

## Listening notes

### Kyrie eleison I – Christe eleison – Kyrie eleison II

In choosing to set the two Kyrie movements as fugues, with the central Christe movement as a lighter *galant* duet, Bach was following in the conventional style of Mass setting of his time. He was also making a doctrinal point here, as this stylistic distinction was often used to highlight the difference between references to the Old Testament of God the Father, and the New Testament of God the Son.

There is quite a gulf of style though between the two Kyrie fugues. The first is very much a 'modern' (for Bach's time) fugue, with its significant independent instrumental lines, and the angular nature of the fugue subject, whereas the second Kyrie looks back to the practice of the 16<sup>th</sup> century with its *Alla breve* notation, the fluid sinuous vocal lines, and instrumental parts that double the voices.

It is thought that none of these three movements was originally composed for the Dresden *Missa*, but that all were taken from pre-existing models. The only new writing is probably the dramatic opening gesture, which was added to align the *Missa* with the style expected at the Dresden court.

### Gloria – Et in terra pax

Here the rejoicing really begins. Everything about this movement, from the festive use of trumpets and drums, to the exuberant dance-like triple metre would speak to a baroque congregation of celebration and joy. The pace changes for the gentle, lilting 'Et in terra pax' section. Notice how the opening rocking gesture of this section becomes the beginning of the main fugue subject (sung by the sopranos), and the virtuosity of the counter subject (for example, as sung by the sopranos once the altos enter with the main subject).

### Laudamus te

This show stopping aria is a competition in virtuosity for the soprano and the solo violin. Baroque performers were normally expected to add ornaments and 'graces' to their lines, but here Bach leaves nothing to chance, and writes out the expected elaborations in full.

### Gratias agimus tibi

Another *stile antico* fugue where, strictly speaking, the instruments should just double the vocal lines. But towards the end, Bach breaks the rules, and adds independent trumpet parts that add a thrilling extra dimension to the closing bars.

### Domine Deus

When a new performing edition was produced in the 1950s, this movement caused considerable controversy. The reason was the rhythm in the opening semiquavers of the instrumental introduction. In the composing score that was eventually inherited by C.P.E. Bach, these notes are written as equal semiquavers, but in the set of Dresden performing parts, they are notated with the unequal 'Lombard' rhythm, or scotch snap. Each performer of this music must therefore make a decision about which version they will play.

### Qui tollis peccata mundi

This follows on directly from the Domine Deus, and the surprise in this music is the haunting and lovely flute lines that weave around the vocal parts.

### Qui sedes ad dextram Patris

This movement is essentially a *gigue*, a dance in 6/8 metre, although the asymmetry of the phrases belies its

dance-like origins. The accompanying instrument is the *oboe d'amore*, the oboe's deeper, softer toned cousin.

## **Quoniam tu solus sanctus**

Undoubtedly aimed at the skilled musicians of the Dresden court, this movement was probably also intended as homage to the Elector Augustus the Strong. With the striking virtuosity of the horn part, it is easy to miss the extraordinary accompaniment for two bassoons that is being played underneath.

## **Cum Sancto Spiritu**

This movement is a parody, and in the original there would almost certainly have been an opening instrumental introduction.

Throughout the Gloria, anyone who sings second soprano might have noticed that they often have a very meagre time of it, particularly in the fugal movements. They are usually the last voice to enter the fugue, and even then they often only have a few notes of the theme before being absorbed into the general texture. This is because the models from which most of these movements were taken were probably only in four parts, and so to preserve the five part vocal writing, Bach had to work in an extra part as best he could. But of course if this had ever been performed in Bach's lifetime, with just one voice to a part, the second soprano would have had a moment of real glory, as the virtuosic *Laudamus te* belongs to him (the part would have been sung by a boy or by an adult castrato).

## **Credo in unum Deum**

Based throughout on the traditional chant that forms the intonation for the opening of the Creed, this movement is given a real sense of purpose by the unrelenting walking bass that accompanies it.

## **Patrem onnipotentem**

The vocal lines here are angular and leap quickly from top to bottom of each singer's range, perhaps intended to illustrate the 'heaven and earth' of the text.

