



Georg Muffat: Missa in labore requies & Church Sonatas by Bertali, Schmelzer & Biber

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[American Record Guide](#) (Charles Brewer - 01.11.2016)

Though a contemporary reported Muffat had written three settings of the Mass, only the "In Labore Requies" Mass survives, in a manuscript now in Budapest. It is among the most festive Central-European Masses with trumpets, and while it lacks the spectacular size of the Salzburg Mass attributed to Biber (Mar/Apr 2000 & Jan/Feb 2010), it is very much a model of its style on only a slightly smaller scale, with only two four-voice choirs of solists and ripieno singers, cornetts and trombones, a choir of five trumpets and timpani, and strings, with continuo ensembles.

The first recording of Muffat's Mass that I know was led by Konrad Junghänel (May/June 1999, see BIBER), who used only eight voices divided into two four-voiced choirs, along with single instruments on each part. The small ensemble also allowed him to take relatively fast tempos. More recently Gunar Letzbor released a recording of this mass (2014, Pan 10301), also without ripieni vocalists, though he may have occasionally divided the four boy sopranos (two for each choir) and two altos from the St Florian Boychoir (for Choir 2). Letzbor's tempos are more stately than Junghänel and allow some of the rich details of Muffat's writing to be appreciated, though he sometimes overemphasizes the rhythm.

Strobl is the first to actually combine the four plus four vocal soloists with eight ripieno singers for each choir, adding significant weight and contrast to Muffat's constantly shifting textures and sonorities. But there are two small ways that this recording misses the mark. With the larger number of vocalists, the string ensemble, with just single players on each part, lacks the presence it has in the two earlier recordings, though it balances well with the soloists. And my nit to pick is that Strobl doesn't have a bassoon for the continuo, as called for in the score. Of the three versions, Letzbor makes the most of Muffat's use of muted trumpets ("trombe sordine") and dampened timpani ("timpani tecta") in the Credo at the mentions of Christ's burial, the judgement of the living and the dead, and the resurrection of the dead.

While Letzbor recorded just the mass, Junghänel's recording included Heinrich Biber's Litanie de Sancto Josepho and the same composer's Sonata 'Sancti Polycarpi' for eight trumpets, timpani, and continuo. Both Junghänel and Strobl include two sonatas by Antonio Bertali (Sonata a 13 and 'Sancti Placidi'), both scored for cornetts, trombones, trumpets, and strings. Junghänel again has distinctly faster tempos and omits a final repeat in 'Sancti Placidi' that Strobl includes. In addition, Strobl's recording includes two sonatas for strings by Biber (VI a 5 & VIII a 5) and Schmelzer's Sonata XII a 7 for two trumpets, 2 cornetts, 3 trombones, and continuo.

The instrumentalists in all three recordings are excellent, especially in the incredibly virtuosic and stratospheric parts for the cornetts; and the vocalists are well-chosen,

though I will admit to a slight preference for the sound of Letzbor's boys. Only the booklet for Junghänel's recording includes texts; most of us are familiar with the text of the Mass. All three include informative background notes; Junghänel and Strobl include essays by the editor of the Mass, Ernst Hintermaier, and Letzbor wrote his own. I enjoy all three recordings, but Strobl has a slight edge by more closely matching the indications in the score.

