

PROGRAM NOTES

When I was a boy, I remember having a little plaster bust of Johann Sebastian Bach on the piano, just behind the music stand, next to the hated (but indispensable) metronome. Handel was with him, wearing the same wig, as was Mozart, with a different one. Beethoven's little statue stood apart, a wigless free spirit. The vainglorious Liszt—what a profile!—was up on a different shelf, along with a much more elaborate bust of Wagner painted in some sort of faux metal verdigris that towered over all the rest. This stern little family of composers all looked on, long suffering, as I practiced my scales and, in Bach's case, hour after methodical hour of inventions, sinfonias, preludes and fugues. A bit later on, when we got to studying theory and composition, my piano teacher would put a book of Bach chorales up in front of me, and have me play three out of the four lines and sing the missing voice. I used to love reading a children's biography of Bach, the tale of his upbringing, how he was orphaned at age ten and sent to live with an older brother (a bit of a taskmaster), and wrote and studied music by candlelight. The little bust gave Bach's dates on the back (1685–1750); along with my childhood phone number, I imagine that will be some of the last information I forget.

Pretty much everyone who has studied music, at any age, and at any level, as a player or a listener, has had to reckon with Bach. Hearing his works is to experience rediscovery and a return to something almost primal, from earliest

memory. The *Mass in B minor* is music that you have always known, even if you have not heard it yet. Without a doubt, it is an awesome achievement, right up there with Michelangelo's daring frescoes and Neil Armstrong's footprint on the Moon. But nothing stands in the way of your truly understanding a work of art more than burying it in superlatives. It becomes distant, colossal, frozen; something to be checked off the list as you jog through the museum on the way to the gift shop. One advantage music has over the visual arts is that it demands duration. One has time—we have time tonight—to listen, co-create, engage, reflect and understand. And ideally, the process of listening helps us recognize something about ourselves.

The first and most obvious thing to notice about tonight's performance are the physical surroundings. This is not a church service—not by a longshot—but the setting, the architecture and the iconography relate to the music, the text, and Bach's inspiration for the *Mass* in a way that no concert hall can. In this Gothic simulacrum, you are sheltered by the same vaults and arches that Bach saw in his church in Leipzig, a style even more ancient than the music of Palestrina, whom Bach revered. If you look up at the ceiling, you will notice that it looks just like the bottom of a large rowboat or canoe; this is where we get the word “nave” (from the Latin word for “ship”). Gothic architecture is the architecture of motion. It draws the eye upward, and with the massive hull above us literally wants to take us somewhere.

Think about the text Bach chose for his masterpiece. The Mass, in one form or another, is the central ritual in many Christian denominations, the centerpiece of which is a reenactment of the Last Supper, a communion, a Eucharist (thanksgiving). It is fundamentally a gathering, motivated by a belief that the Divine can be experienced only in unity with other people. Bach turned to the ancient Latin Ordinary, still in use at the time in the Lutheran church in which he worshiped, believing it to be the most universal, small “c” catholic, expression of his faith. It is a beautiful, compelling text, woven from the Gospels and from early Christian and pre-Christian times, adorned by poetry and incorporating (in the Sanctus) the Hebrew prayer spoken during the 18 benedictions that precede the opening of the ark. Bach used an enduring text for music he wanted to endure.

Bach's process in composing the *Mass* is also worth understanding. The work's torso, the Kyrie-Gloria section (or Missa), was composed in 1733 to celebrate the accession of Friedrich Augustus II as Elector of Saxony and King of Poland. Starting about ten years later, Bach returned to the *Mass* project, incorporating a 1724 Sanctus setting with relatively few changes, and adding a carefully constructed setting of the Credo (Symbolum Nicenum) and Osanna, Benedictus, Agnus Dei and Dona nobis pacem movements. Bach engaged on a deep level with the text, modeling many sections on other compositions—his cantatas—that conveyed parallel incidents or emotions. (For those who do not know the cantatas, the *Mass in B minor* will be a gateway drug.) In tonight's performance, you will hear young Bach (the Crucifixus, modeled

on a 1714 cantata, aged 29) “collaborating” with old Bach (the Et incarnatus est, composed for the Mass in 1748 or 1749, aged 63–64, and the last choral music he ever wrote). What began as a work for a royal patron became a work for posterity.

