

Concerts of Thursday, March 26, and Friday, March 27, 2020, at 8:00pm

Robert Spano, Conductor

Susanna Phillips, soprano

Sasha Cooke, mezzo-soprano

Ben Bliss, tenor

Matthew Rose, bass

Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Chorus,

Norman Mackenzie, Director of Choruses

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

***Missa solemnis* in D Major, Opus 123 (1823)**

I. Kyrie

II. Gloria

III. Credo

IV. Sanctus

V. Agnus Dei

This concert is performed without intermission.

English Surtitles by Ken Meltzer

Notes on the Program by Ken Meltzer

Missa solemnis in D Major, Opus 123 (1823)

Ludwig van Beethoven was baptized in Bonn, Germany, on December 17, 1770, and died in Vienna, Austria, on March 26, 1827. The first performance of *The Missa Solemnis* took place in St. Petersburg, Russia, on April 7, 1824. *The Missa solemnis* is scored for soprano, alto, tenor, and bass soloists, mixed chorus, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, organ, and strings. Approximate performance time is eighty minutes.

First Classical Subscription Performance: May 2, 1968, The Atlanta Symphony Chamber Chorus, The Atlanta Choral Guild, The Atlanta Intercollegiate Chorus, Robert Shaw, Conductor.

Most Recent Classical Subscription Performances: January 21 and 23, 2016, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Chorus, Donald Runnicles, Conductor.

Recording: Telarc CD-80150 (2CD), Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Chorus, Robert Shaw, Conductor.

“My hearing has grown steadily weaker”

By the close of the 18th century, Ludwig van Beethoven had established himself as one of Vienna’s most important pianists and composers. However, in June of 1801, Beethoven wrote to his friend, Franz Wegeler: “But now that envious demon, my bad health, has played me a scurvy trick, namely: for the past three years my hearing has grown steadily weaker...”

Beethoven consulted with physicians in a desperate attempt to save his hearing. In April of 1802, Beethoven, on the advice of his doctor, relocated to the beautiful country village of Heiligenstadt, where he remained until the early fall. During his stay in Heiligenstadt, it appears Beethoven experienced a further decline in his hearing. Beethoven was forced to confront the possibility, even the likelihood, that he would lose his hearing altogether. It was, of course, the cruelest joke fate could play upon Beethoven. He would soon become a virtuoso pianist unable to perform in public, and a composer unable to hear his own music.

It is not surprising that Beethoven spent much time contemplating the meaning of his life. One of the products of this soul-searching process was the document known as the “Heiligenstadt Testament,” written in October of 1802. Addressed to his two brothers, the Testament was found among Beethoven’s papers after the composer’s death in 1827.

In the “Heiligenstadt Testament,” Beethoven confessed:

But how humiliated I have felt if somebody standing beside me heard the sound of a flute in the distance and *I heard nothing*, or if somebody heard a *shepherd sing* and again I heard nothing—Such experiences almost

made me despair, and I was on the point of putting an end to my life—The only thing that held me back was *my art*. For indeed it seemed to me impossible to leave this world before I had produced all the works I felt the urge to compose; and thus I have dragged on this miserable existence—a truly miserable existence...

In the decade following the “Heiligenstadt Testament,” Beethoven responded with ferocious and unflagging energy and determination. During this extraordinary period, Beethoven composed such masterpieces as the Symphonies Nos. 2-8, the Fourth and Fifth (“Emperor”) Piano Concertos, the “Razumovsky” String Quartets, the “Waldstein,” “Appassionata,” and “Les Adieux” Piano Sonatas, and the composer’s only opera, *Fidelio*.

“Human misery in every form”

During the time known as Beethoven’s “Middle Period,” the composer faced other challenges. In May of 1809, Napoleon’s forces bombarded Vienna. Beethoven’s lodgings stood directly in the line of fire, and he took refuge in a basement in another residence. During the massive shelling, Beethoven tried to protect the last remnants of his hearing by covering his ears with pillows. The succeeding French occupation brought physical and economic chaos. On July 26, 1809, Beethoven wrote to his publisher: “What a destructive, disorderly life I see and hear around me, nothing but drums, cannons and human misery in every form....”

Through all of this turmoil and despair, Beethoven never lost his fierce sense of independence and rebellious spirit. Once, during the occupation, a friend spied Beethoven in a café. There the composer stood behind a French officer, shaking his fist and proclaiming: “If I were a general and knew as much about strategy as I do counterpoint, I’d give you fellows something to think about.” It was during this period that Beethoven composed his “Emperor” Piano Concerto. There is an undeniable pride and heroism in the “Emperor,” music that refuses to capitulate to the despair Beethoven witnessed during its composition.

