

Bach Beat

The Newsletter of the Bach Cantata Choir



December 2008

Vol.2, No.2

Artistic Director

Ralph Nelson

Accompanist

John Vergin

Board of Directors

President

Ralph Nelson

Secretary

Maureen Diamond

Treasurer

Julie Beck

Members at Large

Barbara Lance

Susan Nelson

Woody Richen

Lorin Wilkerson

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 fully deductible for income tax purposes.

Newsletter

Editor

Lorin Wilkerson

lorinwilk@yahoo.com

Layout & Photography

Kristin Sterling

The *BachBeat* newsletter is published cyclically by the Bach Cantata Choir.

www.bachcantatachoir.org

M.A. Charpentier: Music in the France of Louis XIV Sun King

By Lorin Wilkerson – Bass

Marc Antoine Charpentier's life as a composer in France was directly or indirectly dominated (as were all things French at this time), by the whims of the legendary court of Louis XIV, *Roi Soleil* (the Sun King). Although the year of Charpentier's birth is sometimes erroneously given as 1634, research shows that he was most likely born in the period between 1645 and 1650. Born shortly after the reign of the Dauphin began (1643), his entire life was lived in the shadow of the musical edicts issuing from the court of the *Grand Monarque*.

Like so many of the best musicians in his day, Charpentier went to Italy to learn something of his craft, and he studied with Giacomo Carissimi in Rome for three years. As was then the custom, he took what he had learned back to his native land and employed it there, where it would eventually help to continue the phenomenon marked by the suffusion of

the Italian style throughout Europe, one of the hallmarks of the Baroque era.

Shortly after his return from Italy, Charpentier was employed by the Duchesse de Guise, a wealthy, pious noblewoman. She was such a lover of the arts that the quality of music in her hall was said to have been superior to that of the courts of sovereigns throughout Europe.¹ He remained there as *maître de musique* until the duchess' death in 1688.

Among other projects he worked closely with Molière, composing music for his troupe even after the famous dramatist's death in 1673. Molière had had a falling out with the Sun King's court composer Jean-Baptiste Lully, who then withdrew permission for Molière to use the incidental and ballet music he had composed for Molière's works, and also persuaded the king to issue edicts that severely restricted the size and type of orchestration that could be used in any French stage production not under Lully's direct control.² Still, the resourceful Charpentier was able to produce quality music even under the most severe restrictions, and the *Comedie Française* continued to flourish even after Molière's death.

Although he was never directly employed by the court at Versailles, he was tutor to the Duc d'Orleans who was (after Charpentier's death) to become the



Member Spotlight



Tom Hard—Bass

Tom Hard has had a lifelong love affair with vocal music, devoting much of his time to the choral arts. He has a very colorful family history. Here's some of it, in his own words: "From 1977 to 2002 I did experimental research in atmospheric chemistry at Portland State. I have a PhD in physical chemistry from the University of Wisconsin.

Music was with me from birth onward; I took piano lessons from my mother for a while, and flute from other teachers. I joined high school choir and have been in choral music almost ever since. I've sung with the Harvard Glee Club, the MIT Choral Society, the Portland Symphonic Choir, and several others. My wife and I met while singing at MIT. Voice lessons with Irene Weldon (BCC alto section leader) have greatly improved my singing.

Growing up in a musical household, it wasn't easy to avoid Bach. After the kids' bedtime, my mother practiced piano, and I can still hear her playing the *Italian Concerto*. In college, the motet *Jesu, Meine Freude* was my first exposure to Bach's choral works. When Ralph announced the formation of the BCC three years ago, I couldn't resist joining.

I've studied six foreign languages but I'm not a fluent speaker in any of them. My parents were painters who met while studying at an art school in Paris. My father was a Michigan native, my mother a German Jew who lost her citizenship by living abroad during the Nazi period. I was born in Florence, Italy, in 1937, in the time of Mussolini. We lived for a while in southern France during the Vichy period. On my next visit to Italy, as a 30-year-old, I was arrested for not having shown up for military service at the statutory age.

My grandfather Adolf Weissmann, was a noted Berlin music critic who wrote biographies of Bizet, Chopin, Verdi, and Puccini, and books on modern music and orchestral conductors. My grandmother, Gisela Grosz, was a Hungarian pianist who quit her concert career to marry the music critic. My mother showed early talents in both music and art, and her ink sketches of noted musicians were published in Berlin periodicals while she was still a teenager."

Regent of France. Charpentier was eventually granted a pension by the Dauphin for his service to French music. He is primarily known for the volume of his sacred vocal works, although music for the stage also forms an important part of his corpus. Late in his life, in 1698, the position of *maître de musique* opened at Ste. Chappelle, which was said to have been the second most prestigious sacred music post in all of France, after the chapel at Versailles.³ He held this post until his death in 1702.

Virtually nothing of his work was published during his lifetime; the vast majority was not published until the twentieth century. Among his most famous pieces are the Noël *Un Flambeau Jeanette-Isabelle* (known to English speakers as the carol 'Bring a torch, Jeanette Isabella'), and the prelude to his *Te Deum*, which is the signature song of the European Broadcasting Union. Also well known is his *Messe de Minuit pour Noël* (Midnight Christmas Mass), selections of which will be performed by the BCC at the Dec. 19th performance along with Bach's Christmas Oratorio. ♪

¹ H. Wiley Hitchcock, *The New Grove French Baroque Masters: Marc Antoine Charpentier*. (W. W. Norton & Co., 1986) p. 74.

² *Ibid.*, p. 76 .

³ *Ibid.* p. 80.

