

Performance of Bach's Mass in B minor on Trumpet

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Music 301, Research Project

November 26, 2022

All trumpet players seeking advancement into graduate schools, or professional careers must know and master orchestral excerpts. One of these is a short passage from Bach's Mass in B Minor. Since this was written in 1749, there is no original recording of it. It is of the most importance that excerpts are played correctly, in terms of notes and rhythm, but also that they match the style for which they were written. The intent of this paper is to study and analyze Bach's Mass in B minor, in order to find out more information on how to play this specific excerpt. I also plan to learn how this excerpt is played today, and what can be done to best apply Bach's intentions onto a modern trumpet, where it was written for a Baroque trumpet. After an analysis of the second movement of Bach's Mass in B minor, *Credo-Patrem Omnipotentem*. The following paper will discuss that although Bach did not specify what was wanted on paper, he typically used trumpets in two ways, as a light ornamentation on top of the orchestra or as a fanfare or high timpani sounding instrument. Today this is performed using a light tongue, playing quarter notes as if they were bell tones and using contour dynamics and phrasing when playing eighth notes. Following these guidelines will allow performers to play well enough to meet today's standards and accomplish their goals.

The trumpet with three valves did not always exist. In the Baroque time period the trumpet had no valves. In a journal on the Observations of Bach's writing for the Baroque trumpet by Timothy Collins about the Baroque trumpet, he wrote, "The trumpet for which Bach wrote was by modern standards quite primitive. Not much more than a glorified bugle, this

Baroque or "natural" trumpet consisted of seven feet of brass tubing.”¹ Such a simple instrument had limited abilities unlike the trumpet used today. It relied heavily on the overtone series. Knowing how the overtone series works, the faster air that is put into a trumpet, the higher the notes sound, and the higher the notes are, the closer they are to one another. In order for trumpet players to play a lot of notes, they would have to play really high in order to play chromatic pitches. Valves make it possible for the use of low notes on the trumpet as well as chromatic notes. Before valves, in order to play more than just Bugle calls, a great amount of skill was required. Timothy Collins continues, “What better way could there be of calling to mind sovereign magnificence than the playing of flourishes on the ‘instrument of kings,’ the trumpet!”² The trumpet was used frequently to signal entrances or provide heralding to royalty. Unlike today, the Baroque trumpet required almost complete accuracy and had little room for error. J. Madeuf wrote in a journal on the Baroque trumpet and how it is used in literature. He said, “Any minor weakness or imperfection in the embouchure, even though it may not impede correct playing on the modern instrument, definitely compromises playing on the natural trumpet, particularly in the difficult repertory of the high register.”³ Playing the Natural trumpet required a great amount of precision and skill. Eventually players tried to play higher and higher so that they could achieve more notes, Peter Downey spoke on the use of trumpets in literature in

¹ Timothy Collins,. “Observations on the Origins and Influences Leading to Bach's Idiomatic Writing for the Trumpet in Grosser Herr, o starker König from the Christmas Oratorio,”. *Bach* .17, no. 2. (Apr 1986):, page 31-44.

² Timothy Collins,. “Observations on the Origins and Influences Leading to Bach's Idiomatic Writing for the Trumpet in Grosser Herr, o starker König from the Christmas Oratorio,”. *Bach* .17, no. 2. (Apr 1986):, page 31-44.

