

BachBeat

The Newsletter of the Bach Cantata Choir

March 2018

www.bachcantatachoir.org

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Lenten and Palm Sunday Concert

Sunday, March 25, 2018 at 2:00 p.m.

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

Johann Sebastian Bach: *BWV 159 Sehet! wir gehn hinauf gen Jerusalem*
 Palestrina: *Pueri Hebraeorum*
 Alice Parker (traditional, arr.): *Ride on, King Jesus*
 Felix Mendelssohn: *Wer nun den lieben Gott lässt walten*
 Johann Sebastian Bach: *BWV 22 Jesus nahm zu sich die Zwölfe*

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.

Before and After Bach

By John Chilgren—Bass

As we are in the liturgical season of Lent, the Bach Cantata Choir will perform works written before and after the Baroque master **J. S. Bach** took center stage in the early 18th century. In this manner the audience can enjoy music appropriate for Lent spanning a period of more than 400 years.

Palestrina (c. 1525-1594)

At the cessation of the medieval period ca. 1400, the invention of the printing press in 1440 revolutionized both the method of learning and of distributing music. New music styles emerged during this period known as the Renaissance (ca. 1400-1600). Among the new composers to flourish in Europe, especially in Italy, was **Giovanni Periluigi** born in a village near Rome called **Palestrina**. Today he is simply known as **Palestrina**. Palestrina's life was described in some detail in the May 2015 and May 2016 issues of the BachBeat newsletters (<http://www.bachcantatachoir.org/>). Born about 1525, Palestrina visited Rome perhaps in 1537, becoming a chorister in the Basilica of St. Mary (*Santa Maria Maggiore*). Little is known of his early history, but a 300-400 year-old Vatican manuscript relates the story of young Giovanni singing in the streets of Rome as he sold products from his parents' farm. Overheard by the choirmaster of St. Mary, Giovanni was taken in by this unknown choirmaster and trained, thus beginning a long and productive career. His fame grew after he was called to Rome in 1551 to be entrusted with the training and direction of the choirboys at St. Peter's Basilica (*Basilica Papale di San Pietro in Vaticano*) and he was soon promoted to choirmaster. In 1554 he dedicated his first compositions to Pope Julius III. After working at various churches for the next 17 years, he returned to the Julian chapel (*Cappella Giulia*) at St. Peter's in 1571 where he remained for the rest of his life. Palestrina died of pleurisy on February 2, 1594, surrounded by friends and in the



arms of his beloved friend Philip Neri, canonized by Pope Gregory in 1622.

Despite many personal losses (a brother, first wife, and three sons), Palestrina would eventually become the most important liturgical composer of his era (and for all time per the Vatican), bringing centuries of vocal polyphony cultivated in France, England, and the Netherlands to its full development. His extensive compositions include masses, offertories, madrigals, motets, hymns, Magnificats, litanies and lamentations. Greatly esteemed by his contemporaries, Palestrina's music continued to be sung centuries after his death. Dubbed "God's secretary" in the influential biography of Palestrina (1828) by **Giuseppe Baini** (1775-1844), Palestrina was the Counter-Reformation saint whose ideology was to connect the congregation to the richness of the liturgy, largely by incorporating elements of Gregorian Chant into his music. An example of this will be heard in his motet, *Pueri Hebraeorum*, a Gregorian Antiphon frequently sung for Palm Sunday.

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

At its last concert, the choir performed BWV 71, **J. S. Bach's** early cantata written expressly for the inauguration of the new Town Council in Mühlhausen in 1707. This concert will include music written 15 years later; Bach had moved on from Mühlhausen and was now leaving the employ of Prince Leopold in the Court of Anhalt-Cöthen.

Candidates:

~~Telemann~~

~~Graupner~~

~~Kauffman~~

~~Schott~~

~~Rolle~~

Bach

Upon hearing about the death of **Johann Kuhnau**, Cantor of *Thomasschule* in Leipzig in June of 1722, Bach decided to apply for this position. He wouldn't be the town council's first or even second choice, however. Kuhnau had been not only an excellent musician, fulfilling his many Cantorate duties extremely well, but had also been a successful lawyer proficient in Hebrew, Greek, and mathematics. An ideal replacement would have been **Georg Philipp Telemann** who had previously established himself in Leipzig as music director of the city opera and organist at *Neukirche*, and had founded the popular *Collegium Musicum*. However, Telemann was in his second year as Cantor in Hamburg and, like Bach, had many extracurricular activities, such as the Hamburg *Collegium Musicum* and city opera, all to the displeasure of the Hamburg council. This council drafted a letter forbidding such outside activities, leaving Telemann with few options. Already in hand was the offer to work once again in Leipzig; Telemann was more than

willing to accept that position and he asked to be released from his contract. After considerable deliberations, the Hamburg council decided that Telemann was too valuable to be discharged, so they increased his salary and allowed him to continue his outside activities. That left the Leipzig Town Council to consider their other candidates. These were **Christoph Graupner** (*Capellmeister* in Darmstadt), **Georg Friedrich Kauffmann** (music director and court organist in Merseburg), **Georg Balthasar Schott** (organist at *Neukirche* and director of the Leipzig Collegium Musicum), and **Johann Heinrich Rolle** (Cantor at Magdeburg), and **Johann Sebastian Bach**. All candidates were told to compose a cantata to be performed in one of the Leipzig churches in early 1723. Bach and Graupner were each assigned to write two cantatas, indicating they were favored candidates. Graupner's audition was scheduled for January 17, and Bach's three weeks later on February 7.

