

# Bach Beat

The Newsletter of the Bach Cantata Choir



December 2019

[www.bachcantatachoir.org](http://www.bachcantatachoir.org)

Vol. 13, No. 2

## ***Baroque Holiday Concert*** ***Friday, December 20, 2019 at 7:30 pm***

**Jan Dismas Zelenka: *Magnificat in D ZWV 108***  
**Bernard Hermann: *It is Now Christmas***  
**Harold Darke: *In the Bleak Midwinter***  
**Johann Sebastian Bach: *Christmas Oratorio BWV 248 Parts 4-6***

Soloists for this concert include: Brian Tierney, Jocelyn Thomas, Laura Butler, Hannah Penn, Nan Haemer, and Paul Sadilek

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](#)).

Tickets are required for this concert. Brown Paper Tickets <https://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/4403832>

### ***Musical Traditions***

Please join us at the Baroque Holiday Concert for 2019.

This concert offers a pair of carols for the Christmas season: *In the Bleak Midwinter* (Harold Darke) and *It Is Now Christmas* (Bernard Hermann). This version of the Hermann piece is edited by the late Martin Tobias, a member of BCC.

Last year the choir paused its annual presentation of Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* and sang instead his *Magnificat in D Major*. This year we present another Magnificat, this one by the Czech-born composer Jan Dismas Zelenka.

And we return to our tradition of presenting J. S. Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*. The oratorio consists of six parts, each part a cantata in itself. This year we present Parts 4-6.

#### **Bernard Hermann (1911-1975)**

Bernard Hermann joined the Columbia Broadcasting System in the early 1930s and by 1940 was Conductor-in-Chief of the Columbia Symphony Orchestra. In 1941 he composed the soundtrack for Orson Welles's movie *Citizen Kane*. Later he worked with Alfred Hitchcock and composed the musical scores for *Vertigo* and *North by Northwest*, among other movies.

He composed *It Is Now Christmas* for his opera *Wuthering Heights* which he completed in 1950. *Wuthering Heights* had its world premiere in 1982 with the Portland Opera Association at Civic Auditorium (Portland, Oregon). Since that time, many local carolers have sung *It Is Now Christmas*.

### **Harold Darke (1888-1976)**

Harold (Edwin) Darke was a long-time London organist who filled in at Kings College Cambridge during World War II. The English poet Christina Rossetti had written *In the Bleak Midwinter* in 1872. Gustav Holst set it to music in 1906, and Darke's setting followed a few years later. The piece is often included in the Lessons and Carols from Kings College Cambridge which is a December tradition for many.

### **Jan Dismas Zelenka (1679-1745)**

Jan Zelenka composed two Magnificats, one in C and this one in D. Written in 1725, Zelenka's *Magnificat in D* is compact and precise, with solos for soprano and alto. The Magnificat is traditionally sung at Vespers. "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior," sings Mary. In the Bible, the Magnificat is a canticle (or song) that Mary sings after she visits her cousin Elizabeth (Luke 1:46-55). Mary is praising and thanking God for allowing her to give birth to Jesus, whom Christians consider to be the Son of God. In many ways, she sings a very strong "protest" song, including the words, "He has put down the mighty from their thrones. He has scattered the proud in their conceit and has sent the rich empty away."

Zelenka was born near Prague in 1679. His father was an organist and likely his first teacher. Young Zelenka continued his studies in Prague and Vienna and became a bass viol player; therefore, any bass player today must live up to the expectations of this talented musician and composer. He was hired by the court in Dresden, holding positions of increasing importance, and was a prolific composer of masses and other works as required for services in Catholic Dresden.

Bach and Zelenka were contemporaries. Unlike Bach, Zelenka never married; he left no heirs and very little personal information. But it is certain that the two composers were personal friends who knew and admired each other's work. Bach would have heard Zelenka's music played in Dresden. Bach himself longed to work in Dresden, where his son Wilhelm Friedemann was an organist, but the elder Bach never achieved that goal. Bach was so impressed with the "Amen" from this *Magnificat* that he obtained a handwritten copy of that section for his own use at Leipzig's Thomaskirche.

### **J.S. Bach (1685-1750)**

Returning to the Christmas Oratorio is like welcoming the return of an old friend. As was common in Leipzig, our audience will be invited to stand and sing selected chorales as noted in the program.

