



J. S. BACH  
MISSÆ BREVES  
BWV 233-236

Publick Musick  
Thomas Folan *director*

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685-1750)

MISSÆ BREVES

BWV 233–236

Thomas Folan *director*

Andrea Folan *soprano*

Heather Gardner *soprano*

Anne Harley *soprano*

Miranda Loud *alto*

Pablo Bustos *tenor*

Max van Egmond *bass*

Publick Musick Orchestra and Choir

## DISC 1

### Mass in F Major, BWV 233

1	<i>Chorus: Kyrie eleison</i>	1'35
2	<i>Chorus: Christe eleison</i>	1'45
3	<i>Chorus: Kyrie eleison</i>	1'46
4	<i>Chorus: Gloria in excelsis Deo</i>	5'49
5	<i>Aria: Domine Deus (bass)</i>	3'15
6	<i>Aria: Qui tollis (soprano: AH)</i>	5'00
7	<i>Aria: Quoniam (alto)</i>	4'17
8	<i>Chorus: Cum Sancto Spiritu</i>	2'44

### Mass in A Major, BWV 234

9	<i>Chorus: Kyrie eleison (soprano: AF)</i>	3'05
10	<i>Quartet: Christe eleison</i>	1'39
11	<i>Chorus: Kyrie eleison</i>	1'31
12	<i>Chorus: Gloria in excelsis Deo</i>	5'12
13	<i>Aria: Domine Deus (bass)</i>	6'04
14	<i>Aria: Qui tollis (soprano: AF)</i>	6'19
15	<i>Aria: Quoniam (alto)</i>	3'25
16	<i>Chorus: Cum Sancto Spiritu (soprano: HG)</i>	4'01

Total time: 56'53

## DISC 2

### Mass in G Minor, BWV 235

1	<i>Chorus:</i> Kyrie eleison	5'59
2	<i>Chorus:</i> Gloria in excelsis Deo	3'32
3	<i>Aria:</i> Gratias agimus tibi (bass)	3'28
4	<i>Aria:</i> Domine Fili (alto)	5'35
5	<i>Aria:</i> Qui tollis (tenor)	3'51
6	<i>Chorus:</i> Cum Sancto Spiritu	5'02

### Mass in G Major, BWV 236

7	<i>Chorus:</i> Kyrie eleison	4'24
8	<i>Chorus:</i> Gloria in excelsis Deo	5'00
9	<i>Aria:</i> Gratias agimus tibi (bass)	5'33
10	<i>Duet:</i> Domine Deus (soprano: AH, alto)	4'08
11	<i>Aria:</i> Quoniam tu solus Sanctus (alto)	5'11
12	<i>Chorus:</i> Cum Sancto Spiritu	4'14

Total time: 55'59



## PUBLICK MUSICK

**P**ublick Musick is a nationally recognized orchestra and choir devoted to performing the masterworks of the Baroque era. Founded in 1995, Publick Musick is based in Rochester, New York and appears regularly throughout the eastern United States. The ensemble comprises musicians from a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences who share the desire to perform their core repertoire with attention to performance practice and on period instruments. The founding music director of the ensemble is Thomas Folan.

**P**ublick Musick has appeared in festivals and at colleges and universities throughout the United States. It is the only fully professional baroque chamber orchestra and choir in upstate New York. Many of Publick Musick's members are well-known soloists and recording artists in their own right. Publick Musick is distinguished among ensembles devoted to accompanied choral music by its concern with investing equal importance in both its vocal and instrumental personnel. All vocal soloists are drawn from the choir, which gives Publick Musick's vocal sound a uniquely homogenous combination of clarity and strength. Publick Musick has appeared at Boston Early Music Festival, Bloomington Early Music Festival and Rochester Bach Festival. In addition to this debut recording of Bach's *Missa Brevis*, Publick Musick has also recorded cantatas BWV 45, *Es ist dir gesagt*; BWV 62, *Nun komm der Heiden Heiland*; BWV 140, *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme* and BWV 192, *Nun danket alle Gott* (also on Musica Omnia).

