

Bach Beat

The Newsletter of the Bach Cantata Choir



December 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.

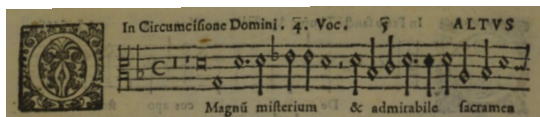
Baroque Holiday Offerings

By John Chilgren — Bass

Styles of music have evolved over the centuries, but Christmas music has never lost its ability to captivate an audience. In this Baroque Holiday Concert the Bach Cantata Choir will present selections from three composers who fashioned works of unending appeal.

SPAIN - Tomás Luis de Victoria (1548-1611) is considered the most important Spanish composer of the 16th century. Born in Ávila, he was also a singer, organist, Catholic priest and one of the most important late composers of the Counter-Reformation, a movement aimed in part to regain religious control of regions that were once predominantly Roman Catholic. De Victoria, who wrote only sacred music, became very well known in his lifetime. After his magnum opus, a *Requiem Mass* for Empress Maria's funeral in 1603, Victoria ceased composing, but his work began to spread throughout Catholic Europe and into the Spanish Americas. Although his fame slowly waned, a revival of sorts began more than a century ago. A late Renaissance composer, his music was simpler and less technical as he preferred more mysterious melodies and shunned the complex counterpoint of his predecessors, all of which foreshadowed the Baroque era.

The serene and melismatic *O Magnum Mysterium* (O Great Mystery) was published in 1572 and today is a frequently performed motet.



NETHERLANDS - Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck, a Dutch composer, was born in Deventer in 1562, 123 years before J. S. Bach. His musical style represents both a culmination of polyphonic Renaissance as well as a forerunner of Baroque styles, like the music of his Italian counterparts,



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Claudio Monteverdi, Giovanni Gabrieli and Andrea Gabrieli. Sweelinck came from a family of organists and emerged eminent in his own right, not only as an organist and organ-builder but also as a composer and master improviser, becoming known as the "Orpheus of Amsterdam," the city in which he would teach and compose until his death in 1621. His organ career at the Oude Kerk

("old church"), Amsterdam's oldest building and oldest parish church, spanned more than 40 years. In 1578 the Oude Kerk became a Calvinist church, which it remains today. Sweelinck produced 254 vocal works, including 33 chansons, 19 madrigals, 37 motets, and 153 Psalm settings. More than 70 of his keyboard works have survived.

Hodie Christus Natus Est comes from the liturgy for the Christmas Day vesper service and is one of his most performed motets from the Latin Catholic *Cantiones Sacrae* collection, a work written after he had converted to Calvinism. With the textual celebration of the birth of Christ, the work changes frequently between duple and triple meter and intersperses the text with cries of "Alleluia" and "Noe" (a form of "Noel") within the antiphonal four-part choral work.



GERMANY - J. S. Bach was nearly 50 years old when he wrote the *Christmas Oratorio*, BWV 248, in 1734. A six-part work intended to be performed during the major feast days of Christmas (December 25 to January 6), the *Christmas Oratorio* relates the Christmas story as told in the New Testament chapters of Matthew and Luke. Since the entire oratorio is three hours long, the Bach Cantata Choir will perform only the first three parts: The Birth (Part 1), The Annunciation of the Shepherds (Part 2), and The Adoration of the Shepherds (Part 3). In this work Bach adapts existing compositions for new purposes, a very common practice in Bach's day. Three previously written secular cantatas written during 1733-1734 provide the basis of much of the *Christmas Oratorio*.

A few other choruses, recitatives, and arias, especially in Part 6, are believed to be from a lost church cantata, BWV 248a. Thus, this work is not truly an "oratorio" in the strict sense of the word but a collection of cantatas that provide more of a thoughtful meditation on the Christmas season's far-ranging implications than a linear narrative of the Nativity story. Indeed, Bach ensured that the entire work would be a coherent and convincing sequence by making both major and subtle revisions and succeeded in producing a triumphant work. Its jubilant theme can be summed up in the words of the opening chorus: *Jauchzet, frohlocket, auf, preiset die Tage* — "Rejoice! Be Glad! Praise the Day!"

Sweetlink
Victoria
J.S. Bach
Hodie Christus Natus Est
O Magnum Mysterium
Christmas Oratorio, Parts 1-3

2015-16 Baroque Holiday Concert
Friday, December 18, 2015 at 7:30 pm
Rose City Park Presbyterian Church
NE 44th & Sandy, Portland OR

BACH CANTATA CHOIR
3570 NE MATHISON PLACE
PORTLAND OR 97212



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



Tickets are required for the Baroque Holiday Concert.
\$30 general \$25 student/senior

You may obtain tickets from choir members, online from Brown Paper Tickets, or at the door.
www.bccholiday2015.brownpapertickets.com

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.