



# Bach Beat

The Newsletter of the Bach Cantata Choir



December 2016

[www.bachcantatachoir.org](http://www.bachcantatachoir.org)

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## *Baroque Holiday Concert*

**Friday, December 16, 2016 at 7:30 p.m.**

**John Vergin:** *Two Medieval Carols*

**Heinrich Schütz:** *Hodie Christus Natus Est*

**Antonio Vivaldi:** *Winter* from *The Four Seasons*

**J. S. Bach:** *Christmas Oratorio, Parts 4-6*

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](#)).

*Tickets are required for this concert. Tickets on sale at [Brown Paper Tickets](#)*

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## A Baroque Christmas for 2016

By John Chilgren—Bass

At Christmastime many choirs will perform at least part of **J. S. Bach's** six-part *Christmas Oratorio* (BWV 248) at venues across the globe. The Bach Cantata Choir is no exception and will perform the last three parts of this work at its December concert.

The Christmas Oratorio is actually six cantatas designed to be performed over 13 days of the Lutheran calendar at six separate occasions: Christmas Day, the second and third days after Christmas, New Year's Day, the first Sunday after New Year's Day and Epiphany (January 6). The running time for the entire work approaches three hours and thus it was never intended to be performed in a single setting.

Conceived at the end of 1734 while Bach was cantor at *Thomaskirche* in Leipzig, this work was the last of

his major contributions to German liturgical music. He had already built up a substantial number of works from which he could draw upon for later compositions. Bach was middle-aged at this point, having now worked in Leipzig for a decade. His musical responsibilities hadn't stopped with his prestigious position at *Thomaskirche*: other assignments included *Nikolaikirche* and two smaller churches, *Neue Kirche* and *Peterskirche*. In addition to being cantor at these churches, he was responsible for *Collegium Musicum* at *Neue Kirche*, a group of talented instrumentalists, university students for the most part. Established by **Georg Philipp Telemann** in 1702 while a student in Leipzig, this group gave weekly concerts at the Café Zimmermann, or *Zimmermannsche Kaffeehaus*, owned by Gottfried Zimmermann and where many of the first performances of Bach's secular cantatas (e.g. the *Coffee Cantata*) and instrumental works were heard. This activity became central to Bach's artistic activity, a sort of refuge, given his frequent disputes with the Town Council that had little sympathy with or appreciation of his artistic intentions and temperament. It was no secret that Bach had grievances about money, tedious duties, overbearing officials, and the subpar musical talent of his students. Nevertheless, Bach had found time during his tenure at Leipzig to compose extensive cycles of keyboard works as well, most notably Parts I and II of the *Clavier-Übung* (the entire work was published between 1726-1742). Against this backdrop of frenetic work, not to mention the births and deaths of several of Bach's children, was born the *Christmas Oratorio*.

Rather than compose something entirely new, Bach turned to his cache of previously written and performed compositions. For the most part, he parodied three secular cantatas (*BWV 213, 214 and 215*) performed in 1733-34, the lost *St. Mark's Passion* (*BWV 247*) performed in 1731, and what is believed to be a lost church cantata (*BWV 248a*) performed in 1734 or earlier. The overarching theme of the Christmas Oratorio is expressed in the words of the opening chorus of Part I: "Leave fear behind, banish lamentation, strike up a song full of joy and mirth."

The Bach Cantata orchestra will perform "Winter" from *The Four Seasons*, a work that is practically synonymous with the Venetian-born Baroque composer **Antonio Lucio Vivaldi** (1678-1741). In 1776 Sir John Hawkins wrote in his *General History of Music* that Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* is "a pretended paraphrase, in musical notes, of so many sonnets on the four seasons, where in the author endeavors, by the force of harmony, and particular modifications of air and measure, to excite ideas correspondent with the sentiments of the several poems." These four violin concertos, first published in a 1725 collection of 12 (*Il cimento dell'armonia e dell'invenzione, Opus 8*) are associated each with a sonnet, the author of which Vivaldi did not reveal. While the circumstances surrounding its composition are unknown, *The Four Seasons* has captured the imagination of listeners for centuries.

Vivaldi's early training is sketchy but it is believed that his violinist father trained the son because they were first mentioned together as musicians in 1706. However, before this time he was training for the priesthood and became known as the "red priest" (*il prete rosso*) referring to his red hair. Ordained in 1703 at age 25 but withdrawing his services after a year owing to an acute respiratory condition, Vivaldi obtained his first professional position in music as *maestro di violino* at the *Ospedale della Pietà* (Hospital of Mercy), a convent, orphanage and music school for young girls who had been abandoned or orphaned. Of the many *Ospedales* in Venice, four of them developed reputations such that they evolved into conservatories including the *Ospedale della Pietà*, the most renowned of all.

For the next few years Vivaldi's reputation as a violinist and composer grew and in 1713 he would premier his first opera and would produce seven more in the next five years while still "house composer" at the *Ospedale*, where most of his composing occurred. His fame grew to the point that in 1716 he was visited by *Friedrich August III*, son of *Augustus the Strong* (the future Elector of Saxony and King of Poland), who made Dresden the most opulent of artistic centers of the world. Even J. S. Bach, who assiduously studied Vivaldi's music, adapted six of his instrumental works for organ and harpsichord.