# PUBLICK MUSICK ORCHESTRA

(on period instruments)

*Violin:* Martin Davids (concertmaster for BWV 233 & 234), Emlyn Ngai (concertmaster for BWV 235 & 236), Rachel Evans, Boel Gidholm, Naomi Guy, Martha Perry, Courtney Orlando

*Viola:* Aliza Appel, Peter Bucknell, Lauren Nelson

*Cello:* Alice Robbins (principal for BWV 235 & 236), Christopher Haritatos (principal for BWV 233 & 234), Rosie Elliott, Nika Zlataric

*Bass:* Heather Miller Lardin

*Organ:* Kristian Bezuidenhout (BWV 235 i-iv, vi; BWV 236 i-iv), Peter Watchorn (BWV 233; 234; 235 v; 236 v-vi)

*Flute:* Colin St. Martin, Kathryn Roth

*Oboe:* Stephen Bard, Owen Watkins

*Bassoon:* Anna Marsh

*Horn:* Douglas Lundeen, Laura Crossler

## PUBLICK MUSICK CHOIR

### *Soprano*

Krista Cornish-Scott

Laura Enslin

Jeanne Fischer

Andrea Folan

Heather Gardner

Anne Harley

### *Alto*

Leslie Barnett

Betha Christopher

Barbara Consler

Jennifer Kay

Miranda Loud

### *Tenor*

Pablo Bustos

Thomas Gregg

Jeff Harp

Eric Lobenstine

Steven Shumway

### *Bass*

Max van Egmond,

Joe Finetti

Todd Florin

Andrew Nagel

Jonathan Rohr

George Spitzer

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To learn more about Publick Musick please visit its website at [www.publickmusick.org](http://www.publickmusick.org).



## THOMAS FOLAN

Thomas Folan is a specialist in the music of the Baroque. At home with the repertoire from the 16th to the 18th centuries, he is an expert in the music of J. S. Bach, particularly the large-scale choral works. Thomas Folan is the Artistic Director and conductor of Publick Musick, a nationally recognized baroque orchestra and choir. The distinguished German musicologist, Alfred Mann, Professor Emeritus of the Eastman School of Music, and Frieder Bernius, director of the *Kammerchor Stuttgart*, are among his mentors.

With his detailed command of rhetorical musical gesture, Thomas Folan's attention to language allows him to extract meaning from the text to an extent that is rare among conductors. He has served on the faculties of Cornell University, Ithaca College, Skidmore College and the University of Rochester. His extensive list of achievements includes notable artistic and organizational contributions to the Bach festivals of Ithaca, Elmira and Rochester, New York.

# TEXT AND TRANSLATIONS

## MISSA BREVIS

Kyrie eleison  
Christe eleison  
Kyrie eleison

Gloria in excelsis Deo  
Et in terra pax  
hominibus bonae voluntatis  
Laudamus te. Benedicimus te.  
Adoramus te. Glorificamus te.

Gratias agimus tibi  
propter magnam gloriam tuam.  
Domine Deus, Rex coelestis,  
Deus Pater omnipotens.  
Domine Fili unigenite, Jesu Christe.  
Domine Deus, Agnus Dei,  
Filius Patris.

Qui tollis peccata mundi,  
miserere nobis.  
Qui tollis peccata mundi,  
suscipe deprecationem nostram.  
Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris,  
miserere nobis.

Quoniam tu solus sanctus.  
Tu solus Dominus.  
Tu solus Altissimus, Jesu Christe.

Cum Sancto Spiritu  
in Gloria Dei Patris.

Amen.

Lord have mercy,  
Christ have mercy,  
Lord have mercy.

Glory to God in the highest.  
And on earth peace  
to all those of good will.  
We praise thee. We bless thee.  
We worship thee. We glorify thee.

We give thanks to thee  
according to thy great glory.  
Lord god, Heavenly King,  
God the Father almighty.  
Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son.  
Lord God, Lamb of God,  
Son of the Father.

Thou who takest away the sins of the world,  
have mercy upon us.  
Thou who takest away the sins of the world,  
receive our prayer.  
Thou who sittest at the right hand of the Father,  
have mercy upon us.

