

Bach Beat

The Newsletter of the Bach Cantata Choir



November 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.

Season Opener 2015-16

By John Chilgren — Bass

Welcome to the Bach Cantata Choir's 11th season. The choir will be presenting a virtual smorgasbord of Baroque composers' works, with samplings from Italy (Palestrina, Marcello), Germany (Bach, Hasse, Handel, Schutz), France (Charpentier), Bohemia—now Czech Republic (Zelinka), and The Netherlands (Sweelinck). In addition, two contemporary composers, one from Norway (Arnesen) and the other from Spain (Casals) will be featured in the second and fourth concerts, respectively.

The first concert of the season will feature works of two German composers, Bach and Handel. From **J. S. Bach** we will hear two pieces: Cantata 97, *In allen meinen Taten* (In all that I do) and BWV 230, the motet *Lobet den Herrn, alle Heiden* (Praise the Lord, all ye heathen). From the German-born English composer **George Frideric** (or Friedrich) **Handel** we will hear *Ode for St. Cecilia's Day* for chorus, soloists and orchestra.

Cecilia is known as the patron saint of music, or as the patroness of musicians, whose feast day, celebrated by the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Eastern Orthodox churches since about the 4th century, is November 22.

Many legends surround her life and information is sketchy but Cecilia's reputation is that of pledging herself to chastity, despite her forced marriage to a dashing young pagan whom she converted to Christianity. She was beheaded when she was found to be aiding the burial of

martyred Christians in Rome. Her connection to music is legend, often represented as playing the organ to express the image of her singing in her heart to God while musicians played at her wedding.

Handel's *Ode for St. Cecilia's Day* (not to be confused with the similarly-titled work of the other great English Baroque composer, Henry Purcell) was composed in 1739 within a mere nine days. The foundation of Handel's cantata is John Dryden's poem, *A Song for St. Cecilia's Day*, written in 1687. Within this work are brief impressions of how various musical instruments reflect the passions of humankind, such as the "trumpet's loud clangor" that "incites us to arms" or "the soft complaining flute" that reveals the "woes of hopeless lovers." Eventually the divine qualities of the human voice are contrasted with the organ, whereupon St. Cecilia enters and with her music attracts an angel, who mistakes earth for heaven.

The apocalyptic end portrays what will happen when the harmony of the universe ceases to exist at the "last and dreadful hour" or Judgment Day.



Handel employs the Pythagorean doctrine of the power of musical harmony in the creation of the universe.

This work was performed in London on November 22, 1739, with Handel conducting.

Handel was J. S. Bach's contemporary but the two Baroque giants never met, despite being born only 80 miles apart. In 1719 Bach traveled to Halle, Handel's birthplace, hoping to meet Handel who had been visiting his mother there. Unfortunately, Handel had already departed for London; thus an historic encounter never occurred.



Handel

G. F. Handel studied in Halle and Hamburg as well as Florence and Venice before traveling to England where he produced the bulk of his prodigious output that included 42 operas, 29 oratorios, more than 120 cantatas, trios, duets, arias, much chamber music and concerti, among others.

Messiah, his most famous

oratorio, was first performed in Dublin when he was 56.

Unlike J. S. Bach, Handel never married and he fathered no children. He died at age 74 and is buried in Westminster Abbey.

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- Recognition on our website and program.
- Invitation to special events, including a caroling party with the choir, and a discussion led by Ralph Nelson followed by refreshments and fellowship.

Director's Circle (\$250+)

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

2015/16 Opening Concert
Sunday, November 8, 2015 at 2:00 pm
Rose City Park Presbyterian Church
NE 44th & Sandy, Portland OR

BACH CANTATA CHOIR
3570 NE MATHISON PLACE
PORTLAND OR 97212



Bach's motet, *Lobet den Herrn*, is based on the first two verses of Psalm 117 and is only one of Bach's six surviving motets and one of two whose text is entirely biblical. A short but serene middle section separates the animated fugal first part from the joyful Alleluia ending.

Mysteries surround the origin of this motet, least of which is its date of composition as well as the date and place of performance. It is Bach's only 4-part (SATB) motet and unlike other motets that have instrumental accompaniments, it has but a figured bass line, leading some to believe that it is part of another work, such as a lost cantata. These issues, as well as its late publication in 1821, have some Bach scholars even doubting its

authorship and consequently very little has been written about it.

The Chorale Cantata BWV 97, *In allen meinen Taten*, was written in Leipzig in 1734. The occasion for which it was composed is unknown although some suggest that it may have been a wedding or the fifth Sunday after Trinity. The text, written in 1633, is based on a hymn by the German poet and physician, Paul Fleming, who wrote words to conform to the 15th century tune "Innsbruck, ich muß dich lassen" by Heinrich Isaac. This melody was adapted for a Lutheran chorale, "O Welt, ich muß dich lassen" in the mid-16th century as well. Bach uses this tune in both chorales as well in other works including the St. Matthew Passion.

John Chilgren sings with the Bach Cantata Choir and the Portland Symphonic Choir and plays clarinet in The Beat Goes On Marching Band of Portland that represented USA in the Shanghai Tourism Festival in 2014. Formerly, he sang with the Portland Choral Arts Ensemble for 19 years and with many other groups in his 50 years of choral singing. He has been a reviewer for AAAS Science Books & Films for more than 40 years.