Given the manner of its composition, we could forgive the *Mass* if it came across as a compilation rather than a single work of art. Yet Bach manages to pull off a coherent whole, a tightly constructed narrative of everything he knew about music and everything he believed about his faith. We proceed through different attitudes of worship: The opening section (Kyrie-Christe-Kyrie) grounds us in a prayer for mercy; the Gloria is an unabashed song of praise and thanksgiving, displaying all of the riches of Bach's vocal and instrumental forces. The Symbolum Nicenum—based on a text written by a committee—is often the most difficult section for composers to write convincingly. Bach somehow makes it vivid and believable, focusing our attention on the central event of the crucifixion of Jesus. The Sanctus lifts us wholly out of body, as we look with the prophet Isaiah on the face of God himself.

I always found the final “folio” of the *Mass* to be the hardest to make sense out of. The composer's omnibus title (Osanna, Benedictus, Agnus Dei et Dona Nobis Pacem) invites you to think of it as a grab bag, true to the maxim that great novels or symphonies tend to fall off toward the end. But if you look closer, you can see how Bach uses these five movements to transmit some important insights about his own faith. In the Gloria and Symbolum Nicenum, we hear fluid connections between the arias and choruses. Here, the connections are abrupt, with rapid mood shifts

from chorus to aria—majesty to intimacy—and back. The searching, exposed setting of the Benedictus for tenor soloist is bracketed by regal double choruses, showing the human frailty of the King of Kings; the juxtaposition makes the Osannas almost mocking, hollow. In the haunting Agnus Dei, Bach addresses Jesus directly, as a departing soulmate, revealing the vulnerability that comes with love. What emerges is a masterful and complex portrait of the central figure in Bach’s faith, a figure both powerful and fragile, who is not perceived remotely but personally, through his injunction to love one another.

For the final movement, Dona nobis pacem—*grant us peace*, Bach circles back to his 1733 setting of the Gratias agimus tibi—*we give you thanks*. The text says “please” but the music says “thank you,” as if the composer is thanking God for giving him the skill and the art to pray through music. The word “peace” is repeated three times in a row, prompting us to reflect on the meaning Bach may have taken from his own faith. Using a constantly expanding choral-orchestral texture, with trumpets taking us ever

higher and the bass instruments plumbing the depths of their own ranges—a span of six octaves in all—Bach finishes his *Mass* with a real view from the mountaintop.

In listening to the *Mass* tonight, I hope that you hear Bach directly—the man, not the bewigged plaster bust. For those who share Bach’s faith, this work can bring fresh insight and purpose. For all people of faith, the *Mass* can do everything religion is supposed to do—beautify, uplift, inspire; propose paradoxes; reconcile faith and doubt. For all who love music, we have a chance to tend the flame of our youthful experience of Bach, a spirit whose meaning only becomes clearer and more important with age—one both timeless and timely. One of Robert Shaw’s long time choristers observed that whenever he sang the *Mass in B minor*, he was acutely aware that someone in the audience would be hearing it for the first time, and someone else for the last. I hope that you have many opportunities to hear this work, and that you remember never to venerate it, but to meet it on its own terms—as the best work of someone like you.

—John Maclay

TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS

KYRIE

KYRIE ELEISON (I)

Chorus (5 voices), flutes, oboi d’amore, strings, continuo

Kyrie eleison.

Lord have mercy upon us.

CHRISTE ELEISON

Sopranos I and II, violins I and II, continuo

Christe eleison.

Christ have mercy upon us.

KYRIE ELEISON (II)

Chorus (4 voices), flutes, oboi d’amore, strings, continuo

Kyrie eleison.

Lord have mercy upon us.

GLORIA

GLORIA IN EXCELSIS

Chorus (5 voices), flutes, oboes, trumpets, timpani, strings, continuo

Gloria in excelsis Deo

Glory to God in the highest

Recycled as the opening movement of a Christmas cantata (BWV 191) (c. 1745)

ET IN TERRA PAX

Chorus (5 voices), flutes, oboes, trumpets, timpani, strings, continuo

et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis.

and on earth peace, good will toward men.

