

Cambridge University Press
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PART I

Historical background and contexts

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1 | Past, present and future perspectives
on Bach's B-minor Mass

CHRISTOPH WOLFF

About 200 years ago the Swiss musician, writer and publisher Hans Georg Nägeli (1773–1836) of Zurich acquired what he surely considered an incredibly valuable trophy. He had purchased from the estate of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach the unpublished manuscript of a Latin Mass of unprecedented scale in the hand of Bach's father.¹ As a publisher Nägeli was a businessman who wanted to put his investment to work. Therefore, he planned to make the Mass available in print for the first time, and, after careful planning, he advertised the publishing project in 1818.

The public announcement referred to Bach's composition as 'the Greatest Musical Work of Art of All Times and Nations'² – an astonishing assertion, made at a time when the works of Mozart had already become a permanent feature of the musical landscape and when Beethoven's contemporary fame was at its peak. By comparison, conceptions of Johann Sebastian Bach in the early nineteenth century among the musical public were hazy, the most common being that the composer, best known as the author of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, was a supreme master of fugue.³

Nägeli's statement about 'the Greatest Musical Work of Art of All Times and Nations' was essentially an intuitive judgement, for he – a very knowledgeable man – had not seen anything like it before. A present-day critic would certainly avoid such superlatives. Nevertheless, it remains remarkable that the leading music publishers of the day, Breitkopf & Härtel and C. F. Peters, both of Leipzig, as well as Simrock in Bonn, did not file any objections. In fact, all of them had begun to make money out of Bach

¹ See *NBA KB II/1*, p. 58.

² *Ankündigung des größten musikalischen Kunstwerks aller Zeiten und Völker* (Zurich, 1818); facsimile repr. in *NBA KB II/1*, p. 215. See also *BDok VI.C 50*, pp. 462–3; English trans. in *NBR/410*, pp. 506–7. The same advertisement also appeared in *Intelligenz-Blatt zur allgemeinen musikalischen Zeitung*, No. 7 (August 1818), col. 28.

³ See *NBR*, pp. 488–91.

editions – Breitkopf with the Chorales,⁴ Motets⁵ and a Mass,⁶ Simrock with two shorter Masses and the *Magnificat*,⁷ Peters with the keyboard works.⁸ Perhaps they hoped that Nägeli's outrageous claim would help boost their business as well. Even Beethoven, a notorious complainer who, after all, happened to be at work on his *Missa solemnis*, remained quiet and, curiously, contacted Breitkopf, asking if the firm could send him Bach's Mass.⁹

Nägeli's use of the phrase 'of All Times and Nations' was deliberate as he was not the first to apply it to Bach. He was merely echoing a statement made almost forty years earlier by Johann Friedrich Reichardt, who, in 1781, announced the forthcoming Breitkopf edition of Bach's four-part chorales as works by 'the greatest harmonist of all times and all nations'.¹⁰ The Ciceronian phrase 'omnium temporum atque gentium' ('of all times and nations')¹¹ had also been used, for example, by the classicist Christian Gottlob Heyne (1729–1812), Johann Matthias Gesner's successor at the

⁴ J. P. Kirnberger (ed.), *Johann Sebastian Bachs vierstimmige Choralgesänge*, 4 vols. (Leipzig: Johann Gottlob Imanuel Breitkopf, 1784–7).

⁵ *Joh. Seb. Bach's MOTETTEN in Partitur Erster Heft enthaltend drey achtstimmige Motetten Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied, etc. Fürchte dich nicht, ich bin bey dir, etc. Ich lasse dich nicht, du segnest mich etc.* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel [1802]) (BWV 225, 228, Anh. 159); *Joh. Seb. Bach's MOTETTEN in Partitur Zweites Heft enthaltend eine fünf- und zwei achtstimmige Motetten Komm, Jesu, komm, mein Leib etc. Jesu! Meine Freude, meines etc. Der Geist hilft unsrer Schwachheit etc.* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, [1803]) (BWV 229, 227, 226); *Jauchzet dem Herrn, alle Welt c.c. Acht Stimmige Motette von Joh: Sebastian Bach. Herausgegeben und der liberalen, dieser Art Music sich so uneigennützig aufopfernden Officin von Breitkopf und Haertel hochachtungsvoll zugeeignet von IOH: FR: SAM: DOERING. In Commission bei Ch. E. Kollmann [1818] (BWV Anh. 160); *Lob und Ehre und Weisheit – Achtstimmige MOTETTE Musik von J. S. BACH [recte: Georg Gottfried Wagner] (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, [1819]) (BWV Anh. 162); *Der 117te Psalm für vier Singstimmen in Musik gesetzt von JOH. SEBASTIAN BACH (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, [1821]) (BWV 230).***

