

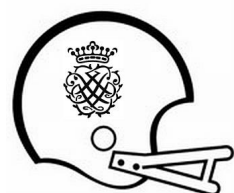
Bach Beat

The Newsletter of the Bach Cantata Choir

February 2018

www.bachcantatachoir.org

Vol. 11, No. 3



Super Bach Sunday

Sunday, February 4, 2018 at 2:00 p.m.



"And this choir does seem to rejoice so in singing." - Bruce Browne

Johann Sebastian Bach: *Brandenburg Concerto No. 4*
Cantata 71 "Gott ist mein König"

Johann Ludwig Bach: *Unsere Trübsal*
Dietrich Buxtehude: *Nun danket alle Gott*

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](#)).

Free will offerings gratefully accepted.

Back-to-Back Bach

By John Chilgren—Bass



While the players of the Super Bowl are never known for certain, the Super Bach concerts leave no doubt as to who will be front and center with the Bach Cantata Choir. In the Super Bach concert, it is "back-to-back Bach." We also feature an early mentor of J. S. Bach whom we've met before: Dietrich Buxtehude.

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

The six Brandenburg concertos are so named because they were dedicated to Margrave Christian Ludwig of Brandenburg in 1721. In the Baroque era, Brandenburg was one of seven electoral states of the Holy Roman Empire and a state that eventually became united with the Duchy of Prussia to form the Kingdom of Prussia.

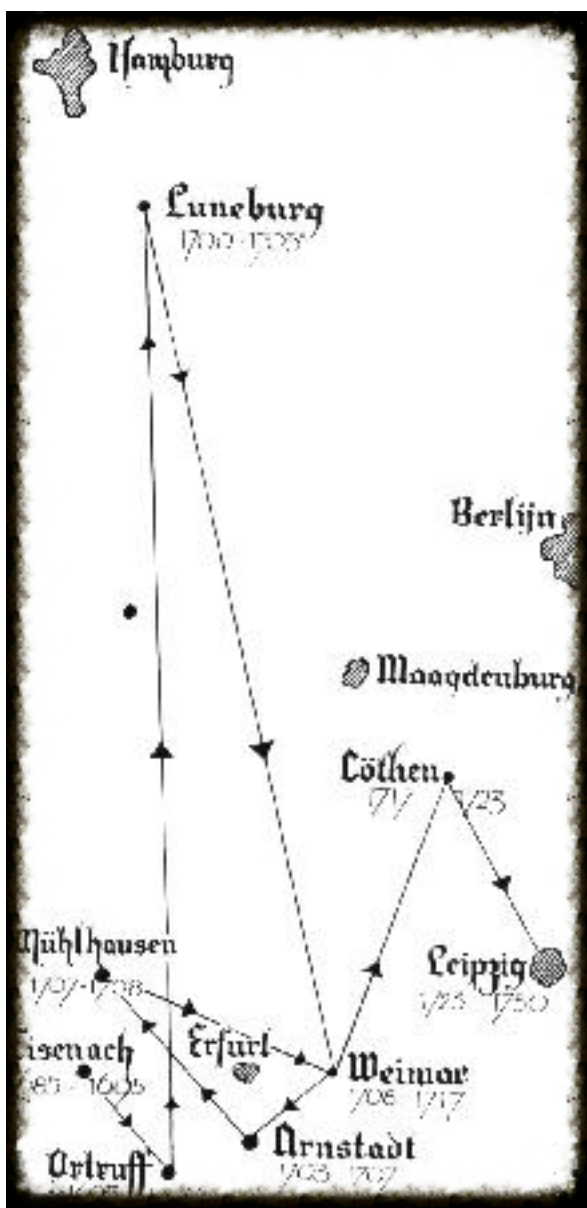
Bach served as *Capellmeister* for Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen from 1717-1723, a period during which he composed most of his secular music including orchestral suites, the six cello suites, sonatas and partitas for solo violin and at least some of the Brandenburg concertos. He also had the opportunity to visit Berlin when Prince Leopold, himself a musician, ordered a harpsichord from that city and needed Bach's eye, and ear, for an inspection.

Nor did Bach's reputation go unnoticed by the Margrave of Brandenburg, who sent Bach an invitation to attend court while in Berlin. Bach's reply included the sentence:

"I...have taken the liberty of discharging my humble obligation to Your Royal Highness with the present concertos which I have adapted to several instruments, begging you most humbly not to judge their imperfections by the standards of that refined and delicate taste in music that everyone knows you to possess, but rather to accept, with benign consideration, the profound respect and most humble devotion that I attempt to show by this means."