Silent Auction 2008 Review



With thanks to the extremely generous support of our audience, choir members and orchestral musicians, the BCC was able to raise over \$3000 dollars at the Silent Auction held before our first concert of the 2008-2009 season. The funds raised at this event are absolutely vital to the continuing financial viability of our organization, so on behalf of all of us, the Bach Cantata Choir extends warm and heartfelt thanks to everyone who participated in this event.

The BCC would like to give special thanks to Silent Auction co-chairs Lorin Wilkerson and Judy Crow, as well as Kristin Sterling, without whose help the success of this event would not have been possible.

Get BachBeat in Your Inbox!

In an effort to save printing and postage costs (and act in a more environmentally responsible way), the Bach Cantata Choir will begin offering an electronic version of *BachBeat* to those who are interested, beginning with the next issue. Every penny counts in a small, non-profit arts organization, so it is of great benefit to the BCC to offer this new opportunity.

There are also advantages to our patrons who choose to receive the newsletter via email. The full-color, high-resolution photographs in *BachBeat* simply cannot be reproduced accurately in a black-and-white newsletter, and you can also feel satisfied in taking one more small, easy step to help ensure the financial stability of the BCC by making this choice.

If you would like to start receiving *BachBeat* in your email, please e-mail me (Lorin Wilkerson), the editor at lorinwilk@yahoo.com. Indicate if you would like to receive the newsletter in an electronic PDF version only (the preferred choice), or if you would like both the paper and the e-version. If you would like to continue receiving it in paper only, no further action is necessary. Electing to receive *BachBeat* electronically will not interfere with your receiving any other mailings that the BCC normally sends out in paper.

Thanks for all the many ways you support the Bach Cantata Choir, and we hope that you will help us further by choosing to receive *BachBeat* via e-mail.

BachGround:

Tidbits about the Christmas Oratorio

- The Christmas Oratorio (Ger. *Weihnachtsoratorium*) BWV 248, is not one work, but a collection of six cantatas intended to be performed separately on the major feast days of Christmas, beginning with Christmas Day and ending with Epiphany (Jan. 6.) Today cantatas 1-3 and 4-6 are usually performed separately with each group as an individual concert, although the entire oratorio is occasionally performed.
- It was first sung for Christmas in 1734, but not all of the cantatas were originally written for the Christmas Oratorio; at least three of them were previously composed cantatas that Bach adapted for the Christmas season. Included in this oratorio is the only surviving copy of an otherwise lost sacred cantata, BWV 248a.
- The Christmas Oratorio, together with the Ascension Oratorio (BWV 11) and the Easter Oratorio (BWV 249) form a set of large oratorios (the Christmas by far the largest) written towards the end of Bach's cantata composing career. All of them are narrated by a tenor Evangelist.
- After its first performance in Dec.-Jan. 1734-35, the Christmas Oratorio was not sung again for 132 years, until the *Berlin Sing-Akademie* resurrected it under Eduard Grell in 1857.

Principal source: www.wikipedia.org, *Christmas Oratorio*.



Jacob Herbert, Nan Haemer and Mary Rowell delight the audience on Oct. 26th.

New Option for Ordering BCC Tickets

The BCC is pleased to offer a new way to order tickets for the *Christmas Oratorio* concert. As you know, much of our support comes through the free-will offerings donated by our audiences at each concert and the enthusiastic participation in our annual Silent Auction. Another very important stream of revenue is income from ticket sales for Bach's resplendent *Christmas Oratorio*, which we are proud has become part of the annual holiday tradition of so many arts lovers in the Portland metro area.

Tickets for this event may still be bought online through the link at our website to TicketsWest.com;

however, if you don't want to wait until the last minute to pay at the door, but would like to avoid TicketWest's service charge, you can now mail in your order for the price of a postage stamp. The process is easy:

1. Go to our website at www.bachcantatachoir.org.
2. Click on the link to "Purchase using Mail-in Form (no service charges!)"
3. Fill out the required information and mail it to the address listed on the form.

It's that simple! You can pay for your tickets by check, money order or credit card this way. Orders received before 12/15 will be mailed to you; those received after 12/15 will be held at will call.

The BCC will continue to offer this service for all ticketed events in the future.

2008-09 Concert Season

Friday, December 19, 2008 7:30pm

Marc-Antoine Charpentier: *Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus, Agnus Dei*
J. S. Bach: *Christmas Oratorio*, parts 1-3
Tickets required (\$20/\$15 students & seniors). Call 503-224-TIXX or visit www.bachcantatachoir.org to order online.

Sunday, February 1, 2009 2:00 pm

"SuperBach" Sunday

Nicolaus Bruhns: *Muss nicht der Mensch*
J. S. Bach: Cantatas 137 & 159, *Orchestral Suite in B Minor*

Sunday, March 15, 2009 2:00 pm

Lenten Concert

Hans Leo Hassler (1564-1612): *Motet for Two Choirs*
J. S. Bach: Cantatas 12 & 131

Sunday, April 26, 2009 2:00pm

Mendelssohn: *Psalm 43, Heilig, Heilig, Heilig*
William Billings: *Three Fuguing Tunes*
J.S Bach: Cantata 112, Motet No. 2

All concerts are free (with free-will offering) unless otherwise noted.

The audience is invited to join the choir in singing selected chorales.

All concerts are held at Rose City Presbyterian Church at NE 44th and Sandy Blvd. in Portland, Oregon.



BACH CANTATA CHOIR
3570 NE MATHISON PLACE
PORTLAND OR 97212



**Get your tickets now
for the Christmas
Oratorio concert!**

Friday, December 19 at 7:30 pm
Call 503-224-TIXX or
visit www.bachcantatachoir.org