

# JOHANN JOSEPH FUX

(um 1660–1741)

## Missa Sancti Joannis Nepomucensis K 34a (FuxWV IV.I.6)

### Notes on the work

by Ramona Hocker

Based on *Johann Joseph Fux – Werke*, vol. A/I/1

Fux concertato no. 5

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## NOTES ON THE WORK<sup>1</sup>

### Johann Joseph Fux, *Missa Sti. Joannis Nepomucensis* (K 34a)

The *Missa Sti. Joannis Nepomucensis* (K 34a) is one of the few works by Johann Joseph Fux for which a composition autograph has survived. Contemporary performance materials or further copies are not known. The score does not provide any further information regarding the time of composition, destination and patron. The reason for its creation also remains vague, as the reference to a vow (exvoto) is not further specified. The unclear circumstances of origin concern not only the context of the work, but also its sound, because Fux wrote down only the structurally important parts (2 trumpets, 2 violins, viola, four-part vocal movement, continuo) in his compositional score. The exact instrumentation, however, depends on the room or the room acoustics and on the available instruments: The instrumentation of the individual parts, colla parte winds and the formation of the continuo are not further specified in the score and are flexible within a certain range (cf. the directions for performance in the introduction to the Critical Report).

#### Remarks on the Context

The characteristic style of Fux's handwriting as well as the strong growth of the cult of the Czech Saint John of Nepomuk, beatified in 1721 and canonized in 1729, suggest that the work was written in the 1720s. The use of two trumpets points to a solemn occasion or a commissioner of high rank. The life of John of Nepomuk (John olim Welfini de Pomuk), who was martyred by drowning in the Vltava River in 1393, was glorified in legends at a very early date: John is considered the keeper of the confession secrets, protector of honour, patron saint of confessors and skippers, saviour in case of water hazards and guard over bridges. Accordingly, fortitude and discretion are his virtues.<sup>2</sup>

Tolerated by both the church and the ruling dynasties, intensive veneration took place even before the official canonization; the Habsburgs profited from the cult of Nepomuk, which was particularly rooted in the Bohemian folk belief, and contributed to its expansion into an international phenomenon – among others by actively promoting the canonization process.

Especially in the years of the beatification and canonization (1721 and 1729), many celebrations took place throughout the empire; John of Nepomuk's official holiday was set on May 16th and was usually celebrated throughout the whole octave with high masses, processions, devotions at bridges, litanies and sermons.<sup>3</sup> Liturgical music (ordinary and proper settings, litanies, Te Deum) was played, as well as songs, oratorios and instrumental music (including trumpet music as a sign of the high degree of celebration). Measured against the high demand for music, the documented number of works written specifically for a particular festivity is small. Liturgical works in particular, with their canonical and thus invariable texts, were generally reused for similar occasions with the same degree of festivity.

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1 Detailed information on the context, the history of the source and the music are given in the printed edition of the score: *Johann Joseph Fux, Missa Sti. Joannis Nepomucensis (K 34a)*, edd. Ramona Hocker and Rainer J. Schwob (Johann Joseph Fux – Werke, vol. A/I/1), Vienna: Hollitzer 2016.

2 On the veneration of John of Nepomuk, see the relevant publications in the following anthologies: *250 Jahre Hl. Johannes von Nepomuk. Katalog der IV. Sonderschau des Dommuseums zu Salzburg Mai bis Oktober 1979*, Salzburg: Dommuseum, 1979; Reinhold Baumstark, Johanna von Herzogenberg and Peter Volk (edd.), *Johannes von Nepomuk 1393–1993. Eine Ausstellung des Bayerischen Nationalmuseums, München, in Zusammenarbeit mit dem Prämonstratenserklöster Strahov, Prag, und dem Nationalmuseum, Prag: Kloster Strahov: 17. Mai–15. August 1993*; München, Bayerisches Nationalmuseum: 17. September–14. November 1993, Munich: Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, [1993]; Brigitte Faszbinder-Brückler, Theodor Brückler (edd.), *Johannes von Nepomuk. Seine Zeit – Sein Leben – Sein Kult* (Forschungen aus dem Stadtmuseum Alte Hofmühle Hollabrunn – Sonderband), Hollabrunn: Stadtmuseum Alte Hofmühle, 2001.

3 See also the reports in the *Wienerisches Diarium*, cited in the edition of the score and linked at the addenda page on Fux-online ([https://fux-online.at/cms\\_seite.php?content=1&menu=10&lang=E](https://fux-online.at/cms_seite.php?content=1&menu=10&lang=E)).

## The Music

In K 34a, with the five movements of the ordinary and the subdivision of Gloria and Credo, Fux follows the type of *Missa longa* common in the 18th century.<sup>4</sup> The inner sections are separated from one another by instrumentation, time signature, key, tempo and texture: The Kyrie is divided into three parts, the Gloria into eleven, the Credo into eight, the Sanctus with Benedictus into four and the Agnus into two.

The *Missa Sti. Joannis Nepomucensis* was intended to fulfil a vow of an unknown patron and was possibly performed on the occasion of the installation of a votive offering. It is noticeable that especially Christ-related text passages, as well as petitions and forgiveness of sins, are musically accentuated. In spite of the trumpets, the music does not strike the typical ‘representative’ tone, which is intended to have an apparent sounding effect. Rather, the Mass, with its small-scale structure in the text-rich movements, the deliberate use of instrumentation, dynamics and particular compositional techniques, presents itself as a work with a differentiated disposition, subtle in both sound and composition.

Unusual are the tempo prescriptions for the Osanna (Andante) and the “miserere” calls in the Gloria (Presto). The expressive center is the passage “Et unam sanctam” from the Credo, which is designed as an *accompagnato* for bass solo. The greatest emphasis is placed on the final theme of the forgiveness of sins, where the recitative melody dissolves into increasing leaps – perhaps this passage can be understood as a reaction to the mass’s function as an *exvoto*.

However, the music does not exceed the usual scope of its time. The reason for its creation is not sufficiently reflected in the text and its treatment for clear conclusions to be made about its original purpose – or that a re-performance on other occasions would be impossible: Fux’s *Missa Sti. Joannis Nepomucensis* is a solemn setting of the ordinary, with an expressive character in places, but it can nevertheless be used universally for all occasions with a similar degree of solemnity.

Ramona Hocker, 2018  
English version 2020

<sup>4</sup> See Thomas Hochradner, “Kapitel V: Das 18. Jahrhundert”, in *Messe und Motette* (Handbuch der musikalischen Gattungen 9), edd. Horst Leuchtmann and Siegfried Mauser, Laaber: Laaber, 1998, pp. 189–269, especially pp. 200–202 (“Die *Messa concertata* und der habsburgische Imperialstil”) and 233–248 (“*Missa brevis* und ‘*Missa longa*’. Ein Dualismus und seine Konsequenzen”). – Solemn compositions are characterized by the trumpets and need not necessarily be long (see for example Fux’s *Missa brevis solennitatis* K 5).