If these concertos were designed to secure some sort of employment from the Margrave, they didn't succeed. There appears to be no record that Bach ever received a reply or evidence that the Margrave himself even heard them performed.

Brandenburg Concerto No. 4 heard at this concert is one of the finest examples of the *concerto grosso*, a term first used by Italian Baroque violinist and composer **Arcangelo Corelli** (1653 – 1713), in which the music is passed between a smaller group of solo instruments (*concertino*) and the full orchestra (*ripieno*). In this fashion, the *concerto grosso* allowed an individual's virtuosity to flourish, to wit, the solo violin in Concerto No. 4 in G major. Bach's original score called for solo violin and two *flauti d'echo* in the *concertino*; the first and second violins, viola, cello, violone (precursor of the double bass) and continuo made up the *ripieno*. What, you may ask, is an echo flute? Certainly not today's flute, called a *flauto traverso* in Bach's time, but rather an end-blown recorder.



Johann Sebastian Bach successfully applied for the position of organist in Mühlhausen at the St. Blaise church in April 1707 after hearing of the death of the former organist. At the time, Bach was employed as organist in Arnstadt but that position had become fraught with problems, not the least of which was his long unauthorized absence two years earlier (four weeks became four months) to visit and study with his idol **Dietrich Buxtehude** in Lübeck, north of Hamburg. (Keeping it in the family, his successor in Arnstadt was his first cousin, Johann Ernst Bach.) Sebastian Bach began working in Mühlhausen in July 1707 and began to improve the music facilities of the city. This included creating a new orchestra, developing a choir, and amassing the best German music, including his own, for the town to hear.

Mühlhausen had been governed by a Town Council, rather than by princes and other royalty, for the previous 400 years, being a free imperial city and subordinate only to the Holy Roman Emperor. It was the Town Council that installed Sebastian as their 22-year-old organist in the splendid 13th century Gothic (later Protestant) church inside this walled city. His work required the performance of a cantata, which Bach timed for the Mühlhausen *Ratswahl* or inauguration of the new Town Council. His Cantata 71, "*Gott ist mein König*" is among his earliest works. It was his second cantata, and the only cantata to be published, at the town council's expense, during his lifetime. This festive work requires trumpets, flutes, oboes, bassoon, strings, tympani and organ. The choral sections are divided between a *tutti* (*coro pleno* in Bach's terminology) and a *senza ripieni* (smaller ensemble). The seven movements include scriptural citations to Psalm 74 as well as several references to old age which possibly referred to the retiring burgomaster, 83-year-old Adolf Strecker. The 6th movement contains the beautiful prayer from Psalm 74: *Do not deliver the soul of your turtledove to your enemy*. The European turtledove has a distinct mournful song and has long been a symbol of devoted love.



Owing to theological disputes, fractious interpersonal relationships, and musical disagreements, Bach's stay in Mühlhausen was a mere nine months, after which he moved to Weimar in the employ of Duke Wilhelm Ernst, the brother of his former employer at Weimar some years before.

Johann Ludwig Bach (1677-1731)

We first encountered **Johann Ludwig Bach** on these pages in May 2016. He was born in February 1677 in the village of Thal, which was near Eisenach, the birthplace of his much more famous cousin Sebastian. Ludwig and Sebastian were third cousins, sharing the same great-great-grandfather Veit Bach, the patriarch of the 300 year Bach dynasty. While Sebastian held various positions, Ludwig would spend most of his life in one city, Meiningen, located south of

Eisenach, and would eventually be known as the "Meiningen Bach."



Ludwig attended the Gymnasium in Gotha for five years (1688-1693) where he studied theology along with music. Singing and teaching were his first jobs in Salzungen, and he was the first in the Bach lineage to receive a position in a court, his being in the newly created principality of Saxe-Meiningen in 1708. In addition to being Cantor, he was saddled with strict obligations and tedious administrative and supervisory activities which stifled his creativity until replacements were found for all the duties he disliked; in 1711 he was appointed as *Capellmeister* of the court orchestra. He would remain in this position for the rest of his relatively short life, dying in May 1731 at the age of 54. He was survived by his wife and two talented children, one of whom, Gottlieb Friedrich Bach, became a portrait artist who sketched many images of the Bach family, including that of J. S. Bach, the "Meiningen pastel."

