

WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 29 June 2023
7.30pm

Vox Luminis

Zsuzsi Tóth soprano
Erika Tandiono soprano
Victoria Cassano soprano
Christina Boner-Sutter
soprano
Sophia Faltas alto
Alexander Chance alto
Raffaele Giordani tenor
João Moreira tenor
Lionel Meunier bass
Sebastian Myrus bass

Tuomo Suni violin I
Madoka Nakamaru violin I
Cynthia Freivogel violin II
Birgit Goris violin II
Wendy Ruymen viola
Daniel Rosin cello
James Munro double bass
Jasu Moisis oboe I
Lidewei de Sterck oboe II
Tami Krausz flute I

Armin Köbler flute II, oboe II
Benny Aghassi bassoon
Luís Tasso Athayde Santos bassoon
Rudolf Lörinc trumpet I
Russell Gilmour trumpet II
William Russell trumpet III
Bart Cypers horn
Koen Plaetinck timpani
Kris Verhelst organ

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Mass in B minor BWV232 (c.1747-9)



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When in 1818 the Swiss writer Hans Georg Nägeli hailed **JS Bach's** *Mass in B minor* as 'the greatest musical artwork of all times and peoples', this was a blatant advertising pitch. Nägeli was drumming up support for his planned first printed edition of the *Mass*, which ultimately only appeared complete in 1845. But although Nägeli's publication plans did not quite work out as hoped, his statement came to form the basis for the work's monumentalising reception throughout the 19th Century and beyond: lifted out of its specific historical context to a status of universality and timelessness. And while Nägeli may well have formulated his pronouncement quite differently in a present-day multicultural environment, it is indeed striking that the *Mass* has continued to be deeply meaningful for a wide range of listeners over the past two or so centuries. Why might that be so?

One key reason for the continuing appeal of the *Mass in B minor* lies in the fact that in its very conception the work already outstripped its possible historical functions and performance contexts. Bach assembled it in the late 1740s, right towards the end of his life, in part no doubt as a way of cementing and preserving his artistic legacy. The genre of the Mass Ordinary was an ideal vehicle for this undertaking, as it formed part of both Protestant and Catholic worship practices. Moreover, in its use of the Latin language the *Mass* overcame the limitations of Bach's German-texted and more discernibly Lutheran liturgical compositions. Bach had put together the *Mass's* initial portions – the 'Kyrie' and 'Gloria' – back in 1733 with a specific purpose in mind: they formed part of a targeted appeal for a courtly title, which he hoped to obtain from the newly installed Elector of Saxony, Friedrich August II. But while it is possible that the Kyrie-Gloria pair was actually performed at the Dresden court at this point, in its complete form the *Mass in B minor* would simply have been too long for a standard 18th-century worship service. In this way, the work seems to reach beyond any immediate functional remit and instead make claims for itself as a musical statement of primarily artistic significance.

Another reason for the *Mass's* broad and lasting appeal is its striking stylistic diversity. Undoubtedly its various musical elements were all firmly rooted in Bach's specific musical-historical surroundings. Yet, taken together, they present an extraordinary panorama of musical forms and styles that seems to encompass a breathtaking gamut of human expressive possibilities. The opening sequence of movements that make up the 'Kyrie' portion offers a microcosm of the stylistic variety and contrast that pervade the *Mass* as a whole. The first 'Kyrie' is an expansive ensemble fugue that showcases all those intricate contrapuntal techniques that Bach advanced and perfected over his lifetime. Its long and tortuously chromatic subject determines both the sombre emotional tone and the unusually extensive dimensions of this movement. The subsequent 'Christe eleison' propels listeners into a completely different musical universe: Shifting from the

opening B minor tonality to a bright D major, the movement showcases the soprano and alto soloists in a duet in the most up-to-date galant style. This kind of music was hugely fashionable at the Dresden court at the time, with its thriving culture of Italian opera performances. The second 'Kyrie' then completely changes gear again. This is one of several movements of the *Mass* written in the so-called *stile antico*, an adaptation of 17th-century Palestrina-style counterpoint that Bach widely experimented with in his later years. Of course, Bach's music in no way offers an exact copy of these Renaissance procedures; rather, he updates them for his own expressive purposes. The musical subject of this second 'Kyrie' movement is thus once again highly chromatic, thereby linking back to the opening movement and its sonic profile of intense dissonance and emotional affliction.

