Jesus's utterance. This dramatic scene, then, seems to offer a compelling example of Bach's music perfectly representing the content of the underlying words: the cantata as a 'sermon in music'. And yet, when Bach reused this movement for the *Gloria* of his Mass in A, its affective content appears strikingly transformed. The intricate string figuration here instead becomes a jubilant expression of praise – a potent reminder that so much of the affective quality of Bach's music resides less in the notes themselves than in the way in which an ensemble decides to realise those notes in sound. The 'Qui tollis' section, meanwhile, is an adaptation of the aria 'Liebster Gott, erbarme dich' from the second cantata on our programme. Here Bach transformed his original invention in an upwards direction: he reassigned the instrumental bass part to the violins and violas, with two flutes (instead of the original oboes da caccia) spinning a web of wistful counterpoint in high register above. Bach thereby amplified the timbral-affective character of the original to create a floating, unearthly texture, giving heightened expression to this heartfelt plea for mercy.

In the context of Cantata 179, that soprano aria forms part of a classic affective trajectory that underpins many of Bach's cantatas: from the fear and misery of the believer's sinful state articulated in the opening movements to the softening and cleansing of hardened hearts in order to attain true faith and forgiveness. The initial chorus offers some tortuous chromaticism that really makes listeners feel the 'falseness' and depravity of their corrupt existence. As it happens, those dissonant progressions closely mirror the chromatic contrapuntal style that often characterised contemporary *Kyrie* settings as well; and so that chorus reappears at the opening of Bach's Mass in G – no longer indicating 'Heuchelei' but another appeal for mercy from God's fallen people. All subsequent movements of this Mass are also based on earlier pieces, including another borrowing from Cantata 179 for the 'Quoniam'. This is yet another example of the versatility or slipperiness of musical meaning: in this cantata, the aria 'Falscher Heuchler Ebenbild' seems to prolong the harsh, unsettling musical depiction of a simulated faith, whereas in the Mass, performers might choose a softer articulation and smoother timbre to generate a mellower, more yearning affective character. In these self-borrowings, Bach thereby reveals the myriad ways in which his musical inventions could be moulded and remoulded to serve the invocation of God's grace or human fallibility.

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Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Halt im Gedächtnis Jesum Christ BWV67

(1724)

*Liturgical text, Nikolaus
Herman, Jakob Ebert,
Anonymous*

Tutti

Coro

*Halt im Gedächtnis Jesum
Christ, der auferstanden ist
von den Toten.*

Remember that Jesus Christ

Chorus

*Remember that Jesus
Christ was raised from
the dead.*

Mark Dobell tenor

Aria

Mein Jesus ist erstanden,
Allein, was schreckt mich
noch?
Mein Glaube kennt des
Heilands Sieg,
Doch fühlt mein Herze Streit
und Krieg,
Mein Heil, erscheine
doch!

Aria

My Jesus is risen,
but what affrights me
still?
My faith knows the
Saviour's triumph,
but my heart feels strife
and war,
my Saviour, I beg thee,
appear!

Rebecca Leggett alto

Recitativo

Mein Jesu, heissest du des
Todes Gift
Und eine Pestilenz der Hölle:
Ach, dass mich noch Gefahr
und Schrecken trifft!
Du legtest selbst auf unsre
Zungen
Ein Loblied, welches wir
gesungen:

Recitativo

My Jesus, thou art called
the poison of death
and the plague of Hell:
ah, that danger and terror
still afflict me!
Thou wouldst place on
our tongues
a hymn of praise, that we
have sung:

Tutti

Choral

Erschienen ist der herrlich Tag,
Dran sich niemand gnug
freuen mag:
Christ, unser Herr, heut
triumphiert,
All sein Feind
er gefangen
führt.
Alleluja!

Chorale

The glorious day is come,
at which no one can
rejoice enough:
Christ, our Lord, triumphs
today,
he holds his enemies
captive and leads them
away.
Alleluia!

Rebecca Leggett alto

Recitativo

Doch scheint fast,
Dass mich der Feinde Rest,
Den ich zu gross und allzu
schrecklich finde,
Nicht ruhig bleiben lässt.
Doch, wenn du mir den Sieg
erworben hast,

Recitativo

Yet it seems as though
the remaining foe,
whom I find too many and
terrible,
will not leave me in peace.
But now thou hast gained
victory for me,

So streite selbst mit mir, mit
deinem Kinde.

Ja, ja, wir spüren schon im
Glauben,
Dass du, o Friedefürst,
Dein Wort und Werk an uns
erfüllen wirst.

fight at my side with thine
own child.

Yes, our faith already tells
us
that thou, O Prince of Peace,
will fulfil thy Word and
work in us.

Eamonn Dougan bass

Aria

Friede sei mit euch!

