

# JASON GRANT

## BASS-BARITONE

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#### Singers master the glory of Bach

By TOM STRINI Journal Sentinel music critic

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From 1600 until 1750, European composers were on a collective mission: the unification of the sophisticated polyphonic procedures of the Renaissance and the tonal system of harmony that came in with opera and changed the way musicians thought about combining pitches into chords. J.S. Bach's Mass in B Minor, a project of Bach's last years (1747-1749) is the era's Mission Accomplished.

The Mass wore its grandeur lightly Friday, in a performance by the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, soprano Hyunah Yu, mezzo Nancy Maultsby, tenor John McVeigh and **bass-baritone Jason Grant**.

The chorus, supervised by the able Lee Erickson, excelled in its challenging and crucial role. Bach sometimes arranges the chorus in the usual Baroque way, in four parts, soprano/alto/tenor/bass. Sometimes he splits it into five parts, with soprano I and II. The latter was Bach's conscious attempt to invoke older Renaissance styles and textures, plus a Baroque bass line and chords.

It's not easy to sing five fast-moving, busy lines at once and keep them all clear, but the chorus did exactly that. The glorious transparency let us hear deep into the music to admire the interaction of those lines and not just be bowled over by a wall of sound. Within that music, we did not observe gears meshing, but pliant, living lines at twining play. Of special note are the gently cascading descents of "Et incarnatus est" from the "Credo."

Andreas Delfs and his singers and players underscored the differences between pure Baroque practice and Bach's glosses on older style. The rhythmic buoyancy of some movements showed their connection to Baroque dance, a major influence on Bach's thinking. And the ardency of some of the arias took us beyond the church to the stage. Bach did not write any operas, but he clearly knew how to do it.

Maultsby rightly made a searing lament of the "Agnus Dei" aria; with different words, it could have been about a lost lover or a fallen soldier. Likewise, Yu and McVeigh's "Domine Deus" could be a love duet. **Grant's "Et in Spiritum Sanctum" could have been sung beneath some damsel's balcony.**

Opera, Renaissance counterpoint, dance, basso continuo, grandeur, intimacy, virtuosity - everything the Baroque aspired to be - lies within the Mass in B Minor.

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*Colbert Artists Management*

111 West 57th Street, New York, NY 10019

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