

J.S. Bach, Kleines Magnificat BWV Anh. 21



Johann Sebastian Bach (31 March 1685 – 28 July 1750) was a German composer, organist, harpsichordist, violist, and violinist whose sacred and secular works for choir, orchestra, and solo instruments drew together the strands of the Baroque period and brought it to its ultimate maturity. Although he did not introduce new forms, he enriched the prevailing German style with a robust contrapuntal technique, an unrivalled control of harmonic and motivic organisation, and the adaptation of rhythms, forms and textures from abroad, particularly from Italy and France.

Revered for their intellectual depth, technical command and artistic beauty, Bach's works include the Brandenburg concertos, the Goldberg Variations, the Partitas, The Well-Tempered Clavier, the Mass in B Minor, the St Matthew Passion, the St John Passion, the Magnificat, The Musical Offering, The Art of Fugue, the English and French Suites, the Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin, the Cello Suites, more than 200 surviving cantatas, and a similar number of organ works, including the celebrated Toccata and Fugue in D minor and Passacaglia and Fugue in C minor.

Bach's abilities as an organist were highly respected throughout Europe during his lifetime, although he was not widely recognised as a great composer until a revival of interest and performances of his music in the first half of the 19th century. He is now generally regarded one of the main composers of the Baroque style, and as one of the greatest composers of all time.

The *Kleines Magnificat* (Little Magnificat) dates circa 1720 and was written for an intimate gathering of Bach's friends and family. The manuscript - like most works of a man who composed neither for fame nor for posterity - is a first draft, and is unsigned.

For the first time the *Kleines Magnificat* was performed in 1858, on the occasion of the publication of the great Magnificat in D Major. The work was lost again until 1940, when a musicologist found the manuscript at the Saltykov-Scedrin State Library in Leningrad. Another fifteen years were to elapse before the work was performed again. This time, the German critic Alfred Dürr voiced his doubts about the authenticity of the *Little Magnificat* and has initiated an entire series of studies on the authenticity of the manuscript by the publishing house of De Santis, who, aided by the Italian musicologist Ermenegildo Paccagnella, undertook to establish the authorship of the Magnificat.

Upon examining the manuscript, one immediately notices certain characteristics peculiar to Bach, such as his seal on the first page and the mention of *Soli Deo Gloria* at the end. The pages do not follow a numbered sequence, which indicates that Bach, as was his custom, borrowed pages for this work from another, unused one. Calligraphic similarities in the notes and in the words, as personal as fingerprints, are also found. However, after a closer inspection/analysis of the manuscript carried out by Alfred Dürr and Frederik Hudson the former opinion regarding the work had to be revised: what was once considered to be a Bach autograph score turned out to be a composition

written in an unknown, unidentifiable handwriting. Meanwhile, a German musicologist, Glöckner, reported that he had been able to locate among the piles of anonymous compositions of the Berlin State Library a set of parts for the *Kleines Magnificat*. Among the copyists involved in copying these parts there was one that was identical to the handwriting of the Leningrad/St. Petersburg score. This was the composer of the score. Among the other copyists, as confirming evidence, were, among others, the musical director of the 'Neukirche' (New Church) in Leipzig, Carl Gotthelf Gerlach and the young Gottfried Heinrich Stölzel. By means of further comparisons between the various handwritings, Glöckner finally succeeded in being able to identify the one who wrote and composed the Leningrad-St. Petersburg score: it was the musical director of the Neukirche (New Church) in Leipzig, Melchior Hoffmann, who composed the work.

Melchior Hoffmann died a prosperous citizen, regarded by his contemporaries as an important composer and a sensitive musician. The Leipzig chronicler Christoph Ernst Sicul described him in an obituary as 'a famous composer', whose *collegium musicum* had produced many fine musicians holding prominent positions as organists or in the Kapellen of major German courts. Hoffmann's music shows a feeling for unusual and effective orchestration. His cantata and opera arias are notable for their pleasant, attractive and accessible melodies, sometimes with a strong emotional emphasis, as in the cantata *Meine Seele rühmt und preist*.

Kleines Magnificat text translation

1

Meine Seel erhebt den Herren, und mein Geist freuet sich Gottes, meines Heilandes;
My soul praises the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my saviour;

2

Denn er hat seine elende Magd angesehen.

for he has looked upon his poor handmaiden.

Siehe, von nun an werden mich selig preisen alle Kindeskind.

See, from now all children's children will praise me as blessed.

Denn er hat große Ding an mir getan, der da mächtig ist und des Name heilig ist.

For he has done great things for me who is mighty and whose name is holy.

3

Und seine Barmherzigkeit währet immer für und für bei denen, die ihn fürchten.

And his mercy lasts for ever and ever for those who fear him.

4

Er übet Gewalt mit seinem Arm und zerstreuet,

He shows might with his arm and scatters

die hoffärtig sind in ihres Herzens Sinn.

those who are haughty in the imagination of their heart.

5
Er stößet die Gewaltigetigen vom Stuhl und erhebet die Elenden.
He casts down the mighty from their seats and raises the poor.

6
Die Hungrigen füllt er mit Gütern und lässet die Reichen leer.
The hungry he fills with good things and the rich he leaves empty.

7
Er denket der Barmherzigkeit Und hilft seinem Diener Israel auf.
He remembers his mercy and gives help to his servant Israel.

8
wie er gered't hat unsern Vätern, Abraham und seinem Samen ewiglich.
as he has said to our fathers, Abraham and his seed for ever.

9
Lob und Preis sei Gott dem Vater und dem Sohn Und dem Heiligen Geiste
Glory and praise to God the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit

10
Wie es war im Anfang, jetzt und immerdar. Und von Ewigkeit zu Ewigkeit. Amen.
as it was in the beginning, now and always. And from eternity to eternity. Amen