

Deutsches Magnificat

Heinrich Schütz (1585 - 1672)

Schütz is considered to be the most significant German composer before J S Bach and, with Monteverdi, one of the most important of the 17th century. From 1609 to 1612 Schütz studied with Giovanni Gabrieli in Venice. On his return to Germany he developed a distinctive blend of the Italian choral, vocal and instrumental style and the existing German polyphonic tradition, and he became the leading figure in the establishment of an identifiably German Baroque style.

The *Deutsches Magnificat* is one of Schütz's last works, composed in 1671, shortly before his death. It is a setting for double choir of Luther's translation of the Magnificat. Although Gabrieli's influence can clearly be heard in Schütz's impressive use of Venetian-style *cori spezzati* (divided choirs), the piece is relatively simple when compared with his earlier sacred music, much of which was modelled on some of the grandest and most opulent Venetian works. This comparative austerity was a direct consequence of the Thirty Years War, the devastating effects of which were still being acutely felt more than twenty years after its cessation. In such times of hardship, excessive musical extravagance would have been inappropriate, and in any case the financial and human resources were simply no longer available.

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