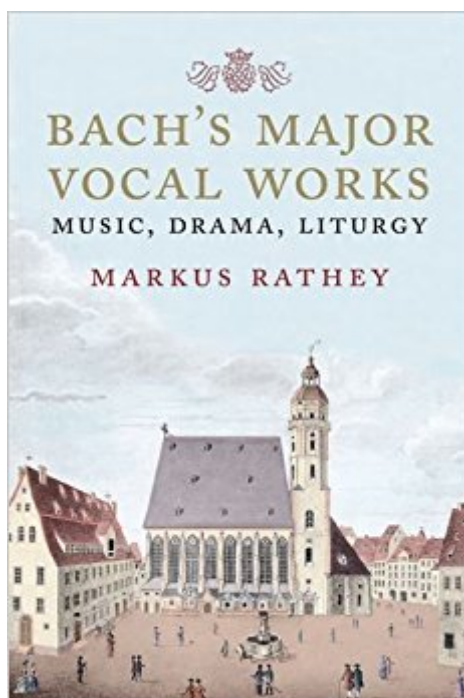


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Bach's Major Vocal Works: Music, Drama, Liturgy



Synopsis

Every year, Johann Sebastian Bach's major vocal works are performed to mark liturgical milestones in the Christian calendar. Written by a renowned Bach scholar, this concise and accessible book provides an introduction to the music and cultural contexts of the composer's most beloved masterpieces, including the Magnificat, Christmas Oratorio, and St. John Passion. In addition to providing historical information, each chapter highlights significant aspects—such as the theology of love—of a particular piece. This penetrating volume is the first to treat the vocal works as a whole, showing how the compositions were embedded in their original performative context within the liturgy as well as discussing Bach's musical style, from the detailed level of individual movements to the overarching aspects of each work. Published in the approach to Easter when many of these vocal works are performed, this outstanding volume will appeal to casual concertgoers and scholars alike.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"An excellent general perusal of Bach's major choral works, this book is recommended for classical music lovers, Bach fans, and those who are interested in Christian music and theology."—Library Journal (Library Journal)
"These are the program notes you have always wanted . . . Rathey helps the amateur listener appreciate details he might otherwise miss. Those who seek to take the next step in their enjoyment of Bach's genius would do well to turn to him."—First Things (First

Things) – “Rathey securely and authoritatively succeeds in making these vocal works accessible on many levels. – Choice (Choice) – “This delightful book written by the Yale musicologist Markus Rathey offers a background account of Bach’s major vocal works in chapters | If you too are a Bach fan then I cannot recommend this book strongly enough. – Robin Gill, Theology (Robin Gill Theology 2016-11-01) – “His writing style is beautifully clear, and careful to elaborate more obscure points – although without ever becoming condescending or over simplistic | excellent, in my opinion. – Classical Music (Classical Music 2016-12-01)

Markus Rathey provides concise and very readable introductions to six of Bach’s greatest works. Apart from the sheer power of the music, the meditation that Bach intended them to inspire is greatly assisted and deepened by an understanding of the rich traditions of theology and liturgy from which they grew. Bach lovers, people approaching Bach for the first time, and particularly people outside these traditions will find this book an enriching companion. – David Ledbetter, author of *Unaccompanied Bach: Performing the Solo Works* – Rathey achieves something that is rare in writing about Bach: a book that is fully informed by scholarship but also one that is relevant and understandable for virtually any interested reader, at any level of musical education. Rathey’s particular contribution is to explain what initially appear to be arcane expressions in the texts of Bach’s major sacred works, bringing out the significance of the many references to love. This helps us to experience Bach’s music as far more sensual and emotional than many may hitherto have believed. – John Butt, author of *Bach’s Dialogue with Modernity: Perspectives on the Passions*

Markus Rathey provides readers a glimpse into the world of Bach and his major vocal works as never before. He writes with depth, focused knowledge, passion and true understanding. He is able to integrate so many facets into an incredibly meaningful and comprehensive work that all readers will enjoy! This is a book that you will read again and again and walk away with inspiration, renewed creativity and might look at the world around you from a completely renewed perspective. I recommend highly recommend this incredibly beautiful read to any and all readers.

Wonderfully informative book but I suggest having the music available at same time. It really enhances the experience. I am untrained musically but I have loved classical music and opera for 40 years and learned a great deal from the book. Highly recommend it.

Pretty well written, but two caveats: First, this is more for anyone who is not already familiar with Bach's vocal works; it is rather a primer that doesn't really add to other basic works. Second, Rathey does not differentiate enough Bach's compositional style and skill from those of his compatriots. Instead, he treats Bach as almost a generic Baroque artist who reflects the tenor and outlook of his time, ignoring the forward-looking and even revolutionary aspects of Bach's tonal, rhythmic, and instrumental genius.

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