

**Prof David Saint Review: Bach: Mass in B Minor
5 April 2025. Lichfield Cathedral**



Professor David Saint is an organ recitalist and choir director. He was Principal of the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire from 2010 to 2015 and is Organist and Director of Music at St Chad's Cathedral in Birmingham. He is a past Chair of the Royal College of Organists and Incorporated Society of Musicians and current chair of the Incorporated Association of Organists, the Young Organ Scholars' Trust and the Bromsgrove International Music Competition. David is a Fellow of the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, the Royal School of Church Music and the Royal College of Organists.

The Birmingham Bach Choir's performance of Bach's *Mass in B Minor*, conducted by Paul Spicer, was committed, profoundly moving and expertly crafted. I was engrossed from the thrilling opening chords of the *Kyrie* to the sublime ending of the *Dona Nobis Pacem*.

Particular highlights for me included the exquisite phrasing of the *Kyrie* fugue, the exuberance of the opening of the *Gloria*, the gorgeous playing in *Domine Deus* (players from the Musical and Amicable Society in fine form) and the sheer joy expressed in *Cum Sancto Spiritu*. This last brought the first half of the performance to its end, and I simply couldn't stop humming it – and wishing I was a participant!

Though I might have preferred a more steely sound for *Credo in unum Deum*, *Crucifixus* was excellent and *Et Resurrexit* did not fail to excite; the plainsong *Confiteor* pierced the texture wonderfully.

The massive harmonic pillars of the *Sanctus* were powerfully delivered though Bach's excessive demands on the voices showed perhaps a little in the *Osannas*. Well, he did seem to forget that singers need to breathe!

The soaring phrases of *Dona Nobis Pacem* brought this overwhelming statement of faith and confidence in God to a most satisfying conclusion.

Mention simply must also be made of the excellent soloists. Sophie Bevan, Simon Ponsford, Ruairi Bowen and Roderick Williams were very well-matched both in terms of balance and their sympathetic, stylistic approach.

This was a most uplifting and spiritually satisfying evening. Paul Spicer's direction was both precise and expressive, guiding the ensemble with a sure and sensitive hand whilst allowing the performers to follow their finest instincts.

