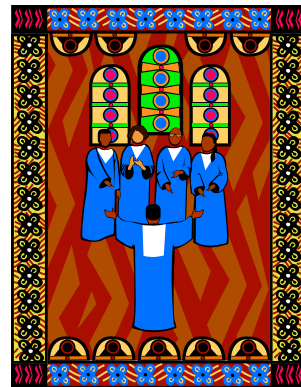


Before B Minor:

Getting Ready for the Mass of Your Life

You've done it! You've snagged a ticket to Bach's B Minor Mass performance, and now you're wondering what you've gotten yourself into. Well, you're in for an evening of musical feasting on some of the finest music in the Western world. Here's a little background to get you started.



1. What You Need to Know About the Venue

- Like a good feature film, the B Minor Mass takes about two hours to perform. It's more like a sit-down, seven-course meal than a fast food run. You will have time to savour each moment of the experience, so settle in and enjoy the show.
- Some people dress up for concerts, and others arrive in jeans. Wear whatever is comfortable for you.
- The seats aren't padded, so you may wish to bring a small cushion of your own if you think you'll miss your armchair.
- Arrive early enough to allow time for parking and seat selection. If you are coming at the invitation of a friend in the choir, ask him or her for seating suggestions. A concert is always more meaningful if you can see the faces of performers you know personally.
- Take a minute to look over the program notes and listen to Syd's introduction before the concert. They will help to contextualize the music you'll be hearing.
- Before you come, check out the Peterborough Singers website, Facebook page, and Twitter stream for links to videos, rants, trivia questions, and other witty B Minor banter.

2. What You Need to Know About the Music

- Bach's music is incredibly complex to perform, and deceptively simple to appreciate. You will notice many sounds happening at the same time, with different voices overlapping and the orchestral instruments playing complicated parts of their own. Somehow, though, it all "works," like a giant puzzle with a thousand jumbled pieces that come together to form a perfect landscape. At the same time, each tiny piece is a work of art on its own. You could spend years studying and marveling at the intricate fragments, or you can just stand back and take in the stunning final effect. Either way, you will love hearing the work of this musical genius.
- One of Bach's favourite musical forms is the fugue (pronounced *fewg*), in which a short musical theme is tossed from one voice to another in a kind of glorified round. This theme is then developed and transformed in a million creative ways by different singers at the same time, with parts weaving in and out among each other and creating a rich musical tapestry. Most of the choruses use this technique. When you hear the same words, and the same tune, popping up in one section of the choir and then reappearing unexpectedly somewhere else, it's likely that you're hearing one of Bach's famous fugues.
- The solos (called "Arias") are also full of interest. Often the soloists sing duets with each other or with instruments of the orchestra. In the Benedictus, for instance, the tenor and the flute perform a gorgeous duet together. Listen to the way the voices and instruments interact with each other as equal partners.

3. What You Need to Know About the Text

- Bach wasn't Catholic, but he wrote a Catholic mass anyway. No one really knows why, since it wasn't performed in its entirety until a century after his death. But most people agree that the *Mass in B Minor* is one of Bach's crowning achievements, combining all the greatest hits of his long career into a profound, liturgical expression of his deeply felt Protestant faith.
- If, for some reason, you're not classically or Catholicly inclined, you might want a refresher on the format of the Latin mass. It's basically the text of a church service, taking the worshipper on a meditative and responsive journey through the doctrines of the Christian faith. Here's a quick summary of a typical mass:

Kyrie

(*Mercy*)

A sinner's prayer for mercy ("Lord, have mercy, Christ, have mercy"). The Kyrie sets the tone for a reverent, intimate time of worship.

Gloria

(*Glory*)

An exultant song of praise to God, beginning with the familiar Christmas text, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, goodwill to men."

Credo

(*Creed*)

A proclamation of the Creed, kind of like the mission and vision statement of the Christian church. It summarizes the beliefs of the faithful, and outlines the history and purpose of God's interactions with his people.

Sanctus

(*Holy*)

A meditation on God's holiness and glory, and a reminder of the reverie of the angels as they perpetually cry, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty" around the throne of God. It is a portrait of heaven.

Benedictus

(*Blessing*)

A benediction; a warm prayer of affirmation ("Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord"), followed by a joyful "Hosanna!"

Agnus Dei

(*Lamb of God*)

A grateful acknowledgement of Christ's self-sacrifice on our behalf, and a prayer that he would continue to remember us and grant us peace.

- When Bach set the mass to music, he expanded some sections and condensed others, clustering the various movements into four sections:

I: The "Missa" includes the Kyrie (split into three sections) and the Gloria (split into nine sections).

II: The "Symbolum Nicenum" is a statement of the Nicene Creed, divided into nine symmetrical sections.

III: The "Sanctus" is paired with the rousing "Pleni Sunt Coeli" ("Heaven and Earth are full of your glory").

IV: The "Osanna, Benedictus, Agnus Dei" expands the final section of the mass into five movements, closing with "Dona Nobis Pacem" ("Grant us Peace").

- Unlike churchgoers attending a shorter version of a mass, you will get an intermission after the *Missa*. Kind of like a seventh inning stretch. But hurry back for the second half! The tenors are particularly dashing when they start throwing their weight around in the eighth section of the creed. Just you wait.