

BachBeat

The Newsletter of the Bach Cantata Choir

November 2016

www.bachcantatachoir.org

Vol. 10, No. 1

Bring in the Brass

Sunday, November 13, 2016 at 2:00 p.m.

Johann Fasch: *Concerto for Three Trumpets and Tympani*

Henry Purcell: *O God, Thou Art My God*

J. S. Bach: Cantata BWV 50, *Nun ist das Heil und die Kraft*
(Now is come the salvation and strength)

J. S. Bach: Cantata 34, *O ewiges Feuer, O Ursprung der Liebe*
(O Eternal Fire, O Source of Love)

Felix Mendelssohn: Psalm 43, No. 2
(*Richte mich, Gott, und führe meine Sache* (Judge me, O God))



Three Trumpets by David G Paul

All Bach Cantata Choir concerts are held at the Rose City Park Presbyterian Church at the corner of NE 44th & Sandy (office address 1907 NE 45th Ave) in Portland, Oregon ([map](#)).

The November concert is free (with free-will offering accepted).

The Mendelssohn Connection

By John Chilgren—Bass

Welcome to the 12th season of the Bach Cantata Choir under the direction of Ralph Nelson. This year's program will be decidedly different, featuring not only late Renaissance, Baroque, and Romantic composers but also American and contemporary composers as well. This issue of the BachBeat looks briefly at the music and lives of one English composer, **Henry Purcell**, and three German composers, **Johann Friedrich Fasch**, **J. S. Bach**, and **Felix Mendelssohn**. We will also meet **Sara Levy**, a woman who deserves credit for her role in keeping alive the music of J. S. Bach.

The November concert opens with a *Concerto for Three Trumpets and Tympani* by **Johann Fasch**, a contemporary of J. S. Bach. Born in 1688 just north of Weimar, Fasch was *Kapellmeister* in the town of Zerbst for 36 years until his death in 1758. Although mostly destroyed during WWII, Zerbst was later rebuilt and holds annual Fasch Festivals in his honor. While not well known in the U.S., Fasch was a highly regarded musical craftsman in Germany as his reputation was the equal of his teacher **Christoph Graupner** and almost as wide as his friend **Georg Philipp Telemann**. J. S. Bach, among others, is known to have copied his manuscripts and performed several of his works. In 1722, Fasch was offered the position of *Thomaskantor* in Leipzig after Telemann declined it (he got a pay raise in Hamburg). Fasch declined it too, and the position was eventually filled by J. S. Bach. A prolific composer of both vocal (most have been lost) and instrumental (largely extant) works, Fasch wrote in a style that transitioned late Baroque and early German Classicism per Hugo Riemann, the Leipzig music theorist.



Later in this newsletter, you will read about his son, **Carl Friedrich Christian Fasch** (1736–1800), the composer and harpsichordist who formed a vital connection between J. S. Bach and Felix Mendelssohn.



Henry Purcell's *O God, Thou Art My God* (Z35), a beautiful service anthem for the Church of England derived from Psalm 63, was probably composed in the period 1680-1682 while Purcell was in his twenties. Had a "Top 40" choral song chart existed then, this work would have made it to the top. It's an engaging and captivating work that quickly spread to universities, schools, churches, and cathedrals in England. It's an example of how Purcell used his lyrical skills in adapting polyphonic styles to the English language and illustrates the composer's familiarity with the works Thomas Tallis, William Byrd, and Orlando Gibbons.

In the absence of verifiable information, the actual date of Purcell's birth is uncertain but believed to have been in London around September 1659. His exceptionally musical family included his two brothers, Edward (an organist) and Daniel (organist and composer). Despite his precociousness, very little is known of Purcell's early life or personal life. He left no letters or private papers, only a vast legacy of music. After the death of his father in 1664, himself a musician at court, Henry was placed in the care of his Uncle Thomas who took him under his wing to study at the Westminster School. Already a singer, he became organist and composer at both Westminster and the Chapel Royal at St. James Palace, where famous organists such as Tallis, Byrd, Gibbons, and G. F. Handel had once performed.

Purcell ranks among the most famous of English composers and was a contemporary of both Handel and J. S. Bach. Purcell died 15 years before Handel immigrated to England but it's unclear if his music may have influenced Handel's later compositions. In his short but prolific lifetime, Purcell covered many genres, including opera (e.g., *Dido and Aeneas*), sonatas, harpsichord suites, overtures, dance music, among others. His premature death at the age of about 36 left an enormous gap in internationally known figures in English music up to the 20th century. Purcell was buried in 1695 in Westminster Abbey where he worked for 16 years. His music continues to inspire musicians today.

Purcell was father to six children, four of whom died in infancy. He was survived by his wife Frances who published many of Henry's works, including the now famous collection *Orpheus Britannicus* (for which Purcell is now called the British Orpheus).

