

BACH 767-8 - J.S. BACH: MASS IN B-MINOR - BWV 232

Johann Sebastian Bach was born in Eisenach, Thuringia, on March 21, 1685. His first official position came at the end of 1703, when at 18 years of age he took up his post at the small town of Arnstadt, with the responsibility of providing music for his own congregation. Following a short period at Mühlhausen, he moved to the princely Court at Weimar in 1708.

Weimar was quite a small town with only 5000 inhabitants; yet Bach was to meet some very cultured people here. Not least was his employer, the Duke of Sachsen-Weimar, one of the most distinguished and cultured nobles of his time. Bach's two-fold position as member of the Chamber Orchestra and as Organist to the Court offered him many opportunities for improvement.

His next position was at the small Court of Anhalt-Cöthen where he would hold the position of Capellmeister, the highest rank given to a musician during the Baroque Age. His master, the young Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen, was a Calvinist so there was no Church Music at Cöthen; however, the young Prince's religious beliefs did not bar him from enjoying a cheerful and cultivated style of living complete with Secular Cantatas and Instrumental Music featuring the latest styles and fashions.

Prince Leopold had already spent three years (1710-13) doing the "Grand Tour of Europe" first to Holland and England, through Germany to Italy, returning by way of Vienna. So he would have been thoroughly familiar with the latest European fashions in music. Thus Bach had, by 1723, experienced a wide variety of musical environments and duties.

Bach moved to Leipzig on May 22, 1723, where for the remaining 27 years of his life he was to live and work as Cantor, or *Directore Chori Musici Lipsiensis* - Director of Choir and Music in Leipzig. Bach's arrival was clearly a major event in the musical and social world, and one North German newspaper described it in great detail:

"Last Saturday at noon, four carts laden with goods and chattels belonging to the former Capellmeister to the Court of Cöthen arrived in Leipzig and at two in the afternoon, he and his family arrived in two coaches and moved into their newly decorated lodgings in the school building". May 31, 1723, marked the inaugural ceremony for the new Capellmeister with the customary speeches and anthems, putting an end to six unsettled months for the city in filling the post. Bach was then 38 years old.

By 1730 Bach had become widely respected as a composer, musician, teacher, organist, and specialist in organ construction. This respect had grown steadily, as Bach's reputation widened, and as he gained the official title of Court Composer to the Dresden Court - the Elector of Saxony and King of Poland. This comfortable security of position combined with the fact that Bach had established, during his first six or seven years' tenure, a more than sufficient repertoire of Cantatas (it has been suggested that he composed in total some 300), allowed him to widen his musical scope of activity.

During the 1730s, the second decade in his life at Leipzig, Bach would now begin to devote more time to activities outside the city; to examine for musical appointments, to advise on organ building, to lend support from time to time to such private establishments as at Cöthen and Weissenfels, where he was honorary Capellmeister from 1729-1736. In particular, Bach had become famous, not only as an organist and improvisator, but as an expert in organ construction. As a result he was frequently asked to advise on new organ specifications and to test newly completed instruments with a thorough and detailed examination and report, as was the custom of the time.

He also took up directorship of the Leipzig Collegium Musicum, which gave concert-style performances of instrumental and orchestral music in the music room of Zimmermann's Leipzig Coffee House.

From 1740 until his death in 1750, Bach would become more introspective, philosophical, looking back over his varied life and compositions, and reviewing the legacy he would leave to the future - for he certainly considered this an important aspect of his art, especially as tastes in music were turning rapidly away from the Baroque arts of fugue and counterpoint towards the more informal style of the Rococo and Classical periods. Thus during the latter years of his life Bach gradually withdrew inwards, producing some of the most profound statements of Baroque musical form. In these last years of his life, Bach's creative energy was conserved for the highest flights of musical expression.

The *Clavierübung* was Bach's most monumental undertaking in keyboard music. It is a publication in four parts, of which the first and second consisted of the Six Partitas for Harpsichord in Part One, and the Italian Concerto and French Overture in Part Two. Part Three is a linked set of Organ pieces based on the fundamental components of the Lutheran liturgy, while Part Four is the *Goldberg Variations*.

Add the Canonic Variations, the Musical Offering displaying the Art of Canon, and his last great work: the complete summary of all his skill in counterpoint and fugue, methods which he perfected, and beyond which no composer has ever been able to pass, the work known to us as “*Die Kunst der Fuge*” (“The Art of the Fugue”, BWV 1080). Bach also sought to leave a significant sacred Choral Work, and began to conceive the notion of what would become known as the Mass in B-Minor.

