

# **BEETHOVEN'S HIDDEN MASS**

## **Preface**

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### **My Background**

I'm an amateur musician, and I've described my background in the Preface to my "Bach's Mass in Goldberg".

### **The Tridentine Latin Mass**

I've written about the Tridentine Mass in the Preface to my "Bach's Mass". Except for a few islands of devotees, it hasn't been used in the last half-century.

## **BEETHOVEN'S DIABELLI VARIATIONS**

The Diabelli Variations don't seem to be any better understood than the Goldberg Variations, and with good reason. They also set the old Latin Mass to music, in my opinion directly in competition with Bach's masterwork. My personal feeling is that Beethoven spotted the Mass concealed in the Goldbergs, and appreciating Bach's cleverness, decided to go the old master one better, in quantity as well as quality. Hence the thirty three variations.

I have never seen or heard any reference to either set's true nature, and I doubt that Beethoven mentioned his discovery to anyone. With Bach, I'm not so sure. I wouldn't be surprised if his sons were familiar with all of their father's methods. At any rate, if I hadn't found Bach's plan, I would never have suspected that the Diabelli Variations also concealed a Mass. The outward similarity in music and structure between the two sets has been pointed out, and both sets have been described as strange, but their true inner connection has been consistently missed.

Beethoven left us clues, as did Bach, but in both cases they were overlooked. Beethoven's twelfth variation (Hosanna) sounds like it was lifted from the Sanctus of the B minor Mass, and his thirty second variation is a quodlibet, just as is Bach's. Both men wrote their variations more or less while working on their major Masses.

On the other hand, I have never seen the words of Consecration, of the Host and of the Wine, set to music (numbers thirteen and fourteen). In fact, I suspect that it would not have been allowed, had Beethoven asked. Nor would the setting of the Pater Noster, in sixteen and seventeen.

Just as Bach undoubtedly enjoyed the implicit humor in certain texts, so too, I think, did Beethoven. The fifteenth variation enjoins us to remember him, every time we play it, and the words of thirteen, if Beethoven was familiar with the expression, are the basis for the disparaging "hocus pocus".

Finally, Beethoven was a competitor. Solomon quotes him writing of the desire to embarrass his opponents in pianistic duels, which brings to mind Bobby Fischer's famous "I like to see 'em squirm". Very few people would feel themselves up to the task of challenging Bach, for all posterity to witness and to judge. A Battle of the B's, so to speak.

Who's the winner? In my opinion, the victory goes to the greatest composer of all time, but of course I'm biased.

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Endicott, New York  
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