Wohl uns! Jesus hilft uns
kämpfen
Und die Wut der Feinde
dämpfen,
Hölle, Satan, weich!

Friede sei mit euch!

Jesus holet uns zum
Frieden
Und erquicket in uns
Müden
Geist und Leib zugleich.

Friede sei mit euch!

O Herr, hilf und lass gelingen,
Durch den Tod
hindurchzudringen
In dein Ehrenreich!

Friede sei mit euch!

Tutti

Choral

Du Friedefürst, Herr Jesu
Christ,
Wahr' Mensch und wahrer Gott,
Ein starker Nothelfer du
bist
Im Leben und im Tod:
Drum wir allein
Im Namen dein
Zu deinem Vater schreien.

Aria

Peace be unto you!

O joy! Jesus helps us
fight
to subdue the fury of our
foe.
Hell, satan, be gone!

Peace be unto you!

Jesus summons us to
peace,
and restores in us weary
ones
soul and body alike.

Peace be unto you!

Help us, Lord, to enter
through the realm of
death
thy glorious Kingdom!

Peace be unto you!

Chorale

Thou Prince of Peace,
Lord Jesus Christ,
very man and very God,
thou art a strong helper in
need
in life and death:
we therefore
in thy name alone,
cry unto thy Father.

Mass in A BWV234 (?1738)

Liturgical text

Tutti

<i>Kyrie</i>	<i>Kyrie</i>
<i>Coro</i>	<i>Chorus</i>
Kyrie eleison.	Lord, have mercy.
Christe eleison.	Christ, have mercy.
Kyrie eleison.	Lord, have mercy.

Tutti

<i>Gloria in excelsis</i>	<i>Gloria in excelsis</i>
<i>Coro</i>	<i>Chorus</i>
Gloria in excelsis Deo.	Glory be to God on high,
Et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis.	and on earth peace, good will towards men.
Laudamus te. Benedicimus te.	We praise thee, we bless thee,
Adoramus te. Glorificamus te.	we worship thee, we glorify thee,
Gratias agimus tibi propter magnam gloriam tuam.	we give thanks to thee for thy great glory.

Ben Davies bass

<i>Domine Deus</i>	<i>Domine Deus</i>
<i>Aria</i>	<i>Aria</i>
Domine Deus, Rex caelestis, Deus Pater omnipotens.	O Lord God, heavenly King, God the Father Almighty.
Domine Fili unigenite, Iesu Christe.	O Lord, the only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ;
Domine Deus, Agnus Dei, Filius Patris.	O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father.

Alexandra Kidgell soprano

<i>Qui tollis</i>	<i>Qui tollis</i>
<i>Aria</i>	<i>Aria</i>
Qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.	Thou that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us.
Qui tollis peccata mundi, suscipe deprecationem nostram.	Thou that takest away the sins of the world, receive our prayer.
Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris, miserere nobis.	Thou that sittest at the right hand of God the Father, have mercy upon us.

Rebecca Leggett alto

<i>Quoniam</i>	<i>Quoniam</i>
<i>Aria</i>	<i>Aria</i>
Quoniam tu solus Sanctus. Tu solus Dominus.	For thou only art holy; thou only art the Lord;
Tu solus Altissimus, Iesu Christe.	thou only, O Jesus Christ, art most high.

Tutti

<i>Cum sancto Spiritu</i>	<i>Cum sancto Spiritu</i>
<i>Coro</i>	<i>Chorus</i>
Cum Sancto Spiritu, in gloria Dei Patris. Amen.	With the Holy Ghost, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Interval

Siehe zu, dass deine Gottesfurcht BWV179 (1723)

*Liturgical text, Christoph
Tietze, Anonymous*

See to it that thy fear of God

Tutti

<i>Coro</i>	<i>Chorus</i>
<i>Siehe zu, dass deine Gottesfurcht nicht Heuchelei sei, und diene Gott nicht mit falschem Herzen!</i>	<i>See to it that thy fear of God be not hypocrisy, and do not serve God with a double heart!</i>

Mark Dobell tenor

<i>Recitativo</i>	<i>Recitativo</i>
Das heutge Christentum Ist leider schlecht bestellt: Die meisten Christen in der Welt Sind laulichte Laodicäer Und aufgeblasne Pharisäer, Die sich von aussen fromm bezeigen Und wie ein Schilf den Kopf zur Erde beugen, Im Herzen aber steckt ein stolzer Eigenruhm; Sie gehen zwar in Gottes Haus Und tun daselbst die äusserlichen Pflichten, Macht aber dies wohl einen Christen aus? Nein, Heuchler könnens auch verrichten.	Today's Christianity is, alas, in a sorry state: most Christians in the world are luke-warm Laodiceans or puffed-up Pharisees, who outwardly appear so pious and like reeds humbly bow their heads, while their hearts conceal proud vanity; they go, indeed, into God's house, and there perform their superficial duties, but does this make a Christian? No, hypocrites can do the same.

