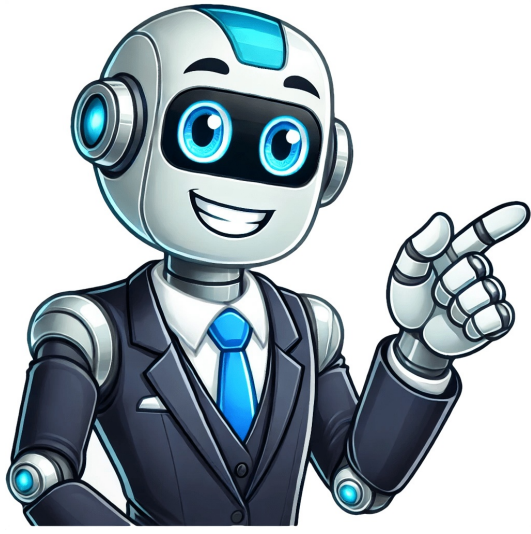


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Allegris Miserere is an unaccompanied choral setting of Psalm 51: Miserere mei, Deus (Have mercy on me, O God). It is commonly sung during Evensong on Ash Wednesday at the start of Lent, and during Tenebrae services in Holy Week before Easter. It was composed around 1638 for exclusive use in the Sistine Chapel, where performances of the Miserere were characterised by the introduction of elaborate ornamentation or embellishment, especially in the higher voice parts, that were improvised or remembered and never written down in a score. One myth surrounding the work is that it was prohibited, on pain of excommunication, to copy the music and remove it from the Vatican. Another is that Mozart transcribed the work from memory at the age of 14 after hearing it for the first time, and instead of being excommunicated, was later praised by the Pope for his musical achievements. Many who appreciate choral music will be familiar with Allegris Miserere, and even if your tastes lie elsewhere, you may recognise the music when you hear it. What makes this music unique is the difference between what we typically hear today, and what was originally written by Allegri and performed in the Sistine Chapel. The Miserere in its modern form became popular after Sir Ivor Atkins published an edition of the music in 1951, and it was subsequently recorded in 1963 by the Choir of Kings College, Cambridge and released on the Argo label in 1964 as part of an album called Evensong for Ash Wednesday. Later the same recording was included on the compilation album World of Kings which helped to secure its popularity. miserere.org refers to this version as the traditional Miserere, because it is how the piece is commonly performed today, with either the original Latin or an English translation of the words taken from the 1662 Book of Common Prayer (as used by Atkins). In 1771 Charles Burney published a version of the Miserere in London and this score became the basis for a variety of early modern performing editions and subsequent recordings that do not feature any ornamentation. A performing edition with the high C was first published by Robert Hass in 1932, based on an example given by W. S. Rockstro in his article on the Miserere in the first edition of Groves Dictionary of Music and Musicians published in 1887. This formed the basis for Sir Ivor Atkins later edition which set the high C in stone. Rockstro was constructing this example of the Miserere, which then became the foundation of the version we hear today. Ironically, despite the famous high C that has been so long associated with the Miserere, the first recorded performances of the Miserere were sung by male voices only, using an arrangement by Archibald T. Davidson produced for the Harvard Glee Club. Learn more about Psalm 51 and Gregorio Allegri on the following pages Share copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format for any purpose, even commercially. Adapt remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially. The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms. Attribution You must give appropriate credit , provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made . You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use. ShareAlike If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you must distribute your contributions under the same license as the original. No additional restrictions You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits. You do not have to comply with the license for elements of the material in the public domain or where your use is permitted by an applicable exception or limitation . No warranties are given. The license may not give you all of the permissions necessary for your intended use. For example, other rights such as publicity, privacy, or moral rights may limit how you use the material. Few choral works in history have been as shrouded in secrecy and reverence as Gregorio Allegris Miserere mei, Deus. Composed in the early 17th century for the exclusive use of the Sistine Chapel, this setting of Psalm 51 was considered so sacred that Pope Urban VIII forbade its transcription under penalty of excommunication. It was performed only during the Tenebrae services of Holy Week, its soaring polyphony echoing through the Vatican, reserved solely for the ears of the papal court. For over a century, the piece remained hiddenuntil 1770, when a 14-year-old Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, visiting Rome with his father, attended a performance. After hearing