

Messe de minuit pour Noël

(Midnight Mass for Christmas)

Marc-Antoine Charpentier

Messe de minuit

Each of the six movements in the **Messe de minuit**, set to the text of the traditional Latin liturgy, is based on popular French carol tunes of the period. Alternating between gentle and dance-like melodies, the work as a whole reflects both the innocence and joy of the Christ child's birth. In 17th Century France, while *noëls* were an accepted part of Christmas music in the church, to combine them directly with the liturgy of the mass itself was brand new. Charpentier adapted eleven *noëls* for the mass, and also composed new material - notably in the Gloria and Credo, which blend seamlessly together. The work is cited as unique to both the genre and the period, and stands as one of Charpentier's most outstanding achievements.



Charpentier intended a small ensemble of string & recorder players, together with a four-part choir and organ for his *Messe de Minuit*. In this spirit, Bel Canto joins **The Elm City String Quartet** for the December concert.



Marc-Antoine Charpentier (1643-1704)

“Prolific” isn’t always a compliment (**Kenny G** can be said to be “prolific”) but in the case of **Marc-Antoine Charpentier**, there is a strong argument for the legitimacy of his popularity and sheer volume of work. At a time when the French were purposefully composing conservatively in reaction to what they saw as the crude and overly emotional **Italian style**, Charpentier spent almost five years in Italy studying under **Giacomo Carissimi**, and upon his return to France, began to inject colour and operatic flamboyance into a refined, but arguably timid **French Baroque** scene. He embraced dissonance to create tension and heighten harmonics, he mixed and matched ensembles and placement, and made extensive use of popular folk melodies.

Charpentier's dominance in the Baroque era - in the ballpark of 800 opus numbers - despite the cultural monopoly famously imposed by Louis XIV's court, stands witness to the power of creativity, and the borderlessness of music.

Further Reading

Tafelmusik: Marc-Antoine Charpentier
A Listening Guide, by Ivars Taurins

The Italian Roots of Marc-Antoine Charpentier's Chromatic Harmony

Graham Sadler and Shirley Thompson
Deutsche Historische Institut in Rom

Charpentier's Midnight Mass: Program Notes
Les Délices & Quire Cleveland 2018

Watch & Listen

Les Arts Florissants: Messe de minuit pour Noël

Ensemble Marguerite Louise:
Noëls sur les instruments - Marc-Antoine Charpentier

Les Arts Florissants: Te Deum in D major, H.146