Mark Dobell tenor

<i>Aria</i>	<i>Aria</i>
Falscher Heuchler Ebenbild Können Sodomsäpfel heissen, Die mit Unflat angefüllt Und von aussen herrlich gleissen. Heuchler, die von aussen schön, Können nicht vor Gott bestehn.	The image of false hypocrites could be likened to the apples of Sodom, which are filled with decay but glisten brightly on the surface. Hypocrites, though outwardly fair, cannot stand before God.

Ben Davies bass

<i>Recitativo</i>	<i>Recitativo</i>
Wer so von innen wie von aussen ist, Der heisst ein wahrer Christ.	He who is inwardly and outwardly the same can be called a true Christian.

So war der Zöllner in dem Tempel, Der schlug in Demut an die Brust, Er legte sich nicht selbst ein heilig Wesen bei; Und diesen stelle dir, O Mensch, zum rühmlichen Exempel In deiner Busse für; Bist du kein Räuber, Ehebrecher, Kein ungerechter Ehrenschwächer, Ach bilde dir doch ja nicht ein, Du seist deswegen engelrein! Bekenne Gott in Demut deine Sünden, So kannst du Gnad und Hilfe finden!	Such was the tax-collector in the temple, who smote his breast in humility, he did not look on himself as a saint; let him be, O man, a glorious example in your own penitence; though you be neither thief nor adulterer, nor an unjust slanderer, do not imagine that you are therefore as pure as an angel! If you humbly confess your sins to God, you shall receive help and mercy!
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Grace Davidson soprano

<i>Aria</i> Liebster Gott, erbarme dich, Lass mir Trost und Gnad erscheinen! Meine Sünden kränken mich Als ein Eiter in Gebeinen, Hilf mir, Jesu, Gottes Lamm, Ich versink im tiefen Schlamm!	<i>Aria</i> Dearest God, have mercy on me, grant me solace and grace! My sins afflict me, like pus in my bones, help me, Jesus, Lamb of God, I am sinking deep in mire!
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Tutti

<i>Choral</i> Ich armer Mensch, ich armer Sünder Steh hier vor Gottes Angesicht. Ach Gott, ach Gott, verfahr gelinder Und geh nicht mit mir ins Gericht! Erbarme dich, erbarme dich, Gott, mein Erbarmer, über mich!	<i>Chorale</i> I, a poor man and sinner, stand here before God's countenance. Ah God, ah God, treat me more gently and do not bring me to be judged! Have mercy, have mercy, my God of Mercy, have mercy on me!
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Mass in G BWV236 (?1738-9)

Tutti

<i>Kyrie</i> <i>Coro</i> Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison.	<i>Kyrie</i> <i>Chorus</i> Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.
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Tutti

<i>Gloria in excelsis</i> <i>Coro</i> Gloria in excelsis Deo, Et in terra pax hominibus onae voluntatis. Laudamus te, Benedicimus te, Adoramus te, Glorificamus te.	<i>Gloria in excelsis</i> <i>Chorus</i> Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace, good will towards men. We praise thee, we bless thee, we worship thee, we glorify thee.
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Eamonn Dougan bass

<i>Gratias</i> <i>Aria</i> Gratias agimus tibi propter magnam gloriam tuam. Domine Deus, Rex coelestis, Deus Pater omnipotens, Domine Fili unigenite Jesu Christe.	<i>Gratias</i> <i>Aria</i> We give thanks to thee for thy great glory. O Lord, heavenly King, God the Father Almighty. O Lord, the only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ.
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Grace Davidson soprano & Daniel Collins alto

<i>Domine Deus</i> <i>Duetto</i> Domine Deus, Agnus Dei, Filius Patris, Qui tollis eccata mundi, Miserere nobis, Suscipe deprecationem nostram. Qui sedes ad dextram Patris, Miserere nobis.	<i>Domine Deus</i> <i>Duet</i> O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us. Thou that takest away the sins of the world, receive our prayer. Thou that sittest at the right of the Father, have mercy upon us.
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Jeremy Budd tenor

<i>Quoniam</i> <i>Aria</i> Quoniam tu solus sanctus, Tu solus Dominus, Tu solus altissimus Jesu Christe.	<i>Quoniam</i> <i>Aria</i> For thou only art holy; thou only art the Lord; thou only, O Jesus Christ, art most high.
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Tutti

Cum sancto Spiritu <i>Coro</i> Cum Sancto Spiritu in gloria Dei Patris. Amen.	Cum sancto Spiritu <i>Chorus</i> With the Holy Ghost, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.
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