it just once, he transcribed it from memory, effectively breaking the Vatican's exclusive hold. Soon, the piece was published and spread across Europe, though not without variations emerging. One of the most famous aspects of the Miserere is the ethereal high C sung by the top soprano in the famous ornamented passages. However, this embellishment was not part of Allegri's original manuscript but rather a result of 19th-century editorial modifications. Over time, different versions evolved, incorporating embellishments passed down through the oral tradition of the Sistine Chapel Choir. Today, the high C is often considered an essential and breathtaking feature of the pieceyet it is not what Allegri originally wrote. In our performance edition, we present a historically informed score that captures the essence of both the original composition and with the later embellishments that have become beloved by audiences. This edition allows choirs to sing the Miserere in its pure form while also embracing the breathtaking soprano flourishes that have defined its mystique. One score is based upon a variety of scores produced in handwritten over time with various alterations, here in the original Latin. The other score is based upon acclaimed performances in English and extensive expression markings. This is not an extremely difficult piece to perform nor does it take long to learn. It is one/third a 5 part choir, then a quartet of soloists, one with a high C, and the last third, a cantor. Rehearse the choir section, skipping to it throughout the score, dismiss them at the end for your usual rehearsal time, then work with the quartet or at another time, and the cantor as well, saving everyone time and the boredom of sitting through sections you are not singing - which encourages talking and disruption. Whether you seek historical accuracy or the awe-inspiring high C, our carefully prepared score provides a definitive version of one of the most transcendent choral works ever composed. The PDF is available for a limited time as a free download. Download, save it to your files while available! When ordering the printed book, you will also receive a free download so that you may print out the "section" pages and start rehearsing right now until your books arrive. A famous anecdote holds that when Mozart was just fourteen years old, he heard Allegris Miserere in the Sistine Chapel and transcribed the music at home from memory. He later had this music publishe King David in Prayer (detail) by Pieter de GrebberGregorio Allegri (1582-1652) was an Italian priest and one of the most famous composers of the Roman School. His masterpiece, the Miserere, was composed in 1638 for annual celebration during Holy Week. It was two times during Holy Week, on Wednesday and Friday during a 3-00 a.m. service, that twenty-seven candles were extinguishedone at a time until there remained a single lit candle. It was said that the Holy Father would participate in these services and Allegri composed the Miserere to be performed at the end of the Tenebrae services and the pope would kneel and pray at the altar with the single remaining burning candle. This must have been a holy, solemn and beautiful moment to behold. There were many versions of the Miserere written, first by Costanzo Festa as early as 1518. Ten more composers including Guerrero and Palestrina also proffered their own versions of this sorrowful psalm, but Allegris striding rendition overshadowed the rest until it became the only rendition used and it remains with us today. It became such a prized possession of Holy Mother Church that there was a prohibition of its performance outside the Sistine Chapel and under the pain of excommunication it was forbidden to copy it. Nonetheless, by 1770 there were at least three copies known to exist, one by Padre Giovanni Battista Martini (1706-1784), the King of Portugal and another copy said to be housed in the Imperial Library in Vienna. Throughout the years there have been many interesting and alluring stories concerning its performances and peregrinations. However, none is quite so intriguing as the story of a twelve-year-old Mozart. In December of 1769, Leopold and Wolfgang Mozart left their hometown of Salzburg for a fifteenmonth tour of Italy where they came across none other than Padre Giovanni Martini, known also for having taught Johann Christian Bach. Young Wolfgang went to Bologna to be taught by Padre Giovanni as well. In April of 1770, the Mozarts visited St. Peters Basilica to celebrate the Wednesday Tenebrae. They wanted to hear the famous Miserere performed at the Sistine Chapel. The youthful