

ABERDEEN BACH CHOIR

Patrons: Dame Emma Kirkby, Professor John Butt OBE

Musical Director: Peter Parfitt

Aberdeen Sinfonietta: Leader Bryan Dargie

J S Bach Christmas Oratorio

(Parts 1, 4, 5 and 6)



7.45pm Sunday 3rd December 2017
St Machar's Cathedral

Emma Kirkby, Soprano • Nicholas Spanos, Counter Tenor
Nathan Vale, Tenor • Dawid Kimberg, Bass

www.aberdeenbachchoir.com

Charity Number: SC008609

Before the concert

Do please:

- Check that you have switched off your mobile phone
- Remain seated in an emergency, until given instructions by the stewards
- Return to your seats promptly after the interval

Latecomers will be asked to sit at the side until a suitable break in the programme.



Toilets are located in the choir vestry at the back of the Cathedral, or in the Gatehouse.

**This concert is dedicated to the memory of
DAVID PARFITT 1933 - 2017**

David Parfitt was a teacher and musician in the Bristol and Bath area for all of his life and the father of Peter Parfitt, Musical Director of the Aberdeen Bach Choir. As a boy he won a scholarship to Bristol Grammar School where he remained until it was time for National Service. This was spent in the Fleet Air Arm of the Royal Navy. He was commissioned to the Royal Naval Air Station at Culdrose in Cornwall as an air traffic controller. After National Service he entered teacher training. His career as a teacher began at a boys' Primary School in Bristol. There followed appointments in several Bristol schools as he progressed up the career ladder culminating with a Headship at Marshfield Primary School, a post he held for nine years. Throughout his time as a teacher he was also the co-ordinator of music education for the Bristol schools. After taking early retirement he trained as an Ofsted school inspector, spending a further ten years on inspection teams.

Throughout his life David's passions were supporting Bristol City Football Club, playing the organ, and the American way of life. He had an encyclopaedic knowledge of US politics and its military services and had visited all 50 states. Playing the organ surpassed all his other hobbies however. He began lessons as a boy with the village organist, and soon progressed to lessons with the organist at Bristol Cathedral. The offer to become an Articled Pupil to the organist of Winchester Cathedral had to be turned down for financial reasons. However, David continued lessons with the organist of Bath Abbey. Following his first appointment as a teenager, David went on to complete a total of 67 years of consecutive service to the Church of England as an organist and choirmaster, unbroken but for his two years of National Service. He finally retired from this in March of this year and, until his final service, conducted regular choral evensongs in the Anglican cathedral tradition with a robed choir of over 40 members. As a man who spent nearly five decades in the field of education, coupled with almost seven decades as a church organist and choir master, David touched, influenced and improved the lives of literally thousands of people, both young and old.

PROGRAMME

WEIHNACHTS-ORATORIUM

CHRISTMAS ORATORIO

BWV 248

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Part I – The Nativity of Christ

Part IV – The Circumcision and Naming

Interval

Part V – The Journey of the Magi

Part VI – The Adoration of the Magi

*And is it true? And is it true, this most tremendous tale of all?
A baby in an ox's stall?
The maker of the stars and sea, become a child, on Earth, for me?*

Sir John Betjeman

*O Virgin of virgins, how shall this be?
For neither before Thee was any like unto Thee, nor shall there be any after.
Daughters of Jerusalem, why marvel ye at me?
The thing which ye behold is a divine mystery.*

Antiphon for Christmas Eve

WEIHNACHTS-ORATORIUM

THE CHRISTMAS ORATORIO

BWV 248

J.S. BACH

PARTS 1, 4, 5 and 6

THE CONTEXT

Following the death in 1722 of Johann Kuhnau, Kantor of the St Thomas School, Leipzig, Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 – 1750) was one of six applicants for the vacancy. The appointing council considered the most outstanding candidate for this prestigious post to be the highly respected musician, already well known in Leipzig, Georg Philipp Telemann. He was elected unanimously by the council members, but, to their great disappointment, turned down the position, and so they turned to their second choice, Christoph Graupner, a virtuoso violinist and former pupil of Kuhnau. He was unable to secure his release from his current position as Kapellmeister at Darmstadt, and so had no alternative but to withdraw his application. In desperation the council offered the job to Bach, who, at the time, was hardly known in Leipzig. One official observed: “as the best musicians were not available we had no option but to take one of the mediocre ones.” Telemann was renowned for his numerous instrumental compositions, as well as a string of cantata and passion settings, which were written for the church at the University of Leipzig, where he had been a student, and Graupner was the Nicola Benedetti of his day. However, neither possessed the devout affinity with the Lutheran church and its overriding Protestant doctrine, which demanded that sacred text be set to the Glory of God, but yet remain accessible to the common man – a feature which is perpetually evident in the sacred music of Bach.