For Thou alone art holy.  
Thou alone art the Lord.  
Thou alone art the most high, Jesu Christ.

With the Holy Spirit  
in the glory of God the Father.

Amen.



# BACH: MISSÆ BREVES, BWV 233-236

Ever since Luther's publication of a *Deutsche Messe* in 1526 the Mass has assumed a place in the German Protestant service. By tradition the 'Short Mass' – the *Credo*, the Catholic creed being omitted – was merely chanted in unison for the regular Sunday service at Bach's church. But on special occasions Bach set the text to music as a work for soloists, choir and orchestra. In total, Bach produced five of these short – in the sense of truncated – 'Lutheran' masses, where the text of just the *Kyrie* and the *Gloria* was set, with each work ending with the words "Cum Sancto Spiritu. Amen." The five masses appear to date from the early 1730's – around the time when Bach was concerned with recycling various other of his works in order to preserve them in a more permanent form. Bach used this "parody" technique in the *Missæ Breves* and in several other compositions. Most notably, Bach reused three of the celebratory cantatas that he had previously written for one-time occasions, such as royal birthdays, to form what we know today as the *Christmas Oratorio* (BWV 248), which was completed and performed over six days at the end of 1734.

In precisely the same way, Bach mined the various treasures contained in his own "well-regulated church music": the five complete cycles of cantatas he composed for performance during the church year. Two-thirds of this legacy is preserved as BWV 1-199. It may even be that Bach wished to add one "reformed" mass setting as a complement for each of his five years of liturgical cantatas. The technique of re-using music and adapting it to a new text – known as "parody", a word which modern usage has reduced to mean "caricature", was familiar to any composer of the 18th century as general thriftiness was integral to an age where resources were scarce, materials were precious and labour-intensive objects (including music) were unlikely to be lightly discarded after little use. Of the five masses that have come down to us (BWV 232-236), the first, and most elaborate, in B minor/D major, was extended into a full Catholic mass towards the end of Bach's life (the so called *B Minor Mass*, BWV 232). It initially served as part of Bach's application for a largely honorary position: that of Royal Electoral Court Composer to the Polish King, Augustus III, with whom Bach, by that time dissatisfied with the attitude of his employers in Leipzig, hoped to acquire some degree of protection against his critics.

The remaining four *Missæ* form a highly integrated set, and illustrate Bach's well-known practice of compiling his music into orderly collections. Their basic structure is almost identical. The only departures from the usual pattern are found in the A Major Mass, which appears to be a special case (see Alfred Mann's article below). Each *missa* consists of six distinct movements and the set of the four *Missæ*,

like all of Bach's mature works, represents a compendium of the various styles of writing that were available to a cosmopolitan composer in the 1730s. In each of the "short" masses (BWV 233-236), the ancient Greek text of the *Kyrie* is set in the "old" style – with instruments basically doubling the voices, while the various parts of the *Gloria* (normally two choral movements framing a set of three arias) utilize the fashionable "concerted manner", mixing elements of the various national styles, principally Italian and French, with which Bach and all informed composers were familiar.

The Lutheran Masses, as they are often called, are all scored for a similar sized ensemble, SATB choir, four-part strings and paired wind instruments: oboes in BWV 235 and 236 (G minor and G major), flutes in BWV 233 (A major), and horns added to oboes and strings in BWV 233 (F major). As in all Bach's settings of Latin church music, there is no recitative connecting the movements, since the mass text, unlike those of the cantatas and passions, does not form any sort of narrative. The four masses are framed by three choral movements each: the *Kyrie* (composed in the contrapuntal *stile antico* in three out of four cases), *Gloria in excelsis Deo* (in the newer Italian concertante style) and *Cum Sancto Spiritu* (also in the new style). These are complemented by various solo arias, distributed among all four voice types. The accompaniments for these arias range from the most intimate: a single solo instrument with continuo, two flutes with violas playing the bass, to full ensemble.