The Oratorio was composed in Leipzig for the Christmas season of 1734-35. For the last three parts, the work is scored for horns, trumpets, timpani, oboes, oboes d'amore, violins, viola, and continuo in addition to the SATB chorus and soloists. Bach, always a master of repurposing, transformed some of his own works which had been written for entirely different occasions and employed a librettist to create this seasonal set of six cantatas. Each cantata was performed on its own, each for a specific feast day of the Christmas season. The last three parts were scheduled as follows:

- Part 4 January 1, 1735: morning at St. Thomas; afternoon at St. Nicholas
- Part 5 January 2, 1735: morning at St Nicholas (a Sunday)
- Part 6 January 6, 1735: morning at St. Thomas; afternoon at St. Nicholas

Part 4 (Feast of the Circumcision) begins with a lilting chorus in 3/8 time: "Fallt mit Danken, fallt mit Loben" (Bow ye, thankful, kneel and praise ye). The evangelist tells us "And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, then was the name of the child called Jesus..." The bass sings of accepting this Jesus into his heart, while the soprano senses an impending sadness and loss. The soprano and her echo also struggle to find meaning in these events; the echo answers "Nein" to questions of fear and doubt, then finally "Ja" in a strong affirmation of joy, now that Christ has come. The closing chorus is "Jesus, be my firm foundation."

Part 5 (First Sunday in the New Year) The opening chorus of this cantata suggests a virtual light show of angels singing "Ehre sei Gott!" (Glory be to God almighty! Glory, praise, and thanks today; all the world doth worship Thee.) This chorus is in 3/4 time but with a very different energy from the previous cantata; it is scored "vivace" (lively) and these angels take their jobs seriously. While the angels are singing, the Wise Men seek Jesus, having seen his star in the east, and they ask where he can be found. The evangelist tells us "Now when King Herod had heard these things, he was troubled, and the whole Jerusalem troubled with him." (It was well-known that Herod was a brutal and jealous ruler.) The alto sings "And why are you thus shaken? Why should my Jesus coming here such fear in you awaken?" Yet even as Herod ponders the birth of a potential

rival, the soprano, alto, and tenor anticipate the coming of peace and salvation.

Part 6 (Feast of Epiphany) begins in 3/8 time, as did Part 4, this time with trumpets and timpani: "Lord, when our haughty foes assail us, let not our faith and courage fail." Fear, doubt, and darkness have given way to faith, hope, and light as represented by the newborn king. The evangelist tells us that the Wise Men, having located and visited the Christ Child, foil the plans of King Herod and return home by another route. Jesus is safe, for now.

For the visit of the Wise Men, Bach includes a chorale "Ich steh an deiner Krippen hier" which has special significance to the choir. Members of the Bach Cantata Choir sang this in 2018 in the town of Eisenach, gathered around the font in which the infant Johann Sebastian Bach was baptized. A few days later in Leipzig we sang it again, this time gathered around his grave in the Thomaskirche.

I stand beside Thy cradle here, O Jesus child so tender.  
The all which Thou has given me which I to Thee surrender.  
Take thou my spirit, take my soul,  
my heart and mind in Thy control,  
and graciously receive them.

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**Fun Fact** In this holiday season of St. Nicholas, it seems appropriate to note that the choir's 2020 tour will have us singing in three different churches named for St. Nicholas:

- St. Nicholas Church in Jüterbog
- St. Nicholas Church in Leipzig
- St. Nicholas Church in Prague

### **Bach Festival Leipzig 2020**

We are excited to return to Leipzig in June 2020 to participate in the annual BachFest Leipzig. We are among 18 choirs from around the world who are coming together to perform Bach's chorale cantatas during this 10-day festival. Later this season we will perform the three chorale cantatas which we have been asked to prepare.

The choir tour (June 11-20, 2020) will begin in Berlin, proceed to Leipzig for 3-4 days, and conclude in Prague. We have room for more non-singing "groupies" on this tour. Tour cost (exclusive of airfare) is \$3,500 per person. (Note: You must additionally provide your own airfare and meet the group in Berlin on June 11, 2020. Price includes all hotels (double occupancy), all ground transportation and 1-2 meals per day. Price also includes tickets to the choir's performance at the Leipzig Bach Fest, but does not include tickets to other Leipzig Bach Festival events – these must be purchased separately. If you are interested in joining us, please email the choir at [info@bachcantatachoir.org](mailto:info@bachcantatachoir.org).

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### **Thank you!**

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

### **Join our Growing List of Season Sponsors!**

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

### **Bach Cantata Choir**

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### *Concert Notes*

**Admission:**

**Artistic Director**  
Ralph Nelson

**Accompanist**  
John Vergin

**Board of Directors**

*President*  
Ralph Nelson

*Vice President*  
Woody Richen

*Secretary*  
Emily Rampton

*Treasurer*  
Julie Beck

*Members at Large*  
Ruth Bolliger  
Don Coates  
Kristie Gladhill  
Jim Hook  
Barbara Lance  
Sue Nelson

- **Ticket are required** for this concert.
- You may order online at Brown Paper Tickets: <https://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/4403832>
- You may also purchase tickets without a service fee from choir members or at the door (if available).

### **Parking:**

- The church's parking lot is very small and fills up quickly. Please allow time to find on-street parking.
- Do not park in the Grocery Outlet lot!

### **Accessibility:**

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

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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