



Bach Beat

The Newsletter of the Bach Cantata Choir

May 2017

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Maria Elisabeth Lämmerhirt
Bach's mother

A Concert for Mother's Day

Sunday, May 14, 2017 at 2:00 p.m.

Alice Parker, arr: *Hark, I Hear the Harps Eternal*

George P. Telemann: *Lobet den Herrn, alle Heiden*

Frederick the Great of Prussia: *Sonata in D Minor for Flute and Continuo (Abby Mages, flute)*

Isabella Leonarda: *Magnificat*

J. S. Bach: *Cantata #4 Christ lag in Todesbanden*

Alice Parker, arr: *Saints Bound for Heaven*

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](#)). Free-will offerings gratefully accepted.

In Honor of Women Composers

By John Chilgren—Bass

Alice Parker (1925 -)



There are few choral groups that have not performed the works of **Alice Parker**, a living legend for the past 65 years. Born in Boston on December 15, 1925, Parker studied piano at an early age, becoming fond of classical, big band, and swing music in her youth. In 1947 she graduated from Smith College with a degree in music performance and composition followed by training at the Juilliard School where she obtained her master's degree in choral conducting. She had met **Robert Shaw** at the Berkshire Music Festival in Tanglewood MA before attending Juilliard where she applied as a choral conducting graduate student and where Robert Shaw served as Director of Choral Activities. By this time (1947) Shaw had already founded his Robert Shaw Chorale that became

America's most prestigious choral group, touring the globe and contracting with RCA Victor to produce albums that would become the standard of choral excellence in the USA. While Shaw wanted to perform only classical choral masterworks, RCA wanted to record light popular music to reach a greater audience. It was at this time that he recruited Alice Parker, recalling her skills in research and composition, to find melodies and texts that the two of them could use in recording sessions. Over the years that followed, this collaboration would produce more than 220 choral arrangements on 17 RCA Victor albums between 1950 to 1968. In 1985 Parker founded Melodious Accord, Inc., a New York-based small non-profit group that teaches, presents concerts, workshops,

videos and recordings as well as many activities focused on the work of Alice Parker. Among multiple honors, Parker has received six honorary doctorates and the Smith College Medal exemplifying the work Parker has done throughout her life. The two works presented are examples of the collaborative efforts of both Alice Parker and Robert Shaw.

Isabella Leonarda (1620-1704)

Throughout history, women have faced difficult odds in being recognized as equals to their male counterparts. The barriers of gender, ethnicity, and class have often prevented women from being recognized for the creativity they have been born into. Centuries ago female composers succeeded only at home, in orphanages such as those that existed in Venice, and convents, such as the one described here: the life of **Isabella Leonarda** of Novara. She was born September 6, 1620, into an influential family in the city of Novara, now a province and city in northern Italy but at the time a Spanish possession under the control of the Holy Roman Empire. Parents often chose a religious life for their daughters if they came from wealthy families and the Leonardis were no exception. In 1636 Isabella entered the convent of St. Ursula, a Roman Catholic congregation founded in 1606, yet extant, with an emphasis on education, the female response to what Saint Ignatius, founder of the Jesuits, had done for boys.



Information on her early training is lacking but she studied with the maestro de capella of Novara Cathedral, **Gasparo Casati** (1610-1641) from 1635 until his death and whose sacred motets still survive. Isabella published her first compositions, *Two Motets for Two Voices*, in Casati's Third Book of Sacred Concerts. Her most productive period, 1665-1700, resulted in many motets and other sacred works, such as masses, litanies and vespers and in all, about 200 compositions. Even after becoming Mother Superior in 1686 at the age of 73, she published a set of 11 trio sonatas and in 1696 she wrote a sonata for violin and continuo, and hence became one of the first of Italian women to compose in the new Baroque instrumental genre. In 1700 she published a book of motets, not long before her death in 1704. Fortunately, all of her works have been preserved in a music library in Bologna. Like nuns before her, such as Hildegard von Bingen of the 11th century, Leonarda inherited the tradition of convent-generated vocal music mostly for the benefit of the nuns themselves, explaining in part why she is virtually unknown today in choral circles.

Georg Philipp Telemann (1681-1767)

Telemann, a contemporary and friend of **J. S. Bach** and godfather to **C. P. E. Bach**, is one of the least celebrated composers in the past 200 years, a fate that is difficult to understand given that he was better known than Bach with a reputation surpassing that of G. F. Handel and more prolific than either and perhaps any composer in history. His music was instructional for the young Mozart, and J. S. Bach assiduously copied his music. Yet his reputation dwindled a few years following his death and was virtually ignored during the 19th century. Some notions as to why this occurred will be addressed later.