In the *Kyrie* of the F Major Mass, the only movement that is a reworking of an earlier piece with the same text (BWV 233a, composed in Weimar around 1715), Bach introduces as a *cantus firmus* the German *Agnus Dei: Christ, du Lamm Gottes*, with the horns and oboes replacing the original soprano *cantus* of the earlier (Weimar) version. The piece is divided into three sections, with the thematic material of the first (*Kyrie eleison*) inverted in the second (*Christe eleison*); while both subject and inversion are combined in the third (*Kyrie eleison*). The resulting piece is among Bach's most impressive compositions. The origin of the opening movement of the *Gloria* is unknown. Presumably it was derived from a secular cantata, especially given the presence of the horns and the festive compound rhythm. Similarly, no model has survived for the bass aria, *Domine Deus*, which appears to be a truncated arrangement of a *da capo* aria. As sources for the other movements, Bach used two cantatas: for the arias BWV 102 (*Herr, deine Augen sehen nach dem Glauben*) and, for the final *Cum Sancto Spiritu*, the opening chorus of the Christmas cantata, BWV 40 (*Dazu ist erschienen der Sohn Gottes*).

No model survives for the galant style *Kyrie-Christe-Kyrie* triptych of the A Major Mass, with its French dotted rhythms and a pair of pastoral sounding flutes. With the *Christe eleison*, set for a quartet of voices, Bach comes closest in style to an accompanied recitative, with its sustained "halo" of strings and flutes, and dramatic harmonic shifts. The *Gloria in excelsis Deo* is a direct transcription of a spectacular



The rear view of St. Thomas' School after the 1732 renovations.

sequence from the exceptionally fine cantata for the second Sunday of Easter, *Halt im Gedächtnis Jesum Christ*, BWV 67, with a *vox Christi* interrupting the brilliant string motifs four times in an *arioso* with the words: *Friede sei mit dir* (Peace be with you). Once again, for the bass aria, *Domine Deus*, with its rich solo violin accompaniment, no model has come down to us. The original sources for the remaining movements are found in BWV 179 (*Siehe du, daß deine Gottesfurcht nicht Heuchelei sei*), BWV 79 (*Gott der Herr ist Sonn und Schild*) and BWV 136 (*Erforsche mich, Gott, und erfahre*).

The G Minor Mass (BWV 235) is in many ways the most modern, yet perhaps the least compromising and most severe in overall affect of the four *Missæ Breves*. The opening chorus, lifted directly and untransposed from the opening chorus of BWV 102, is composed in the modern concerted style, complete with extended opening and closing *ritornelli*, with much elaborate fugal writing in between, while the *Gloria in excelsis Deo* is transposed from its original A minor (as first chorus in BWV 72, *Alles nur nach Gottes Willen*) down a tone, providing a virtual continuation of the sombre mood and affect of

the opening *Kyrie*. The sustained, almost relentless energy of these movements bears a resemblance to the opening chorus, *Herr, unser Herrscher*, from the *St. John Passion* (BWV 245), incidentally composed in the same key. The remaining movements all derive from BWV 187, *Es wartet alles auf dich*, and only one of them (*Gratias agimus*), is transposed (from G minor to D minor).

The beautiful Mass in G Major (BWV 236) shares the same scoring as BWV 235 (oboes and strings), but contrasts with its companion work in virtually every other way. The opening *Kyrie*, a re-working of the opening chorus of BWV 179, *Siehe du, daß deine Gottesfurcht nicht Heuchelei sei*, is a perfect adaptation of the music to suit its new text. The original words (Jesus Sirach: 1, 34) concern the pitfalls of serving God with a false heart, expressed musically by a pervasive falling chromaticism. The *Gloria* begins with a spectacular paraphrase of the opening of the Reformation cantata, *Gott der Herr ist Sonn und Schild*, BWV 79, the horn parts (minus the timpani) of the original work being given in this case to the two upper voice parts. The bass aria, *Gratias agimas tibi* is a conservative re-working of the bass aria from BWV 138, *Warum betrübst du dich, mein Herz*, while *Domine Deus* and *Quoniam* (from BWV 79 and 179 respectively) are considerably altered from their models. The *Quoniam* is the most radically changed of all, its transformation underlined with a new tempo indication: *adagio*, that transports this music far from the sentiments of the original aria, a tempestuous movement whose text rails vehemently against “false hypocrites.” The concluding *Cum Sancto Spiritu* is an arrangement of the opening movement of the splendid 1726 cantata, *Wer dank opfert, der preiset mich*, BWV 17. The original A major piece is here shorn of its extensive string *ritornello*, transposed down a tone and considerably energised through the frequent interjections of the words: “In Gloria Dei Patris.”

