

# Bach Beat

The Newsletter of the Bach Cantata Choir

December 2017

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

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## Baroque Holiday Concert



Friday, December 22, 2017 at 7:30 p.m.

Johann Sebastian Bach: *Christmas Oratorio (Parts 1-3)*

Dietrich Buxtehude: *In Dulci Jubilo*

Marc-Antoine Charpentier: *In Nativitatem Domini Canticum*

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. See Notes below.*

## Music from the BBC: Bach, Buxtehude, and Charpentier

By John Chilgren—Bass



While it is true that “BBC” is a long-standing acronym for the British Broadcasting Corporation, the Bach Cantata Choir will use these letters for a Christmas purpose, airing works by three Baroque masters: **B**ach, **B**uxtehude, and **C**harpentier. Their reputations are not unfamiliar to our audiences but some of the works will be, thus ensuring a rich and new experience for our listeners.



### Dietrich Buxtehude (c.1637-1707)

In about 1637, a son was born to Johannes Buxtehude in the village of Helsingborg (now in Sweden but then in Denmark). The son, born Diderich, later Germanized his name to Dieterich (or Dietrich) owing to some confusion regarding his birthplace, which could have been in what is now modern Germany. **Dietrich Buxtehude** would become the greatest organist since German-born Samuel Scheidt, *Capellmeister* for the Margrave of Brandenburg. Although Buxtehude’s reputation as an organist would eventually be eclipsed by J. S. Bach’s, Buxtehude became one of the leading Lutheran composers and organists of the late 17th century whose music would reflect northern Baroque styles at that time. It is then no surprise that J. S. Bach found in Buxtehude a source for much of his own success that would include clearer ideas of the structure of music and orchestral accompaniments as well as a richer harmonic vocabulary (W. Buzin).

The elder Buxtehude was himself an organist in the Danish church of St. Olaf in Helsingør (Elsinore in English), known for its castle Kronborg, the setting for Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Young Buxtehude’s musical training may have in part come from his father. There is evidence of his scholarly upbringing in local schools, learning music and especially Latin. The first appearance of Dietrich is his debut as an organist in 1657 in Helsingborg and in the following year in Helsingør across the Øresund strait, where he was soon employed at the Church of St. Mary (*Mariankirche*), a German-speaking congregation. In 1667 with the passing of Franz Tunder who had been organist at another



*Marienkirche* in Lübeck, Germany, Buxtehude moved to Lübeck and applied for this organist position, as did the German composer and writer Johann Mattheson and his good friend G. F. Handel, then 18. When a condition of employment included marriage to Tunder's daughter, Anna Margaretha, the list of applicants quickly shrank to one. Buxtehude married Anna Margaretha (with whom he had seven daughters) and thereby assumed the organist position at the *Marienkirche* in Lübeck, a position held until his death on May 9, 1707.

A series of pre-Christmas concerts (*Abendmusiken*) initiated by Tunder as entertainment for local businessmen on weekdays was expanded by Buxtehude. He moved these concerts to five Sundays during the church year including the 2nd, 3rd and 4th Sundays in Advent. It was during these concerts that Buxtehude presented many of his sacred vocal works. Among the visitors to these concerts was an 18-year-old J. S. Bach in 1705. It is documented that, after attending an Advent concert in Lübeck, Bach did not return to his post in Arnstadt for four months! His time with the senior organ master may have been the single most significant influence in his life. Not only did he study with Buxtehude but participated in his concerts as a musician and copied much of his organ manuscripts and choral cantatas. Could Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* extending over six days, produced 30 years later, have been fashioned on the model of *Abendmusiken*?

Although Buxtehude wrote an impressive body of vocal works, many have been lost. Only about 120 manuscripts survive, owing primarily to collections made by his friend Gustav Duben, an organist and orchestra director in Stockholm. The Duben family was, for most of the 17th century, the leading musical dynasty in Sweden and, being of German origin, had close ties with Buxtehude. Duben collected works of many composers and commissioned works by Buxtehude for performance in the German church in Stockholm.

Buxtehude's *In Dulci Jubilo* (BuxWV 52) is based on an ancient tune dating back to the early 14th century, perhaps written by the German mystic Heinrich Seuse (or Sosa) ca. 1328. Later variations of the work were contributed by the Dominican friar Michael Vehe, Michael Praetorius, Michael Pearsall and J. S. Bach. It is called a *macaronic* hymn in which the vernacular (German in this case) alternates with Latin.

This composition is scored for soprano, alto and bass with violins and continuo instrumentals. The violins provide alternating interludes to the choral lines of this serene work. In the jubilant last verse, the excitement of the violins builds and then diminuendos to a peaceful and restful finale.

### **Marc-Antoine Charpentier** (c.1643-1705)

We last encountered Parisian-born **Marc-Antoine Charpentier** in March 2016 and the reader may wish to revisit that issue of the *BachBeat* newsletter at <http://www.bachcantatachoir.org/bachbeat-newsletter.html>.



