

Johann Sebastian Bach

Messe in h-Moll BWV 232 / Mass in B Minor

With Sanctus in D-Dur (1724) BWV 232ⁱⁱⁱ

Autograph Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz.

Commentary by Christoph Wolff

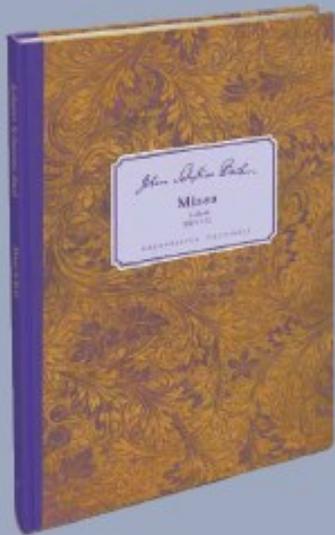
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New color facsimile of the autograph score based on newly commissioned photographs. The "Great Catholic Mass"—as it was referred to in the will of CPE Bach—is both one of the crowning achievements of Johann Sebastian Bach and at the same time one of his most enigmatic works. The Mass conspicuously lacks a title page (its five movements have their own heavily worn title wrappers); the different quality of the handwriting indicates that the various sections originated from different periods of time; to a large extent it is a reworking of previous composed material, notwithstanding its sublime craftsmanship, expressiveness and sophisticated treatment. No complete performance of the Mass in B Minor is known to have taken place during Bach's lifetime. As a Catholic Mass, the separation of the Osanna and Benedictus from the Sanctus contradicts the Roman rite and although it could have been performed in non-ecclesiastical venues, without any external occasion or patron for the Mass, the work, in the words of Christoph Wolff "takes on a semblance of being primarily a musical legacy... coinciding with its instrumental counterpart The Art of Fugue which arose largely in parallel with it during the 1740s".

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