Perhaps we may adopt a more enlightened perspective on the *Missæ* than those of the principal Bach biographers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Philipp Spitta and Albert Schweitzer, both of whom were strangely dismissive of these pieces, though not of the *B Minor Mass* or *Christmas Oratorio*, their obvious companion works. Today we need have no hesitation in fully appreciating these four magnificent, and hardly short, masses as prime examples of Bach at the height of his powers. Far from being “perfunctory” or “occasionally quite nonsensical” arrangements, the various movements that make up the four *Missæ* actually represent Bach at his most polished, cosmopolitan and inventive. By 1734 or so, the composer, though clearly disappointed in his Leipzig appointment, was passionately concerned with consolidating and refining his musical legacy. These masses are clearly important fruits of this process. In any case, let the listener be the final judge. It will be clear to anyone with the ears that the four *Missæ Breves* belong at the very pinnacle of Bach’s remarkable output.

—PETER WATCHORN



Rear view of St. Thomas' Church and School in Leipzig with St. Thomas' gate  
from an engraving by Georg Balthasar Probst (1752).

# BACH'S A MAJOR MASS: A NATIVITY MASS?

Gerhard Herz's study of the Lombard rhythm in Bach's work has drawn fresh attention to a particular phase in Bach's creative career: the years after the turning point marked by the famous letter to Georg Erdmann of October 28, 1730.<sup>1</sup>

This period had gained new significance in modern Bach scholarship through Christoph Wolff's work and its critical point of departure, i.e. "the suggestion that Bach's special concern with the phenomenon of the *stile antico* arose after 1730 thus showing a particular connection with the style of his later years."<sup>2</sup> In adopting the term *stile antico* for an aspect of Bach's *Spätstil* style, Wolff pointed out "the juxtaposition of heterogeneous trends so typical of a composer's personal style in the Baroque era."<sup>3</sup> Wolff's choice of Bach works in the *stile antico* and Herz's listing of works *im lombardischen Geschmack* are indicative of the wide range of the aging Bach's stylistic spectrum.<sup>4</sup>

While the frustrations of the Leipzig office are variously documented in Bach's letter to Erdmann, one might single out the obviously unsatisfactory reception of the St. Matthew Passion in 1729 as a specific source of Bach's disillusionment. From this point on, the composer turns more and more to tasks that sever the output of his later years from the repertoire of the first six years in Leipzig. Wolff's work traces the eminent role that the Mass played in this development – the *Missa* in B Minor was the first major work to follow, and four other settings of the same text bear witness to Bach's preoccupation with the genre.

The term *Kurzmesse*, while literally correct for a setting limited to the Kyrie and Gloria sections, is curiously ill – applied to the *Missa* in B Minor. True, like Bach's other short Masses, this work complies with the Lutheran requirement of omitting the portions introduced with the *Credo*, the Catholic Creed, but the work is anything but short. The immense structural scope at which Bach had arrived in his opening Passion choruses remained a challenge that doubtless guided him in the grand conception of the *Missa*. This challenge may also have been the determining factor that caused Bach to turn, a year after the composition of the *Missa*, to yet another form: the oratorio.

<sup>1</sup>"Der lombardische Rhythmus in 'Domine Deus' der h Moll-Messe J. S. Bachs," in *Bach-Jahrbuch* (1974), pp. 90-97.

<sup>2</sup>"Der stile antico in der Musik Johann Sebastian Bachs: Studien zu Bachs Spätwerk," in *Beihfte zum Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* VI (1968), p. 16.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>4</sup>Wolff, p. 15 and Herz, p. 95, respectively; cf. also Robert L. Marshall, "Bach the Progressive: Observations on his Later Works," in *Musical Quarterly* LXII (1976), pp. 313-357.