⁶ *MESSA a 8 voci reali e 4 ripiene coll'accompagnamento di due Orchestre composta DA GIOV. SEBAST. BACH (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, [1805]) (BWV Anh. 167).*

⁷ *Missa à 4 Voci Due Flauti, due Violini, Viola ed Organo di GIOV. SEB. BACH. No.1 Dopo Partitura autografa dell'autore (Bonn: N. Simrock, 1818) (BWV 234); *MISSA Quatuor vocibus cantanda comitante Orchestra a Joanne Sebastiano Bach. No. 2 (Bonn: Simrock, 1828) (BWV 236); *MAGNIFICAT à Cinque Voci, Due Violini, Due Oboe, tre Trombi, Tamburi, Basson, Viola e Basso Continuo del Sigl Joh. Seb. Bach (Bonn: N. Simrock, [1811]) (BWV 243a).***

⁸ *Oeuvres Completttes de Jean Sebastien Bach* (Vienna: Hoffmeister, Leipzig: Bureau de Musique, 1801–4, repr. Leipzig: Bureau de Musique de C. F. Peters, 1814–). See K. Lehmann, *Die Anfänge einer Bach-Gesamtausgabe*, *Leipziger Beiträge zur Bachforschung*, 6 (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2004), pp. 125–46.

⁹ Beethoven's letter dated 15 October 1810 (Beethoven-Haus, Bonn, Sammlung H. C. Bodmer Br 92 und Br 91) is reproduced in *BDok VI/B 99*, pp. 373–4.

¹⁰ J. F. Reichardt, 'Kunstnachrichten' (Berlin, before 2 October 1781), *J. F. Reichardt's musikalisches Kunstmagazin*, 1 (1782), 51; repr. in *BDok III/853*, pp. 342–3: '... der harmonische Bearbeiter: Johann Sebastian Bach, größter Harmoniker aller Zeiten und Völker'.

¹¹ See e.g. A. Koehly (ed.), *Nonni Panopolitani Dionysiacorum libri XLVIII* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1857), vol. I, p. xvii.

University of Göttingen and teacher of the Humboldt brothers Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859) and Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835). As head of the university library from 1765, he established the universal formula 'the most important writings of all times and all nations' ('die wichtigsten Schriften aller Zeiten und Völker') as a policy for developing the collection.¹² The elevation above and beyond all times and all nations of a single author, Johann Sebastian Bach, let alone a single work of art, the B-minor Mass, remains, however, a most unusual affair. Yet it fits the early idolisation of Bach and the normative standards set by him, symptomatically expressed by the ageing Haydn, who in 1799 referred to Bach as 'the man from whom all true musical wisdom proceeded'.¹³

Timelessness and communal appreciation beyond national and confessional borders seem to be views of the B-minor Mass that have their roots in the eighteenth century. Four different aspects are explored here: (1) the performance history of the work; (2) the history of scholarship concerning the piece; (3) the compositional genesis of the work; and (4) Bach's use of time and space as compositional devices.

The performance history of the B-minor Mass

A trivial observation, of course, is to reflect that the piece has been performed frequently in the past and present, and will surely be performed in the future. In Bach's time, however, this was by no means self-evident or in any way predictable, nor even in subsequent periods until the establishment of a retrospective repertoire in the musical life of the Romantics, primarily through the influence of Mendelssohn and his generation.

