

Bach Beat

The Newsletter of the Bach Cantata Choir



December 2018

www.bachcantatachoir.org

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Baroque Holiday Concert

Friday, December 21, 2018 at 7:30 pm

Tickets available at *Brown Paper Tickets*

<https://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/3607910>

Heinrich Schütz: Weihnachtshistorie (Christmas Story)
Michael Praetorius: Two Christmas Carols
Johann Sebastian Bach: Magnificat in D Major, BWV 243

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.

German Genius for the Christmas Season

By John Chilgren, Bass

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

The *Magnificat*, the canticle or Song of Mary, is an ancient Christian hymn taken from Luke's Gospel where Mary is told by the Angel Gabriel that she will bear God's son and at the same time informs her that her kinswoman Elizabeth will also bear a son even though her age would make this unlikely. Mary visits Elizabeth and together they rejoice as Mary declaims the words of the *Magnificat*: "*Magnificat anima mea Dominum*" (My soul magnifies the Lord). The *Magnificat* is now part of the liturgy in the Vespers of Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran churches.

J. S. Bach's version of the *Magnificat* was his first major work based on a Latin text, which he wrote shortly after his arrival in Leipzig in 1723. His first version (BWV 243a) in the key of E-flat major, was performed in the *Thomaskirche* on December 25 of that year and includes four hymns or *Laudes*, as they were called at the time, related to Christmas. These hymns were well known to Leipzig audiences and had been part of a *Magnificat* composed by Bach's predecessor, **Johann Kuhnau** (1660-1722) who died a year earlier.

Between 1732-1733, Bach produced a new version that was brighter and written in D-major, a more appropriate key for the trumpets. The *Laudes* were omitted, thus expanding the work's usefulness at feasts other than Christmas. It is this more familiar version that will be performed at this concert. The July 2, 1733, performance of the revised *Magnificat* in Leipzig coincided with the feast of the Visitation of Mary as well as the official end of the five-month period of national mourning following the death of Elector Friedrich Augustus (The Strong) in February. During this period of mourning, no concert music was allowed in any churches but Bach was still very busy writing the first two parts (*Kyrie* and *Gloria*) of his *B-minor Mass* that were to be dedicated to Saxony's Elector successor, Frederic Augustus II in Dresden.



The *Magnificat* has been set to music more often than any other liturgical text, excepting the Mass. Composition styles, however, vary greatly from the mystical unaccompanied work of Palestrina to the dramatic setting of Monteverdi written for performance in the San Marco Basilica in Venice where Monteverdi was organist. Now regarded as one of Bach's finest choral works, the *Magnificat* expresses the full range of human emotion from intimate thoughtfulness to absolute joy. It is scored for five-part chorus, soloists in each voice, flutes, oboes, trumpets, tympani, bassoon, strings, and continuo. The two festive outer movements with trumpets and timpani in full force wrap around ten other movements, each with colorful and challenging solos or duets with a fast-paced choral fughetta placed in the center. The emotional setting for Bach would have been enhanced given that his wife, Anna Magdalena, was pregnant with a son born in February 1724.

Heinrich Schütz (1585-1672)

In the fall issue of the Bach Beat (Vol 12, No 2) the life of **Heinrich Schütz** was briefly described but, like all renowned composers, there's always more to their story. By his late twenties Schütz's reputation as composer and organist had spread, the reason that Saxon Elector Johann Georg I asked that Schütz come to Dresden and in particular to assist **Michael Praetorius** with music during the baptism of the Elector's son. Work done by Schütz greatly pleased the Elector who argued strongly with Schütz's mentor, Landgrave Moritz of Hessen-Kassel, to allow Schütz to reside in Dresden. The Elector succeeded. Schütz composed music to entertain the most prominent leaders of the Holy Roman Empire, including Emperor Matthias, Archduke Ferdinand (an instigator of the destructive Thirty Years War), Count Wallenstein (the Bohemian nobleman and military leader, who later commanded the armies of the Hapsburg Empire), and Prince Eggenberg (the German-born nobleman who became a close associate of Ferdinand, the future Ferdinand II and Holy Roman Emperor). It was Schütz's good fortune that he was soon appointed as *Capellmeister* at Dresden, assuming duties of the semi-retired *Capellmeister* **Rogier Michael** (c. 1552-1619) and **Michael Praetorius** (1571-1621).

In 1618 military action began, leading to the Thirty Years War that pitted Protestant Lutheran states against states loyal to the Pope. Although Saxony was the wealthiest German kingdom with ample natural

resources, it too began to suffer the effects of war and, from Schütz's point of view, life was becoming more difficult to sustain since Elector Johann Georg II diverted funds away from court pageantry to fund war efforts creating shortages of singers and musicians who went unpaid, became soldiers, or died from the plague. Schütz was allowed to return to Venice for study with **Claudio Monteverdi** (1567-1643) who taught Schütz techniques that would be employed in later compositions. Schütz also sent Italian instruments and publications back to Dresden and hired musicians for the depleted Dresden court. The war expanded, involving armies of Denmark, Sweden, Austria, Poland, Russia, Netherlands, Spain and France. At the end of the war in 1648, the balance of power and territorial boundaries had changed dramatically. But Schütz continued to write and publish some of his most famous works, notably a collection of sacred motets *Geistliche Chor-Musik*, in 1648.