Bach's interest in the oratorio arose at approximately the same time as Handel's, with totally different results but for strikingly parallel artistic reasons. What both masters in fact achieved was a new approach to the music drama of the Baroque. How seriously Bach was concerned with the large scope of this plan is shown by the fact that he produced a cycle of works embracing the entire church year – the Christmas Oratorio, Easter Oratorio, and Ascension Oratorio.<sup>5</sup> In both the Christmas and Ascension Oratorios the role of the Evangelist, the *Historicus*, reappears. As so often, Bach drew new strength from earlier phases of his work: he returned to the tradition of the Protestant *Historia* with which, so far, he had dealt only in the *Historia Passionis*.

Although the established design of the *Historia* declined and ended with the oratorio cycle, its characteristic dramatic momentum continued to play a role in Bach's work. When he finally resumed the *Missa* in B Minor and, in his crowning choral oeuvre, completed the setting of the Mass text, he encountered in the *Symbolum* text again the drama of Passion and Crucifixion. It is this section of the Mass that seems to have occupied Bach most extensively at the very end of the process of composition. The *Crucifixus* is modeled, as we know, upon a cantata chorus that deals with the theme of the Crucifixion lament (BWV 12: *Weinen, Klagen*), but, as Friedrich Smend writes, "In comparison with its model the *Crucifixus* stands, in fact, as a totally new creation."

Revising the rewritten version again, Bach made it the core of a trilogy of choruses representing the scenes of Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection – the *vox Christi* reappears in the bass solo of *Et resurrexit*, announcing the second coming of Christ. Thus Bach was concerned with a larger dramatic continuity, the drama of Redemption. No one who has heard the sequence of *Crucifixus* and *Et resurrexit* can escape the impact of this dramatic continuity. But what determined its balance was Bach's new setting of the *Et incarnatus* text. Bach separated this portion, originally contained in the duet *Et in unum Deum*, and turned it into the choral prologue which he inserted into the score of the Mass after it was bound. Thus he achieved a choral structure that corresponds to the succession of the choruses *Confiteor*, *Sanctus*, and *Osanna*, reflecting once again, the sequence of death and resurrection and the drama of Redemption.

We are dealing here with three themes of Bach's later years, related though distinct in their individual importance: his power of synthesis in reshaping and finishing a chosen creative task, his revived interest in the choral drama, and his fascination with the particular problem of re-setting and

<sup>5</sup>The Easter Oratorio, though an older work, was not entitled "Oratorio" until about 1735; the other two oratorios can be definitely associated with the church year 1734-35.

<sup>6</sup>*Neue Bach-Ausgabe, Serie 11/1, Kritischer Bericht*, p. 137

reinterpreting a given text or scene. These three themes converged long before the composition of the *Symbolum* in a work which, though often singled out and admired, has not received sufficiently detailed attention – Bach's A Major Mass.

The comparison of the *Missa* in B Minor with the four other Masses shows some general similarities. In setting the older Greek text of the opening section, Bach shows a certain preference for the older *colla parte* style of accompaniment. In setting the Latin text of the *Gloria*, he turns to the modern concerted style. For the sections devoted to God the Son, Bach tends towards the choice of bass (the *vox Christi*) or alto (*altissimus*) as solo voices. The first and last line of the *Kyrie* and the first and last line of the *Gloria* form a basic choral frame. While this basic choral frame was enlarged in the *Missa* in B Minor, the A Major Mass was subjected to yet another departure in structural design. Like the other three Masses (BWV 233, 235 and 236, recorded here) written in addition to the *Missa* in B Minor, the A Major Mass has been under heavy criticism because of the large amount of parody it contains. Schweitzer was especially harsh in his judgment since the parody process conflicts with the *Wort-Ton-Verhältnis* which is the basic premise of his work.

