Singing the B Minor Mass

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Next to the last performance and Nancy, crying, can’t help it: how can anything ever be this big again. Trish too, who until this morning has never forgotten to fix breakfast, her husband saying this singing must fill her right up.

Stranger than fiction, my mother would say. Last week a soprano whose name I still don’t know looked right through me at Sears Auto Parts store and tonight you’d think we were old friends, kept from each other by seating arrangements no one thought about changing any more than notes in a score: faces closed tight as zero, such concentration, no one knew anyone’s name, where in the world we’d later show up: Observer Graphics, rummage sales, the meter maid wagon, outside of your own kid’s school a father whose kid goes there too.

Last night Nathan surprised me, went on about Noah, newborn, named because in one look he saw a son strong enough to live up to a name and Noah is a name to live up to: opening strangers up to each other—on sidewalks, in stores—stopping because of a baby who knows nothing except love, love, a word so total to question it is absurd. Turning our heads, this music tonight against all we ever have learned of decorum (Sanctus! Gloria!), Bach’s postulation of such absolute form tonight again releasing us, binding us, this magnificent counterpoint of control.

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