So, Bach arrived in Leipzig in 1723, to take up what was to be the final appointment of his life. The city had six main churches: the *Neuekirche*, St Paul's, St Peter's, St John's, St Nicholas's (the *Nikolaikirche*), and St Thomas's (the *Thomaskirche*). Today, of these only the last two remain, the others having been reduced to rubble by allied bombing in the early 1940s. Bach's position as *Thomaskantor*, coupled with the post of Civic Director of Music for the city, was one of the most notable musical positions in Germany. The financial security of a municipal employer, as opposed to a private patron, and access to the city's sixty or so professional, salaried musicians, and the boys of the *Thomasschule* (the boarding school adjacent to St Thomas's), for whose musical education and training Bach was responsible, would have been significant attractions. The pupils of the *Thomasschule*, to whom he gave singing, instrumental and Latin lessons, were aged between 12 and 23. Given that, at this time, boys' voices were not expected to

break until they were 17 or 18, Bach could count on solo trebles and altos with a good amount of maturity and musical experience behind them. In the early eighteenth century Leipzig was a thriving city and a hub for commerce and music. It was the centre of the printing and book industry in Germany and had a renowned and established university. With the city being a strong and uncompromising seat of protestant Lutheranism, many of its activities were focused on the church.

In the early years Bach was obliged to produce a significant amount of new music for the church, including one new sacred cantata a week for performance at the Sunday morning service at St Thomas's. According to his son, C.P.E. Bach, he wrote five cantatas for each Sunday and Saint's Day throughout the church year, which, together with some thirty-eight secular cantatas written for the birthday celebrations of various members of the nobility, and for civic occasions, would have brought the total to something over 330 - although about a third of them have been lost. All of Bach's major sacred choral works were written during his first ten years in this post. The St John Passion was written for Good Friday in 1724, Bach's first Easter in Leipzig. The St Matthew Passion was written in 1727, the Magnificat in 1728, the St Mark Passion (which no longer survives) in 1731, a significant part of the Mass in B Minor in 1733, the Christmas Oratorio in 1734, and finally the Easter Oratorio and Ascension Oratorio in 1735. It is frightening to think that, had the city council had their way in 1723, we would almost certainly have been denied these magnificent works, rich as they are in devotional music, drama, a sincerity of belief and transparent and beautiful settings of biblical and poetic texts. These works were composed to order as a direct consequence of Bach's position in Leipzig, just as many of his earlier works, such as the Brandenburg concerti, numerous solo concerti, and harpsichord and organ music, had been written to satisfy the needs of various earlier appointments and patronages. Composers of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries could not afford the luxury of writing for pleasure, such as many of their Romantic successors would come to enjoy. They wrote music to order, for specific occasions, according to their circumstances, and in order to please those who held the purse strings.

THE COMPOSITION, STRUCTURE AND FIRST PERFORMANCE OF THE CHRISTMAS ORATORIO

Completed in the year in which Bach turned 50, the Christmas Oratorio was not so much composed as assembled, being a parody of a number of earlier works; and the term "oratorio" is something of a misnomer. (A parody occurs when existing musical material is taken and adapted for use – usually by changing the words.) An oratorio, traditionally, was a musical setting of a biblical story, told in the words of a librettist, and designed to be performed without costumes or scenery in a concert hall, theatre or church for the purposes of entertainment. The story is usually told through the medium of *secco* (dry) recitative, consisting of simple speech rhythms delivered by a solo singer and accompanied by simple and infrequent chords played by a keyboard instrument and a bass instrument, known collectively as *basso continuo*. The story is interrupted and enhanced by solo arias, duets and choruses. The arias and duets allow for reflection on the events of the plot and insight into the hearts and minds of the characters concerned, and the choruses provide context to the circumstances. The Christmas Oratorio differs from this established model in three fundamental ways. Firstly, the work was written in six parts, to be performed liturgically between the gospel and the sermon at six different church services on six separate days. Secondly, Bach inserts a total of ten chorales, or Lutheran hymn tunes, written by the new generation of Protestant hymn writers and poets. The melodies of these would have been very familiar to the congregation. At the appropriate moment the congregation would have joined with the choir in the singing of these chorales, as they are partly there to provide a liturgical opportunity for a communal response – another key element of the Lutheran doctrine. And thirdly, as in the St John and St Matthew Passions, Bach employs an Evangelist who delivers the story, not in libretto form, but as the personification of the gospel writers themselves, using original biblical text, unabridged and unadulterated.