“Yet according to the findings of modern scholarship, and considering the absence of recitatives, the amount of parody in the Short Masses (BWV 233-236) is entirely commensurate with that in the oratorios and many cantatas. Moreover, in most of the cases we are dealing with parody of an eminent quality.”<sup>7</sup>

The plan of composition for the A Major Mass is anything but “perfunctory and occasionally quite nonsensical.”<sup>8</sup> The work which served for the parody was the cantata *Halt im Gedächtnis Jesum Christ* (BWV 67) composed in Bach's first Leipzig year and performed on April 16, 1724. Its unusually dramatic quality suggests the proximity of the St. John Passion, and it is a quotation from the gospel of St. John on which the climactic section of the cantata is based. A *turba* chorus depicts the ever-present threat surrounding the Christian congregation, and four times the agitated scene is interrupted by the reappearance of the Saviour. With the words “Friede sei mit euch” (John 20, 19) the bass solo of the *vox Christi* changes the scene, in one of the most compelling lyrical phrases Bach has written, to an expression of complete serenity and reassurance. In the parody this *concertato* movement is adapted to the *Gloria* text. The turbulent *tutti* episodes are now guided by the thought “and suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host,” which is the introduction of the *Gloria* text in the gospel. The bass solo

<sup>7</sup>Wolff, p.33

<sup>8</sup>Albert Schweitzer, *J. S. Bach*, trans. Ernest Newman, 1977, (new ed. New York: Macmillan, 1966), p. 326.



sections are reduced to three – sung in turn by alto, bass, and tenor – that lead from the beginning of the *Laudamus* section to an intense elaboration of the words *Adoramus te*.

In order to appreciate this trio of (originally) men's voices in a veritable adoration scene, it is necessary to realize that the original bass solo in BWV 67 is accompanied by an obbligato motif of two flutes that characterizes the solo voice as the *pastor bonus* and that lends the rewritten passages in the Mass an ineffably pastoral character. This motif leads the *Gloria* movement after the last adoration solo into a concluding *Gratias agimus*, and the same motif furnished the thematic material for the opening *Kyrie* chorus.

Thus we are concerned with a complex structure that merged the Mass sections from the first *Kyrie* to the *Gratias* into an entity, a large pastoral scene. Viewed against this perspective, the second section of the work, the initial *Christe* invocation, receives, of course, novel significance. It is the section which Spitta called “an amalgamation of the freest with the strictest form, achieved with the daring of genius – it is a chorus in canon, but with the character of a recitative.”<sup>9</sup> Spitta describes, in fact, a combination of characteristics in Bach's style similar to that which we have mentioned above; it is here the confluence of the work of the contrapuntist and that of the dramatist. Yet above all, it is again Bach's particular manner of writing a new setting for the old text that lends this *Christe* its remarkable quality. Its opening modulATORY sixth chord is akin to the typical opening chord in the recitatives of the Passions. But the tenderness of its unfolding melodies on solemnly sustained harmonies suggests indeed the mystery of the Nativity. Does this recitative, which follows the opening chorus, confirm that we are dealing with a *Historia von der Geburt Jesu Christi*?

It is essential at this point to draw the line between conjecture and evidence. Two details of an adaptation lead directly from model to parody: the dramatic tutti, which is re-interpreted as the appearance of the heavenly host, and the pastoral motif, which becomes the thematic material for the extraordinary structural span from *Kyrie* to *Gratias*. The exact reappearance of this motif surrounds in the parody, as we have noted, a trio of men's voices in an adoration scene.

It would be impossible to maintain that in re-setting the opening of the *Gloria* on this occasion, Bach was not especially aware of the fact that it is taken from the text of the Christmas gospel.<sup>10</sup> The evidence of

<sup>9</sup>Philipp Spitta, Johann Sebastian Bach: His Work and Influence on the I Music of Germany, trans. Clara Bell and J. A. Fuller Maitland (New York: Dover Publications, 1951), p. 33.

<sup>10</sup>As is known, Bach used this text for a Latin Christmas Cantata (BWV 191) drawn from the Missa in B Minor – a work that may have played a role in shaping the plan for the A Major Mass.

reflections of this text in Bach's A Major Mass is unmistakable. Our conjecture is Bach's conscious merging of Mass and *Historia*.