## **Et in unum Dominum**

The music of this movement had an interesting history. While Bach was composing a secular homage cantata for the Elector in the 1730s, he obviously was considering using this music, because part of it is written – and then crossed out – on the back of one of the pages of the score of that cantata.

Notice how the instrumental lines, when their notes are very close, are differentiated by different articulation.

## **Et incarnatus est**

Bach originally intended this text to be included in the previous number, but at the last minute he composed this extra movement, one of the few 'original' movements in the whole Mass.

## **Crucifixus**

This is both the emotional and the structural heart of the whole Symbolum. The fact that it was originally composed for an earlier cantata, *Weinen, kalgen, sorgen, zagen* (Weeping, wailing, lamenting, fearing), does not take away from its suitability for the Crucifixus text.

The structure of this short movement is extraordinary. It is built on 13 repetitions of a common ground bass known as the *passus duriusculus*, used countless times by baroque composers to symbolise sorrow and death. (The famous lament, 'When I am laid in earth' from Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* is another well known example.) In the hands of a lesser composer, the repetition of the bass would also bring about the repetition of the supporting harmony, but not Bach. In this setting, every harmonic possibility of the bass notes is explored, and we barely notice the repetitions. Only in the final two bars is the sequence broken, when the harmony takes an unexpected turn to the relative major key, as Christ is laid gently to rest.

## Et resurrexit

Inevitably, the resurrection is accompanied by trumpets and drums in bright D major. This movement contains a moment of pure glory for our basses, as they sing the long line on 'et iterum venturus est'.

## Et in Spiritum Sanctum

This is one of a family of gentle, pastoral setting for bass, often accompanied by oboes d'amore – think of *Mache dich mein Herze rein* from the St Matthew Passion, for example, or the solo cantata *Schlummert ein*.

## Confiteor – et expecto

The Confiteor movement is remarkable in many ways. The opening theme is modelled on the plainchant that was used for this part of the Mass text. Having worked this theme out, Bach then presents a second theme for the text 'in remissionem peccatorum'. Then, as we should probably expect from Bach, both of these are brought together as a double fugue. As if that were not enough, the plainchant itself is then reintroduced, now in direct quotation, first sung by the basses and the altos, and then in augmentation by the tenors.

Once the tenor quotation of the chant is complete, Bach begins a section of surprising harmonic complexity. We know this passage caused even him some trouble to write, because of the number of alterations and crossings out in the score. The text at this point is 'et expecto resurrectionem mortuorum' (I expect the resurrection of the dead), but it is as if at first the expectation is not entirely sure. But faith, as it were, intervenes, and with a blaze of trumpets and D major, all doubt is removed. We also suddenly understand at this point why in the preceding Confiteor section the voices were accompanied only by the continuo group, as the sudden addition of the other instruments underlies the certainty of the resurrection.

## Sanctus

This Sanctus was first composed by Bach for Christmas in 1724, and was originally scored for three sopranos, alto, tenor and bass. Bach adjusted this scoring to two sopranos, two altos, tenor and bass for use in this Mass.

## Osanna in excelsis

This movement is scored for two 4-part choirs, and is another in the celebratory, D major, triple time family. It is modelled on a movement from a secular homage cantata, and the opening instrumental ritornello has been removed.

## Benedictus

Unfortunately, Bach somehow forgot to specify which obbligato instrument should be used to accompany the tenor soloist for this movement. The flute, though, seems the obvious choice, given that the range is suitable, and given that Bach often used the combination of flute and tenor voice in other works.

After the Benedictus, the Osanna is repeated.

## Agnus Dei

Both this movement, and the earlier aria *Ach bleibe doch* from the Ascension Oratorio, BWV11 are derived from the same (now lost) model. There was considerable reworking involved in creating the Agnus Dei; the opening vocal phrase, for example, does not appear in the Ascension Oratorio. But without the original model, we cannot work out the exact sequence of revisions.

## Dona nobis pacem

The Mass is brought to a noble and valedictory end by this movement, an exact reworking of the *Gratias agimus tibi* that we heard during the Gloria.