After retiring from the Dresden court in 1656, Schütz retreated to his beloved Weissenfels to compose new works for performance in Dresden where he'd return several times a year for religious festivals. Two of these works, *Die sieben Worte Jesu Christi* (The Seven Last Words of Christ) (SWV 478) and *Historia der Geburth Jesu Christi* (History of the Birth of Christ) (SWV 435) were written in 1657 and 1660 respectively when he was in his 70's. It is this latter work, now simply called The Christmas Story (*Weihnachtshistorie*), that the Bach Cantata Choir will perform. Based on the Gospel readings in Matthew and Luke, the work reveals a musical style acquired from Schütz's studies with Gabrieli and other influential Italian composers. First performed in Dresden in 1660, *Weihnachtshistorie* represents a step forward in creating a sort of oratorio that would undergo further development in dramatic liturgical music, especially that of Bach, Handel, and Charpentier. The history of this work is rather complicated as it was preserved in three editions, none of them complete. The recitatives were first published in 1664 but the instrumental and vocal parts weren't discovered until 1908 in the University Library in Uppsala, Sweden.

Michael Praetorius (1571-1621)

The short-lived German genius, **Michael Praetorius**, (nee Michael Schultheiss) was born in the Thuringian town of Creutzberg, Germany (near Eisenach, the birthplace of J. S. Bach) in 1571. In honor of his birthplace, he often signed his name Michael Praetorius Creutzbergensis or simply MPC, which will be used here (MPC should not be confused with the organist Jacob Praetorius from Hamburg in the same Baroque era).

MPC's father was a theologian, taught by **Martin Luther** and **Phillip Melancon**, the intellectual leader of the Reformation and cofounder of Lutheranism. Owing to doctrinal disputes, the Schultheiss family relocated eventually to Torgau in 1573; here MPC attended the Latin school where his father was a colleague of **Johann Walther** (1496-1570), a composer and cantor in the chapel of Frederick the Wise (the Elector who disguised and secreted Martin Luther in the Wartburg Castle in Eisenach). In 1582 MPC entered the University of Frankfurt an der Oder and lived with his brother Andreas, who was both pastor and professor at Frankfurt. After his brother's death, MPC was appointed organist at the university's *Mariankirche*, launching his professional career at age 16 in 1587.

The next time MPC appears in history is as organist for the court of Heinrich Julius of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel. After marrying and later becoming a father of two sons, he is appointed as *Capellmeister* at Wolfenbüttel. In this period, MPC writes and publishes several musical collections. After the death of the Duke in 1613, he is asked to join the Dresden court during the



year of mourning, assisting the current *Capellmeister* Rogier Michael. It is in Dresden that he meets Heinrich Schütz (who eventually succeeds Rogier) and is exposed to techniques and trends in Italian music that influenced his music later on.

He returned to Wolfenbüttel in 1616 but became a freelance consultant to other courts. These interruptions caused him to lose reappointment as *Capellmeister* since the *Hofkapelle* (court orchestra) had begun to decline, as had his own physical and mental state. After a brief period, he died on his birthday at age 50 on February 15, 1621. He is buried in the *Mariankirche* in Wolfenbüttel.

The contributions of Praetorius to music extend far beyond the large collection of sacred works for use in the rapidly growing Lutheran church (recall that his father was educated in Wittenberg by the founders of Lutheranism). His incomplete but monumental multi-volume *Syntagma musicum* (1614–20) was one of the most important systematic sources of 17th-century music as well as a theoretical summary of musical knowledge at the time and an invaluable resource for performers of late Renaissance and Baroque music. In addition, he introduced several hundred foreign dance pieces to Germany with his collection *Terpsichore* (1612).

Praetorius loved Advent music and his arrangements have lasted for centuries. The carols performed at this concert were found in a nine-volume collection *Musae Sioniae* (1605-10) consisting of more than 1200 settings of chorales from 2-12 voices, some in Venetian double-choir style. The author of the original German lyrics to *Es ist ein Ros entsprungen* is unknown, as is the composer of the song's melody.

It isn't known if Praetorius was the original author of the charming polyphonic *Psallite* (Now We Sing) set in a macaronic text of Latin and German, but it remains a popular work during the Advent season.

John Chilgren sings with the Bach Cantata Choir and for many years with the Portland Symphonic Choir and Choral Arts Ensemble. He plays clarinet with a Portland marching band.

Thank you!

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Baroque Holiday Concert

Tickets:

- Ticket are required for this concert.
- You may order online at Brown Paper Tickets: <https://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/3607910>
- You may also purchase tickets without a service fee from choir members or at the door.

Parking:

- No concert parking in the Grocery Outlet lot!
- The church's parking lot is very small and fills up quickly. Please allow time to find on-street parking.

Accessibility:

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

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