

Bach Beat

The Newsletter of the 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 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.

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Welcome to the Mass in B minor

By John Chilgren—Bass

Welcome to the 2014-15 season of the Bach Cantata Choir, celebrating the tenth year since its founding by Ralph Nelson in 2005. Such an occasion necessitates a musical celebration, something all of us will remember: J.S. Bach's *Mass in B minor*. This will not be presented in its entirety as that would exceed two hours. Rather this work will be sung over the course of four BCC concerts this season. In this manner, the audience can absorb and focus on Bach's true genius by appreciating each part of the mass rather than attempting to digest such a prodigious work all at once. This is not a new concept but rather how various parts of the *Mass* were actually performed before the first full performance in 1859, 109 years after Bach's death.

Like many of his contemporaries, Bach was attracted to Dresden, the artistic capital of Europe under Augustus the Strong, who also became King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania. Bach visited Dresden in 1731 and performed at the Sophienkirche (St. Sophia's), hoping to catch the eye of the Dresden court. Although Johann Adolf Hasse, the then-famed singer and composer of Italian theater and sacred music, had been appointed Kapellmeister and Director of the Opera by Augustus in 1731, he did not have a permanent contract when Augustus died in 1733. Bach, having grown dissatisfied with his position as cantor

at the church of St. Thomas in Leipzig, had hoped to compete for the position so in 1733, he submitted a *Missa* consisting of the *Kyrie* and *Gloria* as part of his application.

Perhaps owing to the fact that both King Augustus and his son Augustus III had converted to Catholicism, Bach wanted to create a composition that was diplomatically acceptable for both Lutheran and Roman Catholic rites.

He presented his *Missa* to the Dresden Catholic court but lost the competition for Kapellmeister, which Hasse secured. Instead, Bach was given an honorific title of Royal Court composer in 1736. The first two works of his *Missa* or *Missa brevis* would eventually evolve into the complete *Mass in B minor* or *Missa tota*, including not only the *Kyrie* and *Gloria* but also the *Credo*, *Sanctus*, *Benedictus*, and *Agnus Dei*. Such a *Missa brevis* would suffice for a Lutheran mass (or *Missa*) unlike the Catholic mass that

includes the Ordinary, or texts that remain the same for all masses.

Two other Baroque composers, Dietrich Buxtehude and Jan Zelenka,¹ will be featured with Bach in this first concert. Bach crossed paths with both of these composers during the early 18th century but not in the same place. Buxtehude (c. 1637-1707), a Danish composer known mostly for his organ works, grew famous in his eventual and final home of Lübeck, Germany owing to his famed choral and organ concerts during Advent (*Abendmusik*, or "Evening Music") that attracted numerous musicians from all over Europe, including Bach, Handel, Mattheson, and Tellemann. Bach is said to have walked 200 miles from his home in Arnstadt in 1705 to meet



Sophienkirche, Dresden

with Buxtehude for the first time. An unpublished work of Buxtehude, the *Missa brevis*, was found in Bach's library after his death and is believed to be the inspiration for the first two parts of Bach's *Mass in B minor*, the *Kyrie* and the *Gloria*.

Bach's other contemporary, Czech composer, Zelenka (1679-1745), was born in Louňovice, near Prague (then Bohemia), and probably spent his early years in Prague and matured as a musician there. However, in 1710 he too was attracted to the Saxon capital of Dresden as it had become the art capital and cultural magnet of Europe thanks to the vast sums of money poured into Dresden by King Augustus. Already accomplished after becoming principal violone and conductor in the Dresden Court Orchestra, Zelenka also aspired to become the Kapellmeister in 1729. Having acted as an assistant he had good claim, but as mentioned earlier, the post went to Hasse. Zelenka received the title of Court Composer of Church Music, as his many sacred works (about 150) fit well with the Dresden Catholic Court. This was a sore point for Lutheran Saxony and perhaps for this

reason that Zelenka's liturgical music was kept under wraps for nearly 200 years. As with Bach's *Mass in B minor*, where in Lutheran Germany was there a place for music written for the Roman Catholic Church outside the Dresden court? Zelenka's *Haec dies*, or "This is the Day," was composed in about 1730, or close to the time he was competing for the Kapellmeister position in Dresden. It illustrates the composer's gift of inventive orchestration and rhythmic imagination.

Bach's Chorale Cantata BWV 177, *Ich ruf zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ*, or "I call to Thee, Lord Jesus Christ," was first performed July 6, 1732, when Bach was in Leipzig and was his last cantata before writing his *Missa* in early 1733. The text is from Johann Friedrich Agricola, one of Bach's pupils and Director of the Royal Chapel in Berlin after Bach's death.

¹ See *BachBeat* Vol.1-2 for more on Buxtehude, and Vol. 4-5 for Zelenka. Available at www.bachcantatachoir.org.

Silent Auction Fundraiser
to Open the Season!
Sunday, October 26, 2014 at 2:00 p.m.
Rose City Park Presbyterian Church
Doors open early for bidding. Auction
closes 20 minutes after concert ends.
Tickets for our Baroque Holiday Concert
will also be available for purchase.

BACH CANTATA CHOIR
3570 NE MATHISON PLACE
PORTLAND OR 97212



2014-2015 Schedule

Sunday, October 26, 2014 2pm

Silent Auction Follows Concert

Jan Dismas Zelenka (1679-1745): Haec Dies

Dietrich Buxtehude (1637-1707): Missa Brevis

J.S. Bach: Cantata No. 177, "Ich ruf zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ"

J.S. Bach: "Kyrie" from Mass in B minor

Friday, December 19, 2014 7:30pm—Baroque Holiday Concert

Tickets Required (\$25 general & \$20 students/seniors)

Chant: Puer Natus in Bethlehem

J.S. Bach: Christmas Oratorio, Parts 2 and 4

Selected Baroque Christmas Carols

Marc-Antoine Charpentier (1643-1704): Messe de Minuit pour Noël

Sunday, February 1, 2015 2pm—SuperBach Sunday

Antonio Lotti (1667-1740): "Gloria" from Missa Sapientiae

Antonio Vivladi (1678-1741): Bassoon Concerto in C Minor

J.S. Bach: "Gloria" from Mass in B minor

Sunday, March 22, 2014 2pm—Lenten Concert

Martin Luther (1483-1546): "Out of the Depths"

Giovanni Battista Pergolesi (1710-1736): Stabat Mater (excerpts)

J.S. Bach: Excerpts from Cantatas 12, 101 and 120

J.S. Bach: "Credo" from Mass in B minor

Sunday, May 4, 2014 2pm

Chant: Non Nobis Domine

J.S. Bach: Cantata No. 69, "Lobe den Herrn, meine Seele"

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (1525-1594): "Agnus Dei" from Missa Sine Nomine

J.S. Bach: Excerpt from Cantata 11

J.S. Bach: "Sanctus" and "Agnus Dei" from Mass in B minor