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J.S. Bach:
Lutheran Masses – Volume I

Mass in G minor, BWV 235
Cantata BWV 102
Mass in F major, BWV 233

“Often overlooked, Bach’s Lutheran works are restored to glorious life by The Sixteen”

The Observer

Handel: Saul

“Sarah Connolly’s David is in a class of its own. Her wonderfully refined and sensitive singing, radiated with intense musicality and intelligence.”

The Daily Telegraph

Handel: Jephtha

James Gilchrist
Susan Bickley
Sophie Bevan
Robin Blaze
Matthew Brook
Grace Davidson

Released September 2014

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J.S. BACH
Lutheran Masses
Volume II

The Sixteen
HARRY CHRISTOPHERS

The Bach Collection

J.S. Bach:
Lutheran Masses – Volume I

Handel: Saul

Handel: Jephtha

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Some years ago I devised a plan to record Bach’s seldom heard Lutheran Masses. My intention was to use the full choir but, as luck would have it, it never materialised, because if there is any Bach that really does warrant more of a solo voice approach it is these wonderful masses. I have actually adopted a pattern of using two voices to a part in the choruses, thereby allowing vocal support for the incredibly demanding and continuous phrases. Luck also played a part in the conception of this recording. I was asked by London’s Kings Place to partake in their season’s series, “Bach Unwrapped”. The concert hall is very much a chamber music venue, so I decided to programme the Lutheran Masses and investigate Bach and his own plagiarism.

Many composers, through the ages, have reworked other people’s material as well as their own. Renaissance composers were notorious for their parody masses, often using secular chansons as the basis for their imitation – Lassus was the undoubted master of that genre. Handel was notorious for blatantly borrowing other composers’ music and totally transforming it with his own unmistakable brilliance. Bach, more often than not, used his own material and the Lutheran Masses are a perfect example of his artistry.

On this second volume it is his Cantata 79 Gott der Herr ist Sonn’ und Schild for the Feast of the Reformation which provides some of the material for the G major and A major Masses. The alto aria with unison strings, Quoniam tu solus, from the

A major Mass, is an almost identical reworking of the obbligato oboe solo, Gott ist unre Sonn’ und Schild (also for the alto voice), the major difference being that the tessitura of the strings is an octave lower than that of the oboe, thus producing the rich and warm sonority for this movement.

But the most inventive and extraordinary borrowings are reserved for the G major Mass. The soprano and alto duet, Domine Deus, is radically altered from its source in the cantata, but it is the way Bach totally transforms the opening chorus of the Cantata from a joyous ceremonial processional with triumphant horns and insistent drum beat into a graceful and almost madrigalian Gloria, where the horn parts are transferred onto the soprano and alto voices with a delicacy and precision that simply accentuates Bach’s genius.

The concerts and recording sessions were some of the most wonderfully concentrated days of our existence – Bach’s music is quite simply a privilege for us all to perform and listen to.

This recording was made possible by the generous support of the following donors:
Andrew Bowen  ·  Adam and Sara Broadbent  ·  Eric W. Nye and Carol D. Frost  
Michael Keays  ·  Tim Lewis  ·  Roger Mayhew  ·  Timothy and Damaris Sanderson  
Rosemary Prebble  ·  Peter Schabacker  ·  Sir Martin Smith  ·  Joanne West
MASS IN G MAJOR, BWV 236

1 Kyrie 4.22
2 Gloria 5.08
3 Gratias 5.04
4 Domine Deus 4.10
5 Quoniam 5.03
6 Cum Sancto Spiritu 3.51

CANTATA 79 – Gott der Herr ist Sonn’ und Schild, BWV 79

7 Coro: Gott der Herr ist Sonn’ und Schild 4.53
8 Aria: Gott ist unsre Sonn’ und Schild 3.02
9 Chorale: Nun danket uns in der Wahrheit 1.49
10 Recitativo: Gottlob, wir wissen den rechten Weg 1.03
11 Aria: Gott, ach Gott, verlaß die Deinen nimmermehr 3.09
12 Chorale: Erhalt uns in der Wahrheit 0.57

MASS IN A MAJOR, BWV 234

12 Kyrie 6.19
13 Gloria 5.34
14 Domine Deus 6.39
15 Qui Tolls 5.55
16 Quoniam tu solus 3.13
17 Cum Sancto Spiritu 3.31

Total playing time 73.52
J.S. Bach Lutheran Masses

As an example of the western cultural tradition before 1600, the 'Mass' might be considered the musical genre par excellence. Its structure of five movements – the 'Ordinary' – comprising Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus (incorporating the Benedictus and Osanna) and Agnus Dei, provided composers with a text in a fixed and unalterable form; the compositional test was very much to see what the composer was capable of within these strict boundaries. Once into the 17th century, composers began to absorb a much broader range of cultural perspectives into their compositions for the Church; the growth of opera, and the more stand-alone impulses of the court and theatre were inevitably to influence composers' musical responses to arguably the most durable text so frequently set to music. By the early 18th century, the Mass was no longer the single emblem of the high Renaissance; it was a cross-fertilisation of the many flavours of Church and State; a combination of opera, sonata, concerto and many other secular musical genres, no longer from a uniquely 'German' climate, but more pan-European, and specifically more Italian.