Telemann was born March 14, 1681, in war-torn Magdeburg, north of Leipzig. His father was a Cathedral deacon who died when young Telemann was four. At Magdeburg he studied Latin, Greek, and German poetry, taught himself the violin, zither, and recorder, and began to compose an opera at age 12. Angry with her son, his mother Maria sought to quash this musical foolishness by sending him to a Lutheran theologian in Zellerfeld who wisely ignored her wishes and helped further Telemann's studies not only in the sciences and classical languages but in music as well. However, independent Georg continued to learn by studying harpsichord, figured bass, and composition and despite little training found time to write motets for the church choir. At age 17 he attended the now 790-yr old Gymnasium Andreanum in Hildesheim where he continued his studies, graduating 3rd in his class (in 1965 the Telemann-Haus was built in his honor). Here Telemann made frequent visits to the neighboring courts of Braunschweig and Hanover, familiarizing himself with the Italian and French styles (especially the music of Lully) that colored his musical style for the remainder of his life and inspired his learning of the oboe, chalumeau (forerunner of the clarinet), viola da gamba, contrabass, and trombone.



Georg's mother, intent on her son having a noble occupation, sent him to law school at Leipzig University in 1701. While enroute to Leipzig, Georg passed through Halle where he met 16 year old **Georg Frederick Handel**, initiating a lifelong friendship. Very soon Telemann founded a *Collegium musicum* at the university (that **J. S. Bach** would later direct), which performed at academic ceremonies and public concerts and opened its rehearsals at local coffeehouses. In 1702 he became music director of the city opera. When the Leipzig mayor learned of Telemann's composing skills, he commissioned him to write cantatas on alternating Sundays at *Thomaskirche* and later helped him to secure the position of music director of *Neukirche*, much to the jealous annoyance of *Thomascantor Johann Kuhnau*, J. S. Bach's predecessor at St. Thomas. Telemann left Leipzig in 1705. When Kuhnau died in 1722, the Leipzig town council contacted Telemann (who was now working in Hamburg) and offered him Kuhnau's vacant position. (They had been interested in hiring Telemann years earlier.) Telemann accepted the offer, being unhappy with the Hamburg town council. But the Hamburg council, realizing that Telemann was too valuable a musician to lose, acquiesced to Telemann's demands, increased his salary, and refused to let him leave. Telemann remained in Hamburg, and Kuhnau's position eventually went to J. S. Bach.



After leaving Leipzig, Telemann enjoyed being extraordinarily employable, succeeding as composer of church, opera, and instrumental music as well as a concert organizer. Before settling in Hamburg in 1721 he had secured positions in Sorau (Prussian Poland), Eisenach and Frankfurt am Main. In Hamburg he became Cantor of the Johanneum Lateinschule and music director for five main churches in this largest city of northern Europe. Composing two cantatas for each church for each Sunday as well as many Passion cantatas, not to mention special cantatas for civic and induction ceremonies and oratorios for church consecrations, did not faze him. In 1722 he became director of the Hamburg opera and began publishing his own music in 1725, totaling 46 works over the next 15 years. In 1728 he founded the first musical journal published in Germany. He remained in Hamburg for the remainder of his life except for one long excursion to Paris in 1737 where he was greeted with immense enthusiasm, not surprising since French music was usually the backbone of Telemann's compositional style. Here he established royal publishing privileges and performed his most recent music, all of which enhanced his reputation further.

His prodigious output of more than 3,000 works includes 1,700 extant sacred cantatas, 20 complete annual cantata cycles, 52 Passions, eight oratorios, 32 psalms, 16 motets, 20 Masses and sacred services, and more than 1,040 secular works for voice, orchestra, chamber music, opera, etc. Many of these works are lost, however.



Telemann remarried after the death of his first wife, Amalie Louise, during the birth of their second child in 1711. With Maria Catharina he had 8 children. Maria left him after her affair with a Swedish officer was exposed but not before running up an enormous debt that nearly bankrupted him. Telemann died in 1767, at the age of 86, his position as *Capellmeister* being filled by **C. P. E. Bach** in 1768.

As to Telemann's posthumous reputation plunge, there are some who point to "excessive critical reverence" for J. S. Bach and Handel, an anti-French bias by German music critics, and negative commentaries, especially by Philipp Spitta, Bach's first biographer. However, it is now realized that Telemann developed new musical styles, influenced by French, Italian, and Polish sounds and more than any other predecessor brought music to the middle classes, such as his open concerts and coffeehouse performances where people could socialize in a convivial atmosphere, a stratagem he also used in Leipzig, Frankfurt and Hamburg. The legacy of Telemann is still being written.

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)



Young J. S. Bach at age 22 gave up his post at Arnstadt after a promising career start, now having his own two-manual organ and a mind for composing organ music. However, his frequent unauthorized trips to hear organist Dietrich Buxtehude, his dalliances with a lady in the church (probably Maria Barbara, his second cousin and future wife), his dissatisfaction with the undisciplined boys choir all became reasons to find employment elsewhere, which he secured in Mühlhausen after a successful audition in St. Blasius Church on Easter Sunday, 1707. In this year he began to compose cantatas and he married Barbara Bach. After one year, he left Mühlhausen for a position in Weimar.

