

**Nomination form  
International Memory of the World Register**

**Autograph of h-Moll-Messe (Mass in B minor)  
by Johann Sebastian Bach  
(Germany)**

2014-17

**1.0 Summary (max 200 words)**

With the autograph of Mass in B minor (BWV 232), Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) has presented a classic example of a mass composition. In this respect, the manuscript of Mass in B minor is completely unique: it represents a culmination in multiple ways and is the most outstanding evidence of the compositional mastery of Bach. At the same time, the autograph embodies extensive avowal of religion because it composes the mass text in Latin, which is a universal language. And so one cannot help but think that Bach considered Mass in B minor to be his artistic bequest.

The worldwide circulation of Bach's Mass in B minor must be attributed to the tradition of Bach's compositional intentions in the autograph. Only the autograph of the score of Mass in B minor testifies to the years of recording and the long genesis, which ends just before Bach's death. It also exemplifies Bach's intentions to give his personal beliefs a universal form across time and, so to speak, present a classic example of a mass composition of his time with the completion of the mass.

As the Leipzig "Thomaskantor" (cantor of the St. Thomas church), Bach composed several volumes of cantata since his appointment in the year 1723 (total of approximately 300). These works ultimately turned out to be too "old-fashioned" for the contemporary audience in some cases, owing to the musical make or the text used. With the composition of a mass with Latin text, he thus succeeded in creating a work that escaped this fate.

Since Bach had known and composed part music from his youth, he could not avoid the tradition even in Mass in B minor, which composed a text that was canonised since centuries even in his day. However, the composer used historical and modern record types, forms and compositional techniques in his mass. Bach's analysis of traditional samples on the one hand and use of modern compositional techniques on the other in a unique work, Mass in B minor, thus forms a unique selling point. Bach also re-used music from earlier compositions in his mass: a special feature of this parody is to integrate different contexts of abstracted records and to merge them into an artistically cohesive, homogeneous whole. The output that Bach had achieved especially in the creed of Mass in B minor can hardly be valued high enough.

The autograph of Mass in B minor, which is stored in the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, reproduces the only version of this work recorded in his time. The autograph thus conveys the last wishes of the composer by means of this brilliant piece of music, which is among the most common works for choir and orchestra all over the world.

The time of its creation and last revision – 1748/49 which was shortly before Bach's death – also shows that the composer had written the work when he was at the peak of his art. Bach was a path breaking composer; his works continue to influence the musical history till today wherein composers orient themselves to his creations and his works are an integral part of the concert scene.

With the large-dimensioned choral work of Mass in B minor, Bach presents a composition of perfect baroque polyphony, which is accepted universally, thanks to the Latin text. Mass in B minor in the autograph version is thus a milestone in music as regards the compositional technique, word-note relationship, its aesthetically and theologically thought-out complete musical form and was Bach's effective response to questions about mass composition.

## 2.0 Nominator

### 2.1 Name of nominator (person or organization)

Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz (PK)  
Potsdamer Straße 33  
10785 Berlin  
GERMANY

### 2.2 Relationship to the nominated documentary heritage

Owner

### 2.3 Contact person (to provide information on nomination)

Barbara Schneider-Kempf, CEO Director General of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – PK

### 2.4 Contact details

<i>Name</i> Barbara Schneider-Kempf CEO Director General	<i>Address</i> Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz Potsdamer Straße 33 10785 Berlin GERMANY	
<i>Telephone</i> 0049-(0)-30-266-431301	<i>Fax</i> 0049-(0)-30-266- 331301	<i>Email</i> barbara.schneider-kempf@sbb.spk-berlin.de

## 3.0 Identity and description of the documentary heritage

### 3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated

If inscribed, the exact title and institution(s) to appear on the certificate should be given

Personal record of the score of Mass in B minor (BWV 232), music manuscript with 99 pages, date of creation 1733/1748-49, place of creation: Leipzig (Saxony), Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750), composer's profession: "Thomaskantor" (cantor of the St. Thomas church)  
The autograph forms the only source of Mass in B minor completely preserved from Bach's lifetime.

### 3.4 History/provenance

The manuscript was created during the different stages of Bach's lifetime and creations. Whereas the first two parts *Kyrie* and *Gloria* have already been recorded in 1733, the remaining parts *Symbolum Nicenum*, *Osanna*, *Benedictus*, *Agnus Dei* and *Dona nobis pacem* have been recorded from 1748 to October 1749.

After Bach's death, the autograph of the entire mass was passed into the ownership of his second eldest son Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (1714-1788) who used the manuscript further within the scope of his job as a musician in Hamburg.