Graupner also was no stranger in Leipzig, having been trained at the *Thomasschule* with Kuhnau as one of his teachers and having studied law at the university. Graupner's reputation as a composer was growing, first in Hamburg (opera) and later in the employ of Ernst-Ludwig, Landgrave of Hessen-Darmstadt, becoming the *Hofcapellmeister* there in 1711. He would go on to write 1,418 sacred and 24 secular cantatas, outproducing even J. S. Bach. As with Telemann in Hamburg, the Ludwig court decided that Graupner was too exceptional, so their refusal to release him gave the esteemed Leipzig position to the only remaining desirable candidate: Bach. (Graupner too received a salary raise and remained in Darmstadt until his death in 1760.)

The Bach Cantata Choir presented one of Bach's two audition cantatas during the 2015-2016 season (see http://www.bachcantatachoir.org/uploads/2/4/0/8/2408892/vol9-4_newsletter_pdf). The other, Cantata 22 *Jesus nahm zu sich die Zwölfe* (Jesus took under Him the twelve), was composed for the Sunday before Ash Wednesday and is sung at this Lenten concert. The second cantata sung at this concert, Cantata 159 *Sehet, wir gehn hinauf gen Jerusalem* (Behold we go up to Jerusalem), was written and performed in Leipzig for the last Sunday before Lent in 1729. Since no cantatas were performed during Lent, it was the last one heard until Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* was performed on Good Friday.

Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy (1809-1847)

Soon after the death of Bach came revolution in politics, industry, and music, the last involving more virtuosity, emotion, instrumental music, expanded symphonies, etc. About 75 years after the death of Bach, the Romantic era (ca. 1825-1900) brought many composers to the forefront, among them Hamburg-born **Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy**. Like many composers after Bach, Mendelssohn studied the music of Bach which, at the time, was considered outdated. At least two events predisposed the young Felix to rekindle public interest in Bach: 1) receiving a copy of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* as a gift from his grandmother for his 14th birthday and 2) being inspired by his piano teacher, **Carl Zelter**, himself taught by a student of J. S. Bach and who possessed a large private collection of Bach manuscripts. Zelter, director of the famous Berlin *Sing-Akademie*, would later be persuaded by Felix and his friend Eduard Devrient, a German baritone and actor, to perform Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* to a sold-out audience of 400 with 1,000 waiting outside on March 11, 1829 at the *Sing-Akademie*. (In 1841 Mendelssohn would conduct the *Passion* in Leipzig as music director of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra; proceeds from this concert would be used to erect a monument to J. S. Bach.)



Mendelssohn's short 37 years were long enough to leave the world with an immense amount of orchestral, instrumental, piano, lieder, and choral music. *Wer nur den lieben Gott läßt walten* (Whoever lets only the dear God reign) was a hymn written in 1641 by the German poet and hymn-writer **Georg Neumark** (1621-1681). It was used by J. S. Bach several times, particularly in his cantata BWV 93 of the same name, as well as by **Johannes Brahms** (1833-1897) and by Mendelssohn in 1829 as the sacred concerto sung at this Lenten concert.

Alice Parker (1925-)

Moving forward to the 20th century, the Bach Cantata Choir sings the Afro-American Spiritual, *Ride On, King Jesus*, arranged by **Alice Parker** and **Robert Shaw** (1916-1999), whose long and productive collaboration were showcased in the May 2017 edition of the BachBeat (http://www.bachcantatachoir.org/uploads/2/4/0/8/2408892/vol10-5_newsletter.pdf). A graduate of Smith College and the Juilliard School, she eventually became associated with Robert Shaw and his well-known Robert Shaw Chorale, winner of multiple Grammy awards. Their arrangements of spirituals and other choral music are among the best known in the repertoire. Although Alice Parker regarded *Ride On, King Jesus* as a song about Jesus riding into Jerusalem, she also suggested it as an “affirmation throughout the ages” as it’s a song for all time and all people, rich or poor.



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.

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- Two tickets to the Baroque Holiday Concert.

When God Sang German

We are proud to announce that choir member William B. Fischer has published a new book, *When God Sang German*.

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.

Our next BachBeat will highlight another book that may be of interest to our audience. Stay tuned.

Concert notes

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

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

Elevator available from church parking lot on Sandy Blvd.

Bach Cantata Choir

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Ralph Nelson

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Helping Hands

The choir needs volunteers to assist at concerts and related events. Volunteers might serve as ushers, handing out programs or helping with elevator operation. Several individuals have already stepped into these roles but we can use more. 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.

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