Bach's Cantata for Easter Sunday *Christ lag in Todesbanden* BWV 4 (Christ lay in the bonds of death) was described by John Elliot Gardner as Bach's "first-known attempt at painting a narrative in music." It is a chorale cantata, being based on a hymn by Martin Luther of the same name. Much of it may be the audition cantata when Bach applied for the Mühlhausen position but for certain it is one of his earliest cantatas and the first chorale cantata.

The beginning instrumental sinfonia is an atypical short 14 bars before the balanced grouping of voices: Chorus, duet, aria, chorus, aria, duet, chorale, with the chorale melody dominating every movement. It is one of Bach's most popular cantatas.

Frederick the Great (1712-1786)

The enigmatic soldier/scholar/musician Frederick II, a.k.a. **Frederick the Great**, the third and last king of Prussia, came from the Hohenzollern dynasty whose roots reached back centuries. Unlike his tyrannical and militaristic father Frederick William I, who despised anything French and thought nothing of thrashing people in public, Frederick II was more submissive and had an aptitude for the arts, a trait fostered by his mother and sisters. Despite his father's attempts to deny him the pleasures of music performance and training, Frederick II succeeded in studying when possible, especially when his father was busy with the business of stabilizing Prussia. At one point, the young Frederick, who preferred French to German and flute playing to military parades, attempted to flee to England with a friend and other soldiers but was caught and imprisoned. Furthermore, he was forced to watch the beheading of an intimate friend. Although eventually pardoned, young Frederick suffered from this and other traumatic experiences; this has been the subject of many studies. Yet he went on to become a master at the art of war while enjoying music at his court, assuming the crown at age 28 in 1740 until his death at his summer palace near Berlin in 1786.



Frederick the Great composed 121 flute sonatas, four flute concertos, and a flute symphony, among other works. His principal teacher, **Johann Joachim Quantz** (1697-1773) was himself a German flute maker, composer and flutist for the Dresden court under Augustus II (The Strong), studying with **Jan Dismas Zelenka** before touring Europe and visiting Berlin (Prussia's capital) whereupon the Queen of Prussia, Frederick's mother, invited him to come whenever he wished. It was during these visits that Frederick developed his love for the flute. Once king, Frederick assembled many well-known musicians, including C. P. E. Bach, Franz and Joseph Benda, Carl Heinrich Graun, and Johann Quantz.

A fascinating account of how the venerable J. S. Bach met with Frederick II in 1747 is the subject of a book by James Gaines: *Evening in the Palace of Reason*, referring to Frederick's palace Sans-Souci (Sanssouci).

John Chilgren sings bass with the Bach Cantata Choir and formerly sang with the Portland Symphonic Choir and Choral Arts Ensemble. For 20 years he was pianist and choral director of three SW United Methodist Churches and has been a book and film reviewer for more than 45 years.

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the spring.

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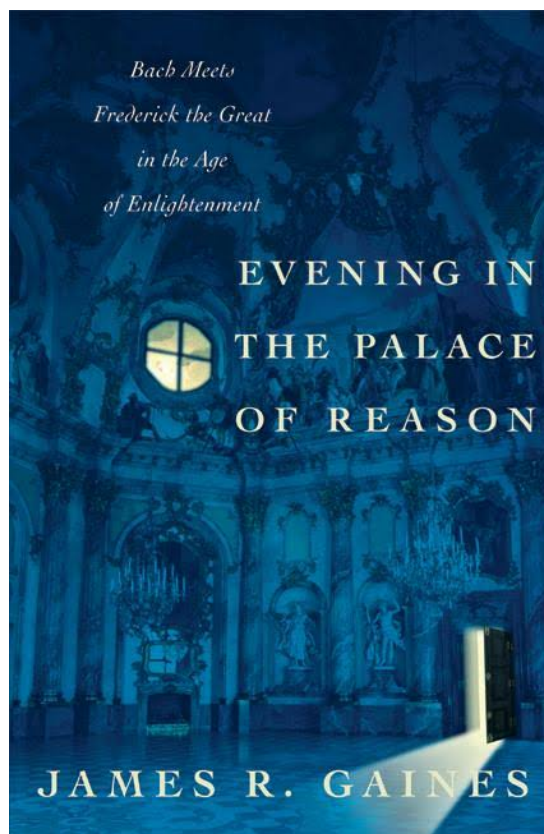
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The Bach Cantata Choir's mission is to sing the entire set of cantatas by Johann Sebastian Bach over a period of 30 years.

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

Emily Rampton, Editor

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