The reason for the oratorio's six part structure is quite simply that the Lutheran church regarded the entire Christmas season, from Christmas Day until the Feast of the Epiphany on January 6th, as a single celebration, and six important church services were held throughout the period to mark key events.

The six parts are, in effect, six cantatas, and are structured as follows:

Part 1	The birth of Jesus	First performed on December 25 th 1734
Part 2	Annunciation to the shepherds	First performed on December 26 th 1734
Part 3	Adoration of the shepherds	First performed on December 27 th 1734
Part 4	Circumcision and naming*	First performed on January 1 st 1735
Part 5	Journey of the Magi	First performed on January 2 nd 1735°
Part 6	Adoration of the Magi	First performed on January 6 th 1735

* Sometimes referred to as the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, or what, today, we call Christening.

° The first available Sunday in that particular year.

According to Bach's own handwriting in the inside cover of the autograph score, the performances were divided up between the two town churches of St Thomas and St Nicholas as follows:

Part 1	Early morning performance at St Nicholas / afternoon repeat at St Thomas
Part 2	Early morning performance at St Thomas / afternoon repeat at St Nicholas
Part 3	Midday performance at St Nicholas
Part 4	Early morning performance at St Thomas / afternoon repeat at St Nicholas
Part 5	Midday performance at St Nicholas
Part 6	Early morning performance at St Nicholas / afternoon repeat at St Thomas

It was only at St Nicholas, therefore, that the entire work was heard. Although it was never performed as a single entity in Bach's time, there are several indications that Bach may have conceived the piece as such. The Evangelist's narration, taken from Luke 2:1 - 21 and Matthew 2:1 -12, weaves together all six cantatas chronologically - from the decree from Cæsar Augustus demanding registration for taxation in the first cantata, to the visit of the Magi in the sixth. Bach begins and ends the work in D major (returning to that key in Part 3 as well), implying large-scale form with the use of recurring tonality, as exists in the passion settings. Finally, as Bach's nineteenth-century biographer Philipp Spitta asserts, "to think of the Christmas Oratorio as six independent cantatas conflicts with the way in which the church thought of the Christmas season. Irrespective of the fact that the six parts of the Christmas Oratorio deal with a progressive sequence of events, they must be held, according to church doctrine, to constitute a whole, falling, as they do, closely within one short Christian season."

The six cantatas which form the Christmas Oratorio follow the standard form that had come to be Bach's default approach to cantata writing; namely a balance of straight biblical quotation from passages appropriate to the season of the Christian calendar, followed by poetic biblical exegesis and hymns. Performed between the gospel and the sermon, they formed the musical and spiritual spine of Sunday morning worship.

As mentioned earlier, the work is a parody, in that it recycles compositions which Bach had already written. In the case of parts 1 – 4, this consists of two secular cantatas, BWV 213 and 214, on which Bach drew heavily. The first of these, originally entitled *Laßt uns sorgen, laßt uns wachen* (which loosely translates as *Let us provide, let us take care*), was written for Dresden royalty - specifically the birthday of the eleven-year-old son of the Elector of Saxony, Friedrich Christian. Its only performance was on September 5th 1733. The second, *Tönet ihr Pauken! Erschallet! Trompeten!* (Literally *Sound ye drums! Ring out! Trumpets!*), was written for the birthday of Maria Josepha (December 8th), Queen of Poland, and performed on that day in 1733 during her state visit to Leipzig. Music for parts 5 and 6 are believed

to have been plundered from a third secular cantata (*Preise dein Glücke, gesegnetes Sachsen*, written in October 1734 to celebrate the first anniversary of the accession of August III as King of Poland, and also from the St Mark Passion (Leipzig, 1731), and another sacred cantata (BWV 248a, Leipzig, 1734), all of which are now lost.

The secular cantatas, known also as *dramma per musica*, were a similar but separate breed from the sacred Sunday cantatas. They were, in effect, mini operas. The controlling city fathers (the Town Council) had closed Leipzig's opera house in 1720, somewhat piously believing its type of secular entertainment to be unsuitable and a bad influence on the Godliness of its citizens. There was, however, a healthy appetite amongst the people for these slightly illicit musical dramas. They were written largely for state occasions such as the swearing in of a new city council, the state visit of a foreign dignitary, or the birthday of a prominent member of the aristocracy. The German-born Harvard professor Christoph Wolff, in his highly regarded book on Bach, states that "Bach's [secular] cantatas were by no means makeshift substitutes for operas. These compositions demonstrate at every step a full mastery of the dramatic genre and skilful pacing of the various plots." BWV 213 is the story of Hercules at the Crossroads, a well-known tale, depicted in several paintings contemporary to Bach, in which Hercules meets two maidens, respectively representing virtue and vice, at a crossroads and has to choose which one to follow. One way leads to eventual glory through hardship, the other to ignominy - but with a lot of fun along the way! The story was doubtless chosen to appeal to the small boy whilst also offering him a moral from which to learn. BWV 214 tells the fictional story of a queen who is blessed and attended by the goddesses Bellona, Pallas, Irene and Fama – doubtless a subservient gesture from Bach, a municipal employee, towards Queen Maria Josepha, the royal guest of the municipal employer.

