

Mass (Composite)

19. Credo

(Missa brevis No. 2)

Robert Führer

(1807-1861)

arr. William Melton

Führer, Robert Jan Nepomuk

(born 2 June 1807 in Prague; died 28 November 1861 in Vienna)

A boy chorister at the Prague Cathedral from the age of ten, Führer studied organ and counterpoint with his godfather, the cathedral Kapellmeister Johann Vitásek. Parallel studies in the humanities left young Robert with a mastery of Latin, Italian, French and English (and serviceable Hungarian) in addition to his native Czech and German. At sixteen he was already playing the organ for worship services, and six years later Führer became organist at the monastery of Strahov. In 1830 he was engaged to teach at the Prague school for organists, and he succeeded his teacher as Kapellmeister at the Prague Cathedral in 1839 at the age of thirty-two. A profile in the *Allgemeine Wiener Musikzeitung* (1843) lavishly praised his talents. Unfortunately these undeniable talents were coupled with a bent for larceny. Führer sold a Stradivarius violin owned by the cathedral, and he was dismissed in 1845 when the theft was discovered. He left his wife and two sons and henceforth lived as a journeyman organist, choral director, and musical jack-of-all-trades in a slew of locales ranging across the southern Austro-German landscape. His obvious talent led to frequent engagements, but his criminal bent led just as inevitably to his discharge (the offenses usually involved embezzlement, but he also stole in other ways, once publishing a mass by Schubert as his own). The pattern of musical highs and criminal lows continued. In 1856 he competed against Anton Bruckner for the organist position in Linz, and his playing was greatly admired by those present though Bruckner would win the post. 1859-60 saw Führer in a prison cell, and he died impoverished in Vienna a year later. A half-century would pass before his life and works were documented in book form (Prague, 1912).

During his harried, nomadic life, Führer composed and published an improbably large amount of music. His over four hundred works, chiefly

sacred, included quite a number of ordinary masses and Requiems (and an oratorio, *Te Deum*, cantatas, Vespers, and smaller forms). He also composed secular cantatas, songs, and organ pieces (preludes and fugues), and authored pedagogical books on organ, rhythm, and ancient Greek modes. His accessible, richly consonant style, with its echoes of Mozart and southern German folk song, was extremely popular with rural choirs. This style is well displayed in the *Missa brevis*, No. 2, in B flat Major, 'composit Robertus Führer' and first published by Joseph Aibl of Munich (plate no. 881).* The Credo compacts its lengthy text into three sections, the outer Moderatos 'Patrem omnipotentem' and 'Et resurrexit' (bar 24) framing the middle Adagio 'Et incarnatus est' (bar 13). Melody, aside from a few deft harmonic shifts in the Adagio, remains paramount throughout. Führer's appealing musical style evoked praise even from his worst critics, like the conservative composer Franz Xaver Witt: 'Führer possesses a degree of fluency and technical facility with musical forms that is rarely seen. He combines an easiness of invention with naturally flowing melody, and these are always winning qualities in a composer'.

Text by William Melton

*The arranger is indebted to the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich for preparing photographs of the original Aibl publication (2 Mus. Pr. 342: Führer, Robert: *6 kurze Messen; für Sopran, Alt, Tenor und Bass mit willkürlicher Orgelbegleitung* [München: Aibl]).