



SING
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PLEASURE

SfP Pointers

#14: Austro-Germanic Latin pronunciation

This is not meant to be a definitive guide, but will hopefully help with authentic pronunciation of Latin text in Masses by Austrian or German composers; examples shown are taken from Bach's Mass in B Minor.

Vowels

A general guide for pronouncing the vowels. (There are some exceptions, however.)

- a** ah – as in father
- e** either long (ē) – sound is as in first part of diphthong “day”),
or short (eh) – as in bet in unaccented syllables and single syllable words
- i** ee – as in beet
- o** oh – as in boat
- u** oo – as in boot
- ae** ä – similar to bet
- oe** ö – like mouth position of “oh” with tongue position of “ee”
- y** ü – like mouth position of “oo” with tongue position of “ee”

Consonants

- c** ts – as in bits before e, i, ae, oe; k – as in cat at all other times
- g** hard g – as in get
- h** h – as in hot (pronounced, not silent)
- j** y – as in you
- qu** kv – no English equivalent. (qui = kvee)
- r** (r̄) – flipped like the sound of a soft d
- s** z – before vowels; s – before consonants and at the end of a word
- t** ts – as in bits before i; hard t at all other times
- x** kz – before vowels; ks before consonants and at the end of a word
- xc** kts – before e (“excelsis” = ek-tsehl-zees)

Examples of individual words:

benedicimus =	beh-neh-dee-tsee-moos
coelestis =	tsö-leh-stees
Agnus Dei =	Ahg-noos Deh-ee
suscipe =	zoos-tsee-peh
quoniam =	kvoh-nee-ahm
solus =	zoh-loos
descendit =	dehs-tsehn-deet
crucifixus =	kroo-tsee-fee-kzoos
ascendit =	ahs-tsehn-deet
caelum =	tsä-loom
saeculi =	zä-koo-lee
Sanctus =	Zahng-ktoos
pacem =	pah-tsehm

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Examples of specific text in the B Minor Mass, by movement:

<i>Movement</i>	<i>Word</i>	<i>Pronunciation</i>
Kyrie	Kyrie	Kü-r̃ee-eh
	eleison	ẽ-leh-ee-zohn
Gloria	excelsis	ekstselsis (or extselsis if that seems easier)
	benedicimus	beneditsimus, not (Italian) benedichimus
	agimus	hard g
	magnam	hard g
	coelestis	tsoelestis (or tsaylestees to be literal), but not choelestis
	unigenite	hard g
	agnus	hard g
	suscipe	sustsipe
Credo	coeli	tsoeli (see coelestis above)
	unigenitum	hard g
	genitum	hard g
	descendit	destsendit, not deschendit
	coelis	tsoelis (see coelestis above)
	virgine	hard g
	crucifixus	crutsifikzus, rather than Italian cruchifiksus
	ascendit	a'tsendit, not aschendit
	coelum	tsoelum (see coelestis above)
	regni	hard g
procedit	protsedit	
Sanctus	coeli	as above
	excelsis	as above
Benedictus	excelsis	as above
Agnus Dei	agnus	as above
	pacem	patsem

T is also pronounced ts in the formation (ti + another vowel), but this is in effect the same as in Italian Latin, so should not present additional difficulties. So:

Gloria	gratias	gratsias
	deprecationem	depreca ^s tionem
Credo	consubstantialem	consubstantsialem
	etiam	etsiam
	Pontio	Pontsio
	tertia	tertsia
	resurrectionem	resurrectsionem

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In German the emphasis is on the first syllable of 'A-men' and not, as in English usage, on the '-men'; so it is better to think of it as 'A-min'. In the music of German-speaking composers you will invariably find instances where 'A-' is given a longer note than '-men', or more elaborate treatment, like runs. More tellingly, you will find places where the stress is on 'A-' and '-men' falls on a relatively weak beat. Of course, it is inevitable that, since 'Amen' is usually the last word, '-men' will eventually fall on a downbeat; but even then it should not be overstressed.

Finally, a point which is not to do with the German/Italian issue. It is important to distinguish between the two pronunciations of the ending '-is':

- the i is pronounced as in English e.g. 'sit' in Patris (3 times in the 'Gloria') and tollis (once in the 'Gloria' and once in the 'Agnus Dei')
- but it is pronounced 'ee' as seen in excelsis (once each in 'Gloria', 'Sanctus' and 'Benedictus') and nobis ('Gloria' and 'Credo' once each; 'Agnus' twice)
- In finis (once in 'Credo') the first i is long, the second short, so feenis

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