To this day we know of no performance of the B-minor Mass complete under the composer's direction or during his lifetime, even though I consider it inconceivable that the work as a whole would have been composed without a performance purpose in the background. But this is unknown. This does not, however, invalidate the notion of at least a partial (or additional) function of the B-minor Mass as representing a kind of musical legacy on Bach's part. But even in this sense the Mass does not assume a unique position, for works like *The Art of Fugue*, the *Clavier-Übung* series,

¹² Cf. E. Mittler, "'... die wichtigsten Schriften aller Zeiten und Völker ...': Die Göttinger Bibliothek im Zentrum einer europäischen Gelehrten-Elite des 18. Jahrhunderts", *Georgia Augusta*, 3 (2004), 11–17.

¹³ *NBR*, p. 374.

The Well-Tempered Clavier and others fulfil a similar function as a bequest made by a devoted teacher of music to future generations.

There were partial performances of the B-minor Mass during the eighteenth century that might offer helpful hints; for example, the 1786 Hamburg performance of the *Symbolum Nicenum*, the *Credo* section, under the direction of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach. This was definitely not a liturgical performance, but one for a benefit concert in support of a hospital for the poor.¹⁴ Two questions need to be asked: did C. P. E. Bach violate his father's legacy by presenting a 'secular' performance? Or did he perhaps know that it was designed as a concert piece? After all, no Lutheran or Roman Catholic service could under normal circumstances accommodate a Mass of such dimensions.

However, resulting from its heterogeneous genesis (see further below), the Mass does indeed contain sections that were used liturgically. The *Sanctus*, in its original version from Christmas 1724, was apparently a repertoire piece receiving repeat performances. It was customary in Leipzig to perform a polyphonic *Sanctus* at the principal churches on high holidays. Yet, as we know, Bach lent a set of parts to Franz Anton Count Sporck in Bohemia. The loan of performing parts (and *not* a score) would make sense only if this wealthy Roman Catholic music-lover wanted to have this work performed at his palace, but surely not within the context of a liturgical service since Bach's abbreviated Lutheran *Sanctus* lacked the sections essential for the *Sanctus* of the Roman Catholic mass, namely the 'Hosanna' and 'Benedictus':

Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth. Pleni sunt coeli et terra
 gloriae tuae [JSB: ejus].¹⁵
 Hosanna in excelsis.
 Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini.
 Hosanna in excelsis.

In other words, Bach the Lutheran cantor gave or sent the parts to Sporck knowing full well that his work could be presented there only as a concert piece.

The *Kyrie* and *Gloria* sections of what was to become the B-minor Mass offer related perspectives. This *Kyrie–Gloria* Mass, a customary complete unit in both Lutheran and Catholic rites, was dedicated on Monday, 27 July 1733 to the Catholic court of Dresden. It is possible, if undocumented, that it was given in the Sophienkirche in Dresden, where Wilhelm Friedemann Bach was the newly appointed organist and where in previous years Bach had given organ recitals. This performance, involving the Dresden Hofkapelle, would

¹⁴ See *NBA KB* II/1, pp. 41–3; *BDok* III/911, p. 421. ¹⁵ In place of 'tua' Bach used 'ejus'.

then have taken place on the Sunday, the day before the presentation of the used performing parts to the Dresden court. Such a performance could have been either during the morning service or possibly as an afternoon concert.

Regardless of any actual performance, however, the *Missa* of 1733 was deliberately and definitely conceived as a bi-confessional work, neither exclusively Lutheran nor exclusively Catholic but definitely a sacred Christian piece. Moreover, there was a political purpose behind Bach's motivation for the dedication, namely his interest in obtaining an honorary title and in offering his services to the court. As for the wider context in which the Mass originated, it seems worth noting the fact that Bach's musical taste and interests were never genuinely influenced by the doctrinal and religious conflicts among theologians and political rulers. Not only did the beliefs of a Frescobaldi, Couperin or Vivaldi simply not matter to Bach; he considered the religious music of a Palestrina, Lotti or Pergolesi worthy of bringing to the attention of his Lutheran constituency. Additionally, unlike German cantatas and oratorios, the Latin Mass as music transcending confessional and national boundaries offered Bach the unique opportunity of reaching a broader audience.