Subsequently, the manuscript was passed into the ownership of his daughter Anna Carolina Philippina Bach and was bought, in 1805, by the music manuscript collector and musician Christian Friedrich Gottlieb Schwencke for the Swiss music teacher and music publisher Hans Georg Nägeli. Nägeli wanted to be the first to publish the work entirely in print, but hardly found any subscribers for his proposition, owing to the high degree of difficulty of its musical performance. After the death of H. G. Nägeli in 1836, the autograph was passed into the

ownership of his son Hermann, whose attempt to publish the work was also thwarted for financial reasons. Arnold Wehner acquired the manuscript in 1857 for the musicologist Friedrich Chrysander, who wanted to develop the first scientific copy of the work. It finally came out in 1857. The ownership of the expensive autograph changed once again and it became property of the Bach-Gesellschaft, Leipzig founded in 1850.

In 1861, the valuable autograph could be acquired by the former Königliche Bibliothek zu Berlin, currently the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz.

Since then, it is accompanied with the collection of manuscripts of Johann Sebastian Bach. Berlin has the largest Bach collection in the world, which particularly includes the works of Bach's sons, Carl Philipp Emanuel and Wilhelm Friedemann Bach as well as the so-called old Bachian archive, a music archive compiled by Johann Sebastian Bach himself with compositions from his musician ancestors.

#### 4.0 Legal information

Name	Address	
Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz	Musikabteilung mit Mendelssohn-Archiv, Unter den Linden 8, 10117 Berlin	
Telephone	Fax	Email
+49-(0)30-266-435201	+49-(0)30-266-335201	<a href="mailto:musikabt@sbb.spk-berlin.de">musikabt@sbb.spk-berlin.de</a>

#### 4.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage (name and contact details if different from the owner)

Name	Address	
	Dr. Martina Rebmann, Head of the Music Department including Mendelssohn-Archives	
Telephone	Fax	Email
+49-(0)30-266-435200		<a href="mailto:martina.rebmann@sbb.spk-berlin.de">martina.rebmann@sbb.spk-berlin.de</a>

#### 4.3 Legal status

The manuscript is in the possession of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz. It is already in Berlin since 1861 in the possession of its predecessor institutions.

#### 4.4 Accessibility

The Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin is a universal academic research library which is open to the public. It stores numerous internationally renowned music manuscripts such as the autograph collections of Johann Sebastian Bach, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Ludwig van Beethoven, Carl Maria von Weber, Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy and Robert Schumann. The Music Department of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz has all the required infrastructure features as an academic institution that promotes research: academically qualified personnel, reading rooms, repositories with significant stocks, comprehensive reference material as well as the necessary technical equipment. The Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin has a modern digitisation centre and also one of the biggest restoration workshops for autographs and old books in Germany.

The autograph of Johann Sebastian Bach's Mass in B minor is completely digitised since the year 2009. The digital copies of the autograph can thus be accessed on the Internet via the website at all times and regardless of your location:

[www.bach-digital.de](http://www.bach-digital.de)

Moreover, since the end of 2011, all other autographs by Johann Sebastian Bach are also

available via this Internet portal, available in the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin as digital copies (total of approximately 18,000 music pages). Script comparisons and other academic research on Bach's manuscripts are thus possible from anywhere across the globe, no matter where you are. In addition to the academic work with the autographs, low-threshold and easy access to these unique cultural assets is however also the focus in particular. All interested people should get a digital view of the musical works of Bach in his own handwriting.

The autograph of Mass in B minor can be seen in high-definition or as a full-page image on the Internet so that, depending on your level of interest, you can quickly "skim through" the manuscript or view individual points minutely, just like with a magnifying glass.

For reasons of safety as a result of the high value of the manuscript as well as mainly for reasons of conservation of the status quo, i.e. for conservational reasons, the original autograph can be viewed only in case of specific research interests or by stated culturally interested groups of persons within the scope of management.

The manuscript is fragile and worthy of protection owing to its age and condition. Restoration measures, which were necessary owing to the ink corrosion on some pages of the autograph, were successful, but require conservationally suitable storage, preferably constant at 18 degree Celsius and a relative humidity of 50 to 55%. Every presentation or use of the autograph outside this constant climate data must thus be avoided.

Nevertheless, a temporary presentation under suitable lighting conditions (maximum 50 lux) can be carried out.

---

#### 4.5 Copyright status

Describe the copyright status of the item(s) / collection

*Where copyright status is known, it should be stated. However, the copyright status of a document or collection has **no bearing** on its significance and is not taken into account in determining whether it meets the criteria for inscription.*

All image copyrights are with the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz.

