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Buxtehude, Dietrich, *Missa alla brevis* (BuxWV 114) for 5 voices (SSATB) and basso continuo (BuxWV 114), ed. Günter und Leonore von Zadow. Edition Güntersberg, 2008. Publisher # G139. ISMN M-50174-139-7. Score (unrealized) and six parts, 17,50 €.



The *Missa alla brevis* stands apart both as Buxtehude's only known setting of the Mass and as his sole surviving work in the *stile antico*. While it is ostensibly a vocal composition, Edition Güntersberg has published a handsome and practical edition that is conveniently adaptable to a variety of performance options, including one that is purely instrumental.

The work is a Lutheran "Short Mass." This means it consists of only the first two sections of the five-part *Ordinarium missae*, the Kyrie and the Gloria, as Protestant Germany preferred to use hymns for the Credo, Sanctus/Benedictus, and Agnus Dei. While this work is exceptional for Buxtehude, the *Missa Brevis* was not uncommon in seventeenth-century Germany, where it frequently took the form of a *stile antico* composition. Buxtehude's title is both an indication of the length and contents of the Mass, as well as perhaps a reference to his use of the *brevis* (equivalent to two whole notes) as the fundamental unit of time.

Buxtehude's decision to set the Kyrie as a variation canon is another nod to the older style—the canon was a key symbol of the *prima prattica* during the seventeenth century. Though frequently a demonstration of compositional craft, Buxtehude's use of the canon and the resulting texture is not particularly complex, making the tripartite Kyrie perhaps more interesting from a musicological rather than performance perspective. This is not to say that the overall effect is not musically satisfying; the last section is particularly enjoyable with its frequent use of cadential suspensions within a lively triple meter.

The more complex Gloria presents a variety of text-driven themes that are combined, sometimes unexpectedly, so that they generate an effect that goes beyond simple text presentation. A fine example is the "Qui tollis" section, where Buxtehude layers upward leaps of a sixth in the top, middle, and bass voices around downward leaps of a fourth and a rising fifth in each of the other two. The highly contrapuntal texture of this piece also makes the brief moments of homophony on words like "Gratias" and "Cum sancto spiritu" quite dramatic. Also of note is the concluding "Amen" in which a chromatic motive is tossed among all the voice parts in striking fashion.

This piece demands at a minimum five independent musical voices. However, both the nature of this composition, as well as seventeenth-century performance practice, make a variety of performance options feasible. This edition argues that a chordal continuo instrument should be employed. However, since the continuo part is a *basso seguente* that doubles whichever voice is lowest in the texture, and since the texture of the mass employs

the full five voices after their initial imitative entrances, continuo is not essential to this work, though it is certainly an option. Other performance alternatives include *colla-parte* doubling by any number of instruments and/or multiple voices, which would not have been unusual in Buxtehude's day. In addition, the evidence of instrumental performances of contemporary madrigals, combined with Buxtehude's strict voice-leading and use of instrumental idioms, make this work suitable for a purely instrumental ensemble. Though a diverse group of instruments might be appropriate since many of Buxtehude's works tend to be dominated by the *stile concertato*, here his intentional recourse to an archaic style is arguably better suited to a single family of instruments, such as a viol consort.

This edition, which provides a score along with six parts including the basso continuo, has been created specifically with an instrumental performance in mind. The original parts are untitled and lie in the following clefs: treble, soprano, alto, tenor, and bass.

The piece fits well on a viol consort of two trebles, two tenors, and a bass, and Güntersberg has modernized clefs accordingly so that the upper two parts are presented in treble clef, the lowest in bass, and the middle two parts in both modern tenor and alto clef. One useful feature of these parts is cue notes before major entrances. Also, the inclusion of the Mass text in all parts benefits considerations such as articulation and phrasing.

As mentioned, the basso continuo part is a *basso seguente* that doubles whichever voice is lowest in the texture. Both in the manuscript and in this edition, the basso continuo appears in whatever clef it is doubling. This edition has modernized those clefs to bass, ottava, and treble. The frequent changes of clef are awkward, and the editors might have been better advised to utilize only bass and treble clef, especially since they have included helpful markings, both in the score and in the parts, to indicate which voice part is doubled. Another useful modification not implemented is a realization of the basso continuo. While those who play continuo may prefer an uncluttered part, a suggested realization would make the piece more widely accessible, especially as the basso is only partially figured.

Facsimiles of the beginning lines of the uppermost voice and of the final measures of the bass/title page are included. The visual information they provide is supplemented with an excellent introduction by Gunther Morche, printed in both German and English. Morche gives a thorough background to the work, explains the preparation of the edition, and describes modifications to the manuscript. This edition is meant to be practical, and while it does retain original note values, bar lines are added and regularized, and accidentals placed according to current day practices.

As is standard for Güntersberg, overall this is a clear and well-edited edition. The piece itself would be of significance to those interested in a work that is both exceptional for Buxtehude, as well as a fine example of German *stile antico* composition during the latter half of the seventeenth century. Though this is not a difficult piece, Buxtehude provides enough musical material to keep his *Missa Brevis* engaging for its duration in performance of six to seven minutes.

