

Notes on the Program



We have been privileged to have Dr. Robin Leaver as The Bach Choir's program annotator for 30 years. On this significant anniversary, we thank Dr. Leaver for all that he has brought to our audiences through his distinguished scholarship in the field of sacred choral music and his illuminating insights into the music of Bach.

This year's Bach Festival marks a particular personal milestone for me. It was 30 years ago (unbelievably!) that I began writing program notes for The Bach Choir of Bethlehem. In the fall of 1984 Greg Funfgeld had only recently become the conductor of The Choir, and I was in my first semester at Westminster Choir College, Princeton, having just been imported from England. The Bach world was then looking forward to the Bach Year of 1985, the celebration of the 300th anniversary of Bach's birth. The new conductor came up with the idea that The Choir should not wait until the 1985 Bach Festival to celebrate the anniversary but should anticipate it with a concert in December of 1984. This was a new venture for The Choir that up until then had mostly only performed at its annual Bach Festival in May. Greg met with me in Princeton early in the semester and invited me to write the notes for this extra concert. How could I say no to the opportunity of contributing to the oldest Bach Choir in America? So I duly wrote the notes for the one-off occasion and thought that was that, since I knew that Alfred Mann, the previous conductor of The Choir – the much-respected Bach and Handel scholar – would be continuing to write the program notes for the annual Bethlehem Bach Festivals. Thus Dr. Mann wrote the notes for the Bach Year Festival in 1985, but he indicated that these would be the last he would write for The Choir, and recommended that I should take his place as the program annotator. So from then on I have written the program notes, not only for the annual Bach Festivals but also for the Christmas concerts which, after the December concert of 1984 anticipating the Bach year, quickly became annual events, as did the spring concerts that were soon added to the annual sequence of performances.

The Bethlehem Bach Festival has its origin in the first complete American performance of the *Mass in B Minor*, which took place in March 1900. Since then, at every subsequent Festival, this massive vocal work has formed the center-piece of the program. In my early notes for the annual Bach Festivals, I commented on sections of the *Mass*, along with the other vocal works of Bach that were to be performed in the respective year. But I occasionally commented on the *Mass* as a whole. It is therefore high time that I should concentrate again on the complete *Mass in B Minor*, and take the opportunity to refer to some of the important developments of the past 30 years or so.

Much attention has been given to the state of Bach's original manuscript score, which has suffered from acidity of the ink that has eaten into the paper. But also C.P.E. Bach made modifications to the score when he conducted performances of the *Symbolum Nicenum* in Hamburg. It is extremely difficult to distinguish between what Sebastian Bach wrote and C.P.E. modified. Thus parts of the score have been subjected to micro X-ray fluorescence analysis (reported in *Bach Jahrbuch* 2009) which has certainly helped to clarify some of the problems. But in the same issue of the *Bach Jahrbuch* Peter Wollny revealed that another son, J.C.F. Bach, had also made some contributions to the score during the last

months of his father's life. Thus the struggle to clarify what Bach intended in this superlative work has continued to engage many Bach scholars who have written books and articles as well as creating new scholarly editions of the work: Christoph Wolff (1997), Joshua Rifkin (2007) and Uwe Wolf (2009), as well as a high quality facsimile of the original score (2007). An international symposium on the *Mass in B Minor* was held in Belfast, Northern Ireland, in 2007, which in turn led to the recent publication of collected essays discussing various aspects of the work and its performance: *Exploring Bach's Mass in B Minor*, edited by Yo Tomita, Robin A. Leaver, and Jan Smaczny (Cambridge 2013).

