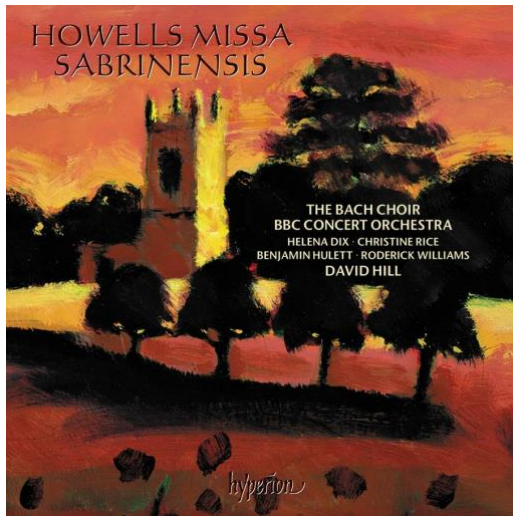


The Bach Choir releases a new recording of Howells's monumental *Missa Sabrinensis*



Friday 1 May 2020
Hyperion | CDA68294

Herbert Howells *Missa Sabrinensis*

David Hill conductor
The Bach Choir
BBC Concert Orchestra

Helena Dix soprano
Christine Rice mezzo-soprano
Benjamin Hulett tenor
Roderick Williams baritone



“I have to keep reminding myself that these people are amateurs: I can’t imagine a professional choir giving a more perfect and passionate performance.”

The Independent on the Choir’s performance of Bach’s *B Minor Mass*, February 2020

In a disc released on **Friday 1 May**, **The Bach Choir** champions **Herbert Howells’s** monumental *Missa Sabrinensis* with the **BBC Concert Orchestra** and soloists **Helena Dix**, **Christine Rice**, **Benjamin Hulett**, and **Roderick Williams**, conducted by **David Hill**. The Bach Choir returned the 1954 work to the public conscious in 1982 after the Mass had been declared ‘unperformable’.

Named for the ‘Mass of the River Severn’, the work pays tribute to the banks of the English river where many of the country’s greatest composers had grown up: Elgar, Vaughan Williams, Finzi, Holst, and Howells himself. The *Missa Sabrinensis* is a homage to Howells’s musical heritage.

An extended, complex setting of the Latin Mass, the *Missa Sabrinensis* stands over an hour long, and is the composer’s most technically-demanding and ambitious large-scale work. Careful editing on the recording makes audible the intricate detail in Howells’s complex counterpoint, despite the massed forces. Alongside a full orchestra, the recording features 155 voices of The Bach Choir, with the four solo voices rising and falling from the dominant chorus parts.

The Bach Choir’s Music Director **David Hill** said:

“The Missa Sabrinensis really is one of those pieces that needs as much time as, say, Gurrelieder or Mahler’s eighth symphony, and I absolutely believe it’s as deserving of that care and attention as those works. It’s a kind of choral symphony, very powerful – tumultuous even. Howells clearly threw everything of himself into it – it’s very taxing for the soloists and immensely complicated for the choir. What I hope we’ve achieved on the disc is a forensic

approach to the work – not in the sense of cold or dispassionate, but simply clarifying everything so that a listener can make out the incredible detail within the piece.”

The *Missa Sabrinensis* was commissioned by David Willcocks for the 1954 Three Choirs Festival, although the score was nearly lost when Howells’s bag was stolen and thrown from a train, before being miraculously retrieved by police. Its early performances were challenging, and the work was soon considered unperformable. The Bach Choir and Willcocks, their music director, finally returned the work to the public’s attention with a successful performance in 1982 held in honour of the composer’s ninetieth birthday.

*“The return of the opening music in Howells’s final movement reinforces the symphonic nature of the work, giving the listener such a strong sense of returning home. The nostalgia of this retrospective could be linked to the composer’s personal sense of ‘home’ in the area, but it is also tinged with sadness. The countryside of his childhood around the Severn was now also associated with the loss of his son on a family holiday, and of Michael’s subsequent burial at Twigworth, outside Gloucester—quite the opposite of the English pastoral idyll. For Howells, as in *Hymnus Paradisi*, the *Missa Sabrinensis* was about the memorializing of a lost son (personalizing the work’s biblical origins), and that he was able to combine these elements within such a grand symphonic plan makes it one of his greatest achievements.”*

- Jonathan Clinch

Between concert performances and CD recordings, the Choir frequently features on film and video game soundtracks, including recently *The Martian* and *Star Wars: Jedi Fallen Order*.

The Bach Choir

Founded in 1876, The Bach Choir is recognised as one of the world’s leading choruses, building upon a tradition that combines musical excellence with creativity and innovation.



From the first performance in Britain of Bach’s *Mass in B minor* 144 years ago to the soundtrack for Ridley Scott’s epic *Prometheus*, the Choir’s musical heritage is as rich as it is diverse. Directed by David Hill, one of the country’s most eminent conductors and choir trainers, the Choir regularly performs and records across London and the UK in prestigious venues, from the Royal Albert Hall to Abbey Road Studios.

Described by the London Evening Standard as ‘probably the finest independent choir in the world’, The Bach Choir values the freedom that its independence brings, allowing it to work with the very best orchestras and soloists, and to choose the music it performs. To date the Choir has sung over 400 works in more than 120 venues, and continues to share its work with audiences around the world. Following an invitation from the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, the Choir gave two performances of Bach’s *St Matthew Passion* in Hong Kong’s Cultural Centre just before Easter 2014, and it gave further concerts in Shanghai and Hangzhou. In October 2017, the Choir gave six concerts in the Netherlands of *a cappella* music and works for choir and organ, one of which was broadcast on Dutch radio. A five-city concert tour of the USA in March this year was cancelled at very short notice due to COVID-19.

“probably the finest independent choir in the world”

Evening Standard

With a strong commitment to new music, The Bach Choir has commissioned works from some of the world’s leading composers including the late Sir John Tavener, Bob Chilcott, Jonathan Dove, Will Todd and Carl Rütti. In June 2017 the Choir gave the world premiere performance of James MacMillan’s *Blow the trumpet in the new moon*, and recently commissioned Roxanna Panufnik to complete her *Four Choral Seasons*, which was premiered by the Choir in October 2019.

The Bach Choir has always been characterised by the commitment of its members. With over 250 talented singers coming from all walks of life, an international touring schedule, and a pioneering outreach programme, *Vocalise!*, that takes its passion for music into inner-city schools and dementia care homes, the Choir takes pride in performing, recording and sharing music for all to enjoy.

thebachchoir.org.uk

For more information on any of the above, please contact:

Nicky Thomas Media

2-6 Baches St, London N1 6DN

+44 (0)20 3714 7594 | +44 (0)7768 566 530

info@nickythomasmedia.com

www.nickythomasmedia.com