The work is in the public domain.

---

## 5.0 Assessment against the selection criteria

### 5.1 Authenticity.

The authenticity is verified and there is absolutely no doubt about it. The history of the autograph and its journey up to its safekeeping in the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin can be proved without any gaps (compare Point 3.4 History/provenance). The ownership sequence is certain, right from its creation by Johann Sebastian Bach until today.

### 5.2 World significance

The autograph of Mass in B minor by J. S. Bach presents a unique cultural heritage in the European musical history since it is unique in form and monumentality as well as in its complete recording. It is known all over the world today and is among the best known and most mysterious works of Bach, which constantly gives a cause for intensive research work. In addition, the music is the most frequently mentioned work of the composer.

Since its genesis and completion as a musical cycle, Mass in B minor, as a mass cycle, is an unrivalled classic example and key work from the point of view of musical, philological and theological aspects. However, newer aspects keep arising even when it comes to questions regarding Mass in B minor relating to practical performance as well as the historical reception.

Thus, a musical recourse is being made to it over and over again since its genesis; not only was Bach's work passed on to the Vienna classics W. A. Mozart and L. v. Beethoven by his sons, mainly the second eldest, Carl Philipp Emanuel, but was also tremendously appreciated by other significant composers of the 19th century such as Felix Mendelssohn and Johannes Brahms. They all trained on his compositional techniques and drew inspiration from the diversity of his works. This continued for different composers even in the 20th century and until today, for example, in recent times by the composer and pianist Patrick Beelaar (\*1971), who resorted to the form of the Mass in B minor cycle in his works "Pantheon" for piano.

The cultural activity of the human population because of Bach's music, be it in choirs or in research institutes, cannot be assessed high enough. Germany for instance has significant institutions such as the Bach Archive Leipzig, the Internationale Bach-Akademie Stuttgart and the Neue Bach-Gesellschaft. Musical ensembles were written worldwide, which were committed to Bach preservation, i.e. in Asia, Australia and North America. In this case, Bach and his music are the inspiration, eponym and programme content. The number of Bach choirs and institutes is almost incalculable and spread all over the world (for this, see the updated list on <http://www.bach-fest.org/orgs.aspx>). In addition to the whole of Europe and the American continent, an intensive and stimulating Bach preservation has especially evolved in Japan in the recent years, under the Japanese conductor Masaaki Suzuki, which is now setting standards worldwide.

Mass in B minor takes up a unique role in many ways: it is a milestone in Bach's works, since it was an aesthetically and theologically thought-out complete musical form created most intensively. This is Bach's response to the question of mass composition. Like Beethoven introduced the chorus, the human voice, in his 9th symphony in the form that was previously only instrumental, Bach, with the large-dimensioned choral work of Mass in B minor of five voices, presented a composition of perfect baroque polyphony, which is accepted universally thanks to the Latin text. In addition to the compositional mastery that is reflected in the autograph, a special challenge is the particularly high level of difficulty when it comes to performance. The demands from the singers as well as the orchestra are extremely high. They are fulfilled with the exceptional diversity of record types, forms of sound and expression in music, a distinct word-note relationship as well as an extraordinary amount of compositional elaboration in the autograph. This gets the work a special position in its personal recording and leaves it without parallels in the musical history.

What makes the extremely high demands exceptional is the manner in which Mass in B minor is perceived: While Bach extended the so-called Lutheran mass (the first two parts of Mass in

B minor created in 1733: *Kyrie and Gloria*) to a complete mass before his death (in the years 1748/9 with *Credo, Sanctus, Benedictus* and *Osanna*), the entire cycle was never performed during his lifetime. The tradition of performing Mass in B minor in full was started only in the 19th century, which was accompanied by numerous attempts to print the work. If the rediscovery of Bach's music in the 19th century is considered in retrospect, Mass in B minor then assumes a central role.

The genesis reflects this uniqueness, in which it extends over a period of more than three decades, where Bach had not originally aimed at a well-rounded, monumental opus. And even the genesis can be deduced extremely well and only from the original score of Mass in B minor.

- The manuscript is not only a unique complete source of the work from Bach's lifetime. The score was created in different phases of his creation. The smooth flow of Bach's notation and text font in the first two mass parts *Kyrie* and *Gloria* (recorded in 1733) distinctly stands out from the remaining parts. They have characters which look stodgy and uncertain since they go back to the last years of Bach's life (1748/49).