What we now know as Bach's *Mass in B Minor* is made up of music composed between 1714 and 1749, in other words, it is music that spans almost all of Bach's compositional activity, although it was only put into its familiar form sometime during the last year or so of Bach's life. He arranged the music in four distinct sections: *Missa*, *Symbolum Nicenum*, *Sanctus*, and *Osanna* through *Dona nobis pacem*. While each of these sections could have been – and some clearly were – performed in the Leipzig liturgy, it is clear that the work was conceived as an integrated complete whole, even though there was no occasion when it could have been used in its entirety within the Lutheran liturgy of the Leipzig churches, or even the Catholic liturgy of the Dresden court chapel – it was just too long. No one before, nor since, had composed a *Mass* on such a scale. The irony is that the composer himself never heard his massive *Mass in B Minor* in a single performance.

Missa

The *Missa*, that is, the setting of the *Kyrie* and *Gloria*, was completed by mid-1733. Bach sent a packet containing a set of 21 orchestral and vocal parts of the *Missa* to the new Elector of Saxony, Frederick Augustus II, and with it he sent a covering letter, dated 27 July 1733, in which he requested the honorary title of Saxon Court Capellmeister. The main reason for Bach's request was in order to establish his rights in a series of disputes with Leipzig officialdom concerning his duties in the city. In Leipzig it was the custom to perform concerted settings of the *Missa* on major festivals and other special occasions. Thus it seems likely that the *Missa* was originally composed for use in the Leipzig churches sometime before 1733, and that copies of the parts were specially made to be sent to Dresden, where in the Catholic court chapel it was also customary to perform concerted settings of the *Missa*, rather than settings of all five parts of the Ordinary of the *Mass*. However, there are no signs in these Dresden parts that the *Missa* was ever performed in Dresden.

Following earlier models, Bach employs a threefold *Kyrie*, a simple symmetrical structure in which the soprano duet is framed by two choral fugues:

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| 1. <i>Kyrie eleison</i> | choral fugue, single theme |
| 2. <i>Christe eleison</i> | soprano duet, homophonic variety of themes, with canonic imitation, etc |
| 3. <i>Kyrie eleison</i> | choral fugue, single theme |

Instead of starting out directly with the fugal theme, Bach makes a majestic, four-measure announcement at the beginning of the first *Kyrie*. The soprano motif of these measures is clearly derived from the first *Kyrie* of Luther's *Deutsche Messe* (1526), as is the theme of the following fugue. In the opening four measures it is the word "Kyrie" that is emphasized; in the fugue it is "eleison"; and the music of both is an insistent and intensive prayer for "mercy." In an essay that was published in German in 1967 but not translated



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into English until 1991, Christoph Wolff (*Bach: Essays on His Life and Music*, Cambridge, MA, 1991, pp.141ff.) demonstrated that Bach was influenced by a setting of the *Kyrie* from the *Missa in G Minor* by Johann Hugo von Wilderer (1670–1724) that he had copied and performed in Leipzig sometime earlier. The parallels are unmistakable but the ingenuity of Bach's counterpoint surpasses that of the composer to the Palatine court in Düsseldorf and Mannheim.

In the following soprano duet a distinctive contrast is drawn as Bach focuses on "Christe," to whom the prayer "elevation" is made, and through whom grace and forgiveness come. The two voices enter in what Wilfred Mellers calls "a luminous chain of parallel thirds" (*Bach and the Dance of God*, New York, 1981, p. 172), and are symbolic of the person of Christ. The same symbolism is found in the duet *Et in unum Dominum Jesum Christum* in the *Credo*. The two voices, which speak as one, are a symbolic reference to the two natures of Christ, a fundamental tenet in Lutheran theology: Christ is both Son of God and Son of Man, the one, unique mediator between the perfect God and imperfect humanity, the guarantor of grace and forgiveness. It is a theme that can be found in a number of Bach's cantatas, notably the Estomihi (Sunday before Lent) Cantatas: *Du wahrer Gott and Davids Sohn* ("Thou true God and David's son," BWV 23), and *Herr Jesu Christ, wahr' Mensch und Gott* ("Lord Jesus Christ, true Man and God," BWV 127). With the final *Kyrie* the stress returns to the prayer for mercy, in the *stile antico*, that is, a choral fugue written in the "old style" associated with the music of Palestrina. It is a dense and tension-packed movement which nevertheless ends on an optimistic F-sharp Major chord, preparing the way for the jubilant *Gloria*.