³ J.-F. Madeuf “The Revival of the Natural Trumpet in the Baroque Repertory: Utopian or Not?” *Early Music* 38, no. 2 (2010): page 203–204

his article on the Baroque trumpet, “ It is noticeable when studying Henry Purcell's use of lipped notes on natural trumpets that there was a preoccupation with the diatonic filling-in of gaps between the lower, triadic natural harmonics until 1693, after which interest in them waned and attention was directed at previously avoided higher natural-harmonics.”⁴ Don L. Smith continued on this same topic in his academic journal on the Baroque trumpet after 1721 he said, “Even at this respect a player skilled at note bending, that is lipping down particular notes to execute non-harmonic tones, could reasonably have coped with the variety of pitches found in many chorales without ever having to change positions.”⁵ However as time went on composers began to write for these skilled musicians, and they included the higher notes in their music, Downey continued in his article, “During the 17th century, in common with other instrumentalists, trumpeters sought to test the capabilities of their instrument to the limit, and composers welcomed and exploited the expanded instrumental resources in their music.”⁶ On top of playing in the high register, trumpet players would also play, written-out mordents and turns on the triadic natural harmonics. Clearly from this information we can see that the Natural trumpet was used mostly in the high register and was very difficult to play. It was used as a timpani sort of instrument or for fanfares, but also for high ornamentation. In the Baroque time period, trumpets were used quite frequently, so Bach definitely knew how and why they were used Timothy Collins continued in the same Journal on the Baroque trumpet, “The facts clearly show that Bach was exposed to

⁴ Peter Downey, “On Sounding the Trumpet and Beating the Drum in 17th-Century England.” *Early Music* 24 no.2 (1996): page 263–77

⁵ Don L. Smithers, “The Baroque Trumpet after 1721: Some Preliminary Observations. Part Two: Function and Use.” *Early Music* 6 no.3 (1978): page 356–61

⁶ Peter Downey, “On Sounding the Trumpet and Beating the Drum in 17th-Century England.” *Early Music* 24 no.2 (1996): page 263–77

trumpet fanfare idioms. This exposure would have come principally from the musicians at his disposal, some of whom were a product of a way of teaching and playing dating back to the fifteenth century.”⁷ Bach had heard trumpets being used as fanfare instruments and in royal settings, and he used that in his writing, Collins continued, “Bach capitalized on this ‘Affective’ concept quite often when scoring and writing for brass in his cantatas and other church music.”⁸ Bach knew a trumpet player, Gottfried Reiche, who was a well known trumpet player of his time. Collins goes on to say how Bach wrote for Reiche, “Nonetheless, Bach was not hindered by the natural limitations of the instrument. Taking full advantage of such capable players as Gottfried Reiche, Bach made use of the extreme upper ambitus of the trumpet, the clarino register. Only in that register was a diatonic scale possible”⁹ Bach among other composers began to expand the use of the trumpet in their music, Collins continued in the same article, “Bach, like other composers of his time, was inventively employing the natural limitations of the instrument to his artistic advantage, partly by means of tapping a vast reserve of idiomatic musical elements best suited to the instrument.”¹⁰ Bach knew and understood the sound of a trumpet, he wrote for them specifically in his Mass in B minor.

⁷Timothy Collins, “Observations on the Origins and Influences Leading to Bach's Idiomatic Writing for the Trumpet in *Grosser Herr, o starker König* from the Christmas Oratorio,” *Bach* .17, no. 2. (Apr 1986):, page 31-44.

⁸ Collins, Observations page 31-44.

⁹ Timothy Collins, “Observations on the Origins and Influences Leading to Bach's Idiomatic Writing for the Trumpet in *Grosser Herr, o starker König* from the Christmas Oratorio,” *Bach* .17, no. 2. (Apr 1986):, page 31-44.

¹⁰ Collins, Observations page 31-44.

Looking at the excerpt the following can be observed: examining Bach's original score that can be found on IMSLP,¹¹ provided below, the excerpt starts at the top of the following image, it continues on the 12th line, there are no articulation marks indicated., All of the quarter notes are the same, no tenuto or accents on any of them, there are also no written words to imply style wanted. On a different score provided by the trumpet excerpt website,¹² this is a website that has all trumpet excerpts available to the public domain, also shown below, this also has zero marks on it, so it can be difficult to know how to play this excerpt.