The reference in C. P. E. Bach's estate catalogue of 1790 to 'the great Catholic Mass' has a clear meaning. In eighteenth-century Protestant Germany, Catholic Christians were ordinarily called Roman or Popish. The term 'Catholic' as such, however, relates less to the Roman rite than to the 'una catholica ecclesia', that is, the 'one universal church' of the ancient Nicene Creed. Thus the B-minor Mass tacitly recognises the situation in the religiously divided electoral Saxony, an aspect certainly understood by Bach the pragmatist. In this sense, the liturgical function of the music is clearly subordinated to the overall Christian-religious character that is in no way compromised by a concert performance of the work, a destination not merely tolerated but probably anticipated by the composer.

The B-minor Mass in the mirror of Bach scholarship

Like no other work by Bach, the B-minor Mass represents, as Hans-Joachim Schulze once put it, 'a perpetual touchstone of Bach scholarship'.¹⁶ The Mass remains to this day a fascinating challenge to musical scholarship, and it seems to resist all attempts of those seeking definitive results in very many areas of

¹⁶ H.-J. Schulze, 'The B minor Mass – Perpetual Touchstone for Bach Research', in P. Williams (ed.), *Bach, Handel, Scarlatti: Tercentenary Essays* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 311–20.

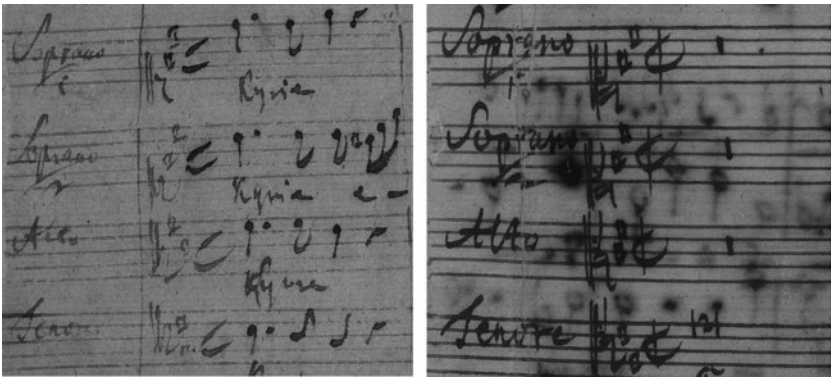


Figure 1.1 Bach's C-clefs in the opening pages of 'Kyrie' I and 'Credo' in Bach's autograph score

investigation, hence my prediction that research on this work will continue for a long time and that the Belfast symposium is unlikely be the last of its kind.

This symposium built on a long line of research accomplishments of the past. This is, of course, not the place to present a comprehensive review of the history of research on the work. I therefore propose to concentrate on a single point: the fact that the study of the original sources of the B-minor Mass had the greatest impact on modern Bach scholarship, leading to a genuine revolution in the chronology of Bach's works, and that this resulted in a very different view on, and more reliable knowledge of, the unfolding over time of the composer's creative output.

It all began with a very important article on the genesis of the B-minor Mass by Friedrich Smend, published in 1937.¹⁷ Smend was the first to explain, on the basis of an analysis of the autograph score, that the work reflected a complex compositional history extending over a number of years. He observed details of Bach's handwriting style that helped to differentiate between different stages. He pointed out that the *Kyrie–Gloria* section reflected a handwriting style different from that of the *Credo* section and showed, for instance, very different types of C-clef in the soprano, alto and tenor parts of the scores (see Figure 1.1).

