

Bach Beat

The Newsletter of the Bach Cantata Choir



May 2015

www.bachcantatachoir.org

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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 BCC is a legally organized non-profit corporation under Oregon law, and 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 BCC.

Soli Deo Gloria

By John Chilgren—Bass

The Bach Cantata Choir will present a short and colorful canon, *Non Nobis Domine* (Not unto us, O Lord), the original often attributed to the Renaissance English composer **William Byrd** (c. 1539-1623). However, in the past century strong evidence has emerged that Byrd's rendition was based on a work by the Flemish composer **Philip van Wilder** (c. 1500-1554), court musician to Henry VIII. This canon was sung in England and Wales during the Elizabethan era, especially in recusant circles (a recusant was an English Roman Catholic who refused to attend Church of England services) and the text was added to the Anglican Book of Common Prayer in 1549.

Another Renaissance composer **Giovanni Pierluigi de Palestrina** (1525-1594) or simply Palestrina, was a prolific composer, organist, and *maestro di cappella* in the Basilica of St. Peter (San Pietro) in Rome. He wrote more than 100 masses in addition to hundreds of other works. The *Agnus Dei* presented in the May concert is part of a Mass Ordinary titled *Missa sine nomine* (literally, mass without a name), one of several written by Palestrina. J. S. Bach came to know this work via Johann Gottlob Harrer, born in 1703 in Görz, Germany (where "The Grand Budapest



William Byrd



Palestrina

Hotel" was filmed). He would eventually be Bach's successor as *Thomaskantor* in Leipzig upon Bach's death in 1750. Harrer had studied in Leipzig and Rome, thanks to his friendship with a powerful statesman, Count Heinrich von Brühl, a power broker for Augustus III (The Strong) of Saxony. In 1731 Harrer had become conductor for von Brühl's private orchestra and after traveling to Italy, courtesy of von Brühl, returned with several published sacred works of Italian masters, including Palestrina, who was fortunate to have many of his works published in his lifetime. Bach performed the *Kyrie* and *Gloria* from one of these masses in about 1742 and added orchestral parts to them.

The cantata presented in this final concert of the season is *Lobe den Herrn, meine Seele* (Praise the Lord, my soul), BWV 69. There are two versions of this work with the same title, the first (BWV 69a) composed in 1723 (Bach's first year in Leipzig) for the 12th Sunday after Trinity on August 15, and the second (BWV 69) composed in 1748 for the Town Council Inauguration on August 24, St. Bartholomew's Day. While the monumental opening chorus and bass aria are identical in both of these works, the other movements were rewritten. Notably, the chorale melody in BWV 69 is based on a chorale by **Martin Luther**, *Es wolle Gott uns gnädig sein*, while the chorale text is the 3rd verse of the same Martin Luther chorale. This cantata was Bach's last church cantata, albeit reworked from BWV 69a.

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Concluding the B Minor Mass with *Sanctus*
and *Agnus Dei* and featuring complimentary
pieces from William Byrd and Palestrina.

Sunday, May 17, 2015 at 2:00 p.m.
Rose City Park Presbyterian Church

Final Concert of the Season

BACH CANTATA CHOIR
3570 NE MATHISON PLACE
PORTLAND OR 97212



The Bach Cantata Choir concludes their performance with Parts III and IV of the Mass in B minor, viz., *Sanctus*, *Osanna*, *Benedictus*, *Agnus Dei*, and *Dona Nobis Pacem*. Parts I and II were performed in earlier concerts. The mass evolved over time from 1724, when Bach composed a *Sanctus* for use in a 1725 Christmas service in Leipzig, to 1749 when Bach completed his "Great Catholic Mass" that was never performed in his lifetime and was his only complete setting of the Mass Ordinary, not surprising since Bach was thoroughly Lutheran.

The original *Sanctus* is scored for SSAATB and is dominated by triplets, suggesting the beating of angel wings as they sing to each other. Immediately following is the *Pleni sunt coeli* (Full are the heavens). The *Osanna in excelsis* (Osanna in the Highest) is for double choir and festive orchestra. The opening chorus of the *Osanna* is based on Bach's secular cantata *Preise deine Glücke, gesegnetes Sachsen* (Praise Thy Good

Fortune, Blessed Saxony) (BWV 215) written to commemorate an anniversary of the election of August III, Elector of Saxony (and King of Poland) when the king and his wife visited Leipzig on October 5, 1734.

The *Benedictus* is an aria for tenor and an unspecified obbligato instrument while the *Agnus Dei* is an aria for alto with violin obbligato. It was modeled after the aria *Ach, bleibe doch, mein liebstes Leben* (Ah, just stay, my dearest Life) of Bach's *Ascension Oratorio*, BWV 11 (*Lobet Gott in seinen Reichen*) (Praise God in His Riches).

The final movement, *Dona nobis pacem* (Grant us peace), is for 4-part chorus. Bach has these words sung to the music of *Gratias agimus tibi* (We thank thee) from the *Gloria* in Part I. This concluding piece is thus a confident and earnest praise of peace rather than a prayer for it.