¹¹ Johann Sebastian Bach, *Mass in B Minor, Credo- Patrem omnipotentem*, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (1733-1749)

¹² Sidney E. Shuler "Www.trumpetexcerpts.org - Your Online Resource for the Study of Trumpet Literature from the Orchestra and Wind Ensemble." *Trumpet Excerpts*. Last modified 2011. Accessed November 26, 2022.

This image shows a page of handwritten musical notation on aged, yellowed paper. The notation is arranged in several staves, with notes and rests written in dark ink. Below the notes, there are lines of Latin text, which appear to be lyrics for a religious or liturgical piece. The handwriting is cursive and somewhat dense, typical of historical musical manuscripts. The paper shows signs of age, including some staining and discoloration.

in D.

A short musical staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It contains a few notes, likely serving as a key signature indicator or a short melodic fragment.

pa - tris om - ni - po - tens -

A musical staff with a treble clef, starting with a measure number 21. It contains a sequence of notes, likely a continuation of the piece.

A musical staff with a treble clef, starting with a measure number 22. It contains a sequence of notes, likely a continuation of the piece.

A musical staff with a treble clef, starting with a measure number 23. It contains a sequence of notes, likely a continuation of the piece.

What style did Bach indicate? After an investigation the following can be observed. George Kochevitsky wrote in his journal on Bach's style of writing in his keyboard music, "Phrasing was not directly indicated by Bach. In those rare instances where slurs are found in his keyboard music, they indicate legato not phrasing... Bach phrasing... must still be figured out from the melodic line and the texture as a whole."¹³ Most people who analyze Bach's music have a hard time knowing what style was wanted, so they have to draw their own conclusions. Kochevitsky continued, "Some musicians, instead of emphasizing the simple straightforward quality of Bach's line, prefer to indulge in a more elaborate shaping of phrases. Some contemporary editors choose to indicate a kind of phrasing within phrasing in their Bach editions."¹⁴ One interpretation of Bach's phrasing given by Kochevitsky is, "Bach's melodic line may be long and flowing and his phrasing not easily tractable. Nevertheless, Bach's lines are mostly bound by the iron discipline of their meter. Bach knew very well how to place his phrases in connection with metrical units."¹⁵ Bach was not as clear with the style that he wanted, but he stuck to the meter, composers can easily imply what they want by the use of style and phrase markings on the paper. What characteristics are shown in his Mass? Bach wrote this mass near

¹³ George A. Kochevitsky, "Performing Bach's Keyboard Music -- Phrasing." *Bach* 3 no. 4 (1972) page 28-32

¹⁴ Kochevitsky, *Performing* page 28-32

¹⁵ George A. Kochevitsky, "Performing Bach's Keyboard Music -- Phrasing." *Bach* 3 no. 4 (1972) page 28-32

the end of his life, so at this point, he had had a lot of experience and had written a lot of music. He had written for multiple trumpet players and this was not his first Sacred piece. He had written multiple masses before so Bach knew how to incorporate trumpets into a sacred mass.

Jordi Santaló in his academic journal wrote about Bach's Mass in B Minor,

“With regard to instrumentation, unlike Harrer, Bach uses woodwind timbres that reinforce the deeper registers (bassoon) and are singular (oboe d’amore)¹⁰ or ethereal (transverse flute), creating a wide range of colors in both the Adagio and the Largo of his Kyrie I. Along with the B-minor key, these timbres underscore the plaintive semantic of the text. The Andante of Harrer’s Kyrie, on the other hand, evokes the magnificence of God, as mentioned above. In this respect, two trumpets and timpani are employed to give extra emphasis to the words ‘*Kyrie Eleison*’ on initial and final beats of the measure (measures 1-2 and measures 7-8, respectively).”¹⁶

Reviewing all of these studies while looking at the music, it is important to note that there are a lot of quarter notes that are a part of the melodic phrase, as well as a moderately long eight note ascending line. Bach's Mass in B Minor demonstrates these characteristics. Combining how the Baroque trumpet was played, what music it played, what Bach wanted in his music and for trumpets specifically, with what style was implied in Bach's Mass in B minor, it can be implied that Bach wants the trumpet to act as two kinds of musical sounds, the timpani with its full bell like quarter notes and also as the high notes on top providing ornamentations to the melody.

