

of the Mass, including the four-part Mass (c. 1592). This period also coincides with Byrd's move to Essex under the patronage of Sir John Petre – a wealthy Roman Catholic. The Masses, then, are not believed to be an expression of protest but rather a pious attempt to sustain Catholic life into the future.

The Mass as a genre

The Mass is the Eucharistic liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church. The full sung form of this service is known as High Mass and there are countless musical settings of the text in existence between the medieval and modern periods. The two main elements of the Mass are as follows:

The Ordinary: these are the set of texts that do not usually vary.

The Proper: these texts change according to the Church calendar.

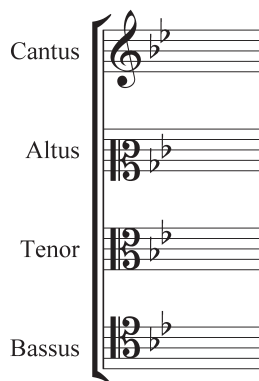
These are the sections of the Ordinary:

- Kyrie (Eleison)
- Gloria (in Excelsis)
- Credo
- Sanctus
- Agnus Dei
- Ite Missa Est*

* Although this is strictly part of the Ordinary, it is rarely set by composers.

The Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus and Agnus Dei form the sections of Byrd's four-part setting.

The score



Check which edition you are using to study the Byrd Mass. In this guide we will be referring to the Henry Washington Edition published by Chester Music – a widely used edition of the work. It transposes Byrd's original down a tone to F minor (it was originally composed in G minor) and reduces 16th century note values by half with a time signature of $\frac{4}{4}$.

Byrd's original score however, would have looked slightly different and in the example *left* you can see the original clefs he would have used. The lower three parts use the C clef, which can sit anywhere on the five-line staff. The join between the two semi-circles in the middle of the clef indicates the position of middle C. It also shows the original key signature (G minor). You will also notice the names of the parts are different: **altus**, **tenor** and **bassus** sound like their modern equivalents (alto, tenor and bass). The word **cantus** was a medieval and Renaissance word for melody, and referred to the highest voice in a polyphonic composition.

Polyphonic texture and imitative counterpoint

The 16th century is regarded as a golden age of polyphony, and Byrd's imitative setting is typical of both the time and genre. All the voice parts are of equal importance. Each movement begins with a head motive that is then imitated by the other parts in varying degrees of strictness, normally at the interval of a 5th. At the beginning of each movement or section the texture therefore gradually builds up from a single voice to all four parts.