- An external reason for the subsequent composition of the additional parts *Credo, Sanctus, Benedictus* and *Osanna* for compiling Bach's Mass in B minor is not known. Bach's understanding of the eternal significance of the mass genre from the point of view of dogmatics, liturgics and musical meaning can be seen from the attention that has been given to compilation, diversity of the compositional record types and styles. The significant instrumentation of the work with a chorus of five to eight voices and five soloists is particularly remarkable; the instruments used are three trumpets, kettledrums, corno da caccia, two transverse flutes, two oboes, two oboes d'amore, two bassoons, first and second violins, viol and basso continuo.

Mass in B minor is Bach's last choral work and is showcased as his musical legacy. "Mass in B minor consolidates Bach's vocal work like none of his other works ever did, not only from the point of view of stylistic diversity, compositional method and richness of sound, but also because of its greatest level of technical mastery at all levels. The mass offers a complete arsenal of compositional skill in terms of breadth and depth, which is not only evidence of theoretical acumen, but also of comprehensive understanding of the musical history, mainly while using old and new styles." (Wolff, 2000, pg. 481).

Even more than 250 years after the completion of the recording, Bach's manuscript continues to fascinate viewers: Bach's calligraphic script, his energetic flow, the distribution of notes on the page, the musical rhythm, which becomes noticeable while viewing, – all this lends the manuscript a unique aura.

The manuscripts by Johann Sebastian Bach are among the rarest and most valuable in the autograph market today. To the advantage of the interested public and academic research, about 90% of the autographs by Johann Sebastian Bach are today with the public authorities and 80% of the preserved Bach autographs are in the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz.

Johann Sebastian Bach's music, especially his major choral works such as Mass in B minor, are among the most frequently performed and presented works in classical music. A few opinions on Bach's music present the high appreciation that his music garnered – this is what Ernst Bloch wrote about Bach's music: "He created the most scholarly and, at the same time, most ensouled music", whereas violinist Yehudi Menuhin summed it up by saying: "He stands for something greater in us."

### 5.3 Comparative criteria:

#### 1 Time

The uniqueness of Mass in B minor was identified very early on. The autograph was completed just before Bach's death. The creation of the autograph went on for decades because Bach had originally composed only two mass parts and made them into a complete mass only after some years.

It was thus not possible to even perform the autograph during Bach's life. The entire mass was

---

first performed by his second son, Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, in Hamburg from the original manuscript in the year 1768. After the death of C. P. E. Bach, it took several more years until the first edition of Mass in B minor was printed although the autograph presented the score of the most famous work by J. S. Bach.

H. G. Nägeli, who was in possession of the autograph from 1805 onwards, wrote the following when he announced the printing:

*Announcing the greatest musical work of art of all times and all peoples:*

*Johann Sebastian Bach, who is great beyond all comparison, has now won recognition in our day and age, which now makes it possible to go ahead and publish the work that greatly surpasses his previously printed works, not only in content and scope but also in the magnitude of style, richness of the invention, as it surpasses those of all other composers irrespective of the contemporary taste and coincidence of the art forms. These include a mass of five voices with a full orchestra, out of which I had purchased the autograph from the descendant of his son, C. P. E. Bach, through Mr. Schwencke (musical director) in Hamburg.*

This autograph directly reflects the universality of Bach as a composer and the manuscript thus marks a milestone in the history of composition.

Bach's work not only ideally combines the compositional technique and musical development of his era, but with this work, Bach is also at the exact point of intersection between the "old" counterpoint, which forms and arranges the musical events "very linearly", and the new, harmonically oriented development of music, which works with functionally correlated chords. In this respect, his composition combines what has been achieved in the past and at the same time, throws light upon what is anticipated in future. All this is reflected in the autograph directly and in a special manner.

## **2 Place**

This is not applicable, rather the location independence of the document stands for its universality.

## **3 People**

Mass in B minor is considered as a musical work of art because of its length of two and a half hours and its great instrumentation that makes it artistically the most important of Bach's works.

As an accomplished late work, the autograph passes on the greatest artistic works of Johann Sebastian Bach. This is because Bach, in addition to Mozart and Beethoven, is indisputably among the most respected and most famous composers all over the world. He set compositional standards with his Mass in B minor, just as he did in other fields as well: in the cantata forms, oratorio, concert, and organ, piano, chamber and orchestral music.

Mass in B minor is also a highlight of Bach's works. In it, he shows the musical opportunity to interpret the mass text, which was never again achieved in this complexity and difficulty.

Today, Mass in B minor is Bach's most performed major work all over the world. Even St Matthew Passion did not achieve the fame and frequency of performance of Mass in B minor.