The liturgical text of the *Gloria* is derived from two sources: the heavenly hymn the angels sang at the birth of Jesus, as recorded in Luke 2:14, to which was added, sometime during the liturgical development of the early church, the earthly hymn of response, beginning with the words *Laudamus te*. The *Kyrie* is a Trinitarian prayer for mercy and the *Gloria* a Trinitarian hymn of praise. Thus it is not surprising to find that the *Missa* in Gottfried Vopelius' *Neu Leipziger Gesangbuch*, published in 1682 – the hymnal in use by the choirs in Bach's day – is included under the section of Trinitarian hymns. The same hymnal also divides the *Missa* into three basic sections: *Kyrie*, *Gloria in excelsis*, and *Laudamus te*, the same divisions found in Bach's *Missa* of 1733. Bach presents the *Gloria in excelsis* into its component parts by separating the Biblical hymn of the angels from the liturgical hymn of the early church:

A

Biblical Hymn

Gloria in excelsis Deo
et in terra pax – Chorus

B

Liturgical Hymn

Laudamus te – Soprano aria
Gratias agimus – Chorus

Domine Deus – Soprano and Tenor duet
Qui tollis peccata mundi – Chorus
Qui sedes ad dextram – Alto aria

Quoniam tu solus – Bass aria
Cum Sancto Spiritu – Chorus

The transition from the close of the *Kyrie* to the opening of the *Gloria in excelsis Deo*, the Biblical hymn, involves more than a change of mood. For Bach it also involves a change in compositional technique. Whereas at the end of the *Kyrie* the orchestra simply doubles the voice parts, in the *Gloria*

there is independent instrumentation, complete with trumpets and timpani. Indeed, there is reason to believe that the movement may have been originally conceived as a purely instrumental piece. The *Kyrie* "alle breve" gives way to triple time, and the chorus voice-parts are increased from four to five. It is a magnificent and demanding concertato movement that works its way to an appropriate climax in the final measures, when the sopranos reach high b for "excelsis." The following *et in terra pax* is in mood and time signature a contrast to the *Gloria in excelsis Deo*, as if the song of earth cannot quite match the song of the heavenly angels, yet even here the ensuing fugue cannot remain earth-bound for long and is soon soaring in sixteenth notes.

Bach's setting of the old liturgical hymn, beginning *Laudamus te*, is a balanced symmetrical structure centered on the chorus *Qui tollis peccata mundi*. The outer movements – *Laudamus te/Gratias agimus* and *Quoniam tu solus/Cum Sancto Spiritu* – concentrate on the glory of the Trinity of Godhead and have the same form: a solo followed by a chorus. The *Laudamus te* at the beginning is an intimate celebration of God's glory, an interplay between solo soprano and solo violin. The equivalent movement towards the end, *Quoniam tu solus*, is an incredible piece, unparalleled elsewhere in Bach's music. The vocal line of the aria as well as the accompanying instruments are all written in the bass clef: bass solo, horn obbligato, two bassoons, and basso continuo. Bach is here accentuating the word "altissimus." At this word the horn soars above the solo voice and the other accompanying instruments, and the bassoons are found at the top of their range. The chorus *Gratias agimus* is a reworking of a movement from the Town Council inauguration Cantata, BWV 29, written in 1731, a dignified ascription of glory and praise – a double fugue in the *stile antico*. The music reappears at the end of the *Mass* as the *Dona nobis pacem* (see below). *Cum Sancto Spiritu* is no less an ascription of fugal praise but shares the character of the opening *Gloria in excelsis Deo*, indeed, the beginning of the fugal theme is an inversion of the opening *Gloria in excelsis Deo*!