Mozart was so moved by the Miserere that when he returned to his accommodations that evening he wrote out the entire manuscript from memory. On Good Friday, he went again to the service to hear it again and make minor corrections to his manuscript. Wolfgang's father Leopold wrote of this achievement to his wife on April, 14, 1770 from Rome: You have often heard of the famous Miserere in Rome, which is so greatly prized that the performers are forbidden on pain of excommunication to take away from it a single part of it, copy it or to give it to anyone. But we have it already. Wolfgang has written it down and we would have sent it to Salzburg in this letter; if it were not necessary for us to be there to perform it. But the manner of performance contributes more to its effect than the composition itself. Moreover, as it is one of the secrets of Rome, we do not wish to let it fall into other hands. There is a mysterious twist to the end of this tale. It turns out that Mozarts manuscript of the Miserere has never been found and it can be supposed that it would have been very informative concerning the style and creativeness employed by the papal choir in 1771. However, there is a famous music historian named Dr. Charles Burney who made a tour of Italy around the same time Mozart returned to study with Padre Martini. Though we know practically nothing of the interaction, Dr. Burney met with Wolfgang in Bologna with Padre Martini. When Dr. Burney returned from his tour he published a collection of music used during Holy Week in the Sistine Chapel and included was a rendition of Allegris Miserere. Since then it has been copied many times and in many places. Allegris Miserere remains one of the most recorded pieces of music in Church History and after listening to it several times, it is easy to recognize why. It is a haunting call to repentance in recognition of the misery of human frailty in the face of Gods call to sanctity. Listen to this and recall Psalm 51 where David pleads for forgiveness for his sins: Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy steadfast love; according to thy abundant mercy blot out my transgressions For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinnedThe sacrifice acceptable to Gods call a broken spirit;a broken and contrite heart Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.Watch and listen below and weep. Listen as you contemplate the chasm that exists between the misery of man and the heart of God. Listen as you ponder how Gods mercy towards sinners bridges that chasm. Notice too how the words misery and heart come together in the Latin word Misericordiadenoting the misery of mans condition redeemed by the infinite ocean of mercy that is Gods heart. Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted. As we sorrow for our own sins and the sins of the world, let Allegris timeless masterpiece carry us to a more profound understanding of this vale of tears as we may encounter Gods unfathomable mercy.[youtube id = nKj1K2WKS8]Print this entry Home Blog Interesting Here Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart is the most iconic classical composer of all time. Its a status not just drawn from the fact that he has behind some of the most recognizable pieces of music ever written, but also because of the prodigious nature of where these works came from. Weve all heard the stories; he started composing at around the age of four, he completed his first symphony by age eight, and so on. But his savant-like ear for music also led to controversy, such as that one time he essentially pirated music from the Pope. A little background. A pontiff didnt write the pirated piece. Rather, Pope Urban VIII commissioned Italian composer and Catholic priest Gregorio Allegri to write a hymn for Holy Week back around 1638. Allegri responded by writing Miserere mei Deus (translation: Have mercy on me, O God); a piece of music based on Psalm 51. Commonly known as Miserere, it was the last of a dozen different settings of the same text that was written for the Vatican over a 120-year stretch. Miserere mei Deus, as sung by the Choir of New College, Oxford Miserere was also the most popular. So much so, it was treated with near sacred reverence by the Catholic Church. So sacred, in fact, that the Pope forbade anyone from trying to transcribe the piece. This was no idle decree, either he threatened excommunication to those that dare go rogue against his proclamation. The Ceremony of Excommunication - Illustration: 22/37 - The Pictorial Edition of the Works of Shakspeare This didnt mean there weren't copies made. There was a transcription