

Kirill Petrenko conducts Beethoven's Missa solemnis

Thursday, January 28, 2027 · 20:00 · Philharmonie Berlin

Kirill Petrenko, conductor · Golda Schultz, soprano · Wiebke Lehmkuhl, contralto · Sebastian Kohlhepp, tenor · David Steffens, bass · Rundfunkchor Berlin, chorus

approximately 80 minutes

Ludwig van Beethoven

80 minutes

1770–1827

Missa solennis in D major, Op. 123

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Kyrie. The mass opens with broad chords in D major, marked *Mit Andacht* (with devotion). The woodwinds sing the melody before any voice enters, and when the chorus comes in with “Kyrie”, solo voices emerge from it one at a time. The middle section, “Christe eleison”, is more active and belongs mainly to the soloists.

Gloria. An eruption: the orchestra rushes upward and the chorus hurls out the word “Gloria”. The movement keeps this energy for long stretches, pausing for a gentler “Gratias agimus” and a slow, pleading “Qui tollis”, where the soloists lead the cries of “miserere”. It ends with a huge fugue on “In gloria Dei Patris, Amen”, after which Beethoven, not content, brings back the opening shout of “Gloria” at even greater speed. The chorus has the last word, alone, after the orchestra has stopped.

Credo. The chorus declares “Credo, credo” on a blunt two-note figure that returns as a refrain. The centre of the movement is its quietest music. For “Et incarnatus est” Beethoven turns to an archaic church mode, with a flute trilling high above the voices; the solo tenor then announces “Et homo factus est” (and was made man) in a warm D major. The “Crucifixus” is marked by stabbing accents, and “Et resurrexit” bursts out from the chorus without any accompaniment. The movement closes with a long

double fugue on “Et vitam venturi saeculi” (and the life of the world to come), which begins gently and returns at twice the speed.

Sanctus and Benedictus. Instead of the usual blaze of sound, the Sanctus begins in near darkness, with low instruments and the four soloists singing in hushed awe. After a brief, fast “Pleni sunt coeli” and “Osanna”, the orchestra plays a slow, shadowy interlude that Beethoven called a *Praeludium*. Then a solo violin enters at the very top of its range and slowly descends, joined by two flutes. It stays for the whole of the Benedictus, playing a long, serene melody above the voices. It is one of the most famous passages in the work.

Agnus Dei. The bass soloist begins the final prayer in a dark B minor, and the other soloists and the men of the chorus join him. When the music turns to D major for “Dona nobis pacem”, Beethoven adds a heading: “Prayer for inner and outer peace”. The peace is twice threatened. First, distant drums and trumpets sound a military signal, and the soloists renew the plea for mercy in frightened recitative. Later the orchestra breaks in with a violent, jagged fugal passage. Each time the chorus resumes its plea. The work does not end in triumph: the last “pacem” is followed by a few short bars from the orchestra, and it is over.



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