

Tafelmusik

BACH B-MINOR MASS

Directed by Ivars Taurins

April 5–8, 2018, Jeanne Lamon Hall, Trinity-St. Paul's Centre

April 10, 2018, George Weston Recital Hall, Toronto Centre for the Arts

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Mass in B Minor

Dorothee Miels soprano

Laura Pudwell mezzo-soprano

Charles Daniels tenor

Tyler Duncan baritone

Tafelmusik Chamber Choir

Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra

There will be a 20-minute intermission between the Missa and the Symbolum Nicenum.

Program Notes

by Charlotte Nediger

In the last years of his life, Johann Sebastian Bach set about composing and compiling a series of works that would represent a summation of his life's work. The works were written, not for specific occasions, but rather as a testimonial to his achievements, and include *The Musical Offering*, *The Art of the Fugue*, *The Goldberg Variations*, and the eighteen chorale preludes. The last to be composed was the Mass in B Minor. Much has been written as to why Bach, a devout Lutheran, would have chosen a setting of the Roman Catholic Ordinary as a testament to his choral work. A plausible explanation is that Bach wished to leave to posterity a great Latin mass, a centuries-old symbol of Western culture, and a musical form that had challenged generations of composers. The tradition and the architecture of the Roman mass gave him the opportunity to write a complex, highly structured work, with a formality and on a scale not permitted by the Lutheran cantatas and Passions. Like those of the other great cyclical works mentioned above, the score of the Mass in B Minor can be seen almost as a "text book." It was, in fact, never performed in its entirety in Bach's lifetime. Bach's score was inherited by his son Carl Philipp Emanuel, who performed the Symbolum Nicenum at a charity concert in Hamburg in 1786. Forkel and Haydn had copies, and Beethoven made two unsuccessful attempts to procure a score. The Berlin Singakademie apparently rehearsed the work in the second decade of the

nineteenth century, but the first performance of the complete work, translated into German and “modernized,” took place in Leipzig in 1859, more than a century after it was written.

One of the most astonishing features of this work is that, despite its elaborate symmetry and complexity, it is largely a compilation of works written much earlier. The first section to be composed was the Sanctus, first performed in 1724 as part of the Lutheran Christmas service. Manuscript parts of the Kyrie and the Gloria accompanied Bach’s petition in 1733 for a court title to the new Elector of Saxony in Dresden. Two new sections, the Credo and the movements from the Osanna to the end, contain large-scale reworkings of earlier works, including movements from several of Bach’s German cantatas. Only a few choruses were newly composed. It does not seem, however, that early models were chosen in order to facilitate or hasten the compositional process, a practice that was common in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as composers struggled to meet deadlines. Bach’s reworkings were extensive and detailed: even details of text accentuation and resulting changes in articulation have been fully considered. It seems rather that Bach’s use of early material was carefully planned, so that this “text book” score could preserve a vast range of styles and genres. It is a remarkable demonstration of Bach’s great skill at reworking and restructuring existing works. It was also a testament to the tradition of the parody mass: parody is the term used to describe the extensive reuse of existing material, and this technique was widely used in mass composition during the renaissance. Parody masses form a large proportion of the masses of such composers as Gombert, Victoria, Lassus, and Palestrina. Bach’s use of the renaissance *stile antico* in several movements of the mass is a further nod to the long tradition of mass composition, here ingeniously coupled with movements written in high baroque style, and others in a “modern,” galant musical language.

From this diverse material Bach created a coherent and balanced work, each of the four main parts presented in a symmetrical design complete unto itself, and yet all parts intricately interconnected. This complex work, which both challenges and satisfies on countless levels, is perhaps the ultimate expression of Bach’s belief that “the aim or final goal of all music shall be nothing but the honour of God and the recreation of the Soul.”

The autograph manuscript score of the Mass in B Minor is in the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin Preußischer Kulturbesitz (Mus. Ms. Bach P180), and can be viewed on their website. After Bach’s death, the score was inherited by his son, Carl Philipp Emanuel, and then by CPE’s daughter, Anna Carolina. Hans Georg Nägeli, a composer and music publisher in Zurich, acquired the score from her estate in 1805, and in 1818 announced his plans to publish the score and sell it by subscription:

ANNOUNCEMENT

of the Greatest Work of Art of All Times and Nations

The incomparably great Johann Sebastian Bach has now, in our own time, been accorded a degree of recognition that makes it possible to proceed toward the publication of the work that, in content and length alone, but above all in grandeur, style, and wealth of

invention, surpasses his works hitherto printed, to the same extent that these, without considering the vicissitudes of taste and the contingency of art forms, surpass those by all other composers. This is a Mass in five voices with full orchestra.

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3.3. *Symbolum Nicenum*

The image shows a handwritten musical score for the Credo section of a Mass in five voices with full orchestra. The score is written on multiple staves, including vocal parts and orchestral instruments. The lyrics "Cre - do in u - num De - um in u - num De - um in u - num De - um in u - num De - um in u - num De - um" are visible on the vocal staves. The score is written in a historical style, with various musical notations and clefs.

Bach's manuscript score of the Credo, described by Nægeli as "truly the most amazing piece of music in existence [...] the awakening of the powers of faith through the wondrous force of music."