designed for the Holy Roman Emperor Leopold I, the King of Portugal, and composer/Catholic friar Giovanni Battista Martini. These copies aren't even written in musical circles. The work itself is a sublime nine-voice setting of Psalm 51: Miserere mei, Deus (secundum magnam misericordiam tuam: Et secundum multitudinem miserationum tuarum, dele iniquitatem meam. Amplius lava me ab iniquitate mea: et ab iniquitate mea: et a peccato meo munda me. Quoniam iniquitatem meam ego cognosco: et peccatum meum contra me est semper. Tibi soli peccavi, et malum coram te feci: iustificeris in sermonibus tuis, et vincasum iudicaris.Ecce, enim in iniquitatibus conceptus sum: in peccatis conceptus me mater mea. Ecce enim veritatem dilexisti: incerta et occulta sapientiae tuae manifestasti mihi. Asperges me hyssopo, et mundabor: lavabis me, et super nivem dealbabor. Auditui meo dabis gaudium et laetitiam: et exsultabit ossa humiliata. Averte faciem tuam a peccatis meis: omnes iniquitates meas dele. Read more: This candlelit rendition of Allegris Miserere is a heavenly choral experienceHave mercy upon me, O God, after thy great goodness:according to the multitude offhy merciesado away mine offences.Wash me throughly from my wickedness:and cleanse me from my sin.For I acknowledge my faults:and my sin is ever before me.Against thee only have I sinned, and done thesivill in thy sight:that thou mightest be justifiedthi saying, and clear when thou art judged.Behold, I was shapen in wickedness:and in sin hath my mother conceived me.But lo, thou hast cleansed me from all unrighteousness:and I shall be whiterthan snow.Thou shalt wash me, and I shall be whiterthan snow.Thou shalt make me hear of joy and gladness:that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.Turn thy face from my sins:and put out all my misdeeds.Make me a clean heart, O God:and renew a right spirit within me.Cast me not away from thy presence:and take not thy holy Spirit from me.O give me the comfort of thy help again:and stablish me with thy free Spirit.Then shall I teach thy ways unto the wicked:and sinners shall be converted unto thee.Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God:thou that art the God of my health:and my tongue shall sing of thy righteousness.Thou shalt open my lips, O Lord:and my mouth shall shew thy praise.For thou desirest no sacrifice, else would Igive it thee:but thou delightest not in burnt-offerings.The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit:a broken and contrite heart, O God, shalt thou not despise.O be favourable and gracious unto Sion:build thou the walls of Jerusalem.Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifice of righteousness,with the burnt-offerings and oblations:then shalt they offer young bullocks upon thine altar. Share copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format for any purpose, even commercially. Adapt remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially. The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms. Attribution You must give appropriate credit , provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made . You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use. ShareAlike If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you must distribute your contributions under the same license as the original. No additional restrictions You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits. You do not have to comply with the license for elements of the material in the public domain or where your use is permitted by an applicable exception or limitation . No warranties are given. The license may not give you all of the permissions necessary for your intended use. For example, other rights such as publicity, privacy, or moral rights may limit how you use the material. How Mozart, the Vatican, and centuries of mistakes resulted in one of the greatest pieces of music ever written. In 1638, a singer in the Sistine Chapel Choir composed a setting of Psalm 51 to be sung there during Holy Week. That singer was Gregorio Allegri, and his setting is not commonly known. His masterpiece, the Miserere, is one of the most beautiful pieces of music ever written. But not only is the version we sing today significantly different from Allegris original manuscript if it weren't for one particularly precocious 14-year-old, it may never have been heard outside the Vatican's walls. Papal secrecyAllegris Miserere was the last and the most popular of twelve different settings of the same text written for the Vatican over 120 years. It was so good that, to preserve the sense of mystery around the music, the Pope forbade