Some scholars have asserted that this parodying, or recycling of material, constituted laziness on Bach's part. I do not believe this to be so. In fact, the re-using and re-arranging of existing material was common practice amongst composers at this time. Handel reused a significant amount of his operatic and instrumental music in different ways, as did other composers of the day. (After Handel ultimately failed as an operatic composer in the mid-1730s he turned to oratorio as a vehicle for composition. He was known to be a fast worker. This in no small part was due to his use of parody. Much of *Israel in Egypt* is parodied from his earlier operatic efforts, and numerous operatic love arias turn up as re-worked sacred commentaries in *Messiah*.) Parody mass settings were very common in the Renaissance period, and examples can be found in the works of Palestrina, Dufay and Tavener, amongst others. In any case, it was not in Bach's Lutheran and austere nature to waste material, as is plainly evident from the surviving autograph score of the Christmas Oratorio, where not one single line is left blank. Since the composer's frugality extended to his physical use of manuscript paper, a precious and expensive resource at the time, it is scarcely surprising that complex, difficult and labour-intensive music would not have been discarded either. Bear in mind that this music had been written for a one-time event, and heard only once by a handful of invited guests and dignitaries, the equivalent of today's politicians and minor royalty, who may not even have recognised its quality. In 1733 Bach had already parodied some earlier music to create the Kyrie and Gloria of his Mass in B Minor. Bearing in mind also C.P.E. Bach's record of his father's prolific cantata output, it should not come as a surprise that, like his contemporaries, Bach recycled some of his material.

Not all of the music in the Christmas Oratorio is parodied, however. All of the music for the Evangelist is brand new, as are the other *arioso* or accompanied recitatives, along with one or two of the more tender arias, and the instrumental sinfonia which opens Part 2. In the newly harmonised chorale melodies, Bach demonstrates his ability to challenge his own conventionalities. The chorale settings contain a new level of harmonic sophistication with complex tonal shifts and extended chromatic progressions leading to an even more piquant immediacy of expression and clarity of text than Bach had achieved in the surviving Passion settings. If we trace the sequence of several hundred chorale settings from the earliest Leipzig cantata cycles of 1723 we see a line of development which culminates in these settings written for the Christmas Oratorio.

Nicholas Kenyon, in his detailed and scholarly modern biography of Bach, writes ... “There is no more life-giving, joy-enhancing experience in Bach’s larger scale music than a great performance of the Christmas Oratorio.” He goes on to discuss the parodying of earlier works. “In the 1730s the pressure for the weekly composition of a cantata for the forthcoming Sunday receded and, with it, Bach’s approach to composition changed into one of compiling single works into cycles and larger single compositions. (The six motets were written mostly between 1730 and 1737.) The Christmas Oratorio is a successful product of that change.” The Lutheran church did not require “figured” (complex) music during the penitential season of Advent, and it is likely that this afforded Bach a window of time at the end of 1734 to create the Christmas Oratorio. The Easter Oratorio and Ascension Oratorio, written a few months later, were also largely parodied from earlier music, presumably during the equally quiet and penitential season of Lent.

At the time he was composing the Christmas Oratorio, we know that Bach was becoming dissatisfied and disillusioned with his lot in Leipzig. In 1733 he had written to Georg Erdmann, Kapellmeister in the then German seaport of Danzig (today known as Gdańsk and now in the territory of Poland). The full text of his letter appears in Wolff’s book. It is a revealing letter, clearly written by a frustrated man, who complains about the excessive cost of living in Leipzig and the fact that his salary is partly made up of fees from extra services. Noting that the number of funerals in Leipzig was significantly lower that year - and so, therefore, was his income - Bach appears actively to be seeking alternative employment. He writes: “the authorities are odd and little interested in music, so that I must live amongst continual vexation, envy and persecution; accordingly I shall be forced, with God’s help, to seek my fortune elsewhere. Should your Honor know or find a suitable post in your city for an old and faithful servant, I beg you most humbly to put in a most gracious word of recommendation for me.” We know that this came to nothing and Bach, despite his disillusionment, saw out the rest of his days in Leipzig.