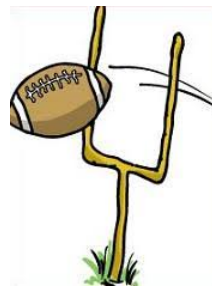
Ludwig Bach's specialty was sacred music; however, very few of his compositions survive. Among the surviving works are 22 sacred cantatas, 11 motets, a Mass, a Magnificat, and orchestral suite, funeral music for his beloved patron, Duke Ernst Ludwig, and a double violin concerto. Were it not for a visit from his cousin J. S. Bach at some point in the early 18th century, the cantatas would have been lost as well, but Sebastian Bach copied them, editing and performing 19 of them in 1726 while in Leipzig. These cantatas were, in the 18th and 19th century, the most popular and respected of Ludwig's compositions even though today one hears his motets performed more frequently. The motets often feature unique stylistic word painting or expressive musical sections as can be heard in the beginning of the SSATTB motet *Unser Trübsal*. The text of this motet is from 2 Corinthians 4:17-18 and in it there are two contrasting ideas: the material world (visible) and the spiritual (invisible). The motet is written in three sections, each with a different meter and tempo. The soprano voices often sing together in thirds juxtaposed against the lower voices. The date and first performance of this work are unknown.

Dietrich Buxtehude (c. 1637-1707)

Considerable space was dedicated in the previous issue of the *BachBeat* to the great German/Danish organist, **Dietrich Buxtehude**, who spent almost 40 years at *Marienkirche* in Lübeck. His influence on J. S. Bach was considerable, the young Bach having studied with and copied music of the baroque master during a prolonged visit in 1705. Buxtehude's job at *Marienkirche* never required him to write vocal music and yet more than 120 compositions in various genres, texts, styles and scoring are part of his legacy. These works have survived largely due to the collections made by a Swedish colleague and friend, Gustav Duben, *Capellmeister* at the court in Stockholm.



Most of Buxtehude's cantatas, including the one performed at this concert, were probably written between 1676-1687. Nothing is known about any music composed during the last 20 years of his life. *Nun danket alle Gott* (Now thank we all our God), BuxVW79, is one of the sacred cantatas preserved in the Duben collection. Scored for SSATB, strings, trumpets, bassoon, and continuo, it's a richly-contrived work, consistent with Buxtehude's far-flung reputation for entertainment and excellence. The date of composition and first performance of this work are unknown.



John Chilgren sings bass with the Bach Cantata Choir; he formerly sang with the Portland Symphonic Choir and Choral Arts Ensemble. For 20 years he was pianist and choral director of three SW United Methodist Churches and has been a book and film reviewer for over 45 years.

Thank you!

"Portland's Bach Cantata Choir has grown in artistic excellence in the past several years. The sonic values are fresh and vibrant. This choir has a wide age range, fine choral singers all. Many have labored in the choral trenches for several decades and are joined by a healthy number of those beginning their choral careers." So writes Bruce Browne in his December 29 ArtsWatch review of our 2017 Holiday Baroque Concert. Read the entire review here: <http://www.orartswatch.org/bach-cantata-choir-sweet-rejoicing/>

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

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- Recognition on our website and program.
- Invitation to special events, including "Bach-Sing" day carol sing on Dec. 26 and an event in the spring.

Director's Circle (\$250-499)

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- Two tickets to the Baroque Holiday Concert.

Bach Cantata Choir

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When God Sang German

We are proud to announce that choir member William B. Fischer has published a new book, *When God Sang German*. Sample copies of Dr. Fischer's book will be available at our February 4 concert:

Music is a universal language, but the German that Bach uses in his sacred music is not. "When God Sang German" explains the etymologies and precise meanings of words like Gott (God), Mutterleib ('womb'), Schuld (debt, guilt), Glauben (faith, believe), and Gnade (mercy, grace). The Introduction traces the history of German, with particular regard to language in music and to Luther's importance to Bach...The author is a scholar of literature, language teacher, and experienced singer of Bach and opera. He has taught practical German to young opera singers, crawled through the rafters of the Thomaskirche in Leipzig, and been chained behind an elephant as an Ethiopian POW in Aida. — Amazon.

Concert notes

No tickets required. A free-will offering will be accepted.

The church's parking lot is very small and fills up quickly. Please allow time to find on-street parking.
(No concert parking in the Grocery Outlet lot.)

The church has an elevator accessible from its parking lot, facing Sandy Blvd.

Helping Hands

The choir needs volunteers to assist at concerts and related events. Volunteers might serve as ushers, handing out programs or helping with seating. If you are interested, please contact us:

Email: info@BachCantataChoir.org
Phone: (503) 702-1973

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 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

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