The Mass in B-Minor – Programme Notes

The original manuscript shows that Bach divided the *Mass* in four major sections, similar to the sections in the Roman Catholic Mass Ordinary. The first section is the *Missa*, and includes the *Kyrie* and *Gloria*. The second is the *Symbolum Nicenum* (or the *Credo*). The third consists of a single movement, the *Sanctus*, and the fourth is entitled *Osanna, Benedictus, Agnus Dei et Dona nobis pacem*.

For his friend the music-loving Count Anton von Sporck, a great admirer of Bach’s Cantatas who was unable to perform them in his home in Bohemia which was strictly Catholic, Bach had cleverly assembled some of his finest Cantata movements into four Short Masses, the *Missae Breves*, thus disguising Lutheran Cantata Choruses and Arias as Catholic pieces! This may well have given Bach the idea of assembling his great Mass in B Minor from his own earlier works. Thus we look back over Bach’s Choral Music to find the origins of the Mass, back, first of all, to the foundation stone, a short Kyrie-Gloria Mass from 1733.

February 1st, 1733, marked the death of Friedrich August I (also known as August the Strong), who had reigned as Prince-Elector of Saxony since 1694 and additionally as King of Poland since 1697. Saxony had not celebrated the enthronement of a new Elector-King for almost forty years, so the Coronation of August II was marked with dazzling celebrations throughout the Saxon Land. According to Ancient Custom, the new *Landesherr* would visit the important cities of his territory, to receive there the greetings of the populace. Leipzig, being Saxony’s most important City after the Capital Dresden, was first to receive the Royal Visit. On April 20, 1733, the Prince-Elector of Saxony and King of Poland made his entry into Leipzig. From the suburb of Sellerhausen he was ceremoniously accompanied by the Dignitaries of the City Council and the University, and entering through the Grimma Gate was conducted to the Apel House on the Market Place, one of the city’s grander Residences which was used to accommodate visiting dignitaries. Here the Elector descended from his Carriage and was conducted to his quarters.

The Official Celebrations were held on the next day. Following a Church Service in the Nikolaikirche, His Majesty was conveyed in a *Chaise* or Carrying Chair to the Bourse, there to accept the Greetings of the Nobility (*Ritterschaft*). He was then conducted to the *Rathaus*, the Town Hall, receiving Greetings from members of the Council and University.

During the Church Service in the Nikolaikirche, Leipzig’s main church, *Capellmeister* and *Director Musices* Johann Sebastian Bach conducted a performance of the *Kyrie* and *Gloria* especially composed for the Occasion. Though Saxony was fervently Lutheran Protestant, August I had converted to Catholicism in order to accept the Polish Crown, and his successor August II followed suit. So the Dresden Court was officially Catholic. Bach’s *Kyrie* and *Gloria* were, diplomatically, acceptable equally to both faiths. These two movements would later form the opening of the B-Minor Mass. In the following descriptive notes, the origins of each movement are noted, where known.

PART ONE: Missa, consisting of Kyrie and Gloria.

The magnificence of this work is signalled at the very outset with the mighty *adagio* five-part setting of the words *Kyrie eleison* succeeded by a fugal section of architectural grandeur and complexity. The *Christe eleison* is a gentle duet for Sopranos with a charming ritornello for Strings. The second *Kyrie*, for four-part Choir, has an intense, chromatic fugal subject. *Kyrie Eleison* (Greek for “Lord have mercy”) is a very old, even pre-Christian expression used constantly in all Christian liturgies. Its use establishes a tone of timeless nobility.

The first part of the *Gloria*, a joyous outpouring, was probably reworked from a now lost instrumental movement. The setting of *Et in terra pax* was grafted on to it without a break. The *Laudamus te*, with its beautiful Soprano Solo balanced by an equally beautiful Violin obbligato, has all the hallmarks of having originally been a Violin Duet. The *Gratias* is a fairly straight copy of the opening Chorus of Cantata No. 29 (1731), the words of which “*Wir danken dir, Gott*” (“We thank Thee, O God”) represent a literal German translation of the Latin text set here with such solemn nobility and assurance. The *Domine Deus* is a Duet for Tenor and Soprano, with accompaniment for flute and muted strings. It leads directly into the *Qui tollis*, a revision of part of the opening Chorus of Cantata No. 46 (1723), “*Schauet doch und shehet*” (“Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto His sorrow”).

In *Qui sedes*, the Alto Solo is matched by the instrument of corresponding pitch, the Oboe d’amore. The *Quoniam*, with its dark tones of Horn obbligato and well-rounded Bassoon duet figurations, provides an impressive vehicle for the Bass soloist, and leads straight into the gloriously jubilant *Cum Sancto Spiritu*, complete with agile Choral Fugue, marking the end of Bach’s original *Missa*.