anyone from transcribing it, on pain of excommunication. Only three copies were made: one for the Holy Roman Emperor, one for the King of Portugal, and one for an eminent music scholar but these versions were so simplified from the original that the King of Portugal actually complained. The Pope wanted to keep its genius a secret and so it remained for over 100 years. Wolfgang's trip to RomeWhat the Pope hadn't planned for was Leopold Mozart's trip to Rome in 1770; and, more specifically, the attendance of his 14-year-old son, Wolfgang Amadeus. Wolfgang Amadeus MozartThe Mozarts popped into the Wednesday service at the Vatican, at which the Miserere was being performed. A couple of hours later, back at home, the young Wolfgang proceeded to transcribe the entire piece from memory. He went back on Friday to make a couple of corrections and the Vatican's secret was out. Later on in their travels, the Mozarts bumped into British music historian Dr Charles Burney. They passed on the manuscript to Dr Burney, who took it to London; and it was published there in 1771. Mendelssohn and the copying errorBut that wasn't the end of the story. In 1831, Felix Mendelssohn decided to make his own transcription and the version he heard happened to be sung higher than originally intended (a fourth higher, to be precise). Felix MendelssohnThis wouldn't have been of much consequence had it not been for an innocent mistake made 50 years later. When the first edition of Groves Dictionary of Music and Musicians was being put together in 1880, a small section of Mendelssohn's higher transcription was accidentally inserted into a passage of the Miserere being used to illustrate an article. This mistake was then reproduced in various editions over the next century, eventually becoming the accepted version. And the result is the most famous and probably the most moving passage of the piece: a beautiful top C sung by a treble soloist, pretty much the highest note found in the entire choral repertoire. So, whenever you hear Allegris Miserere today, remember how lucky you are lucky that the Mozarts chose a good time to visit Rome, lucky that Mendelssohn transcribed it up a fourth, and lucky that one of Groves early editors had a momentary lapse of concentration. If you liked this post, I write regularly on music hit Follow below to receive updates directly in your inbox. Updated: May 2, 2025 Interesting Its no secret that the way we relate to and consume music changes almost as frequently and dramatically as the trends and styles in music themselves. Consider the transition in the last forty years or so, and the level of reverence generated as people changed from owning physical vinyl records to more contemporary streaming trends. Theres an excellent visualization available here for those of you [ ] Updated: May 2, 2025 Interesting So many lists rank artists based on subjective information such as fame or likeability. But when it comes to Spotify's top artists, the data is clear-cut. Compare this list to the 10 Bestselling Artists of All Timeand you'll discover how people's taste in music has changed tremendously over time. Interestingly, there are three artists that feature on both lists. Since the number of streams can be [ ] Updated: May 2, 2025 Interesting The way we consume music is constantly changing. From being a purely live experience to the various recorded formats that weve taken advantage of over the years, from vinyl to tape to CD to mp3, musical tech has come a long way. Since its founding in 2006, Swedish streaming service Spotify has not only come to dominate the streaming market, far outstripping competitors such as [ ] Updated: Apr 11, 2025 Interesting This list of the best-selling albums of all time has more to it than you'd might think. Record labels and artists often post much higher claimed sales than can be certified by companies like Nielsen SoundScan and the RIAA. If those claimed sales aren't even remotely similar to those collected by the certification-awarding companies, they weren't included. There's also situations where double-length albums count as [ ] Updated: Apr 3, 2025 Interesting Many young musicians dream of being rock stars for fame and adoration, even though it's a grueling lifestyle of non-stop touring. These starving-artist types are motivated by this reality: You can make an unbelievable amount of money as one of the top 10 richest rock stars in the world. As you read this list, you will learn: Gaining the marketing momentum and exposure is a [ ] Updated: Apr 3, 2025 Interesting The new data is out! You may not see huge shifts in the list of the top 10 richest