The *Missa solennis*: Composition and Early Performances

The years immediately following the post-“Heiligenstadt” decade were far less productive. Beethoven struggled with health issues. After the death of his brother, Beethoven also became embroiled in fierce and protracted custody litigation over his nephew, Karl. As the second decade of the 19th century drew to a close, the general belief in Vienna was that Beethoven’s career was finished. Beethoven’s friend, Anton Schindler, recalled that when Beethoven heard these rumors, he replied: “Wait a while; you will soon learn differently.” In the final decade of his life, Beethoven composed several of his greatest and most adventurous works. These include the late Sonatas Opus 109-111, and the *Diabelli Variations* for solo piano, the five late Quartets and *Grosse Fugue* for string quartet, and the Ninth Symphony.

Another masterpiece from Beethoven’s extraordinary “Late Period” is the *Missa solennis*, Opus 123. The original impetus for the *Missa solennis* occurred in 1819. That

spring, Rudolf, Archduke of Austria (1788-1831), the youngest son of Emperor Leopold II, learned he had been appointed Archbishop of Olmütz in Moravia (now, Olomouc, the Czech Republic). Rudolf, Beethoven's longtime pupil, cherished friend, and generous patron, was the dedicatee of such pieces as the Fourth and "Emperor" Piano Concerto, the "Archduke" Piano Trio, the Piano Sonatas Opus 81a ("Les Adieux"), 106 ("Hammerklavier"), and 111, and the *Grosse Fugue*.

In June of 1819, Beethoven wrote to Rudolph:

The day on which a High Mass composed by me will be performed during the ceremonies solemnized for Your Imperial Highness will be the most glorious day of my life; and God will enlighten me so that my poor talents may contribute to the glorification of that solemn day.

Prior to starting work on the *Missa solemnis*, Beethoven entered in his journal: "In order to write true church music...look through all the monastic church chorales and also the strophes in the most correct translations and perfect prosody in all Christian-Catholic psalms and hymns generally." Beethoven embarked upon an intense study of the Renaissance composer Giovanni Palestrina and his contemporaries, as well as the music of Handel, J.S. Bach, and C.P.E. Bach. Beethoven also prepared a copy of the Latin text that included a line-by-line German translation, as well as notations for accentuation of each word.

Rudolf's installation took place on March 9, 1820. Beethoven did not complete the *Missa solemnis* in time for the ceremony and in fact, did not finish the work until 1823 (Beethoven did dedicate the *Missa solemnis* to Rudolf). The ongoing litigation involving his nephew Karl may have delayed progress, as did, perhaps, work on various other compositions, including the Ninth Symphony.

The premiere of the *Missa solemnis* took place in St. Petersburg, Russia, on April 7, 1824. The concert, by the Philharmonic Society of St. Petersburg, was organized by Prince Nikolai Galitzin, a devout music-lover, gifted amateur cellist, and patron of Beethoven (three of the late String Quartets are dedicated to Galitzin). The first Vienna performance of the *Missa solemnis* took place at the Kärntnertor Theater on May 7, 1824. That concert, featuring only the *Kyrie*, *Credo*, and *Agnus Dei* portions, also marked the world premiere of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Beethoven stood next to the conductor, Michael Umlauf, following the score and beating time, even though he could hear neither the performances nor the audience's tumultuous ovations at their conclusion. A complete performance took place in Warnsdorf, Bohemia, on June 29, 1830, after the composer's death.

"From the Heart—May it Return to the Heart"

The *Missa solemnis* is a majestic work that continues to inspire reverence, awe, and perhaps some misconceptions as well. The remarkable demands placed upon the range and stamina of the singers (both the soloists and chorus) are often attributed to Beethoven's lack of sympathy (perhaps exacerbated by his hearing loss) for the

capabilities of the human voice. It's an accusation leveled, too, at the vocal writing in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and the composer's opera, *Fidelio*. In his *Autobiography*, Russian composer Igor Stravinsky addressed a similar criticism directed at Beethoven's austere orchestral palette: "But Beethoven's music is intimately linked up with his instrumental language, and finds its most exact and perfect expression in the sobriety of that language."

Perhaps the almost superhuman vocal demands are precisely what Beethoven intended for the "exact and perfect expression" of his goal in composing the *Missa solemnis*. Beethoven wrote to Johann Andreas Streicher: "My chief aim was to awaken and permanently instill religious feelings not only into the singers but also the listeners." Beethoven understood, perhaps as well as anyone, the fortitude required to maintain faith while confronting life's challenges. Beethoven did not hesitate to portray those challenges in the *Missa solemnis*. The struggle is not fully resolved until the defeat of the stunning "war" episodes in the concluding *Agnus Dei* (subtitled by Beethoven "A Prayer for Inner and Outer Peace"). But that struggle makes the triumphant final bars of the *Missa solemnis* all the more gratifying, a fulfillment of Beethoven's fervent wish, inscribed at the top of the score: "From the Heart—May it Return to the Heart."

I. Kyrie

Assai sostenuto (Mit Andacht) (With Devotion)

Kyrie eleison.

Lord, have mercy.

Andante assai ben marcato

Christe eleison.

Christ, have mercy.

Tempo I

Kyrie eleison.

Lord, have mercy.

II. Gloria

Allegro vivace

Gloria in excelsis Deo.