The central chorus is framed by two solo movements. The *Domine Deus* is a profound and ethereal duet for soprano and tenor, clearly representing the first two Persons of the Godhead, since the texts *Domine...pater omnipotens* and *Domine filie unigenite* are set simultaneously: the Father and the Son in dialogue concerning the salvation of the world, accomplished through the *Agnus Dei*, the Lamb of God. The *Qui sedes ad dextram* is a tight, canonic movement in which the alto solo and accompanying oboe d'amore are interwoven together. The two lines converge into a unison passage (mm. 20-21), an unusual feature for Bach, and appear to be a symbolic reference to the unity of the Trinity. At the heart of Bach's setting of the liturgical hymn is the chorus *Qui tollis peccata mundi*. It is another "borrowed" movement, taken from the cantata *Schauet doch und sehet* (BWV 46), written for Trinity 10 in 1723. The Gospel for that day, from Luke 19, concerns the lamentation of Jesus over Jerusalem. Here the text is the three-fold prayer for mercy addressed to Christ, the Lamb of God, reminiscent of the *Agnus Dei* that occurs at the end of the Ordinary of the *Mass*. There are many Trinitarian associations throughout the movement, for example, it is in 3/4 time and the repetition of phrases of the text is usually three-fold in each voice part. It is a profound central movement, emphasizing the unity of the Trinity of the Godhead in redemption, which is focused in the death of the Lamb of God. The movement is thus analogous to the *Crucifixus*, the central movement of the *Credo*. Thus for Bach the glory of God is to be found in the glory of the cross.

Symbolum Nicenum

In an article in the 1988 *Bach Jahrbuch*, the substance of which was not translated into English until 1990 (*Bach. The Journal of the Riemenschneider Bach Institute*, Vol. 21/1, 1990, pp. 3ff.), Yoshitake Kobayashi revealed new



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information on the composition of the remaining sections of the *Mass in B Minor*. By a combination of detailed examination of dated manuscript documents, Bach's handwriting during the last decade of his life, together with the identification of individual copyists' hands, and watermarks of the paper of the respective manuscripts, Dr. Kobayashi was able to construct a more precise chronology of the later works of Bach. One of the far-reaching conclusions is that the *Art of Fugue* (BWV 1080), long considered one of the latest, if not the last, works composed by the Leipzig master was in a substantially complete form by the early 1740s, and that therefore the *Mass in B Minor*, in its final form, was the very last work to be completed by Bach.

In 1994 Peter Wollny revealed the discovery of a manuscript of the first movement of the *Symbolum Nicenum – Credo in unum Deum* – in the hand of Bach's pupil Johann Friedrich Agricola (*Bach Jahrbuch* 1993, pp. 163ff.). There are some notable differences between this manuscript and Bach's score of the *Mass*, not least the fact that it is in G Major whereas in Bach's score it is in A Major. The implication is that Agricola's manuscript is a copy of an earlier version of the movement, which suggests that Bach may have been considering setting the complete text of the Nicene Creed for quite some time.

The first part of the *Mass in B Minor*, the *Kyrie* and *Gloria*, had been composed in (or by) the year 1733. The remainder of the work, from the *Credo* to the end, can now be specifically assigned to the period between August 1748 and October 1749, that is, during the last two years of Bach's life. During these fourteen months Bach reworked a substantial number of earlier composed movements for the remaining sections of the *Mass*. The *Mass in B Minor* in its entirety, therefore, stands at the pinnacle of Bach's creative output, a kind of "last will and testament," a final statement of music and faith.