country singers in the world due to some established giants, but we've dropped some artists out and added new ones. This is more interesting than the usual static list where everyone just earns more money due to investments and new businesses. And that's one of the [ ] Updated: Apr 1, 2025 Interesting How many young guitarists have you known that dream of hitting it big and getting fame, adoration, and riches? Perhaps you're one of them. The songwriting despite the writer's block, the grueling years on tour, the album and merchandise sales.... that all sounds great if you really want it. But you're in for a big surprise if you think that's all it takes to amass [ ] Updated: Apr 1, 2025 Interesting Nothing is more fun than updating this list every six months when new data comes out. Though it's usually the same players moving up or down one or two places based on recent investments, we include all of the data we can get from publicly available sources. It may not be perfectly accurate, but it's pretty darned close. What you'll notice as you read along [ ] Updated: Mar 31, 2025 Interesting With the past year wrapped up, it's always fun to see if the list of the top 10 most wealthy musicians has changed or completely shifted. The data for this year is in, so it's time for an update. Just remember, these values and fluctuations are estimations based on a host of variables and publicly available documents, but they've got to be pretty close! This [ ] Updated: Mar 31, 2025 Interesting All right, champ, it's the big day. Its all been building to this. Youve had the montage, youve looked into the eye of your challengers and said, Not today. Doves keep bursting into fight when you walk into rooms. (Actually, that part you could live without. Its a little annoying.) But, its time. Time to hang tough and prove youre the fastest, strongest, smartest person [ ] Updated: Dec 13, 2023 Interesting Families. You cant live with them, cant leave without them. (Other cliches are available.) Whether the one you are born into, or the one you choose for yourself, there is no one in your life quite like your family. They know your deepest secrets and accept you in spite of your most significant flaws. Or, sometimes, they make you consider moving to a different country [ ] Updated: Dec 13, 2023 Interesting There are all kinds of rappers these days, giving identity to a genre by breathing into it new sounds and styles. Sometimes wrongly dismissed, demeaned, or defined in one aspect by non-believers, the heads know that rap is a broad church. In this article, well take a look at the congregation as they spew lightning-speed rhymes and jaw-dropping flows. It's the ultimate showdown of [ ] Updated: Mar 31, 2025 Interesting Country music, even for those that have never paid close attention to the scene, has such strong imagery associated with it. Trucks, steaks, cold beer, cowboy boots, stiff denim. Were here today to take another look and perhaps see something different. Get ready to saddle up and ride through the rich and diverse world of country tunes spun by some of the most talented black [ ] Updated: Nov 22, 2023 Interesting You want to start an argument with passionate musicians? Ask them who belongs on the "top 10 singers of all time" list. Given enough time you'd come up with at least 50 names because so much of it comes down to taste and preference. Fortunately, because so many of us have voiced our opinions we can tell which vocalists have the most mass appeal, which [ ] Updated: Nov 22, 2023 Interesting Many of the lists produced on this site are opinion-based and encourage an endless amount of fun discussion among their readers who love to preach the gospel of their favorite artists. This list, however, is different. Outlining the bestselling artists of all time is fact-based. There's no negotiating or convincing involved because we've tracked the numbers (for the most part). Still, while the list won't [ ] Updated: Nov 22, 2023 Interesting The conversations around ranking the best bands of all time are opinion-based, but we've boiled it down so that it's at least based on the opinions of hundreds of millions of people. We can crowdsource that info based on things like sales, tours, and awards won. While there might be a consensus this way, we all know the average person couldn't explain to you the [ ] Updated: Nov 21, 2023 Interesting We know. Every song means something. Even the most overproduced glossy pop song has SOME meaning, although sometimes it may not be immediately obvious what that is, and what it is may be very shallow. So how did we approach the compilation of this list? These