While his birth date is unknown, Charpentier's life was well chronicled once his reputation was established. It is known that after receiving a classical Jesuit education, he traveled to Rome in the 1660s where he studied under the great oratorio composer Giacomo Carissimi, absorbing the style and technique of oratorios, motets, and other polychoral works in vogue at the time. He would incorporate these features into his own unique style. Writing primarily for the church (masses and Requiems, motets, oratorios, cantatas, and miscellaneous sacred works), he did compose secular works, often collaborating with Molière and the *Comédie-Française*. Private concerts were held in the home of his patroness, Marie de Lorraine, the Duchess of Guise, who was instrumental in securing his position of *Maître de musique* for the principal church of the Jesuits in Paris (Sainte-Chapelle), a position he maintained until his death on February 24, 1705.

Almost none of Charpentier's sacred music was published during his lifetime and, worse, he was quickly forgotten for 250 years until the mid-20th century. However, Charpentier had meticulously copied much of his music, placing them in notebooks which are now kept in the National Library of France in Paris. His role as France's most important 17th century composer is now firmly established.

The motet sung this year, *In Nativitatem Domini Canticum* (H 314) composed in 1671, is one of several brief motets written for the Christmas season. The particular genre of music into which this selection falls has been debated; it has been called an oratorio, a "dramatic motet," and a "sacred concerto." At any rate, all of Charpentier's French Christmas oratorios or motets have pastoral texts; in this instance, the focus is the announcement of Christ's birth to the shepherds. The principle players are the solo bass with alternating choruses (small ensembles in this instance), conveying the text of the work without the use of recitatives.





## Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)



By the time **J. S. Bach** arrived in Leipzig in 1723, the city was already a 300-year-old major cultural center, but its religious Christmas celebrations would be forever changed with J. S. Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* (BWV 248). The origin of the work has been described in previous editions of the *BachBeat* (i.e., December 2016) but what follows is the short story. Imagine Bach in 1730 at age 45, already having completed a substantial body of work as a church composer in Leipzig over the prior seven years. Like a well-tuned BMW, Bach's life had many moving parts, being responsible for music in four churches while writing music for keyboard and strings

as well. He had at his disposal the students at the *Thomasschule* for his many other musical duties. Moreover, he had resumed the leadership of the *Collegium Musicum*, a group of non-professional but nevertheless talented musicians, primarily university students. Begun by Georg Philipp Telemann while a university student, this group performed well-attended weekly concerts at the Gottfried Zimmerman Coffeehouse. By the year 1734, he had been denied the coveted position of *Capellmeister* in Dresden. However, his associations with the musicians at the Dresden court of Frederick Augustus I proved beneficial in many ways, including his composing a number of secular works, two of which became useful in the yet to be written *Christmas Oratorio*, completed late in 1734. For many reasons one can divine, Bach sought to use his existing cantatas to weave the *Christmas Oratorio*, which is now known to consist of, for the most part, recycled cantatas. Most of the music of Parts I-IV were composed for the royal Saxon household (BWV 213 and 214). One number in Part 5 was derived from BWV 215 and the remainder are parodies of a now-lost model. Two movements were written anew. In all, a choral classic was born but not realized until decades later.

The entire six movements lasting three hours were designed to be performed on consecutive feast days of the Lutheran calendar, Nativity through Epiphany. In this concert, the choir will perform the first three movements (the Nativity, the Annunciation, and the Adoration). How joyfully the work begins! Consider the opening chorus "*Jauchzet, frohlocket, auf, preiset die Tage, Rühmet, was heute der Höchste getan*"! (Rejoice, exult to praise the day! Praise what today the highest has done!).

Like so many composers before him, Bach would fall into oblivion. It was for Felix Mendelssohn to awaken European audiences to Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* in 1829. Another 65 years would pass before anyone in America heard portions of the *Christmas Oratorio*, thus there being another reason to rejoice! We are living in the age where we can hear and appreciate all the surviving works of this musical genius.

*Jauchzet, frohlocket!*



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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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## Friends of the Choir (\$100-249)

- Recognition on our website and program.
- Invitation to special events, including "Bach-Sing" day carol sing on Dec. 26 and an event in the spring.

## Director's Circle (\$250-499)

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- All the benefits available to Friends of the Choir.
- Two tickets to the Baroque Holiday Concert.

## *Notes:*

**Tickets are required** for the holiday concert (\$25/\$30). They can be purchased from any choir member (no service charge) or online through Brown Paper Tickets. Seating is general admission.

<https://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/3077474>

The church's parking lot is very small and fills up quickly. Please allow time to find on-street parking. (Grocery Outlet requests **no parking** in their lot.)

The church has an elevator accessible from its parking lot, facing Sandy Blvd.

### **Helping Hands**

The choir is in need of volunteers to assist at concerts and related events. Volunteers might serve as ushers, handing out programs or helping with seating. If you are interested, please contact us:

Email: [info@BachCantataChoir.org](mailto:info@BachCantataChoir.org)

Phone: (503) 702-1973

## **Bach Cantata Choir**

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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 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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