During the process of compilation and composition of the *Symbolum Nicenum* Bach changed his mind over the structure of the individual movements. This is evident from his manuscript score of the *Credo*. Originally he planned to set the Creed in eight movements:

1. *Credo in unum Deum*
2. *Patrem omnipotentem*
3. *Et in unum Dominum* (including *Et incarnatus est*)
4. *Crucifixus*
5. *Et resurrexit*
6. *Et in Spiritum sanctum*
7. *Confiteor*
8. *Et expecto*

Just how far Bach had proceeded with this plan is difficult to say, but at some later date – certainly after he had written out some, or all, of the *Crucifixus*; possibly after he had written out all eight movements – he decided to change the whole structure of the Creed. Instead of the original eight movements he decided on a symmetry of nine, with the *Crucifixus* at the center. There was an obvious theological reason for doing so since the work of Christ on the cross stands at the center of Christianity and also at the center of the classic confession of faith. Such concern for symmetry around an important focal point is frequently found in Bach's works: for example, the *Johannespassion* (BWV 245), the motet *Jesu meine Freude* (BWV 227), the *Magnificat* (BWV 243), numerous cantatas, as well as in the 1733 *Missa*.

In order to produce this focal point of the *Crucifixus* Bach first re-wrote the vocal parts of the duet *Et in unum Dominum*, to eliminate the words *Et incarnatus est*, and included the newly-written parts in an appendix given at the end of the manuscript score of the *Credo*. He then composed the now

familiar meditative *Et incarnatus est*, written out on a separate sheet and inserted into the score before the *Crucifixus*:

1. *Credo in unum Deum*
2. *Patrem omnipotentem*
3. *Et in unum Dominum*
4. *Et incarnatus est*
5. *Crucifixus*
6. *Et resurrexit*
7. *Et in Spiritum sanctum*
8. *Confiteor*
9. *Et expecto*

The *Credo in unum Deum* is a masterpiece of contrapuntal engineering, an eight-part – five voices, two upper strings, and continuo – movement in the *stile antico*. The feeling of antiquity is reinforced by the fugal theme which is developed from the intonation, the opening melodic phrase, of Gregorian chant: *Credo in unum Deum*. Bach's reasoning seems to have been that belief in God is both ancient and fundamental. The second movement, *Patrem omnipotentem*, is an adaptation of the first movement of Cantata 171, written for New Year's Day 1729, and associated with the text of Psalm 48:10: "O God, according to thy Name, so also is thy glory to the ends of the world," a confession of faith in the Creator, and thus akin to the opening statements of the *Credo*. Bach therefore, with understandable logic, uses the same music he had originally composed to glorify God's name, almost 20 years earlier, to extol the specific name of God: *Patrem omnipotentem*. But the movement underwent substantial re-composition for this new position in the *Credo*. For example, instead of the vocal fugal entries being made in simple succession at the beginning of the movement, they are disguised by a superimposed figure derived from the preceding movement, and the text *Patrem omnipotentem* is juxtaposed with *Credo in unum Deum*. Bach therefore links the two movements together indivisibly: faith in God the Creator must lead to the celebration of his glory.

In the symmetrical structure of the *Credo* a pair of choral movements occur at the beginning and at the end. The first movement of the concluding pair, *Confiteor unum baptisma*, has many links with the opening *Credo in unum Deum*. It is composed in the *stile antico*, and the associated Gregorian melody is heard within the counterpoint. But there are also distinct differences because of the content of the different text. Musically *Confiteor* is stressed, rather than *unum baptisma*, together with *in remissionem peccatorum*, thus making the correlation that to believe is to be forgiven. In the continuo of this ingenious movement are rising chromatic figures, the inversion of what is heard repeatedly in the continuo of the *Crucifixus* movement. It is a musical statement of the theological precept that forgiveness is the outcome of the crucifixion.

Following the *Confiteor*, the text *Et expecto resurrectionem mortuorum* is heard twice: first in an *adagio* section emphasizing "death" followed by a *vivace e allegro* depicting "resurrection." This repetition of the text blurs the distinction between the two movements 8 and 9, and parallels the close relationship between movements 1 and 2. Movement 8, like movement 2, is a re-working of an earlier piece from a cantata. Bach took the second movement of Cantata 120, written for the inauguration of the Leipzig Town Council in 1728, and substantially recomposed it for the final statement of the *Credo*. The general theme of rejoicing in the original cantata is recast as specific joy in the resurrection, with appropriate fanfares and emphatic "Amen."