songs deal with the real, raw stuff. They hit the listener on a deeper, more profound level, touching on [ ] Updated: Sep 26, 2023 Interesting Compiling a list of the best flute players in the world was straightforward. As with many of our Top 10s, however, the hard part lies in the order of those names. While the flutist had to be among the most skilled, we also took into consideration their levels of creativity, their techniques, and their contributions to keeping this instrument live in the public mind, much [ ] Updated: Sep 24, 2023 Interesting When it comes to naming our top 10 piano players in the world, I think you'll agree with who is included, both modern and classical. We'd go so far as to say this is the objective part. It's the order of their ranking that you'll want to argue about. Obviously the skill level matters, but you might judge a certain strength as more important than [ ] Updated: Sep 24, 2023 Interesting Musicians have talked about this forever until these "talks" have turned into full-blown arguments. And that's "Who makes the list of the best bassists of all time?" It's a fun discussion because everyone qualifies musicians in different ways. For instance, some people care about technical skill and music theory abilities. Others care about which bands the bassists were in and who had the most mass [ ] We have decided to don the sackcloth and ashes and search out the best recordings of the haunting setting of Psalm 51: Allegri's Miserere. But what are the best recordings of this great Holy Week choral work? The title Allegris Miserere only tells half the story. While Gregorio Allegri did indeed write his setting of the penitential Psalm 51 for Romes Sistine Chapel in the 1630s, the standard version we are familiar with is probably some way removed from the composers original thoughts. Allegris own music was relatively simple, alternating sections by a five-voice main choir and a four-voice solo choir, the latter of whom would then add skillfully improvised ornaments (abbellimenti) the fearsome high C faced by the treble or soprano soloist today probably emerged as a result of some improvisation over the years. Six of the best unknown carolsFestive music: our top picksProud of its choral jewel, the Papacy forbade publication and performance of the Miserere outside the Vatican, hence the 14-year-old Mozart needing to rely on his own ears to make a copy of the score after just one hearing in 1770. The feat is not quite as impressive as it seems as, over its 12 or so minutes, the Miserere essentially repeats the same music five times over, its sections divided by passages of plainchant. With any recording of Allegris Miserere, the listeners attention is inevitably drawn to, above all, how well the soloist tackles those top Cs. Its not so much reaching the note itself that is so difficult but keeping what lies either side under control swooping up to the C and/or then smudging the tricky quaver ornament on the way down are both hard to avoid.Treble Roy Goodman set the early benchmark with the Choir of Kings College, Cambridge in 1964, since when recordings have emerged with regularity from boys and adult choirs in roughly equal measure. No fewer than four of these come from the Tallis Scholars.While their live performance in Rome in 1994 is scintillating, its the Scholars 1980 recording in the chapel of Merton College, Oxford that impresses most. Their pure-voiced soprano Alison Stamp soars sublimely and expressively (not easy at that pitch) above a solo quartet that is placed some distance from the microphones, giving that all-important degree of separation from the main choir something a number of recordings surprisingly lack.The balance of voices throughout is impeccable, while overall pacing is also deftly managed by conductor Peter Phillips always appropriately self-reflective, but never ingenuously self-indulgent. Above all, it's a recording that is packed with atmosphere.Gimell CDGIM 339 (1980) Six of the most inspiring women in musicWhat are the London Symphonies?The Miserere has been well served on disc by Britains cathedral choirs. Truro (2003; Lammas Records), for instance, has a superb treble soloist in Joshua Brooksbank, not would I want to be without Westminster Abbey's 1986 recording under Simon Preston (Archiv). But neither can boast the extraordinary acoustic of St Pauls.Notice just how long the echo rings around the dome at the end of each section before conductor John Scott even dares to move things along no wonder this comes in at around a minute longer than most other recordings.Yes, roomy acoustics are famously forgiving, but the choirs