Et in terra pax

hominibus bonae voluntatis.

Laudamus te. Benedicimus te.

Adoramus te. Glorificamus te.

Glory to God in the highest.

And on earth peace,

to people of good will.

We praise You. We bless You.

We worship You. We glorify You.

Meno Allegro

Gratias agimus tibi

propter magnam gloriam tuam.

We give thanks to You

because of Your great glory.

Tempo I

Domine Deus, Rex coelestis,

Deus Pater omnipotens.

Domine Fili unigenite,

Jesu Christe.

Domine Deus, Agnus Dei,

Filius Patris.

Lord God, Heavenly King,
God the Father Almighty.
Lord, the only begotten Son,
Jesus Christ.
Lord God, Lamb of God,
Son of the Father.

Larghetto

Qui tollis peccata mundi,
miserere nobis.
Qui tollis peccata mundi,
suscipe deprecationem nostram.
Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris,
miserere nobis.

You who take away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us.
You who take away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer.
You who sits at the right hand of the Father,
have mercy on us.

Allegro maestoso

Quoniam tu Solus Sanctus.
Tu solus Dominus.
Tu solus Altissimus, Jesu Christe.
Cum Sancto Spiritu

For only You are holy.
Only You are Lord.
Only You most high, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,

Allegro, ma non troppo e ben marcato—Poco più Allegro
in gloria
Dei Patris. Amen.

in the glory
of God the Father. Amen.

III. Credo

Allegro ma non troppo
Credo in unum Deum.
Patrem omnipotentem,
factorem coeli et terrae,
visibilium omnium et invisibilium.

Credo (Et) in unum Dominum, Jesum Christum,
Filius Dei unigenitus.
Et ex Patre natus
ante omnia saecula.
Deum de Deo, lumen de lumine,
Deum verum de Deo vero.
Genitum, non factum,
consubstantialem Patri:
per quem omnia facta sunt.
Qui propter nos homines
et propter nostram salutem
descendit de caelis.

I believe in one God.
The Father almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth,
and of all things visible and invisible.
I believe (and) in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
only begotten Son of God,
and born of the Father
before all generations.
God from God, light from light,
true God from true God.
Begotten, not made,
one in substance with the Father:
by whom everything was made.
Who for us men
and for our salvation
came down from heaven;

Adagio

Et incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto
ex Maria Virgine:

and was made flesh by the Holy Spirit
of the Virgin Mary;

Andante

Et homo factus est.

and was made man.

Adagio espressivo

Crucifixus etiam pro nobis:
sub Pontio Pilato passus, et sepultus est.

And was crucified also for us

under Pontius Pilate,
suffered, and was buried.

Allegro

Et resurrexit tertia die
secundum Scripturas.

And He was resurrected on the third day
according to the Scriptures;

Allegro molto

Et ascendit in coelum:
sedet ad dexteram Patris.
Et iterum venturus est cum gloria,
judicare vivos et mortuos:
cujus regni non erit finis.

and ascended into heaven,
sitting at the right hand of the Father.
And He shall come again with glory
to judge the living and the dead,
His kingdom shall have no end.

Allegro ma non troppo

Credo (Et) in Spiritum Sanctum,
Dominum, et vivificantem:
qui ex Patre Filioque procedit.
Qui cum Patre et Filio
simul adoratur et conglorificatur:
qui locutus est per Prophetas.
Credo (Et) in unam sanctam catholicam
et apostolicam Ecclesiam.
Confiteor unum baptisma,
in remissionem peccatorum.
Et exspecto resurrectionem mortuorum,

I believe (And) in the Holy Spirit
Lord and giver of life:
Who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
Who with the Father and Son
is equally worshipped and glorified:
Who spoke by the Prophets.
I believe (And) in one holy catholic
and apostolic Church.
I acknowledge one baptism
in the remission of sins.
And I wait for the resurrection of the dead,

Allegretto ma non troppo—Allegro con moto—Grave
Et vitam venturi saeculi. Amen.

and the life of the world to come. Amen.

IV. Sanctus

Adagio (Mit Andacht)
Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus,
Dominus Deus Sabaoth.

Holy, Holy, Holy,
Lord God of Hosts.

Allegro pesante
Pleni sunt coeli et terra
gloria tua.

Heaven and earth are full
of Your glory.

Presto
Osanna in excelsis.

Hosanna in the highest.

Praeludium
Sostenuto ma non troppo

Andante molto cantabile e non troppo mosso
Benedictus, qui venit
in nomine Domini.
Osanna in excelsis.

Blessed is He who comes
in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.

V. Agnus Dei

Adagio
Agnus Dei,
qui tollis peccata mundi,
miserere nobis. Agnus Dei:

Lamb of God,
Who takes away the sins of the world,

have mercy on us. Lamb of God,

Allegretto vivace (Bitte um innern und äussern Frieden) (A Prayer for Inner and Outer Peace)—Allegro assai—Tempo I—Presto—Tempo I

Dona nobis pacem.

grant us peace.