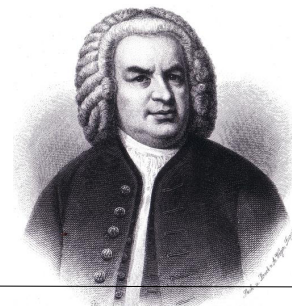


Bach Beat

The Newsletter of the Bach Cantata Choir



March 2016

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.

Lenten Concert

By John Chilgren — Bass



Cöthen

J. S. Bach spent six years (1717-1723) at Cöthen, having left Weimar because of a dispute that involved his being passed over as Capellmeister. Under the direction of 23-year-old Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen, Bach composed few sacred works as the Calvinist prince opposed ceremonial aspects of Lutheran liturgy and thus no church music was performed. But as a musician himself and with a richly endowed style of living, Leopold gave Bach freedom to compose at will; during this time Bach produced many secular cantatas as well as instrumental and keyboard music, such as the Brandenburg Concertos and the Well-Tempered Clavier. But Bach felt the need to compose sacred music in a university town where his sons could be educated. The position of Cantor of the Thomaskirche at Leipzig was vacant, owing to the death of Johann Kuhnau in June 1722. The Town Council had hoped to hire Georg Philipp **Telemann**, but he was unable to leave his post in Hamburg.



Thomaskirche, Leipzig

Bach composed **Cantata BWV 23**, *Du wahrer Gott und Davids Sohns* (You true God and son of David), along with Cantata BWV 22, as audition material in February 1723 for this position. Successful in his quest, Bach obtained a letter of dismissal from Prince Leopold and moved his family, including his new 22-year-old soprano wife and newborn daughter, to Leipzig. Here he would produce an enormous body of sacred music and remain for the rest of his life as Cantor of the Thomaskirche. His arrival was chronicled by one newspaper:

"Last Saturday at noon, four carts laden with goods and chattels belonging to the former Capellmeister to the Court of Cöthen arrived in Leipzig and at two in the afternoon, he and his family arrived in two coaches and moved into their newly decorated lodgings in the school building."



Cantata 23, essentially a long prayer and one of Bach's greatest cantatas, was written for the Sunday preceding Ash Wednesday and differs from his typical pattern in that it has only four movements beginning with a duet (soprano & alto) followed by a solemn tenor recitative accompanied by strings. The 3rd movement alternates the chorus with a tenor-bass duet. The final movement, added later after writing the first three movements, is a chorale fantasia like no other Bach composed. It is the setting of the German *Agnus Dei* sung three times, each with a different harmonization, leaving no doubt that Bach's audition work would leave a lasting impression on the Town Council.



*O vos omnes, qui transitis per viam,
Attendite, attendite et videte:
Si est dolor sicut dolor meus.*

Pablo Casals (1876-1973)

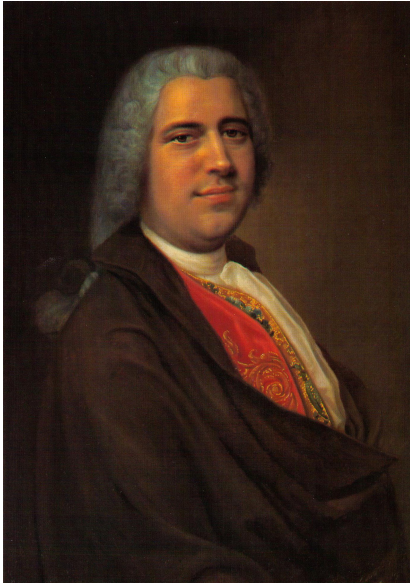
O vos ómnes qui transitis per víam (All you who walk by on the road) is a sacred work originally performed during Holy Week in Roman Catholic liturgy but now is commonly performed as a motet. Famous settings of this work include those by the Spanish Baroque composer Tomás Luis de Victoria and Franco-Flemish Renaissance composer Orlando de Lasso, among many others.

The Bach Cantata Choir will perform the version by **Pablo Casals**, the famed 20th century Spanish cellist, who began as a pianist and violinist before taking up the cello at age 11. Casals' motet **O vos ómnes**, composed in 1932, may come as a surprise to those who think of Casals only as a cellist, most notably for his recordings (1936-39) of Bach's **Cello Suites** that were composed when Bach lived in Cöthen.

Marc-Antoine Charpentier was indubitably the most important French Baroque composer of his generation. Born to an influential family in or near Paris ca. 1643, his early life is not well documented, but most musicologists agree that he traveled to Rome in 1667 where he studied music with the famed Giacomo Carissimi, who developed the oratorio, which Charpentier would further develop in his native country. Upon his return to France he was recruited by a wealthy patron, Marie de Lorraine (a.k.a. Mademoiselle de Guise) as her house composer where he lived for 20 years and collaborated with the French playwright Molière. For example, he composed musical interludes and dance sequences for Molière's highly popular comedy-ballet, *The Imaginary Invalid* (1673). His later employment included the influential Lycée Louis-le-Grand, the Jesuit Church of St. Louis and the renowned Gothic Sainte-Chapelle in Paris where he remained until his death in 1704. He was nearly forgotten for 250 years until the French musicologist Claude Crussard hailed him in 1945 as one of France's greatest in his book, *Un Musicien Français Oublié* (A Forgotten French Musician). Charpentier's music is recognizable in the opening bars of his brilliant work *Te Deum* (H. 146) selected as Eurovision's theme song. The musicologist Catherine Cessac wrote: ". . . the grandeur and originality of Charpentier's music is due to a combination of exceptional musical talent and deep faith, each complementing the other."