LAUDAMUS TE

Soprano II, solo violin, strings, continuo

Laudamus te. Adoramus te.	<i>We praise thee. We adore thee.</i>
Benedicimus te. Glorificamus te.	<i>We bless thee. We glorify thee.</i>

GRATIAS AGIMUS TIBI

Chorus (4 voices), flutes, oboes, trumpets, timpani, strings, continuo

Gratias agimus tibi propter magnam gloriam tuam.	<i>We give thanks to thee on account of thy great glory.</i>
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Modeled on BWV 29/I (1731) (“Wir danken dir, Gott, wir danken dir und verkündigen deine Wunder—*We thank you, God, we thank you and tell of your great deeds,*” Psalm 75:2)

DOMINE DEUS

Soprano I, tenor, solo flute, strings (muted), continuo

Domine Deus, rex coelestis, Deus Pater omnipotens. Domine Fili unigenite, Jesu Christe altissime. Domine Deus, Agnus Dei, Filius Patris:	<i>Lord God, king of heaven, God the omnipotent Father. Lord the only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, the most high. Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father:</i>
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Recycled (to a different text) as part of BWV 191 (c. 1745)

QUI TOLLIS

Chorus (4 voices), 2 flutes obbligato, strings, continuo

Qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis. Qui tollis peccata mundi, suscipe deprecationem nostram.	<i>Who takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us. Who takest away the sins of the world, hear our prayer.</i>
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Modeled on BWV 46/I (1723) (“Schauet doch und sehet, ob irgendein Schmerz sei wie mein Schmerz—*Behold and see, if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow*”, Lamentations 1:12)

QUI SEDES AD DEXTRAM PATRIS

Alto, solo oboe d’amore, strings, continuo

Qui sedes ad dextram Patris, miserere nobis.	<i>Who sittest at the right hand of the Father, have mercy upon us.</i>
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QUONIAM TU SOLUS SANCTUS

Bass, solo horn, 2 bassoons obbligato, continuo

Quoniam tu solus sanctus, tu solus Dominus, tu solus altissimus: Jesu Christe	<i>For thou alone art holy, thou alone art God, thou alone art most high: Jesus Christ</i>
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CUM SANCTO SPIRITU

Chorus (5 voices), flutes, oboes, trumpets, timpani, strings, continuo

cum Sancto Spiritu, in gloria Dei Patris. Amen.	<i>with the Holy Ghost, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.</i>
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Recycled (to a different text) as the final movement of BWV 191 (c. 1745)

SYMBOLUM NICENUM

CREDO IN UNUM DEUM

Chorus (5 voices), violins I and II, continuo

Credo in unum Deum	<i>I believe in one God</i>
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Based on a lost Credo intonation composed c. 1742 (in G mixolydian)

PATREM OMNIPOTENTEM

Chorus (4 voices), oboes, trumpets, timpani, strings, continuo

Patrem omnipotentem, factorem coeli et terrae, visibilium omnium, et invisibilium.	<i>the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.</i>
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Modeled on the opening movement of a 1729 cantata (BWV 171) (“Gott, wie dein Name, so ist auch dein Ruhm bis an der Welt Ende—*God, as your name is, so also your praise is to the ends of the world,*” Psalm 48:11)

ET IN UNUM DOMINUM

Soprano I, alto, oboes, strings, continuo

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 nos-
tram salutem descendit de coelis.

*And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the
only-begotten Son of God, born of the
Father before all ages; God of God,
Light of Light, very God of very God;
begotten, not made, being of one sub-
stance with the Father, by whom all
things were made, who for us men and
for our salvation came down from
heaven.*

Composed in the 1740s for the Mass, based on an unknown cantata movement

ET INCARNATUS EST

Chorus (5 voices), violins I and II, continuo

Et incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto
ex Maria Virgine: ET HOMO
FACTUS EST.

*And was incarnate of the Holy Ghost
by the Virgin Mary, AND WAS
MADE MAN.*

Newly composed for the Mass in 1748 or 1749, and Bach's last known choral work

CRUCIFIXUS

Chorus (4 voices), flutes, strings, continuo

Crucifixus etiam pro nobis sub Pontio
Pilato, passus, et sepultus est.