It is within this broader cultural perspective that Bach was developing his ideal of the high Catholic Mass, but now firmly within the Lutheran tradition. It is a mistake to see Luther as a strict, anti-Catholic figure. He was not in opposition to Catholic liturgy per se; Latin was accepted in places where it could be readily understood. For Luther, his interests lay far more in reforming doctrine; his was a cause concerned with adaptability as opposed to strict rules. Luther’s Formula Missae, an evangelical reform of the Latin Mass from 1523, resulted in a fragmentation of the Ordinary. Furthermore, his Deutsche Messe of 1526 introduced a vernacular liturgy with hymnic substitutes for some parts of the Ordinary. The Credo, Wir glauben all an einen Gott, was often intoned in German, and the Sanctus and Agnus Dei were optional. As musical settings of these three texts were rare, the so-called 'Lutheran Mass' evolved into the Kyrie and Gloria only. Whilst criticism of the Lutheran service was more widespread by the early 18th century, Lutheran directives were still keenly observed in Leipzig, where Bach worked from 1723 until his death in 1750. Even though worshippers in that city were not unaware of the disintegration of traditions elsewhere, they were conscious of the value accorded to church music by having, side-by-side, the Latin and German languages in a mix of concerted, chanted and polyphonic styles, some sung by choir alone and some involving congregational participation. This readily adaptable liturgy was to provide Bach with an enviable chance for experimentation; in such a context his musical and theological ideas were afforded the space and oxygen to ferment and develop, perhaps more so than anywhere else he might have worked at this time.

Within Bach's oeuvre there are five masses in which the first two of the five sections of the Ordinary are set polyphonically. A remarkable collection of individual movements, the Masses are varied in style and form, placing equal demands on singers and instrumentalists. A cursory glance at the list of settings of the Mass by other composers, to be found in Bach's library around 1730, reveals eclectic tastes. Ranging from the stile antico settings of Palestrina and Fux to the stile moderno voices of Wilderer, Graun, de Grigny and Durante, the index supports what is known of Bach's habit throughout his
career of learning from the best works of others. This process of assimilating the tradition and learning one's craft through a deep analysis of the works of others was the standard method of teaching and learning in the 18th century. It is no surprise then that in his composition of the Lutheran Masses, Bach’s use of parody from his own works as the starting point would have been the logical next step; having learnt from others, Bach was not going to rest on his laurels, choosing instead to revisit some of his own earlier compositions, and see whether they could be worked out further, and re-shaped in new forms. So far as the Masses are concerned, by choosing music from two of his cantata cycles, and therefore taking musical material previously assigned to specific feast days and occasions within the church year, and apportioning the ‘best bits’ to the more general and recurring context of the Mass Ordinary, Bach was ensuring his music had the chance of more regular performance. Living as he was in the age of the encyclopaedia, this must have been a very conscious and determined act on his part.

Of the five Masses, the first, BWV 232/I, forms the basis of the Mass in B minor. Of the remaining four, theories abound as to why Bach composed them. Stephen Daw has suggested that they may have been written as some sort of preliminary study towards the later completion of the Mass in B minor. Other evidence suggests that the Mass in F, BWV 233, was possibly written for Easter 1736; the Mass in A, BWV 234, might have been specifically designed for Christmas. Whatever the reasons, it appears that Bach needed a new challenge. By 1730 he had written between three and five complete cycles of cantatas, and whilst his interest in cantata composition was obviously waning, the idea of parody as a compositional process for the Masses was therefore an obvious way to conserve some of the best moments from the cantatas. Parody itself was an important part of the cantatas’ composition: of the three surviving cycles totalling 250 or so sacred and secular cantatas, no fewer than 163, or 65 percent, show traces of borrowing to a greater or lesser extent.