Movements 3 and 4 are paired together in Bach's symmetrical structure, but not as closely as movements 1 and 2. *Et in unum Deum*, like *Christe eleison*, is a



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duet in which the differences and similarities of the Father and Son relationship are depicted. This is appropriate since the words of the text stand at the beginning of the second paragraph of the Nicene Creed which centers on the person and work of God the Son. The movement is followed by the *Et incarnatus est*, composed as something of an afterthought – although it is anything but superficial. The downward motion of the upper strings and the voice entries are representations of the symbolically downward movement of the incarnation.

The two movements which are immediately consequential to the central movement are 6 and 7: *Et resurrexit* and *Et in Spiritum Sanctum*. The first is a virtuosic, concerto-like movement which calls for the full orchestral and vocal resources – for the first time in the *Credo*. It stands in stark contrast to the preceding *Crucifixus* and is a magnificent celebration of the resurrection and ascension. In yet another contrast, movement 7 is calm, tranquil, and light in comparison with the previous movement, a lively honoring of the *Spiritum Sanctum vivificantem* – “the Spirit, the giver of life.”

At the center of Bach’s monumental setting of the *Credo* is the *Crucifixus*. The music is taken from the opening section of the first movement of the Weimar cantata for the Third Sunday after Easter, 1714, *Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen* (BWV 12). This cantata libretto deals with the significance of the cross for Christian life, but does so in a rather oblique, almost hidden, way. For example, the second part of the first movement speaks of “the sign of Jesus” but does not actually say that “the sign of the cross” is meant. However, the implication is very clear and at the opening of the cantata movement, after the entry of the voices in descending order, makes a disguised sign of the cross on the score with the successive voice entries: tenor, bass, soprano and alto, but if you trace your finger on the score from soprano entry above to the bass entry below, from the tenor entry on the left to the alto entry on the right then you will find that you have made the sign of the cross. Thus in the original cantata there was already a “crucifixion” motif and therefore it is easy to see why Bach chose to re-use this music at this pivotal position in the *Credo* of the *Mass in B Minor*.

Bach reworked his music in small but significant ways, for example the addition of a four-measure introduction in which the repeated passacaglia theme in the *continuo* is clearly stated, and the modification of the upper voice parts to intensify the declamation of *Crucifixus*. In the *Mass* this movement has links with the setting of *Qui tollis peccata mundi* in the *Gloria in excelsis Deo*: significantly both are pivotal movements in the center of symmetrical structures of movements; they are the only two movements in the *Mass* in which the normal five-voice vocal writing is reduced to four, by the elimination of the first soprano; and both have pulsating, anxious note repetitions in the *continuo*. These connections are not arbitrary for he “who takes away the sin of the world” did so by the work of the cross. The repeated *passacaglia* theme in the *continuo* – the only instance of the form in the *Mass* – is also to be thought of theologically as well as musically: the repeated theme in the *basso continuo* is a reminder of the basic doctrine of the cross, which needs to be continuously restated in both theology and life.

Sanctus

The massive *Sanctus* originated as an independent movement for *musica sub communione* – music during the distribution of communion – first performed on Christmas Day 1724. How often it was repeated at suitable high festivals in subsequent years is unknown, but there is evidence – from a *continuo* part – that it was sung again sometime between 1743 and August 1748. Significantly, this is the period that immediately preceded the fourteen months that Bach worked on completing the *Mass*, which incorporates the 1724 *Sanctus*. The liturgical use of the *Sanctus* at the distribution of communion