Over the course of the *Mass*, Bach in this way stretches his listeners emotionally in different directions, plunging them into deepest despair and lifting them to the height of exhilarating joy. One moment that encapsulates the vast emotional spectrum traversed in the work occurs in the 'Credo', specifically the transition from the 'Crucifixus' to the 'Et expecto resurrectionem'. The 'Crucifixus' presents perhaps the most subdued and dissonance-ridden passage of the whole work, built upon a repeated descending chromatic bassline that had come to embody affects of tragedy and lament in Baroque operatic writing. From there, the upbeat ascending motives of the 'Et resurrexit' literally raise listeners up from the depths into a sonic feast of dance-infused jubilation. A similar emotional rollercoaster awaits as the 'Confiteor' gives way to that archetypal expression of musical joyfulness, the 'Et expecto resurrectionem'. This latter movement, as well as the 'Crucifixus' and many other of the *Mass's* individual numbers, were in fact not newly composed by Bach but reworked from pieces he had written previously, some as early as 1712. In the *B minor Mass*, Bach thus not only created a comprehensive compendium of musical style and expression, but also an anthology of what he considered to be the highpoints of his musical career – a very personal compilation of greatest hits.

So perhaps it is the combination of the *Mass's* vast proportions and its multi-layered stylistic character that generates its remarkable capacity for meaningfulness, which has allowed the piece to transcend its original time and place. Its monumental aspirations were significantly amplified, of course, by those massed stagings of the late-19th and early-20th centuries that sometimes involved literally hundreds of performers. But even with the slimmed-down forces of 21st-century historically informed performance practice, when that first 'Kyrie' exclamation strikes up, it is hard to shake an enveloping sense of awe and anticipation at the musical-affective journey that lies ahead.

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Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Mass in B minor BWV232 (c.1747-9)

Liturgical text

Kyrie

Coro
Kyrie eleison. *Chorus*
Lord, have mercy.

Aria (Duetto)
Christe eleison. *Aria (Duet)*
Christ, have mercy.

Coro
Kyrie eleison. *Chorus*
Lord, have mercy.

Gloria

Coro
Gloria in excelsis
Deo. *Chorus*
Glory be to God in the
highest.

Coro
Et in terra pax
Hominibus bonae voluntatis. *Chorus*
And in earth peace
to men of good will.

Aria
Laudamus te, benedicimus
te,
Adoramus te, glorificamus
te. *Aria*
We praise thee; we bless
thee;
we worship thee; we
glorify thee.

Coro
Gratias agimus tibi
Propter magnam gloriam tuam. *Chorus*
We give thanks to thee
for thy great glory.

Aria (Duetto)
Domine Deus, Rex coelestis,
Deus Pater omnipotens,
Domine Fili
unigenite,
Jesu Christe altissime,
Domine Deus, Agnus Dei,
Filius Patris. *Aria (Duet)*
O Lord God, Heavenly King,
God the Father Almighty.
O Lord Jesus Christ, the
only begotten Son.
Jesus Christ most high.
Lord God, Lamb of God,
Son of the Father.

Coro
Qui tollis peccata
mundi,
Miserere nobis,
Qui tollis peccata
mundi,
Suscipe deprecationem
nostram. *Chorus*
Thou that takest away the
sins of the world,
have mercy upon us.
Thou that takest away the
sins of the world,
receive our prayer.

Aria
Qui sedes ad dextram
Patris,
Miserere nobis. *Aria*
Thou that sittest at the right
hand of the Father,
have mercy upon us.

