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**MASS IN B MINOR**
**BWV 232**
**J. S. BACH**

**Catherine Dubosc**
**Catherine Denley**
**James Bowman**
**John Mark Ainsley**
**Michael George**

**The Sixteen**
The Symphony of Harmony and Invention

**Harry Christophers**
To record Bach’s iconic Mass in B minor has to be one of the highlights of my career. Not only does it demand choral singing of blistering athleticism but also sensitive, responsive and, at times, majestic orchestral playing coupled with virtuosic obligatos and a team of soloists who can breathe an immediacy of expression into the words of the mass.

I do believe that this is a recording of exceptional quality and one of the most remarkable and memorable in The Sixteen’s catalogue. In the company of such phenomenal musicians, it is perhaps remiss of me to single out anyone in particular. However, I feel I must mention the unique James Bowman; when I asked James for this project, I was astounded to learn that he had never recorded the work before - our gain and others’ loss. He himself was nervous of the challenge but he had no reason to be; you are witness here to one of the most heart-rending interpretations of the Agnus Dei that you will ever hear.

When you are recording, you long for the occasion when one ‘take’ not only suffices but indeed fulfils all expectations. Michael George’s and Roger Montgomery’s rendition of the Quoniam does just that; singing of immense nobility and playing that is sheer perfection. How anyone can play the natural horn without splitting at least one note is unimaginable.

For once words fail me; it is for you alone to judge whether or not The Sixteen in all its glory sounds inspirational.

Harry Christophers
Mass in B Minor

Johann Sebastian Bach

Bach did not compose the Mass in B Minor, he compiled it. The Mass had its origins in two much shorter and entirely separate pieces: a Sanctus written for a Christmas service at Leipzig in 1724, and a B minor Missa (just a Kyrie and Gloria) composed for the Catholic court at Dresden in 1733. The Osanna in excelsis, Benedictus, Agnus Dei and Credo Bach adapted from suitable arias and choruses drawn from his existing cantatas. Only a handful of movements (including the opening of the Credo) appear to have been written specifically for the Mass when Bach came to compile it during the final years of his life.

In his careful recycling of old material Bach may be considered a ‘green’ composer, but not a lazy one. Such economy of effort was entirely typical of the period. Bach and his contemporaries didn’t want to be struck by the blinding light of inspiration, they were craftsmen who were required to produce music regularly and to order. Parody technique – the re-use of existing music but with new words – was widely employed at the time both as a convenient expedient when time was short and as a means of giving occasional music greater permanence.

Originality per se was not the major criterion of artistic judgement that it is today. So the Mass is in no sense a compromise, rather we should view it as a powerful vindication of parody as a compositional technique.

But for what purpose did Bach assemble the Mass in B Minor? A complete setting of the Mass had no place in the Lutheran liturgy in Leipzig which only used the Kyrie, Gloria and Sanctus (and even then not all at the same time). Neither could the work have been performed as part of a Catholic service. Not only was it simply too long, but Bach also departed from the authorised Latin text (omitting the third petition of Agnus Dei), and divided the Sanctus into two separate sections which would have been liturgically inappropriate. It would have been unusual for a composer of the Baroque era to write a work for no specific occasion and with no prospect of a performance, but yet there are no records to show that the work was ever performed in its entirety in either a sacred or secular context during Bach’s lifetime. So why did he expend so much trouble and energy on the work?

Perhaps it was written with an eye to posterity: a summation of Bach’s compositional skills charting his artistic development over three decades. There is no doubt that Bach was acutely aware of his own musical heritage. For over two centuries before his birth there had been Bachs in well-placed positions as court, town or church musicians in central Germany, and around the time of his 50th birthday Johann Sebastian collated the available evidence and produced a Bach family tree. His interest in his predecessors also extended to their music. He had inherited from his father, and further supplemented, a manuscript collection of family music, the Alt-Bachisches Archiv; and regularly performed the motets of his uncles Johann Christoph and Johann Michael. Might the Mass in B Minor, then, have been intended as his own musical legacy to his family?

The Mass does not stand alone. In his final years Bach, who had long since ceased to invest much time or energy in discharging his church duties as Thomaskantor, seems to have planned a series of works as a summation of his art in many fields. It was a rich harvest: The Well-Tempered Clavier Book II, the eighteen chorale preludes BWV 651-667, The Musical Offering, Goldberg Variations and the compendious Art of Fugue. In common with the Mass, both the second book of The Well-Tempered Clavier and the eighteen chorale preludes also contain much earlier material, carefully refined with a wisdom which only comes with age and experience. And like the Mass all these works exhibit a self-conscious and encyclopaedic panoply of styles, techniques and approaches. But unique amongst this group of late works, the Mass alone is for choral forces.

Bach seems to have viewed the Mass as the most historically durable of forms. Undeniably, the Latin text stood above time and transient fashion, unlike the ephemeral poetry of his cantatas. Arguably, too, choral music was less prone to fashionable changes than solo vocal and instrumental music, and the Mass had always been essentially choral rather than soloistic in emphasis. Bach was also keenly aware of the venerable tradition of Mass composition as far back as Palestrina (whose six-voice Missa sine nomine he performed and later echoed in the opening chorus of Cofitector of the Credo), and must have wanted to contribute to the genre which from the fourteenth century composers had come to regard as the ultimate form of sacred music.