Bach's great creative productivity must be particularly emphasised. His catalogue of works (Bach Works Catalogue, s. bibliography) comprises more than 1,100 compositions. The scope and popularity of his work is, among other things, reflected in the richness of the recordings of the works of the Leipzig "Thomaskantor" (cantor of the St. Thomas church), since the time it was possible to carry out sound recording.

## **4 Subject and theme**

Mass in B minor is a classic example of the mass composition and, in this respect has specific significance since a Protestant musician is creating a musical version of the Latin (Catholic) mass text. Bach stood in the tradition of Lutheran musicians, who particularly resorted to composing Gospel motets in the baroque period in the field of church music. However, significant elements of the conventional Latin liturgy were used in the Protestant church services as well. Whereas the composition of Latin texts hardly played a role for Bach in the early professional stages, a form was crystallised with Mass in B minor, which gets timeless importance with the underlying Latin language: the mass setting, which was also practiced in

---

the Protestant church service, was not exposed to the transience of the baroque text compositions because of the canonised text, which quickly became dated compared to this. In the contemporary context of the Protestant church music, Mass in B minor is however absolutely unique owing to its monumental character as regards the composition and arrangement (length, number of voices, soloist required).

### **5 Form and style**

The significance of Mass in B minor as a composition is extremely prominent for Bach: it represents a culmination as the composer, with the completion of the mass, submitted a classic example of a mass composition in his time so to speak.

As the "Thomaskantor" (cantor of the St. Thomas church) Bach composed several volumes of cantata since his appointment in the year 1723 (total of approximately 300). These works ultimately turned out to be too "old-fashioned" for the contemporary audience in some cases, owing to the musical make or the text used. With the composition of a mass with Latin text, he thus succeeded in creating a work that was supposed to escape this fate. At the same time, Mass in B minor is a great compositional complete work that was created from the adoption of cantata movements as well as from newly composed parts. Bach thus managed to protect the particularly high-quality pieces important to him from extinction by re-using them in his mass.

Mass in B minor mainly comprises choral pieces; for a vocal work of this time, it contains remarkably less soloistic pieces. This is especially conspicuous unlike Bach's cantatas, his passions and oratorios. Concert music-making was thus not so much of Bach's main focus, but vocal polyphonic music-making that offered numerous options definitely was.

Since Bach had known and composed part music from his youth, he could not avoid the tradition even in Mass in B minor, which composed a text that was canonised since centuries even in his day. However, the composer used historical and modern record types, forms and compositional techniques in his mass. Bach's analysis of traditional samples on the one hand and use of modern compositional techniques on the other in a unique work, Mass in B minor, thus forms a unique selling point.

### **6 Social/ spiritual/ community significance**

Today, Bach's music is considered to be a culmination not only of the Lutheran church music and as a "music expression of reformation". It is not without a reason that the baroque composer also referred to as the fifth Evangelist.

There are very few personal testimonials passed on by Bach himself on his religious views. However, we know that according to Bach, music has two main purposes - it should do God honour and, at the same time, be a "recreation of the mind". Bach increasingly devoted himself to composing sacred texts, which was not least linked to his position in Leipzig as a church music director. His aim was to make comprehensive Lutheran church music, which he created using the cantata volumes in his position in Leipzig. Mass in B minor is however a completely unique example of the deep religiousness of the composer. The religious significance of the work is undisputed and a special characteristic of the active as well as passive involvement in Bach's sacred work and especially Mass in B minor is that it inspires people religiously.

## **6.0 Contextual information**

### **6.1 Rarity**

The autograph of Bach's Mass in B minor is unique.

This work is a key work owing to the genesis and tradition history as well as the significance for the music history. Naturally, there have been innumerable printed note editions until today, which protect the note text intrinsically.

At the same time, the manuscripts written by Bach are at risk, as shown by the different restoration measures in the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin based on scientific findings. The ink used by Bach has proved to be aggressive as compared to the described paper until today and even the paper itself used to often be in a poor state. However, since the personally

recorded works of Bach are extremely inspiring, which can be attributed to the aura of the original, it is mandatory to preserve the original despite all the modern options of reproduction/digitisation. This is one of the most important objectives of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin.

### **6.2 Integrity**

The autograph of Bach's Mass in B minor is the only version created during his life and thus also the only complete version by him.

It is available as a score written by the composer and comprises the parts *Kyrie, Gloria, Symbolum Nicenum, Sanctus, Osanna, Benedictus, Agnus Dei* and *Dona nobis pacem*.