

Bach Beat

The Newsletter of the Bach Cantata Choir



February 2020

www.bachcantatachoir.org

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Super Bach Sunday! ***Sunday, February 2, 2020 at 2:00 pm***

Giovanni Gabrieli: *Canzona #28*
In ecclesiis in 14 parts
Gloria in 12 parts

Johann Sebastian Bach: *BWV 1043 Concerto for two violins in D minor*
BWV #38 Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir
BWV #149 Man singet mit Freuden vom Sieg

Soloists for this concert include: Hannah Penn, Jacob Herbert, Leslie Green, and Vakarė Petroliūnaitė
Violins: Mary Rowell, Erin Green

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](#)).

Admission is free. A free-will offering will be taken.

Good Angels vs Bad Angels: May the Best Team Win

Please join us at the 2020 Super Bach concert! As always, we offer you an extra helping of Bach (not one but TWO cantatas, and even the violin concerto is a double) along with a healthy serving of brass to liven things up.

In June 2020, the Bach Cantata Choir will participate in the annual Leipzig Bach Festival, which offers ten days of music, primarily but not entirely Bach. This year's festival includes such varied offerings as *Bach Meets Heavy Metal*, and *Flying Bach* (break dancing). The festival will also celebrate Beethoven in the 250th anniversary year of his birth.

The theme for this year's festival is *We Are Family*. In this case it is a very large family; we are one of 18 Bach choirs coming from 15 countries on five continents to perform the complete cycle of chorale cantatas which are programmed in liturgical order.

The chorale, or hymn, was an established part of the Lutheran service. Martin Luther himself wrote many of them. The congregation knew and sang the chorales on a regular basis. Building on this tradition, Bach undertook a major project when he arrived in Leipzig in 1723: he would compose a new cantata for each Sunday as well as feast days. Between July 1724 and July 1725 these cantatas were specifically based on Lutheran hymns in keeping with the liturgical calendar. Others he wrote in later years. These are the chorale cantatas and they follow a certain format in which the first movement is generally a choral fantasia based on the hymn and the final movement is a stanza of the hymn itself. Just as we invite our Portland audience to join us in singing the final chorale, the Leipzig audience will sing the chorale just before the cantata.

For the festival, we have been assigned three chorale cantatas, all composed in Leipzig in 1740 and intended for use on

the 20th, 21st, and 22nd Sundays after Trinity: *Schmücke dich, o liebe Seele*, BWV 180; *Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir*, BWV 38; and *Mache dich, mein Geist, bereit*, BWV 115. For the February concert we offer BWV 38. The other two will be heard in future concerts as we prepare for this special opportunity in Leipzig.



Giovanni Gabrieli (ca. 1557-1612)

The brass always plays a prominent role on Super Bach Sunday. While we cannot replicate the acoustics of St. Mark's, the brass will perform a *canzona* with two trumpets and two trombones, and the choir will sing two works also by Giovanni Gabrieli.

In ecclesiis was first published in 1615, after the composer's death. Written for two choirs and instruments, it features a variety of configurations both for voices and instruments. It includes the soft and loud variations referenced below by Gerald Webster, and, when performed at St. Mark's, would have taken full advantage of spatial separation of the different groups. Soloists sing the verses, each followed by a strong and recognizable choral *Alleluia* of which no two are voiced quite alike.

The 12-voice *Gloria* is an antiphonal work in which the singers are divided into three separate choirs.

Gerald Webster, a long-time Professor of Trumpet and Coordinator of Brass Studies at PSU, shares some of his experiences:

"Having performed internationally for most of my years on the trumpet, I consider myself very privileged to have played concerts in San Marco in Venice. I also played at St. Peter's Basilica, the Duomos in Florence, Milan, etc. These were remarkable experiences, but St. Mark's was special. In addition to the acoustics, the cathedral is visually unique with its bright gold mosaics, spacious interior and greenish-golden light. And since Venetian law was that all traders bring back something valuable for the church from their journeys, San Marco is a treasure trove of fine art and jewelry.

Built in the shape of the Greek Cross, with all four arms of equal length, the church uniquely contains two opposing gallery areas which ultimately gave birth to a *coro spezzati* (separate choirs and separate small organs), and thus antiphonal liturgical chant flourished. Unique to the space there were octagonal platforms known as *bigonzi* or tubs/platforms that are about 6 feet off the floor and several feet apart in the center area of the church. Contrary to popular beliefs, the musicians were most often placed in these platforms, not in the choir lofts. In addition to viols and bassoons, early brass instruments called cornetti (an instrument resembling the modern day recorder) and sackbuts (early trombones) were used to support the voices in the choir and offer wonderful contrasts in timbre, especially with San Marco's acoustical characteristics with its 5-6 second sound decay.

As an innovator, Giovanni Gabrieli (ca.1557-1612) was one of the first to indicate levels of volume (*forte vs piano*) to be played by the instrumentalists. And his close relationship to Giovanni Bassano and Girolamo dalla Casa (both wonderful cornetto players) increased his own inclination to apply "divisions" (melodic ornaments) to his music. Melodic improvisation, as we know it, therefore actually began in the early 17th century and can easily be compared to modern day jazz!

While the modern trumpet and trombone have a much more complex set of overtones in their sound when compared to their early counterparts, the excitement of mixing timbral colors together with today's larger sized choirs still remains.

As an aside, when I was the Music Director of the 1974 World's Fair in Spokane, I organized a brass band as the official music ensemble (the first in the history of World's Fairs). We performed throughout the site, but our most favorite location used the acoustics of the Opera House exterior wall, the floating stage on the river and the buildings opposite. Talk about echo and delay! Gabrieli would have been extremely happy!!"