Bach was obviously tied to the Mass text. But even a casual review of his five Masses shows with what infinite variety he penetrated the meaning of this text. Bach's ingenious transformation of the pastor bonus scene may be taken as an intentional widening of a further reference to the Nativity gospel that the Mass text yields, a portrayal of the adoration of the three Men which surpasses in its lyrical quality the one he had drawn in the *Christmas Oratorio*. Yet with this the text portions directly related to the Christmas gospel seem exhausted. One is reminded of the intimacy of Handel's Nativity scene in *Messiah*; perplexed by its brevity, the modern interpreter is often tempted into bringing it to a forced conclusion with the Hallelujah chorus. But in reality the traditional *Historia* presents, like *Messiah*, only a reflection; the basic dramatic thought of the *Historia* is – again, like that of *Messiah* – the drama of Redemption.

This point becomes explicit in the *Gratiarum actio*, the traditional conclusion of the *Historia* (cf. the final chorus in Schütz's *Historia von der Geburt Jesu Christi*: "Now let us all thank thee, God our Lord, Christ Jesus, who hath with his birth shone upon; us, and hath redeemed his children by his Passion from the fires of Hell." The interpretation of the *Gratias agimus* as *Gratiarum actio* is the key to the conjecture of Bach's merging Mass and *Historia*, of his specific re-interpretation of the Mass text in a work that may have been intended for a Christmas performance. *Kyrie* and *Gratias* based on the same pastoral theme, are here considered opening and concluding choruses of a *Historia* – that is – choruses not sung by the choral protagonist, as the turba scene, but by the Chorus of Believers asking the Lord's mercy before the action of the Christmas *Historia* begins and giving thanks that mercy has been granted after its action is completed.

In this sense the A Major Mass would be a *Vorstudie* to the completion of the B Minor Mass whose immensely larger structure is also rounded by a final *Gratiarum actio*, the *Parodie zweiten Grades* of the thanksgiving chorus from *Wir danken dir, Gott* (BWV 29). Both Mass compositions show that Bach's interest in the choral drama was not abandoned after the oratorio cycle. Both show the supreme art of his parody process, be it directly or indirectly tied to the model,<sup>11</sup> and both show how much there always remains to be understood about his profound work.

–ALFRED MANN (reprinted with permission)

<sup>11</sup>The opening *Kyrie* may be a parody of a lost work. See Joshua Rifkin, commentary for Johann Sebastian Bach, Masses BWV 233-236, Nonesuch Recording HC-73020, and the discussion of Bach's autograph in Robert L. Marshall, *The Compositional Process of J. S. Bach: A Study of the Autograph Scores of the Vocal Works*, Princeton University Press, 1972.

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*Executive Producer:*  
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*Session producers:*  
Kate Vincent and Peter Watchorn

*Recording & Mastering:*  
Joel Gordon

*Editing & Post-production:*  
Peter Watchorn and Joel Gordon

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Anne Harley

*This recording is dedicated to  
our colleague and friend James O. Bohyard.*

*Front cover:*  
St. Michael's Church  
Rochester, NY  
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*Inside back cover*  
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*Back cover:*  
Portrait of J. S. Bach (1746)  
by Elias Gottlob Haußmann (1695-1774)





Johann Sebastian Bach (1746)  
by Elias Gottlob Haußmann (1695-1774)

*The four short masses (BWV 233-236) are far less well-known than Bach's great B minor Mass, BWV 232, although all five works were similarly arranged from the church cantatas, originally as settings of only the Kyrie and Gloria portions of the mass. This new release in Musica Omnia's series of Bach's choral works features Publick Musick, one of the finest specialist ensembles in the USA, directed by founding conductor, Thomas Folan.*



# JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685-1750)

## MISSÆ BREVES, BWV 233-236

Publick Musick Orchestra and Choir  
Thomas Folan *director*

### DISC 1

Total time: 56'53

1-8 Mass in F Major, BWV 233

9-16 Mass in A Major, BWV 234

### DISC 2

Total time: 55'59

1-6 Mass in G Minor, BWV 235

7-12 Mass in G Major, BWV 236

Total time: 1hr 52'52

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