There's a controversial side to Vivaldi's life as well. During a two-year visit to Mantua (Italian city and province), filling a post as *Chamber Capellmeister* at the court of Landgrave Philip van Hessen-Darmstadt, he became attracted to 13-year-old Anna Giraud whom he trained as a successful mezzo-soprano (Vivaldi always insisted the relationship was artistic despite reproaches from the church). She and her sister lived with Vivaldi until his death. At least once Anna shared the stage with Faustina Bordoni, wife of the extraordinary German composer, singer, and teacher, **Johann Adolph Hasse**.

Vivaldi died at age 62 in Vienna shortly after resigning from the *Ospedale* in 1740. He was nearly penniless and unknown, his music out of favor on that 27th day of July 1741. His pauper's grave and the cemetery have long disappeared, but fortunately not his vast legacy of hundreds of concertos, sinfonias, operas, and sonatas which

continue to be discovered.

The Bach Cantata Choir is proud to feature **John Vergin** as an arranger for two ancient German carols, *Festa Dies Agitur* and *Lo, How a Rose*. Born in the Midwest, John moved with his family to the Pacific Northwest. He came to Portland in 1974 for undergraduate work at Reed College in music and theater. Not only is he the continuo player, organist, and pianist for the Bach Cantata Choir, John is an organist at two Portland churches, teaches voice at Reed College, and has performed for Mock's Crest Theater at the University of Portland as well as composing solo and choral works for Capella Romana, Cantores in Ecclesia, Choral Arts Ensemble, Choral Crossties, and In Mulierbus.

*Festa Dies Agitur* (The festive day is celebrated) is a 13th century Latin Christmas carol. *Es ist ein Ros entsprungen* (A Rose has sprung up) is more commonly known as *Lo, How a Rose e'er blooming*. It's a familiar German Christmas carol first appearing in the Old Catholic Songbook and the Speyer Hymnal, both published around 1599-1600. **Michael Praetorius**, the Renaissance German court composer, organist and theorist, wrote the familiar harmonization a decade later.

**Heinrich Schütz**, German organist and composer and J. S. Bach's predecessor by a century, was once heralded as the "father of our modern music." Born in 1585 to a nonmusical family, his considerable talent was discovered by Moritz von Hennen-Kassel in 1598. From that point on, his prowess grew. By 1612 he had spent three years studying with **Giovanni Gabrieli** and in 1615 was lent by Moritz to the Elector of Saxony *Johann Georg I* in Dresden to work, obtaining a permanent post in 1617 as court composer and *Capellmeister* until his retirement in 1650. During his tenure in Dresden, he infused Italian ideas into his music and in 1628 traveled again to Venice, probably meeting **Claudio Monteverdi** who influenced Schütz as well. In 1620 Schütz married but his wife died in 1625 leaving behind two daughters whom he placed in care with their maternal grandmother. He never remarried. Schütz died in Dresden at age 87 in 1672. Yet by 1700 Schütz's compositions were largely forgotten and it wasn't until the early 20th century that a revival of his reputation grew, first in Germany and later in the USA.

The first Heinrich Schütz International Festival held in the US took place in 1973 in Eugene, Oregon. While little of Schütz's secular music has survived, his sacred works, numbering in the hundreds, have survived intact and have restored his position as the greatest composer of his generation.

Schütz' *Hodie Christus natus est* (Today Christ is born) has no date of composition but is believed to have been written in Venice when he was studying with Gabrieli. The motet of six voices, a favorite combination of Schütz, shows extraordinary technical and melodic inventiveness.

John Chilgren sings bass with the Bach Cantata Choir. He performed with the Portland Symphonic Choir for a decade and the Choral Arts Ensemble of Portland for 20 years. He has been a book and film reviewer for AAAS Science Books and Films for nearly 50 years.

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## Bach Cantata Choir

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Our thanks to all who support the choir and enjoy the music that we share throughout the year.

"Leave fear behind, banish lamentation, strike up a song full of joy and mirth."

Barbara Lance  
Pat Messick  
Sue Nelson  
Woody Richen

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, Editor.

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## Thank you!

We appreciate the generosity of all who support the Bach Cantata Choir.

### Join our Growing List of Season Sponsors!

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<b>Friends of the Choir</b> (\$100-249) <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Recognition on our website and program.</li><li>• Invitation to special events, including "Bach-Sing" day carol sing on Dec. 26 and a book discussion party* in the spring.</li></ul>	<b>Director's Circle</b> (\$250+) <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All the benefits available to Friends of the Choir.</li><li>• Two tickets to the Baroque Holiday Concert.</li></ul>
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### \* **Book discussion**

*Evening in the Palace of Reason — Bach meets Frederick the Great in the Age of Enlightenment*  
by James R. Gaines

Available in hardback, paperback, Kindle or Nook versions.

For a New York Times review: <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/17/books/review/evening-in-the-palace-of-reason-being-geniuses-together.html>

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