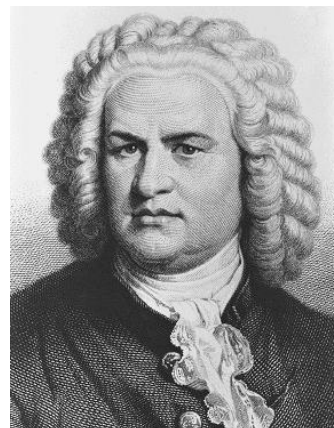
J. S. Bach (1685-1750)

Bach's Cantata BWV 50, *Nun ist das Heil und die Kraft* (Now is come the salvation and strength), is extraordinary for several reasons: (1) it is the only 8-part chorus (double choir) of any of Bach's cantatas, (2) it is

believed to be the only surviving movement of a lost or uncompleted cantata, (3) the date of composition and year and place of performance are unknown, although scholars have placed it sometime between 1723 to 1730 in Leipzig, (4) no autograph sources exist and the earliest extant copies make no mention of Bach's name, suggesting to a few scholars that another composer was responsible. However, as English conductor and writer John Eliot Gardner pointed out: *"For who other than Bach amongst his German contemporaries could have come up with such an extreme compression of ideas, at the same time giving the impression of colossal spatial breadth and majesty?"*

To be certain, this cantata is a fascinating and compelling choral work, with text based on Revelations 12:10, the Epistle for St. Michael's Day (Michaelmas). Schweitzer wrote of the choral double fugue: *"...the theme ...consists of a combination of the motif of strength and the motif of joy. In this way Bach expresses thematically the whole substance of the text, the subject of which is the triumph of God and the rejoicing over Satan's fall (Rev. 12:10)."* We think you will agree that this is one of Bach's most superb choruses.

J. S. Bach's Cantata 34, *O ewiges Feuer, O Ursprung der Liebe* (O Eternal Fire, O Source of Love) was originally a wedding cantata (BWV 34a) written in 1725-26 for a clergyman friend (this work has been lost). For the Lutheran church year, this Pentecost Cantata 34 was reduced from seven to five movements for its first performance on June 1, 1727 in St. Nikolai Church in Leipzig. We know that Bach wrote a new score for a performance in the mid-1740's and this is what the Bach Cantata Choir will perform. However, printed librettos of this and three other cantatas were discovered about a decade ago in St. Peterburg and were dated 1727, confirming their earlier origins. Unfortunately the nature of Bach's musical revisions will never be known, as the original music of Cantata 34 has been lost.



The centerpiece of this work, perhaps one of Bach's best, is a wonderful pastoral alto aria, accompanied by flute, strings, and continuo (*It is well for you, you chosen souls, whom God has designated for his dwelling*). The alto aria is flanked by recitatives with the chorus opening and ending the work, there being no chorale. The opening chorus (*O eternal fire, o source of love, ignite our hearts and consecrate them*), the longest section, provides dramatic orchestration with images of eternal flames of divine love and contentment featuring Bach's favorite instrument, the trumpet.

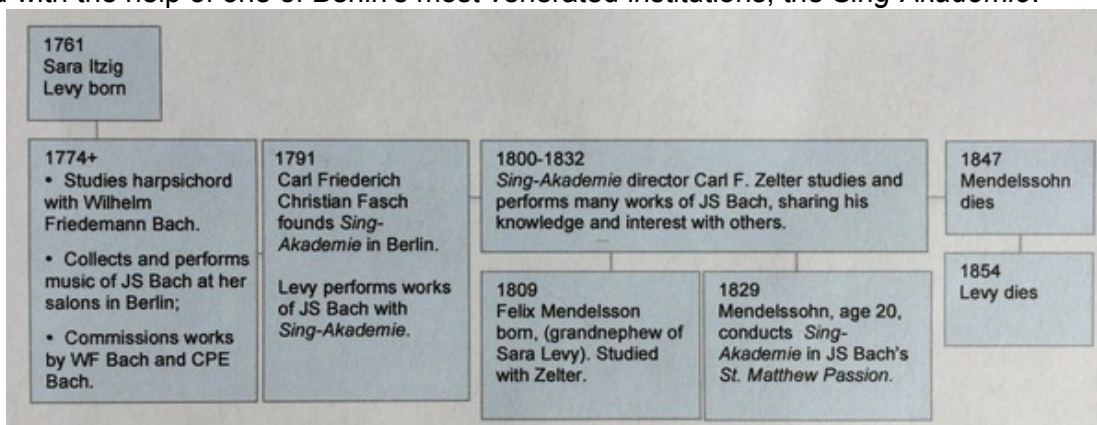


Felix Mendelssohn (Jakob Ludwig Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy) was born in 1809 into a prominent Jewish family and recognized as a prodigy at an early age, eventually becoming one of Germany's most important composers of the early Romantic period. A skilled pianist, organist and conductor as well, Mendelssohn produced an immense quantity of works: Vocal, choral, organ, piano, stage, chamber, and orchestral (symphonies, concertos, overtures) music over the course of his regrettably short life of 38 years. He died of a stroke in November 1847; his beloved sister Fanny, a talented pianist and composer in her own right, suffered the same fate only months earlier. A grandson of the philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, Felix was baptized at age seven as a Lutheran, his parents adopting the surname Bartholdy after their conversion as well. Mendelssohn traveled widely (England, Scotland, Wales, Italy) and in 1835 became conductor of the Gewandhaus Orchestra in Leipzig (estab. 1743), creating a conservatory there in 1843. Now called the

Hochschule für Musik und Theater "Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy" Leipzig, the conservatory is the oldest university school of music in Germany.

