

BachBeat

The Newsletter of the Bach Cantata Choir



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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

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www.bachcantatachoir.org

Notes About Hans Hassler

By Mark Woodward*

Composing during a critical transitional period, Hans Leo Hassler (1562-1612) led northern German music, both sacred works and secular concert forms, into the early Baroque by assimilating new Italian compositional and aesthetic trends into the established traditions of his native culture.

Little is known about Hassler's childhood. He most likely began his musical studies with his father, a master church-organist, in Nürnberg. He would later self-describe his early keyboard proficiency, saying "from a tender age, [I was] more talkative with the fingers than the tongue."

At age 22 Hassler traveled about 380 miles south to Venice to continue his education. There he met several leading Italian musicians, including Giovanni Gabrieli, his father Andrea, and their musical camerata. He only stayed about a year and a half before returning to Germany—most likely following the death of Andrea Gabrieli—to accept the position of court organist under Octavian Fugger II of Ausberg, a city about 80 miles south of his hometown. He remained there for the next fifteen years.



While in Ausberg he spent a great deal of time composing vocal works for publication. These works incorporated Italian features that he observed while in Venice, including polychoral settings, heightened chromaticism, and Latin polyphony. Molded to fit his own musical thumbprint, his application of these techniques was steered primarily by thoughtful text setting. Despite these innovations, his sacred choral works are known today for their homophonic, sonorous clarity. Similarly, his secular works feature many of these thoughtful characteristics. Recognizing these features,

Paul Gerhardt harmonized the melody of Hassler's secular motet *Mein G'müt ist mir verwirret* in 1656 to the text *O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden*. This chorale is often called the 'Passion Chorale' as it was incorporated by Bach in his *St. Matthew Passion* as well as his *Christmas Oratorio* and Cantatas 135,

159, and 161.

In spite of his extensive choral output, Hassler was regarded somewhat as the "organ-whisperer" of his day. His reputation resulted in his examinations of many new instruments and eventually the construction of his design for a clockwork organ. As an extension of his keyboard knowledge, Hassler composed a great deal for the organ. Unfortunately many of his keyboard compositions were not preserved, and as a result there are few

Member Spotlight



Geri Miller – Soprano

Soprano Geri Miller has been active as a singer all her life. Here is some of her story in her own words:

"At U of O I sang for 4 years in University Singers under the tutelage of Don Allton. Every spring, we toured the state for a week, singing at small town high schools. It was an experience I treasure to this day! I also took voice lessons and for 2 years was a music major, but I changed to Speech and Broadcasting. After graduating I took a job with radio station KEX and moved to Portland.

I loved broadcasting and writing copy, but when I went back to Kansas City to visit my folks I met a handsome young civil engineer who proposed. I continued my broadcasting career there writing for two KC stations. One of my fondest memories was writing radio commercial spots for an organization known as "The Follies Theatre" which boasted some pretty risqué burlesque shows starring women with very suggestive names (one popular performer went by the name of "Tempest Storm.") I had a great time dreaming up elegant prose for The Follies Theatre!

After a move to Omaha I was a church soloist for many years, and also did some singing for a local musical company at the Omaha Playhouse. (I remember singing in *Pajama Game*, *La Traviata*, and *Beggars Opera*.) What fun!

After a few years, we were transferred to Portland, and I continued to sing as a church soloist and joined the Portland Symphonic Choir. I sang under Conductors David Wilson and Bruce Browne -- and had the privilege of touring Estonia and the Czech Republic with the PSC. After years of committee and board work I served as the PSC President for four years. Finally, after 29 years with PSC, I "retired". Meanwhile, I worked at First Presbyterian Church as Music Administrator (which meant that I was the head "Go Fer" in the Music Department.)

When the Bach Cantata Choir was organized 3 years ago, I jumped at the chance to participate! To sing with others who feel equally moved by this music is tremendously important to me. It is the culmination of a life so enriched by music I can scarcely express what it has meant to me."

surviving copies of his influential pieces. This is the case for many of his contemporaries including Sweelinck and Erbach. In fact, many of his organ compositions were not discovered until the 1960s when the tablets of Turin were reassessed and cataloged. These works show surprising characteristics of Italian styles including the *ricercar* and complex fugues. These pieces make it clear why often to him, alongside Orlando di Lasso, is attributed the migration of Italian styles into the German compositional language.

In addition (and of special interest to this ensemble) Hassler began basing his keyboard works on instrumental motives and figuration, rather than on vocal melodies and traditional *cantus firmi* as had been the German tradition through most of the 16th century. This feature was significantly developed throughout the Baroque, and helped to characterize that era. These practices were dramatically employed by Buxtehude and Bach, and are, in some ways, responsible for the highly instrumental nature of Bach's vocal melodies.

Hassler finally returned to his hometown in 1600 after the death of Octavian, despite great civic privilege and respect in Ausberg. He stayed four years before moving to Ulm and marrying in 1604. He then moved to Dresden in 1608 to work for Elector Christian II of Saxony, where he died of tuberculosis with no surviving children in 1612. ♪

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<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/public/>>

* Mark Woodward, BCC tenor, holds a B.M. in Vocal Performance from Central Missouri and a M.M. in Composition and Theory Pedagogy from Missouri-Columbia. He has performed with many ensembles across the country, including the Missouri Symphony and the Bach Collegium Musicum Choir. In addition to singing with the BCC, he is tenor section leader at First United Methodist Church and sings with the Portland Symphonic Choir. He is active as a composer, and has had works commissioned and performed in Illinois, Utah and Oregon. In addition to music he spends time painting and sculpting.

Photo Gallery

Christmas Oratorio Concert
December 19, 2008



Soprano Elise Groves.

SuperBach Sunday
February 1, 2009



Abby Mages plays the difficult flute solo in the *B Minor Orchestral Suite*.



Bass Tom Hard.



Soprano Mel Zupan.



A full house enjoys the BCC sing Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* at the festive Rose City Presbyterian Church on a cold and snowy winter night in December!



Alto Carol Lewis.

A Month of Accolades and Honors for Jacob Herbert

Anyone who has been a fan of the BCC for any length of time knows Jacob Herbert as our talented principal bass soloist as well as bass section leader. Many might not know quite *how* talented however.

The month of February was especially kind to Jacob. First came the Grammy-winning performance with the Phoenix Bach Chorale (2009 Winner: Best Small Ensemble Performance). Jacob was the soloist on the title track of the PBC's release "Spotless Rose: Hymns to the Virgin."

Later that month Jacob auditioned with the world-renowned vocal ensemble Chanticleer, based out of San Francisco. The group selected to audition in person with Chanticleer was very select: it was a multi-tiered audition

process that began with hundreds of résumé submissions, from which group 50 individuals were asked to send in a CD. Out of those 50, ten were invited to San Francisco to sing with the group and audition in person, and Jacob was one of those.

Although there are no current openings for baritone with the group, the fact that Jacob was invited in spite of that says something about the caliber of his singing. Jacob was satisfied with his audition and we all hope that this will open more doors for him in the future. A lifetime of training and dedication to music is a hallmark of many performers with the Bach Cantata Choir, and in Jacob's case this was recognized in a big way during the month of February. Congratulations!

Please join us for our final two concerts this season!



Sunday, March 15, 2008 2:00 pm

Lenten Concert

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

Sunday, April 26, 2008 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



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