

German Latin Pronunciation of the Mass Text

This crib is intended to help singers who have some knowledge of singing “Italian” Latin to make a few basic accommodations appropriate for singing settings written in German-speaking regions in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

The issue mainly affects two situations:

- C is pronounced ts (rather than ch as in Italianate Latin) when it comes before *e, i* or *oe*
- G is hard as in English ‘got’, not soft as in ‘general’

<i>Movement</i>	<i>Word</i>	<i>Pronunciation</i>
Kyrie	kyrie eleison	Kü-ree-ray ay-lay-i-zohn
Gloria	excelsis	ek-tsehl-sees
	benedicimus	be-ne-di-tsi-mus, <i>not</i> (Italian) be-ne-di-chi-mus
	a-gi-mus	ah-gee-moos (hard g as in “get”
	mag-nam	mahg-nahm (hard g again)
	coelestis	tsuh-leh-stis, <i>not</i> (Italian) cheh-leh-stees)
	unigenite	oo-nee-geh-nee-tay (hard g again)
	agnus	ahg-noos (hard g)
	suscipe	soo-tsee-pay
Credo	coeli	tsuh-lee (see coelestis above) (Round lips on first vowel)
	unigenitum	oo-nee-geh-nee-toom (hard g)
	genitum	geh-nee-toom (hard g)
	descendit	deh-tsen-deet, <i>not</i> deh-shehn-dit
	coelis	tsuh-lees (see coelestis above)
	virgine	veer-gee-nay (hard g)
	crucifixus	croo-tsee-fee-ksoos, <i>not</i> Italian cru- chi -fi-xus
	ascendit	ah-tsehn-deet, <i>not</i> a-shehn-deet
	coelum	tsuh-loom (see coelestis above)
	regni	ray-gnee (hard g)
	procedit	proh-tseh-deet
Sanctus	coeli	as above
	excelsis	as above
Benedictus	excelsis	as above
Agnus Dei	agnus	as above
	pacem	pah-tsehm

T is also pronounced ts in the formation TI + vowel, but this is in effect the same as in Italian Latin, so should not present additional difficulties.

So:

Gloria	gratias	gra-tsee-ahs
	deprecationem	de-pre-ca-tsi-o-nem
Credo	consubstantialem	con-sub-stan-tsee-ah-lehm
	etiam	eh-tsee-am
	Pontio	Pon-tsee-oh
	tertia	ter-tsi-a

resurrectionem re-sur-rec-tsi-o-nem

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. 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 in *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 fee-nihs

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