In recent years historically informed approaches to the performance of Bach’s Mass have led to a certain amount of controversy both on and off the concert platform. Reliable scholarly work by the American musicologist Joshua Rifkin has suggested that Bach’s Leipzig cantatas and Passions were usually performed by just four singers who took both the solo as well as the chorus parts. When more good singers were available, Bach might either write for them in six parts (as in the Sanctus of 1724) or in eight parts (as in the St. Matthew Passion), or else deploy his four extra singers to strengthen the solo choral ensemble at climactic moments, rather like the ripieno strings in a Baroque concerto grosso.

Some conductors have applied this evidence to the entire Mass in B Minor, with mixed results. Movements such as the highly-charged
Crucifixus have gained a madrigalian intimacy, while other sections, like the explosive opening of the Gloria, have struck some as rather underpowered. But of one thing we can be certain: Bach was a practical musician and worked with whatever forces were at his disposal, large or small. Maybe we should do the same; perhaps pragmatism should be our only dogma. The present recording therefore follows Bach’s fundamental performing ethos, and uses the best forces available today.

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**MASS IN B MINOR bwv 232**  
J. S. BACH  

**CD1**  

**KYRIE**  

- **Chorus**  
  *Kyrie eleison*  
  Lord have mercy  

- **Duet (Soprano I & II)**  
  *Christe eleison*  
  Christ have mercy  

**GLORIA**  

- **Chorus**  
  *Gloria in excelsis Deo*  
  Glory be to God on high  

- **Chorus**  
  *Et in terra pax, hominibus bonae voluntatis*  
  And on earth peace  
  to men of good will.  

- **Air (Soprano II)**  
  *Laudamus te, benedicimus te, adoramus te, glorificamus te.*  
  We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we worship Thee, we glorify Thee.  

- **Chorus**  
  *Gratias agimus tibi propter magnam gloriam tuam.*  
  We give thanks to Thee for Thy great glory.  

- **Duet (Soprano I, Tenor)**  
  *Domine Deus, Rex coelestis, Deus Pater omnipotens.*  
  *Domine Fili unigenite, Jesu Christe altissime.*  
  *Domine Deus, Agnus Dei, Filius Patris.*  
  O Lord God, heavenly King,  
  God the Father Almighty.  
  O Lord, the only-begotten Son,  
  Jesu Christ most high.  
  O Lord God,  
  Lamb of God,  
  Son of the Father.  

- **Chorus**  
  *Qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.*  
  *Qui tollis peccata mundi, suscipe deprecationem nostram.*  
  Thou that takest away the sins of the world,  
  have mercy upon us.  
  Thou that takest away the sins of the world,  
  receive our prayer.
And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds. God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made. Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven.

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

And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried.
Chorus

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

And the third day He rose again according to the scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father. And He shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead, whose kingdom shall have no end.

Air (Bass)

Et in Spiritum Sanctum Dominum et vivificantem, qui ex Patre Filioque procedit; qui cum Patre et Filio simul adoratur et conglorificatur; qui locutus est per Prophetas. Et 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 together is worshipped and glorified; who spake by the prophets. And I believe in one holy Catholic and Apostolic church.

Chorus

Confiteor unum baptisma in remissionem peccatorum.

I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins.

Chorus

Et expecto resurrectionem mortuorum et vitam venturi saeculi. Amen

I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins.

Sanctus

Chorus

Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth. Pleni sunt coeli et terra gloria eius.

Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts. Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory.

Chorus

Osanna in excelsis.

Hosanna in the highest.

Benedictus

Air (Tenor)

Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini.

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

Chorus

Osanna in excelsis.

Hosanna in the highest.

Agnus Dei

Air (Alto)

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.

O Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us.

Chorus

Dona nobis pacem.

Grant us peace.
The Sixteen

Supporting The Sixteen

“As time goes by, I find Harry Christophers’ music making more and more captivating.”
BBC RADIO 3

Over 30,000 people each year hear our concerts and so have their lives enriched by the music-making of Harry Christophers, The Sixteen and The Symphony of Harmony and Invention. Many thousands more enjoy our CD recordings and radio broadcasts.

There are many ways to support The Sixteen. If you would like to help by contributing to its work, or would like information about membership schemes, patronage, specific projects or business sponsorship, please see www.thesixteen.com

CORO is the lively and successful record label of The Sixteen, The Symphony of Harmony and Invention and Harry Christophers.

Formed in 2001, CORO is re-mastering, re-packaging and re-issuing recordings of The Sixteen that were for a short time available on Collins Classics, and making brand new recordings every year.

The Sixteen

Harry Christophers

After nearly three decades of world-wide performance and recording, The Sixteen is recognised as one of the world’s greatest vocal ensembles. Its special reputation for performing early English polyphony, masterpieces of the Renaissance and a diversity of 20th century music is drawn from the passions of conductor and founder, Harry Christophers. Over ninety recordings, many prize-winning, reflect The Sixteen’s quality in a range of work spanning the music of six hundred years.

The Sixteen has toured throughout Europe, Japan, Australia and the Americas and has given regular performances at major concert halls and festivals worldwide, including the Barbican Centre, Sydney Opera House, and Vienna Musikverein; also the BBC Proms, and the festivals of Salzburg, Granada, Lucerne and Istanbul. The vigour and passion of its performance win new fans wherever it performs.

At home in the UK, the group promotes A Choral Pilgrimage, a tour of our finest cathedrals bringing music back to the buildings for which it was written.

The choir is enhanced by the existence of its own period instrument orchestra, The Symphony of Harmony and Invention, and through it Harry Christophers brings fresh insights to music including that of Purcell, Monteverdi, JS Bach and Handel. 2004 witnessed the launch of the group’s annual Handel in Oxford Festival, a weekend of concerts and events dedicated to the life of this great composer.