His work, *Le Reniement de St. Pierre* (The Denial of St. Peter) performed this March is a miniature Latin oratorio that follows Peter's relationship with Jesus from the time of his sworn allegiance to the time of his denial. The bulk of the text is from the New Testament book of Matthew but material from all four Gospels is incorporated. The score involves only voices and continuo.



The German composer **Johann Adolph Hasse** (b. 1699) lived the ideal life of a Baroque composer, having success first as an opera singer in his birth town of Hamburg before traveling in Italy and settling in Naples where he successfully composed many operas and studied with Sicilian composer Alessandro Scarlatti (father of Domenico Scarlatti). In 1730 he married the already-famous Venetian-born soprano Faustina Bordoni, who was raised under the protection of the **Marcello** brothers, whom we met in the previous newsletter issue. In Venice he was *Capellmeister* of a conservatory (*Conservatorio degli Incurabili*) for young women (orphans and abandoned children). It was here in 1735 that he wrote his *Miserere in C minor* (Psalm 51) for women's chorus and strings. He later revised this work for SATB and small orchestra, and it is this revision that will be performed.

Although already appointed as *Capellmeister* at the lavishly endowed Dresden court, Hasse's work took him to Naples and Venice. It was in the period between 1732-33 that both **Jan Zelenka** and **J. S. Bach** coveted positions at the Dresden court, especially after the death of Augustus the Strong (Elector of Saxony and King of Poland). During the Seven Years War (1755-64) that involved all major European powers excepting the Ottoman Empire, Dresden was destroyed and along with it all the personal effects of Hasse. He and Faustina eventually moved to Vienna where he encountered the young **Mozart** and realized that his musical style would soon be replaced by classical composers. Hasse retreated to Venice after nine years and died at age 84 in 1783, Faustina having died two years earlier. Musicologists believe that Hasse produced more than 70 operas and a large volume of cantatas, oratorios, ballads, sacred music, and instrumental music.



The destruction of Dresden took a great toll on Hasse: his personal letters, mementos, and a book of his music, nearly ready to be published by the world's oldest publishing company, Breitkopf of Leipzig (now Breitkopf & Härtel), were all lost. However, Hasse was so famous during his lifetime that many people came to Dresden and copied his music. Guest conductor Dr. David Wilson was able to locate and identify some of these copies. Further destruction during World War II had undoubtedly caused additional losses and disruptions, while Cold War politics complicated his research. An ongoing "Hasse Project" is continuing the effort to locate his music, but the true extent of Hasse's output will never be known.



Hofkirche, Dresden after WWII (left).
Original church was dedicated in 1751 with a performance of Hasse's *Mass in D Minor*.

The church was rebuilt in the mid-1980s.

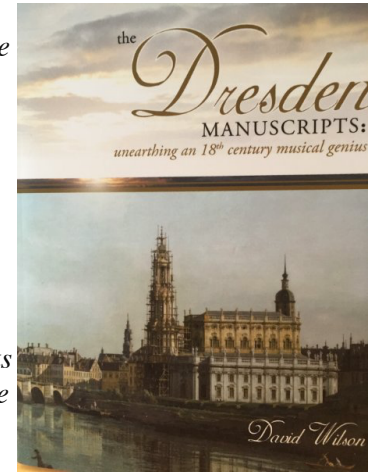
John Chilgren sings bass with both the Bach Cantata and Portland Symphonic Choirs. He previously sang 19 years with the Portland Choral Arts Ensemble. For more than 40 years he has been a book and film reviewer for AAAS Science Books and Films.

The Bach Cantata Choir is pleased to introduce guest conductor Dr. David Wilson, who will conduct the *Miserere in C minor* by Johann Hasse. Dr. Wilson has personally researched and brought to light much information on the works of Johann Hasse. His book, pictured below, describes the challenges and rewards of his research in cold-war Dresden. Prior to his long career at USC, Dr. Wilson served as Director of Choral and Vocal Studies at Portland State University in the late 1970s.

David Wilson, teacher, scholar and conductor, is Professor Emeritus of the Thornton School of Music at the University of Southern California. In addition, he is Artistic Director/Conductor Emeritus of the Long Beach Bach Festival and the Camerata Singers of Long Beach.

A graduate of the University of the Pacific and University of Illinois, he also studied conducting at the Berkshire Music Festival in Tanglewood, where he worked with Leonard Bernstein, Aaron Copland and Erich Leinsdorf, and at the Hochschule fur Musik in Vienna.

As a recognized expert in 18th century music, he has conducted hundreds of works by Bach, Handel, Mozart, Haydn and their contemporaries. His rediscovery of the sacred works of Johann Adolf Hasse is the subject of his first book, "The Dresden Manuscripts: Unearthing an 18th Century Musical Genius."



— Amazon.com

Casals O Vos Omnes
 Bach Cantata 23 Du wahrer Gott und Davids Sohn
 Charpentier Le Reniement de Saint Pierre
 Hasse Miserere in C minor

Lenten Concert
 Sunday March 13 at 2:00 pm
 Rose City Park Presbyterian Church
 NE 44th & Sandy, Portland OR

BACH CANTATA CHOIR
 3570 NE MATHISON PLACE
 PORTLAND OR 97212