Hence, he concluded that these two sections were composed at different times, and he was clearly right about this. According to Smend's chronological conclusions, which were refined in the *Kritischer Bericht* to his 1954 edition of the B-minor Mass for the *NBA*, the *Credo* section originated

¹⁷ F. Smend, 'Bachs h-Moll-Messe: Entstehung, Überlieferung, Bedeutung', *BJ*, 34 (1937), 1–58.

in 1732,¹⁸ the *Kyrie* and *Gloria* section (for which there exist firm external dates) in 1733,¹⁹ the *Sanctus* in 1736,²⁰ and the movements from 'Osanna' through to 'Dona nobis pacem' in 1738–9.²¹

Smend's observations from the 1930s encouraged the editorial office of the *NBA*, the Johann-Sebastian-Bach-Institut in Göttingen, established in 1951, which was at the early stages of the editorial project, to undertake a systematic review of all surviving original Bach manuscripts: to analyse not only Bach's own handwriting style, but also to survey his copyists and their different hands, to catalogue the numerous paper types used and to examine carefully all the details revealed by the sources.²² Such a thorough investigation had never been conducted before, for Bach or for any other composer. The results, presented primarily by Alfred Dürr and Georg von Dadelsen, the principal investigators, were stunning.²³ They were also fundamentally different from what Smend had concluded on the basis of his much more limited research. He had remained within the general framework of the composer's life and works as presented in Philipp Spitta's path-breaking Bach studies of the late nineteenth century.²⁴ To return only to the two handwriting samples (Figure 1.1), according to the new research results the square type of C-clef is typical of Bach's handwriting style in the late 1740s whereas its hook-shaped form is typical for Bach's earlier Leipzig period. As for the B-minor Mass, this meant that the compositional history of the work extended from 1724 through to 1748–9, that is, over a twenty-five-year period, rather than over the seven years from 1732 to 1738–9 as assumed by Smend. Not only that, but the order in which the various sections were composed was different as well (see Table 1.1).

Researchers after Dürr and Dadelsen have added further details to the chronology of the B-minor Mass. Of particular importance was the discovery of an early version of the opening movement of the *Credo*, in the key of G mixolydian,²⁵ indicating that the gestation period of the *Symbolum Nicenum* also extended over several years. We certainly do not know what else might come up to shed light on the B-minor Mass or any other work by Bach. If past Bach scholarship teaches us anything, it is that the future still has surprises in store.

¹⁸ *NBA KB II/1*, pp. 129, 163–5. ¹⁹ *NBA KB II/1*, p. 85. ²⁰ *NBA KB II/1*, pp. 171–3.

²¹ *NBA KB II/1*, p. 186.

²² Cf. A. Dürr, '25 Jahre Johann-Sebastian-Bach-Institut', *Musica*, 30/3 (1976), 231–2.

²³ Dürr A; Dadelsen A; Dadelsen B. See e.g. Walter Emery's review of the first and the last items in *Music & Letters*, 40/2 (1959), 192–4, and *Music & Letters*, 40/4 (1959), 382–4.

²⁴ P. Spitta, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1873, 1880).

²⁵ D-GOl, 2° 54c/3. See Wollny B.

Table 1.1 Chronology of Bach’s B-minor Mass

I. <i>Missa</i>: 1733
1. Kyrie
2. Christe
3. Kyrie
4. Gloria
5. Et in terra
6. Laudamus te
7. Gratias
8. Domine Deus
9. Qui tollis
10. Qui sedes
11. Quoniam
12. Cum Sancto Spiritu
II. <i>Symbolum Nicenum</i>: 1748–9
13. Credo
14. Patrem
15. Et in unum
16. Et incarnatus
17. Crucifixus
18. Et resurrexit
19. Et in Spiritum Sanctum
20. Confiteor
21. Et expecto
III. <i>Sanctus</i>: 1724; revised 1748–9
22. Sanctus
IV. <i>Osanna, Benedictus, Agnus Dei et Dona nobis pacem</i>: 1748–9
23. Osanna
24. Benedictus
25. Osanna [repeated]
26. Agnus Dei
27. Dona nobis pacem

The genesis of the B-minor Mass and the musical genre of the Mass

When we consider the compositional history of the work as we know it today, it seems clear that when Bach wrote various Sanctus compositions in the 1720s, in line with the needs of Leipzig church music, he had no plans for a large-scale Mass. This future idea apparently emerged slowly and in all likelihood only after completing the *Kyrie–Gloria* Mass of 1733. There is no way