

Bach Beat

The Newsletter of the Bach Cantata Choir



March 2015

www.bachcantatachoir.org

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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.

The *BachBeat* newsletter is published cyclically by the BCC.

The Year 1749: The Habit of Perfection

By John Chilgren—Bass

Martin Luther, the German friar and theology professor who initiated the Protestant Reformation, was born on November 10, 1483, to a working class family in Eisleben, Saxony, then part of the Holy Roman Empire. Against his father's intention that he become a lawyer, young Luther took up philosophy and theology and, after a "near-death" experience, became an Augustinian friar. After earning his Doctor of Theology degree in 1512, he wrote in 1517 in Latin his *Disputatio pro declaratione virtutis indulgent* that came to be known as *The Ninety-five Theses*.

Martin Luther began to write hymns in about 1523 as a way to help his German followers to express and develop their faith. He became a prolific writer, setting Biblical texts to music as well as modifying older German hymns and spiritualizing German folk-songs. Although "A Mighty Fortress is our God" (*Ein feste Burg*) is Luther's most famous hymn (and has been translated into more languages than any other hymn), his hymn "Out of the Depths, I Cry for You" (*Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir*) was probably the first melody he wrote and was the hymn sung at his funeral in 1546. Composed in 1523, this hymn is based on Psalm 130.

The city of Jesi, Italy, has been the birthplace of many important personalities, even into the 20th century. On January 4, 1710, a musical prodigy would be born into the family of Francesco Draghi: **Giovanni Battista Pergolesi**, named after his godfather, Giovanni Battista Franciolini, a nobleman who played an important role in his life, not only in Jesi but also in Naples

where he spent his most productive years.

Young Pergolesi studied violin and composition with local musicians and churchmen in Jesi with the help of his godfather. His virtuosity was noted elsewhere and when only 16, Pergolesi was invited to attend the only ecclesiastical music conservatory in Naples, the *Conservatorio dei Poveri di Gesù Cristo*, where he studied under Gaetano Greco, Fernando Feo, and Francesco Durante, Neapolitan composers of keyboard, opera, and sacred vocal music respectively. Pergolesi would

become one of the most important early composers of *opera buffa* (comic opera), his first (*La Salustia*) being performed in Naples at 22 when he had become *maestro di cappella* to the Prince of Stigiliano (House of Colonna). In his remaining four years he would produce several more operas, some commissioned by the powerful nobility in the Houses of Colonna and Carafa, and all of them performed in Naples excepting one first given in Rome.



Martin Luther

Pergolesi's other works include both many sacred and secular vocal works as well as instrumental compositions. The actual number of works attributed to him far exceed those that have been authenticated, which is why it is difficult to ascertain an accurate number of his compositions. However, there is no doubt that his sacred work *Stabat Mater* completed shortly before his death is authentic and remains his best known work. Commissioned in Rome by a confraternity (*Confraternità dei Cavalieri di San Luigi di Palazzo*), who presented an annual Good Friday meditation honoring the Virgin Mary, the *Stabat Mater* would replace a work composed by Alessandro Scarlatti only nine years earlier. J.S. Bach would pen a musical parody of the *Stabat Mater* for his Cantata BWV 1083, *Tilge, Höchster, meine Sünden*.

For the last three years of his life Pergolesi was employed by the Duke of Maddaloni (House of Carafa). With his health failing from tubercu-

losis and having lost his parents and three siblings, he was sent to the Capuchin monastery at Pozzuoli, near Naples, as the air there was considered beneficial to those with consumption. Pergolesi died penniless on March 16, 1736, and was buried in an unmarked tomb at the cathedral in Pozzuoli, the Cattedrale di San Procolo. The *Stabat Mater*, scored for soprano and alto soloists, strings and basso continuo (cello and organ), received acclaim after Pergolesi's death and continues to be his most popular composition performed today.

The BCC performs **J. S. Bach's** the Cantata 101, *Nimm von uns Herr, du treuer Gott* (Take from us Oh Lord, faithful God) that was written for the 10th Sunday after Trinity. It was first performed in Leipzig on August 13, 1724. The opening chorus is described as a chorale fantasia with the cantus firmus of the soprano line set to the tune of the Lord's Prayer (*Vater Unser in Himmelreich*) often ascribed, but not indubitably so, to Martin Luther. The text is a collective and passionate plea to spare humankind beset by deserved punishments and miseries, whether from disease, war, fire or plague, giving the cantata a somber tone. Bach's inspiration for this work was a hymn written dur-

ing a time of plague in 1584 by the German poet and priest, Martin Moller.

The BCC also continues with its production the B Minor Mass by presenting in this concert the *Credo* (termed Symbolum Nicenum, its Lutheran name), the *Kyrie* and *Gloria* having been performed in earlier concerts. The *Credo* has nine movements with the *Crucifixus* at the center. As was so common in the Baroque and other periods, composers borrowed from others as well as from themselves. The *Crucifixus*, a four-part choral work, is derived from his 1714 Cantata *Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen* (Weeping, Lamenting, Worrying, Fearing). Bach reworked the first section of the first chorus of this cantata (BWV 12) to form the *Crucifixus* that will be recognized when the two are juxtaposed to each other. This makes the *Crucifixus* the oldest music of the B Minor Mass. Readers of the *BachBeat* will recall that while Bach wrote the *Kyrie* and *Gloria* (*Missa Brevis*) before 1733 and submitted them to the Dresden Court in hopes of receiving an appointment as Court Composer, the remainder of the B Minor Mass was not completed until late 1749, less than a year before his death in 1750 in Leipzig.

Continuing the B Minor Mass with *Credo*,
Bach Cantatas 12 and 101, and works from
Martin Luther and Giovanni Pergolesi.

Sunday, March 22, 2015 at 2:00 p.m.
Rose City Park Presbyterian Church

Centen Concert

BACH CANTATA CHOIR
3570 NE MATHISON PLACE
PORTLAND OR 97212



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Upcoming Sponsor Events

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- **Thursday, March 19 at 3:00 p.m.**

Join us for All Classical's Thursdays @ Three. Very limited seating. If you can't attend in person, be sure to tune in on 89.9 FM (in Portland) or listen online at www.allclassical.org.

- **Saturday, March 21**

Attend our dress rehearsal (starting at 1:00 p.m.) and stay through for a birthday party for Bach (at 4:00 p.m.).

- **Saturday, April 18, time TBD**

Join a discussion led by Ralph Nelson based in part on John Eliot Gardiner's *Bach: Music in the Castle of Heaven*.