PART TWO: Symbolum Nicenum (Credo)

The Nicene Creed, originally written in Greek and one of the fundamental creeds of Christianity, was drawn up by the Council of Nicaea, a meeting of Bishops in AD 325, the first Ecumenical (=worldwide) Council consisting of Church Leaders who met to discuss teachings about Jesus. The words of the Nicene Creed were formulated by the Bishops and were a statement of the most important beliefs of Christianity, being an Ecumenical Christian statement of faith accepted by the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, and major Protestant churches. The Nicene Creed is much longer than the better-known Apostles' Creed and is usually said by Christians during the celebration of the Eucharist (Mass or Holy Communion). Its three sections state beliefs about God (*Credo in unum Deum* sections 1,2), Jesus Christ (*Et in unum Dominum*, sections 3-6), and other aspects of Christianity (*Et in Spiritum Sanctum* sections 7-9). The middle section, which states Christian belief about Jesus, is the longest. It affirms that Jesus is God "of one being with the Father", which stresses the Oneness of God.

Like the *Missa*, the *Symbolum Nicenum* has its own cohesive structure. It is a superlative example of Bach's concern with symmetry: *Crucifixus* is the central pivot and the centre of the trinity of movements concerning Christ's incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection.

The Credo bursts forth with two vibrant Fugal Choruses. The first, in antique style, is based upon the plainchant associated with the words '*Credo in unum deum*' and symbolises strength of faith; the second is adapted from a chorus of praise from Cantata No. 171 (1729) "*Gott, wie deine Namem*" ("God, Thy fame is as Thy name").

Et in unum Dominum is set for Soprano and Alto with Oboe and Strings. The chorus *Et incarnatus est* depicts an intense awe, an emotion that is deepened into despair in the *Crucifixus*, reworked from a chorus in a Weimar Cantata, No. 12 (1714) "*Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen*" (Weeping, wailing, grieving, fearing). The Mass springs out from the depths of hopelessness with the jubilant *Et resurrexit*, again apparently reworked from an instrumental movement. The symmetry is apparent as the Bass Aria, *Et in Spiritum*, recalls in tone *Et in unum Dominum*, and the fugal *Confiteor*, like the first movement of the *Credo*, harks back to the older church style and uses plainsong to underpin the firmness of the belief it represents. It is linked to the final joyous *Et expecto* by a passage of the strangest, most haunting quality - quite a contrast with the exuberant chorus that ends the *Credo*.

PART THREE: Sanctus and PART FOUR: Osanna, Benedictus, Osanna (repeat), Agnus Dei, Dona Nobis Pacem

Bach's magnificent *Sanctus*, with its exultant fugue, was written originally for Christmas Day, 1724. The choir for this piece is divided into six parts. But a double (eight-part) chorus is required for the sprightly *Osanna*, based on the opening chorus of the secular Cantata No. 215 (1734) "*Preise dein Glucke, gesegnetes Sachsen*" ("Praised be your fortunes, most blessed Saxony"), a piece performed in honour of the Coronation of Augustus III as King of Poland. In a society which regards Kings as divinely appointed by God, Bach would have seen no incongruity in using the same music to praise the King of Poland and the King of Heaven.

The *Benedictus*, apparently the vestige of a lost tenor aria, with its slow, long, graceful vocal and instrumental lines is an evocation of serene love and longing. The *Agnus Dei*, which follows a straight reprise of the *Osanna*, is scored for Alto solo matched to a low-lying ritornello for strings. It uses almost the same music as "*Ach bleibe doch, mein liebstes Leben*" ("Oh, stay with me, my dearest life"), from Cantata No. 11. The *Dona nobis pacem* reprises the *Gratias*, bringing the Mass in B Minor to a triumphant close and linking majestically the concepts of peace, praise, and gratitude to God.

Postscript

While the Mass of 1733 (the *Kyrie* and *Gloria*) provided suitable music for the Royal Visit, and would subsequently lay the foundation stone for the Mass in B-Minor, Bach also had another purpose in mind for this 1733 work.

By this time, Bach had established a wide reputation as composer, musician, organist, and as an expert in organ construction and acoustics. Yet he often found himself subjected to petty criticisms by his employers, the Leipzig Town Council. Some kind of Royal Title from the Dresden Court would give him the prestige he needed and felt was his due. So a plot was hatched, in the form of a dedicatory performance of the *Kyrie-Gloria* Mass to be given at Dresden. Preparations were set in motion.