Aria
Quoniam tu solus sanctus,
Tu solus Dominus,
Tu solus altissimus Jesu
Christe. *Aria*
For thou only art holy,
thou only art the Lord,
thou only art the most
high, Jesus Christ.

Coro
Cum Sancto
Spiritu
In gloria Dei Patris.
Amen. *Chorus*
Together with the Holy
Ghost
in the glory of God the
Father. Amen.

Interval

Symbolum Nicenum

Coro
Credo in unum Deum. *Chorus*
I believe in one God.

Coro
Credo in unum Deum,
Patrem omnipotentem,
Factorem coeli et terrae,
Visibilem omnium et
invisibilem. *Chorus*
I believe in one God;
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
and of all things visible
and invisible.

Aria (Duetto)
Et in unum Dominum Jesum
Christum,
Filius Dei
unigenitum
Et ex Patre natum ante
omnia saecula.
Deum de Deo, lumen de lumine,
Deum verum de Deo vero,
Genitum, non factum,
Consubstantialem
Patri,
Per quem omnia facta
sunt.
Qui propter nos homines
Et propter nostram salutem
Descendit de coelis. *Aria (Duet)*
And in one Lord Jesus
Christ,
the only begotten Son of
God,
begotten of the Father
before all worlds;
God of God, light of light,
true God of true God,
begotten not made;
being of one substance
with the Father,
by whom all things were
made.
Who for us men
and for our salvation
descended from heaven.

Coro
Et incarnatus est
De Spiritu Sancto ex Maria
virgine,
Et homo factus est. *Chorus*
And was incarnate
by the Holy Ghost of the
Virgin Mary,
and was made man.

Coro
Crucifixus etiam pro nobis
Sub Pontio
Pilato,
Passus et sepultus est. *Chorus*
He was crucified also for us,
suffered under Pontius
Pilate,
and was buried.

Text continues overleaf. Please turn the page as quietly as possible.

Coro
Et resurrexit tertia
die
Secundum scripturas,
Et ascendit in coelum,
Sedet ad dextram Dei
Patris,
Et iterum venturus
est
Cum gloria judicare vivos et
mortuos,
Cuius regni non erit
finis.

Chorus
And on the third day he
rose again
according to the Scriptures:
and ascended into heaven.
He sitteth at the right
hand of the Father;
and he shall come again
with glory
to judge the living and the
dead;
and his kingdom shall
have no end.

Aria
Et in Spiritum Sanctum
Dominum et vivificantem,
Qui ex Patre Filioque
procedit;
Qui cum Patre et Filio
simul
Adoratur et conglorificatur;
Qui locutus est per
Prophetas.
Et unam sanctam catholicam
Et apostolicam
ecclesiam.

Aria
And in the Holy Ghost,
the Lord and giver of life,
who proceedeth from the
Father and the Son,
who with the Father and
the Son together
is worshipped and glorified;
as it was told by the
Prophets.
And I believe in one holy
catholic and apostolic
Church.

Coro
Confiteor unum baptisma
In remissionem peccatorum.

Chorus
I acknowledge one baptism
for the remission of sins.

Coro
Et expecto resurrectionem
mortuorum
Et vitam venturi saeculi.
Amen.

Chorus
And I await the resurrection
of the dead
and the life of the world to
come. Amen.

Sanctus

Coro
Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus
Dominus Deus Sabaoth.
Pleni sunt coeli et terra gloria
eius.

Chorus
Holy, Holy, Holy,
Lord God of Hosts.
Heaven and earth are full
of thy glory.

Coro
Osanna in excelsis.

Chorus
Hosanna in the highest.

Aria
Benedictus qui venit
In nomine Domini.

Aria
Blessed is he that cometh
in the name of the Lord.

Coro
Osanna in excelsis.

Chorus
Hosanna in the highest.

Agnus Dei

Aria
Agnus Dei
Qui tollis peccata
mundi,
Miserere nobis.

Aria
Lamb of God,
who takest away the sins
of the world,
have mercy upon us.

Coro
Dona nobis pacem.

Chorus
Grant us peace.