

The Open University Choir

German Latin Pronunciation of the Text of the Mass

This crib is intended to help singers who have some knowledge of singing Italianate Latin to make a few basic accommodations appropriate for singing settings written in German-speaking regions in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

If this territory is new to you, don't feel intimidated – there are not very many words to be concerned about. 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>
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
Credo	unigenite	hard g
	agnus	hard g
	suscipe	sustsipe
	coeli	tsoeli (see coelestis above)
	unigenitum	hard g
	genitum	hard g
	descendit	destsendit, not deschendit
	coelis	tsoelis (see coelestis above)
	virgine	hard g
	crucifixus	crutsifixus, rather than Italian cruchifixus
	ascendit	atsendit, not aschendit
	coelum	tsoelum (see coelestis above)
Sanctus	regni	hard g
	procedit	protsedit
	coeli	as above
Benedictus	excelsis	as above
	excelsis	as above
Agnus Dei	agnus	as above
	pacem	patsem

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	gratsias
	deprecationem	deprecatisionem
Credo	consubstantialem	consubstantsialem

etiam	etsiam
Pontio	Pontsio
tertia	tersia
resurrectionem	resurrectsionem

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 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 feenis

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