was long-standing in Lutheran tradition in general and in Leipzig custom in particular, but usually only on high festivals such as Christmas and Easter. The *Neu Leipziger Gesangbuch*, edited by Gottfried Vopelius, included three different settings of the *Sanctus* (two plainsong and one in six voices). Like Vopelius before him, Bach chose to write the *Sanctus* in six voices, but he was probably as much directly influenced by the Biblical background of the *Sanctus* as by the setting of the editor of the Leipzig hymnal. Isaiah 6.1-2 reads: “I saw the Lord...about him were attendant Seraphim, and each had six wings; one pair covered his face and one pair his feet, and one pair was spread in flight. They were calling ceaselessly to one another...” Thus Bach’s *Sanctus* abounds in sixes, threes and twos, not only illustrating the Isaiah 6 passage but also symbolizing the traditional interpretation of the *Sanctus* as a Trinitarian hymn in which each “*Sanctus*” is addressed to the three Persons of the Trinity in turn. The movement is the only six-part writing found in his ecclesiastical vocal works and, in addition to timpani and *continuo*, calls for an orchestra made up of three trumpets, three oboes, and three strings. Further, it makes emphatic use of triplets, especially in the opening measures; often calls for three vocal parts to be contrasted against the full six-part texture; and on two occasions – both for the duration of three measures – the three highest voices and the three lowest voices call back and forth to each other, imitating the Seraphim of Isaiah’s vision. It is a truly magnificent “visionary” movement, and it is not surprising that later in life Bach wanted to incorporate it into the longer work conceived on an even grander scale.

Osanna, Benedictus, Agnus Dei and *Dona nobis pacem*

Liturgically, the *Osanna* and *Benedictus* immediately follow the *Sanctus*. According to the Saxon *Agenda*, when the *Sanctus* was sung to simple plainchant, the *Osanna* and *Benedictus* were included. The *Neu Leipziger Gesangbuch* of Vopelius, however, indicates that choral settings of the *Sanctus* usually omitted the additional texts. This practice explains why Bach omitted the *Osanna* and *Benedictus* from his *Sanctus* of 1724. Since Bach was now intent on setting the complete Ordinary of the *Mass*, they are to be included – in a simple symmetrical structure created by the repetition of the *Osanna*:

1. *Osanna in excelsis*
2. *Benedictus*
3. *Osanna in excelsis*

The *Osanna* is a reworking of the opening chorus of the celebratory, secular cantata, *Preise dein Glücke, gesegnetes Sachsen* (BWV 215). Bach’s choice appears to have been determined by the similarity of its principal theme with that of *pleni sunt coeli* of the *Sanctus*. It is a movement of massive proportions, eight-part chorus with twelve-part orchestra, unparalleled elsewhere in the *Mass*. In contrast the *Benedictus* calls for the least number of resources in the whole work: a trio for violin or flute (Bach’s score does not indicate which), tenor, and *continuo*. It too is probably a parody of an earlier, otherwise unknown, movement. By the symmetry of the three movements Bach focuses upon the *Benedictus*, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” By so doing he emphasizes the presence of Christ, which is fundamental in Lutheran eucharistic theology and devotion. The surrounding *Osanna in excelsis*, with its rich orchestral texture, has links with the *Gloria in excelsis* of the *Missa*.

The last two movements of the *Mass in B Minor*, both of them parodies of earlier music, together form a setting of the *Agnus Dei*, and are probably to be considered as a single unit. There is a liturgical connection between the *Kyrie* and *Agnus Dei* in that the latter can be regarded as a troped (expanded) version of the former. The title “*Kyrie*” (“*Lord*”) is replaced by the title “*Agnus Dei*” (“*Lamb of God*”), which is followed by the trope “*qui tollis peccata mundi*” (“*who takes away the sin of the world*”). In Lutheran tradition both liturgical pieces have an obvious



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threefold structure and the essential prayer in both remains the same: “eleison,” “miserere nobis,” “have mercy upon us.” This connection between the *Kyrie* and *Agnus Dei* can be found in Luther’s liturgical writings and also in various works by Bach. It is therefore not surprising to find that Bach, in bringing his monumental setting of the traditional liturgy towards its close, should here recall the *Kyrie* with which the *Mass in B Minor* begins.