large numbers are impressively disciplined in terms of balance and control, while treble Jeremy Buddis impeccable intonation and diction is matched by that of his fellow soloists.Hyperion CDA 66439 (1990) Among adult choirs, a superbly agile Miserere was released by the Cardinals Music in 2011, though their use of the more ornate tones peregrinus plainchant may not suit all tastes, while a nicely balanced 1995 performance by the Choir of Clare College, Cambridge (Brilliant Classics) is let down only by an unflatteringly dry acoustic.Thats an accusation that cant be levelled at Tenebraes 2006 supposedly recorded version on Signum.Nigel Shorts 26-voice choir may contain some individual star names, but they blend excellently as a group the result is a gutsy, but never coarse, choral sound, complemented by first-rate soloists headed by soprano Grace Davidson. As part of a similarly beautifully sung and deftly chosen programme, its a must-have.Signum SIGCD 085 (2006) The best choral works for PassiontideThe best Bach BrandenburgsNearly 50 years, but only a couple of hundred yards of river, separate the two recordings vying for the final place in my library. So the Choir of St Johns College, Cambridges inspiring Chandos disc from last year broad-paced, contemplative and captured in glorious sound or the famous 1964 Kings version on Decca?Despite the slightly cloudy recorded sound and occasional smudged choral entries, the latter just wins the day, not least because its age gives it a certain sense of occasion. Welcome, too, is the fact that the Miserere is sung here in English which has few choirs been tempted to follow suit?And then theres Roy Goodman. With an ease and control at the top of the range that copes even with conductor David Willcocks decidedly deliberate tempos, Goodmans is a treble voice that still inspires today.Decca 466 3732 (1964)The best choral work for Easter Miserere mei, Deus,secundum magnam misericordiam tuam: Et secundum multitudinem miserationum tuarum, dele iniquitatem meam ab iniquitate mea: et a peccato meo munda me. Quoniam iniquitatem meam ego cognosco: et peccatum meum contra me est semper. Tibi soli peccavi, et malum coram te feci: iustificeris in sermonibus tuis, et vincasum iudicaris.Ecce, enim in iniquitatibus conceptus sum: in peccatis conceptus me mater mea. Ecce enim veritatem dilexisti: incerta et occulta sapientiae tuae manifestasti mihi. Asperges me hyssopo, et mundabor: lavabis me, et super nivem dealbabor.Auditui meo dabis gaudium et laetiam: et exsultabit ossa humiliata. Averte faciem tuam a peccatis meis: et omnes iniquitates meas dele. Read more: This candlelit rendition of Allegris Miserere is a heavenly choral experienceHave mercy upon me, O God, after thy great goodness:according to the multitude offhy merciesado away mine offences.Wash me throughly from my wickedness:and cleanse me from my sin.For I acknowledge my faults:and my sin is ever before me.Against thee only have I sinned, and done thesivill in thy sight:that thou mightest be justifiedthi saying, and clear when thou art judged.Behold, I was shapen in wickedness:and in sin hath my mother conceived me.But lo, thou hast cleansed me from all unrighteousness:and I shall be whiterthan snow.Thou shalt wash me, and I shall be whiterthan snow.Thou shalt make me hear of joy and gladness:that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.Turn thy face from my sins:and put out all my misdeeds.Make me a clean heart, O God:and renew a right spirit within me.Cast me not away from thy presence:and take not thy holy Spirit from me.O give me the comfort of thy help again:and stablish me with thy free Spirit.Then shall I teach thy ways unto the wicked:and sinners shall be converted unto thee.Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God:thou that art the God of my health:and my tongue shall sing of thy righteousness.Thou shalt open my lips, O Lord:and my mouth shall shew thy praise.For thou desirest no sacrifice, else would Igive it thee:but thou delightest not in burnt-offerings.The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit:a broken and contrite heart, O God, shalt thou not despise.O be favourable and gracious unto Sion:build thou the walls of Jerusalem.Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifice of righteousness,with the burnt-offerings and oblations:then shall they offer young bullocks upon thine altar.The best classical music albums released in 2024 so farThis article originally appeared in the March 2011 issue of BBC Music MagazineIllustration: Steve Rawlings/Debutart Skip to content

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