20 out of 24 movements in the four Lutheran Masses, BWV 233-6, are parodies of movements from earlier cantatas. The extent to which the music is changed varies enormously; some show simple transcription, others changes in instrumentation; some are more elaborate results of cutting and pasting, whilst others show complete recomposition. Other movements Bach chose were clearly already of superlative musical quality, and the parodies are only altered minimally to accommodate the new Latin text. Laurence Dreyfus has written extensively on Bach’s compositional process showing ‘patterns of invention’; contrary to the 19th-century image of Bach, the tortured genius who just wrote the music out as he heard it in his head, Dreyfus has argued most convincingly that like any composer developing his thoughts, Bach had to play with the basic musical ideas and invent the music through a process of trial and error. With reference to Bach’s parody technique, it is logical to understand, as Robert Marshall has suggested, that ‘Bach did not have the patience or the inclination – or ability – merely to copy any vocal work on a larger scale...in a purely mechanical manner without introducing improvements of detail.’ Critical reception of the Lutheran Masses has not always been kind. The now outdated 19th-century view that only a fundamental compatibility between words and music could guarantee a work of highest quality prompted Spitta to denounce the Masses as ‘mindless adaptations’. Similarly, Albert Schweitzer found them to be ‘perfunctory and occasionally quite nonsensical.’ Only more recent musicological research by Blankenburg, amongst many others, has revealed the extent to which Bach went during the parody process to ‘provide full justice.
for the new text, both as to meaning and expression, that the duplicate, in comparison with the original, experiences marked diffraction and receives its own individual character.’

On this second disc in Harry Christophers’ survey of the Lutheran Masses, The Sixteen presents the Masses in G major BWV 236 and A major BWV 234, interspersed with the Cantata Gott der Herr ist Sonn’ und Schild (God the Lord is sun and shield) BWV 79. This cantata was written in Leipzig in 1725 for Reformation Day and first performed there on 31 October 1725; it is from Bach’s third cycle of cantatas. Parodies from this cantata appear in BWV 236 – the opening chorus of the Gloria shows a considerable down-sizing in orchestration, whilst the Quoniam of BWV 234 shows few, though very detailed, changes in articulation markings.

All four Lutheran Masses follow the same structure of a tripartite Kyrie – Christe – Kyrie and then a five-movement Gloria. Each Gloria is framed by big chorus movements, allowing flexibility for the middle three movements to be shared out as arias. As Robin Leaver has pointed out, as the central focus of all four Glorias, the arias are significantly Eucharistic; in BWV 235 and 236, the focus is on Christ as the Lord and only begotten son – the sacrificial lamb; in BWV 233 and 234, the focus is on Christ and his actions in taking away the sins of the world. Such subtle shifts of focus within the fixed parameters of the Ordinary of the Mass show Bach’s creativity and feel for liturgical meaning in his music; such care in the re-composition of his extant music reveals that as a technique, Bach’s parody was not merely a process of arrangement or transcription, but instead a full-scale re-moulding of the musical material at the service of the text.

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2013

TEXTS & TRANSLATIONS

Mass in G major, BWV 236

1 Kyrie chorus
Kyrie eleison.
Christe eleison.
Kyrie eleison.

2 Gloria chorus
Gloria in excelsis Deo.
Et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis.
Laudamus te, benedicimus te, adoramus te, glorificamus te.

3 Gratias aria bass: Eamonn Dougan
Gratias agimus tibi
propter magnam gloriam tuam.
Domine Deus, Rex coelestis,
Deus Pater omnipotens.
Domine Fili unigenite Jesu Christe.

Lord, have mercy upon us.
Christ, have mercy upon us.
Lord, have mercy upon us.

Glory be to God on high.
And on earth peace to men of good will.
We praise Thee, we bless Thee,
we worship Thee, we glorify Thee.

We give you thanks to Thee
for Thy great glory.
Lord God, heavenly King,
God the Father almighty.
Lord, only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.
4 Domine Deus duet soprano: Grace Davidson, alto: William Purefoy

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.

Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
Thou that takest away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us.
Thou that takest away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer.
Thou that sittest at the right hand of the Father,
have mercy on us.

5 Quoniam aria tenor: Jeremy Budd

Quoniam tu solus sanctus,
tu solus Dominus,
tu solus altissimus
Jesu Christe.

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

6 Cum Sancto Spiritu chorus

Cum Sancto Spiritu
in gloria Dei Patris, amen.

With the Holy Ghost
in the glory of God the Father, Amen

Cantata 79: Gott der Herr ist Sonn’ und Schild, BWV 79

7 Gott der Herr ist Sonn’ und Schild chorus

Gott der Herr ist Sonn’ und Schild;
der Herr gibt Gnade und Ehre.
Er wird kein Gutes mangeln lassen
den Frommen.

Gott ist unser Sonn’ und Schild aria alto: Robin Blaze

Gott ist unsre Sonn’ und Schild;
darum rühmet dessen Güte
unser dankbares Gemüte,
die er für sein Häuflein hegt.
Denn er will uns ferner schützen,
ob die Feinde Pfeile schmetzen
und ein Lästerhund gleich billt.