The performing parts were copied out in secret by members of the Bach family only, so that neither the Thomas School nor City officials would be aware of Bach's intentions. For the scores being prepared could not have been destined for use in Leipzig, but clearly for St Sophia's Church Dresden where W.F. Bach was Organist, since the organ there was tuned a whole tone lower than those of the Leipzig churches. Furthermore, Bach took care to gain prior support from officials at the Dresden Court and leading players in the Dresden Court Capelle. The Dresden

performance took place in July 1733 with appropriate flowery dedication to His Majesty together with a Petition requesting official recognition at Court.

Though this was not immediately forthcoming, after a reminder in 1736 by Bach's influential friend Count von Keyserlingk, the title of *Compositeur* of the Royal Court Capelle was "conferred upon Johann Sebastian Bach on the latter's most humble entreaty and because of his ability". It might be added that thereafter there were no further records of disagreements at Leipzig between Bach and either the School or City authorities.

BACH: MASS IN B-MINOR - Part 1: Missa

Kyrie

[1] Kyrie eleison! [2] Christe eleison! [3] Kyrie eleison!

Gloria

[4] Gloria in excelsis Deo.

[5] Et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis.

[6] Laudamus te, benedicimus te, adoramus te, glorificamus te.

[7] Gratias agimus tibi propter magnam gloriam tuam.

[8] Domine Deus, Rex coelestis!

Deus Pater omnipotens! Domine Filii unigenite, Jesu Christe altissime. Domine Deus! Agnus Dei! Filius Patris!

[9] Qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.

Qui tollis peccata mundi, suscipe deprecationem nostram.

[10] Qui sedes ad dextram Patris, miserere nobis.

[11] Quoniam tu solus sanctus, tu solus Dominus tu solus altissimus, Jesu Christe!

[12] Cum Sancto Spiritu in gloria Dei Patris. Amen

Part 2: Symbolum Nicenum

[1] Credo in unum Deum.

[2] Patrem omnipotentem, factorem coeli et terrae, visibilium omnium et invisibilium.

[3] Et in unum Dominum Jesum Christum, Filium 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 caelis.

Missa

Kyrie

Lord, have mercy upon us! Christ, have mercy upon us! Lord, have mercy upon us!

Gloria

Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace to men of good will. We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we worship Thee, we glorify Thee. We give thanks to Thee for Thy great glory. O Lord God, King of Heaven! God the Father Almighty, O Lord the only begotten Son, Jesus Christ most high, O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father! Thou, that bearest the sins of the world, have mercy upon us. Thou, that bearest the sins of the world, receive our prayer. Thou that sittest at the right hand of the Father, have mercy upon us. For Thou only art Holy, Thou only art Lord, Thou only art most high O Jesus Christ! With the Holy Spirit in the glory of God the Father. Amen

The Nicene Creed

I believe in one God. The Father Almighty, maker of Heaven and Earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, and born of the Father before all ages. God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God; begotten, not created; one in being with the Father by whom all things were made. Who for us and for our salvation came down from Heaven.

[4] Et incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto ex Maria Virgine, et homo factus est.

[5] Crucifixus etiam pro nobis sub Pontio Pilato passus et sepultus est.

[6] Et resurrexit tertia die secundum Scripturas Et ascendit in coelum, sedet ad dextram Dei Patris. Et iterum venturus est cum gloria iudicare vivos et mortuos; cuius regni non erit finis.

[7] 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 in unam sanctam catholicam et apostolicam ecclesiam.

[8] Confiteor unum baptisma in remissionem peccatorum.

[9] Et exspecto resurrectionem mortuorum, et vitam venturi saeculi. Amen.

Part 3: Sanctus

[10] Sanctus Dominus Deus Sabaoth! Pleni sunt coeli et terra gloria ejus.

Part 4: Osanna, Benedictus, Agnus Dei, et Dona Nobis Pacem

[11] Osanna in excelsis!

[12] Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini!

[13] Osanna in excelsis!

[14] Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.

[15] Dona nobis pacem.

And was incarnate by the Holy Ghost, of the Virgin Mary, and was made Man.

He was crucified also for us, suffered under Pontius Pilate and was buried. And the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures.

And ascended into Heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father.

And He is to come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead, of whose Kingdom there shall be no end. 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 is adored and glorified: foretold by the prophets.

And in one Holy Universal and Apostolic Church. I confess one Baptism for the Remission of Sins. And I expect the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. **Amen.**

Sanctus

Holy is the Lord God Sabaoth! Heaven and Earth are full of Thy glory.

Osanna, Benedictus, Agnus Dei, and Dona Nobis Pacem

Hosanna in the highest!

Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest!

Lamb of God, that bearest the sins of the world, have mercy upon us. Grant us peace.