Jerry Webster



Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

BWV 38 Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir ("In deepest need I cry to you")

This chorale cantata begins and ends with text from the first and the fifth stanzas of a hymn by Martin Luther; the hymn itself was sung at Luther's funeral in 1546. The opening chorus takes a canonical form, beginning with a descending fifth on the syllable "tief-" (deep). The sopranos then have the cantus firmus (chorale tune) while the lower voices continue contrapuntally. The closing chorale is tutti. The work is scored for two oboes, bassoon, four trombones, strings, and organ.

The intervening recitatives and arias (alto, tenor, and soprano solos and a trio for soprano, alto and bass) further develop the theme of crying for relief. The singers remind themselves that the Lord will comfort and rescue them, yet they seem not fully convinced that this can be true. Listen for the chorale tune within these movements; it occurs in the continuo during the soprano recitative.

The closing chorale, which is the actual hymn, at last carries a greater note of confidence as the combined voices affirm:

His helping hand has no limit, however great the harm may be.
He alone is the Good Shepherd who will redeem Israel from all its sins.

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

BWV 149 Man singet mit Freuden vom Sieg ("One Sings with Joy of the Victory")

This cantata was composed in Leipzig in 1728 for the Feast of St. Michael. It was first performed in September of 1728 (or 1729 according to some scholars). The Feast of St. Michael falls in late September and commemorates the joyous victory of St. Michael and his good angels over Satan and his evil angels:

7. Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. 8. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. 9. The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him." Rev. 12:7-9 NIV

The first movement opens with celebratory trumpets, using a theme which Bach first used in his secular Hunting Cantata BWV 208, written in 1713 during his time in Weimar. Bach, himself an instrumentalist, made the most of the instruments available to him. The choir sings the energetic opening chorus, joined by 3 trumpets, timpani, 3 oboes, bassoon, strings, and continuo: "One sings with joy of the victory in the dwellings of the righteous."

In Movement 2 the bass aria further describes the struggle against Satan. Opinions may differ, but Australian-born Bach scholar Julian Mincham writes: "Bach's depictions of Satan frequently have an opera buffo quality about them, a sense not of grandeur but of buzzing malice."

Movements 3-6 (alternating recitatives with solos and an alto/tenor duet) continue the focus on angels, either as guides or as comforting protectors. The soprano aria (movement 4) is accompanied by strings:

God's angels never waver; They are near me on all sides.
When I sleep, they are awake,
When I walk, When I stand, They carry me in their hands.

The choir returns for the closing chorale. Martin Schalling, a 16th century Lutheran pastor, composed this hymn tune, and Bach is using Stanza 3 to complete the angel theme.

Lord, let at last Thine angels come,
To Abram's bosom bear me home,
That I may die unfearing;
And in its narrow chamber keep
My body safe in peaceful sleep
Until Thy reappearing.
And then from death awaken me,
That these mine eyes with joy may see,
O Son of God, Thy glorious face,
My Savior and my fount of grace.

Lord Jesus Christ, my prayer attend, my prayer attend,
And I will praise Thee without end.

Source: Lutheran Service Book #708



And here once again the brass has the last word.

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

BWV 1043 Concerto for two violins, strings and continuo in D minor

Bach most likely composed this double concerto in the early 1720s, possibly during his time in Cöthen where he had two excellent violinists at his disposal. We have two excellent violinists of our own, Mary Rowell and Erin Green, who will perform this double concerto at the Super Bach Concert. Mary shares the following recollections:

As a young violin student, Mary was eager to learn this work very early in her studies, but her instructor held it out as a carrot: Mary was allowed to work on the Double only after she had perfected the other pieces assigned to her first.

In the late 1980s Mary was working in New York City at the offices of CF Peters, music publishers with roots in Leipzig. A client requested that CF Peters publish a facsimile of the 'Bach Double', to be given to violinist Isaac Stern for his upcoming 70th birthday. It became Mary's job to coordinate this project. But the original manuscript was located in Eastern Europe, behind the Iron Curtain. The Biblioteka Jagiellonska in Krakow had for centuries been an important repository of books and manuscripts. A photographer was dispatched to take pictures of the manuscript. Accessing information would have been difficult enough during Communist rule, but now Eastern Europe was facing political upheavals. Poland had experienced widespread labor strikes and riots in 1988, and the Berlin Wall was coming down by the time the photography was complete. Would the photographer and his photos be allowed to cross the border amidst the chaos? Telephones and fax machines were the only forms of communication at that time (no internet yet), and the CF Peters staff had to wait on pins and needles until they were certain that the photographer – and the photos – were safely out of the country.

Mary recalls the emotional experience of seeing the slides of the manuscript for the first time and getting her first look at Bach's own handwriting! Stern's 70th birthday was in July 1990. After they printed a short run of the facsimile for Stern, Mary received a copy also.

Bach Festival Leipzig 2020

To read more about the festival: <https://www.bachfestleipzig.de/en/bach-festival/leipzig-bach-festival-2020-0>

Thank you!

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Bach Cantata Choir

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Artistic Director
Ralph Nelson

Concert Notes

Admission:

- Tickets are not required at this concert. A free-will offering will be taken.

Accompanist
John Vergin

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Barbara Lance
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Parking:

- The church's parking lot is very small and fills up quickly. We expect a large audience for this concert. Please allow time to find on-street parking.
- Do not park in the Grocery Outlet lot! Sunday is their busiest day.

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, Writer and Editor

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