The setting of the basic petition of the *Agnus Dei*, which is repeated *verbatim*, is a reworking of the alto aria in the *Ascension Oratorio* (BWV 11), and is itself a possible re-working of an earlier aria. In 1988 Christoph Wolff demonstrated what a sophisticated and complex re-composition this is (*Bach: Essays on His Life and Music*, 332ff.). Bach only uses about half of the *Ascension Oratorio* aria, divides it into three sections, then composes two new canonic bridge-passages to join them together to form this remarkable movement.

There appear to be at least two reasons for Bach’s choice of this music for the *Agnus Dei*. First, its basic theme bears a strong motivic relationship to the fugal subject of the *Kyrie* with which the whole work begins. Second, in the *Ascension Oratorio* the text of the aria is a prayer that Christ will remain present with the worshiper. Given the specific eucharistic context of the *Agnus Dei* – that it was sung during the distribution of communion – and given also that Lutheran eucharistic theology stresses the presence of Christ in the sacrament, it is understandable that Bach was drawn to this poignant aria, and hence his decision to adapt it for his setting of the *Agnus Dei*.

The third repetition of the words *Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi* are not actually sung in Bach’s setting; however, the final five measures of the aria, in which the basic thematic material is intensified, can be seen as an instrumental exposition of the words which leads directly into the final movement: *Dona nobis pacem* (“grant us peace”).

Instead of composing new music for this final movement Bach re-uses a movement that appeared earlier in the *Mass*, the *Gratias agimus tibi* from *Gloria in excelsis Deo*. This movement is itself a parody of the first chorus of Cantata 29, *Wir danken dir*. The association between the movements in that cantata and the *Mass* is an obvious one, since *Gratias agimus tibi* (“We give thanks to you”) is the Latin equivalent of the German *Wir danken dir*. Significantly, in his *Deutsche Messe* of 1526, Luther directed that at the end of the eucharist, before the benediction, there should be a thanksgiving collect, beginning with the words “Wir danken dir...” – the same words that begin Cantata 29. Thus it may have been this association between the closing collect of thanksgiving, in constant use in Leipzig, and his chorus in cantata 29, that gave Bach the idea of repeating this thanksgiving music, heard earlier in the *Gloria* of the *Mass*. There is also a musical connection in that the first of the two fugal subjects is related thematically to the opening melodic phrase of the German *Agnus Dei, Christe, du Lamm Gottes*. Furthermore, in the Saxon *Agenda*, which includes the liturgical forms used in Leipzig during the time of Bach, *Christe, du Lamm Gottes* and the collect, *Wir danken dir*, appear on adjacent pages. Thus, in his massive and majestic prayer for peace at the end of his monumental *Mass*, Bach appears to have intended an underlying ascription of thanksgiving, to which he could only add in the score the same ascription he appended to the *Missa* of 1733: “Fine D S GI,” that is, *Deo Soli Gloria*, “To God alone be glory.”

The cantatas at this year’s Bach festival are among the best-loved of all Bach’s cantatas. Two of the cantatas of the afternoon concert were composed while Bach was organist in Mühlhausen, around 1707–08. The first is the sensitive and beautiful funeral cantata (BWV 106) in which the young Bach demonstrates his developing compositional skills. The second, equally impressive,

is a penitential cantata (BWV 131) based on Psalm 130. In between them will be heard the solo cantata (BWV 56) composed in Leipzig in 1726 that exhibits Bach’s maturity in creating intertwining counterpoint of voice and obligato instrument.

The cantatas of the evening concert are more celebratory in mood, all composed within a few years of each other, between 1724 and 1727. First is the dramatic St. Michael’s Day cantata (BWV 19) that begins with one of Bach’s most extravagant choruses. Second is the astonishingly beautiful cantata (BWV 78) that opens with an instrumental and vocal passacaglia, continues with a charming duet, with following arias that have wonderful instrumental adornments, before the concluding chorale is reached. The final cantata is the exuberant Pentecost cantata (BWV 34), originally composed for a wedding.

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