While Mendelssohn is often credited with reviving interest in the music of Bach, there is a lesser known story of the connection between these two German composers. The connection is **Sara Levy** (1761-1854), younger sister of Mendelssohn's maternal grandmother and thus his great aunt. Sara was one of 15 children born to the Itzigs, one of the most famous and influential families in 18th century Prussia. By 1774 she was studying harpsichord with J. S. Bach's eldest son, **Wilhelm Friedemann Bach** (1710-1784) and was an outstanding keyboardist in her own right. Sara owned a vast collection of Bach's music, much of which she performed in her salon to an audience of other salonnières and intellectuals in Berlin; guests included W. A. Mozart and Joseph Haydn. She commissioned works by both W. F. Bach and his younger brother, **Carl Phillip Emanuel Bach** (1714-1788), including the autograph score of the latter's last composition. Levy's performances for the *Sing-Akademie zu Berlin*, a bourgeois choral society formed in 1791 by **Carl Friedrich Christian Fasch** to promote

sacred German choral music, would be a driving force for classical music, especially that of J. S. Bach. Its archives formed one of the richest collections of classical music in the 18th century. A subsequent director, **Carl Friedrich Zelter** (1758-1832), became committed to the works of Bach, especially his sacred choral works, and would pass this zeal to his student Felix Mendelssohn. While Mendelssohn's reputation grew along with a renewed appreciation for Bach, the foundation for the Bach renewal had taken place in the salons of his great-aunt Sara and with the help of one of Berlin's most venerated institutions, the *Sing-Akademie*.



Over a 25 year period (1822-1847), Mendelssohn composed 20 psalms in a variety of styles. His Psalm 43, No. 2 "*Richte mich, Gott und führe meine Sache*" (Judge me, O God), written for a *capella* double chorus, was composed in 1843. It is one of several psalms he put to music during the winter of 1843-44 during an unhappy stint as director of Prussian church music while in Berlin, after which he returned to Leipzig. The Bach Cantata Choir will sing Psalm 43 in this concert.

John Chilgren sings bass with both the Bach Cantata and Portland Symphonic Choirs. He previously sang 19 years with the Portland Choral Arts Ensemble. For more than 40 years he has been a book and film reviewer for AAAS Science Books and Films.

Bach Cantata Choir

Artistic Director
Ralph Nelson

Assistant Conductor
Emma M. Riggle

Accompanist
John Vergin

Board of Directors
President
Ralph Nelson

Secretary
Emily Rampton

Treasurer
Julie Beck

Members at Large
Don Coates
Jim Hook
Barbara Lance
Pat Messick
Sue Nelson
Woody Richen

The Bach Cantata Choir's mission is to sing the entire set of cantatas by Johann Sebastian Bach over a period of 30 years.

The Bach Cantata Choir is a legally organized non-profit

Harvest and Holiday Market

Following the concert, join us in the church parlor for our Harvest and Holiday Market!

Check out the creative artwork, offerings, and homemade goodies created by our multi-talented choir members. Prices are marked for immediate purchase.

Each purchase helps to support the Bach Cantata Choir.



corporation under Oregon law, and is a registered 501(c)(3) corporation with the IRS. Donations to the choir are tax-deductible to the extent provided by law and regulation. The *BachBeat* newsletter is published cyclically by the Bach Cantata Choir.

Emily Rampton, Editor.



Thank you!

We appreciate the generosity of all who support the Bach Cantata Choir.

Join our Growing List of Season Sponsors!

Sponsorships are available at two levels (below). To become a sponsor, visit our [website](#).

Friends of the Choir (\$100-249)	Director's Circle (\$250+)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recognition on our website and program.• Invitation to special events, including "Bach-sing" day carol sing on Dec. 26 and a book discussion party* in the spring.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All the benefits available to Friends of the Choir.• Two tickets to the Baroque Holiday Concert.

* **Book discussion**

Evening in the Palace of Reason — Bach meets Frederick the Great in the Age of Enlightenment
by James R. Gaines

Available in hardback, paperback, Kindle or Nook versions.

For a New York Times review: <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/17/books/review/evening-in-the-palace-of-reason-being-geniuses-together.html>

[Click to view this email in a browser](#)

If you no longer wish to receive these emails, please reply to this message with "Unsubscribe" in the subject line or simply click on the following link: [Unsubscribe](#)

[Click here to forward this email to a friend](#)

USA

[Read](#) the VerticalResponse marketing policy.