8 Nun danket alle Gott chorale

Nun danket alle Gott
mit Herzen, Mund und Händen,
der große Dinge tut
an uns und allen Enden,
der uns von Mutterleib
und Kindesbeinen an
unzahlig viel zugat
und noch izzund getan!

Now all thank God
with heart, mouth and hands,
who does great things
for us and all our purposes;
who for us from our mother’s womb
and from our first steps
countless great kindness
has done and still continues to do.
God be praised, we know the right way to blessedness; for, Jesus, you have shown it to us through your word: therefore your name forever remains praised. But since many still at this time must bear a foreign yoke through their blindness, ah! have pity on them graciously so that they come to know the right way and name you as their only mediator.

Gott, ach Gott, verlaß die Deinen nimmermehr! Laß dein Wort uns helle scheinen; obgleich sehr wider uns die Feinde toben, so soll unser Mund dich loben.

Keep us in the truth, give us eternal freedom to praise your name through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Lord, have mercy upon us. Christ, have mercy upon us. Lord, have mercy upon us.

Glory to God on high. And on earth peace to men of good will. We praise Thee, we bless Thee. We worship Thee, we glorify Thee. We give thanks to Thee for Thy great glory.
For Thou alone art holy, Thou alone art the Lord; Thou alone art most high, O Jesus Christ.

Quoniam tu solus sanctus, tu solus Dominus, tu solus altissimus Jesu Christe.

Thou that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us.

Qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis, Qui sittis ad dexteram patris, miserere nobis

Thou that sittest at the right hand of the Father, have mercy upon us.

O Lord God, heavenly King, God the Father Almighty, O Lord, the only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father.

Harry Christophers is known internationally as founder and conductor of The Sixteen as well as a regular guest conductor for many of the major symphony orchestras and opera companies worldwide. He has directed The Sixteen choir and orchestra throughout Europe, America and Asia Pacific gaining a distinguished reputation for his work in Renaissance, Baroque and 20th- and 21st-century music. In 2000 he instituted The Choral Pilgrimage, a national tour of English cathedrals from York to Canterbury in music from the pre-Reformation, as The Sixteen's contribution to the millennium celebrations. The Pilgrimage in the UK is now central to The Sixteen's annual artistic programme.

In 2008 Harry Christophers was appointed Artistic Director of Boston's Handel and Haydn Society; he is also Principal Guest Conductor of the Granada Symphony Orchestra. As well as enjoying a partnership with the BBC Philharmonic, with whom he won a Diapason d'Or, he is a regular guest conductor with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields. With The Sixteen he is an Associate Artist at The Bridgewater Hall in Manchester and features in the highly successful BBC television series, Sacred Music, presented by Simon Russell Beale.

Harry has conducted numerous productions for Lisbon Opera and English National Opera as well as conducting the UK premiere of Messager's opera Fortunio for Grange Park Opera. He is a regular conductor at Buxton Opera where he initiated a very successful cycle of Handel's operas and oratorios including Semele, Samson, Saul and Jephtha.

Harry Christophers is an Honorary Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, as well as the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama and has been awarded the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Music from the University of Leicester. He was awarded a CBE in the 2012 Queen's Birthday Honours.
After more than three decades of world-wide performance and recording, The Sixteen is recognised as one of the world’s greatest ensembles. Its special reputation for performing early English polyphony, masterpieces of the Renaissance, baroque and early classical periods, and a diversity of 20th- and 21st-century music, all stems from the passions of conductor and founder, Harry Christophers.

The Sixteen tours internationally giving regular performances at the major concert halls and festivals. At home in the UK, The Sixteen are ‘The Voices of Classic FM’ as well as Associate Artists of The Bridgewater Hall, Manchester. The group also promotes The Choral Pilgrimage, an annual tour of the UK’s finest cathedrals.

The Sixteen’s period-instrument orchestra has taken part in acclaimed semi-staged performances of Purcell’s Fairy Queen in Tel Aviv and London, a fully-staged production of Purcell’s King Arthur in Lisbon’s Belém Centre, and new productions of Monteverdi’s Il ritorno d’Ulisse at Lisbon Opera House and The Coronation of Poppea at English National Opera.

Over 100 recordings reflect The Sixteen’s quality in a range of work spanning the music of 500 years. In 2009 they won the coveted Classic FM Gramophone Artist of the Year Award and the Baroque Vocal Award for Handel’s Coronation Anthems. The Sixteen also features in the highly successful BBC television series, Sacred Music, presented by Simon Russell Beale.

In 2011 the group launched a new training programme for young singers called Genesis Sixteen. Aimed at 18 to 23 year-olds, this is the UK’s first fully-funded choral programme for young singers designed specifically to bridge the gap from student to professional practitioner.

For further information about recordings on CORO or live performances and tours by The Sixteen, call: +44 (0) 20 7936 3420 or email: coro@thesixteen.com

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