¹⁶ Jordi Rifé i Santaló, “The Kyries of J. S. Bach’s B-Minor Mass and Gottlob Harrer’s D-Major Mass (Harwv 32): Between Late Baroque and the ‘Style Galant.’” *Bach* 45 no.2 (2014): page 68–93

The Eight note passage was phrased in a typical orchestral trumpet sound, take a look at measures 12 to 18, leading the line to the contour notes, which would be the high notes of each phrase. For example the C's in measure 12 and finally the D in the 19th measure. The sixteenth note passage in the fourth measure was slurred and smooth, hinting at that light ornamentation on top of the orchestra.

The second one performed by The Robert Shaw Chorale and Orchestra, this recording was also found on Youtube.¹⁹ This performance was very soft and light. It was hard to notice the same timpani or bell-like sound on this recording's quarter notes, looking again at measure one through six, but it was all short and light, this player hinted more towards the light ornamentation on top rather than the bell-like full sound shown by the first performer. The sixteenth notes in measure four were also slurred in this one helping prove this theory. It is interesting that this performer slurred these, because on none of the copies of the music is a slur written in. That hints how this performer leaned more towards a light ornamentation idea versus a trumpet with a timpani like sound.

The third and final example by the John Eliot Gardiner Monteverdi Choir English Baroque Soloists, also found on Youtube.²⁰ This recording was also quite different. First of all the quarter notes played in this one were very loud and pointed, more like the first example, but very loud. The sixteenth notes were tongued and all the eighth notes were all the same dynamic.

¹⁹ *Bach-Mass in B Minor, Credo- Robert Shaw 1960. YouTube.* SME, 2013. Accessed November 26, 2022.

²⁰ *Bach Mass in B Minor, BWV 232 John Eliot Gardiner Monteverdi Choir English Baroque Soloists. YouTube.* The Orchard Music, 2020. Accessed November 26, 2022.

They also paid special attention to measures ten and eleven, and phrased it as if it were a melodic line. I think that this performer made it more of a fanfare with a sweet little two measure solo. After reviewing multiple recordings of the same excerpt, The one played by the New York Philharmonic Orchestra is the closest to what was gathered on the study of the Baroque trumpet and Bach's intended style for the trumpet excerpt in his Mass in B minor. Again looking at the score, it can be observed that the quarter notes should be played as if they were bell tones, as was typical of the Baroque trumpet. Another analysis would suggest that the eighth notes should follow the idea of contour dynamics, by making the highest notes the loudest, and shaping the phrase to these notes.

To conclude, this excerpt is a very difficult passage to master, it requires a high level of skill. We no longer use Baroque trumpets, which honestly makes it easier to change between notes, but we also do not have Bach to ask what he wanted. Going off of all of his other works, and the style that he wrote for with his Sacred Music, and how he used trumpets in his music, it gives us a good idea of what he wanted. Applying the way that multiple professional musicians have played this excerpt leads me to believe that the style required to play this excerpt is outlined in this paper. After and analysis of the second movement of Bach's Mass in B minor, *Credo-Patrem Omnipotentem*. This paper showed that although Bach did not specify what was wanted on paper, he typically used trumpets in two ways, as a light ornamentation on top of the orchestra, and as a fanfare or high timpani sounding instrument, this has been played today, on trumpets with valves making it much easier to play then on a Baroque Trumpet, and had been played by many musicians, playing quarter notes as if they were bell tones and using contour dynamics and phrasing when playing eighth notes will not only emulate what Bach intended, but

help performers play well enough to meet today's standards as well. Following these guidelines will allow a performer to excel at playing this excerpt.

Bibliography

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