*And was crucified also for us under Pontius
Pilate; he suffered and was buried.*

Modeled on the second movement of the 1714 cantata "Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen" (BWV 12) ("Weeping, lamentation, worry, despair, anguish and trouble are the Christian's bread of tears")

ET RESURREXIT

Chorus (5 voices), flutes, oboes, trumpets, timpani, strings, continuo

Et resurrexit tertia die, secundum
Scripturas. Et ascendit in coelum: sedet
ad dexteram Patris. Et iterum venturus
est cum gloria judicare vivos et mortuos,
cujus regni non erit finis.

*And on the third day he rose again according to
the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sit-
teth on the right hand of the Father, and he shall
come again, with glory, to judge both the quick
and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.*

Based on a lost instrumental concerto (BWV Anh. 9/1, 1732 or 1735)

ET IN SPIRITUM SANCTUM

Bass, 2 oboi d'amore, continuo

Et in Spiritum Sanctum, Dominum et
vivificantem: qui ex Patre Filioque pro-
cedit. Qui cum Patre, et Filio simul
adoratur et conglorificatur: qui locutus
est per Prophetas. Et in unam, sanctam,
catholicam et apostolicam Ecclesiam.

*And I believe 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
worshiped and glorified; who spake by the
Prophets. And I believe in one holy Catholic and
Apostolic Church.*

Newly composed for the Mass, probably in 1748 or 1749

CONFITEOR

Chorus (5 voices), continuo

Confiteor unum baptismam in remis-
sionem peccatorum. Et expecto resur-
rectionem mortuorum...

*I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission
of sins, and I look for the resurrection of
the dead...*

Newly composed in the 1740s for the Mass

ET EXPECTO

Chorus (5 voices), flutes, oboes, trumpets, timpani, strings, continuo

Et expecto resurrectionem mortuorum.
Et vitam ventura saeculi. Amen.

*and I look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.*

Modeled on second movement of BWV 120 (1729) ("Jauchzet, ihr erfreuten Stimmen, steigt bis zum Himmel 'nauf—Exult, you delighted voices, climb all the way to heaven!")

SANCTUS

SANCTUS

Chorus (6 voices), oboes (3), trumpets, timpani, strings, continuo

Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, Dominus	<i>Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God</i>
Deus Sabaoth. Pleni sunt coeli et terra	<i>of Hosts. Heaven and earth are full</i>
gloria eius.	<i>of his glory.</i>

Composed for Christmas Day, 1724; originally for three sopranos, alto, tenor and bass; modified for the *Mass* for two sopranos, two altos, tenor and bass

OSANNA, BENEDICTUS, AGNUS DEI ET DONA NOBIS PACEM

OSANNA

Double chorus, flutes, oboes, trumpets, timpani, strings, continuo

Osanna in excelsis.	<i>Hosanna in the highest.</i>
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Derived from a secular cantata used in an open-air performance for the Saxon King-Elector on his visit to Leipzig (BWV 215/1, 1734). "Preise dein Glücke, gesegnetes Sachsen, Weil Gott den Thron deines Königs erhält—*Praise your good fortune, blessed Saxony, since God upholds the throne of your king*"

BENEDICTUS

Tenor, solo flute, continuo

Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini.	<i>Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.</i>
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Composed for the *Mass* c. 1748–1749, based on an unknown aria

OSANNA

Double chorus, flutes, oboes, trumpets, timpani, strings, continuo

Osanna in excelsis.	<i>Hosanna in the highest.</i>
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AGNUS DEI

Alto, violins, continuo

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis. Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.	<i>Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, have mercy on us. Lamb of God, who tak- est away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.</i>
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(final statement omitted by Bach)

Modeled on an alto aria from BWV 11 (also called the Ascension Oratorio) (c. 1735) (Ach, bleibe doch, mein liebstes Leben, Ach, fliehe nicht so bald von mir!—*Ah, just stay, my dearest Life, Ah, don't flee so soon from me!*), based on a lost wedding cantata movement (BWV Anh. 196/3) (1725)

DONA NOBIS PACEM

Chorus (4 voices), flutes, oboes, trumpets, timpani, strings, continuo

Dona nobis pacem.	<i>Grant us peace.</i>
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Modeled on Gratias agimus tibi (from the *Mass*, BWV 232)