After the Christmas of 1734, the next performance of the oratorio seems to have been given by the twenty-four-year-old Brahms at the Berlin Singakademie in 1857 as part of Mendelssohn’s movement to re-popularise Bach’s music by introducing it to the contemporary Berliners. A translation of the work into English by Helen Johnston gave rise to the first English performance by William Sterndale Bennett at the Hanover Square Rooms in London in 1861. (Both Johnston and Sterndale Bennett had been responsible for the first English performance of the St Matthew Passion at the same venue in 1854.)

THE TEXT

When considering the text for the Christmas Oratorio we have to consider both the biblical and the non-biblical. From a biblical point of view a comparison of the four gospels is interesting.

Neither St John nor St Mark refer to the Immaculate Conception, or of the birth of Jesus in any way, both choosing to begin their biographical narratives with the baptism of the young adult Jesus by John the Baptist in the River Jordan.

The end of the first chapter of St Matthew, and the first twelve verses of Chapter two, while used exclusively through Parts five and six of the Christmas Oratorio to plot the story, make only passing reference to the immaculate conception, assume the nativity to have happened without actually mentioning it, and tell of the journey and subsequent adoration of the Magi and the anxiousness and actions of King Herod, before cutting a couple of decades or so to the baptism of Jesus. It is in the first twenty-one verses of the second chapter of St Luke, and there alone, that we find an account of the nativity story as we recognise it, complete with the decree of taxation from Cæsar Augustus, the journey to Bethlehem of the unmarried and expectant couple, the overcrowded inn, the stable, the appearance of angels to shepherds on the hillside and the virgin birth itself. It is to these verses therefore that Bach had to turn to plot the story, in regular, short and well-rationed statements through Parts one to four. St

Luke makes no reference to the Magi. (There are 3,779 verses in the four gospels combined; as an aside it is interesting to consider that the entire multi-billion pound annual occurrence which we call Christmas is based entirely on just 33 short verses of historic scripture.)

As in the telling of the passion stories therefore, and uncommonly for the writing of cantatas or oratorios, Bach has chosen to use sequential passages of scripture. The more usual form for cantatas was to set to music the appointed biblical readings for the day, along with associated scripture, sacred poetry and words from hymns or chorales.

The parodying of vocal music throws up some significant challenges. If one is going to take existing music and fit new words to it, the words have both to fit, and to make sense. We do not know who the librettist was for the Christmas Oratorio, but it is very likely to have been Christian Henrici (1700 – 1764), a local postal worker and tax officer and a close friend of Bach. Henrici wrote under the pseudonym Picander. Although not a poet of great depth, Picander was an ideal partner for Bach, being widely read, technically skilful and well versed in music. He could express his ideas with clear and simple imagery which was well suited to a composer's needs, allowing, as it does, scope for effective musical illustration of the text. Picander had already provided the text for the St John Passion, the St Matthew Passion and many of Bach's cantatas; so, in the absence of any other evidence, and given their long-established working relationship, it is highly likely that Picander was the chosen wordsmith to "bend" new text to fit Bach's existing music. The musicologist Alfred Dürr also suggests that the non-biblical text for the Christmas Oratorio could only have been written by Picander in collaboration with Bach.

Whoever the accomplished author may have been, Bach himself must have played a crucial part in shaping the text. In particular, he must have been instrumental in selecting which musical movements were to be inserted between the passages of biblical text and in defining the expressive character of each of them in turn, for it was necessary to ensure a perfect match between the metrical patterns of the individual lines of existing melody and the scansion of the new poems. In other words, it had to be possible, on a purely technical level, to set them to the same music. This is a reversal of the usual composition process in which the text is the starting point and music is written to fit the words.

At least as important as Bach's contribution to shaping the text was his influence on the planning of the oratorio as a whole, an involvement that must have included choosing how to divide up the verses from St Luke, choosing which arias and choruses to plunder from existing works, and integrating the chorales.

Below is the German text of the Christmas Oratorio and a translation. Biblical translations are taken from the King James Authorized Version of 1611. All other translations are by my colleague Mr Robert Minett, to whom I offer my sincere thanks. Where no credit is given for the text, we can assume it to have been written by Picander in collaboration with Bach.

Alongside, where appropriate, there is a commentary on the music in italics to aid listening.

Peter Parfitt

THE MUSIC

PART 1 THE BIRTH OF JESUS

Scoring : 3 trumpets, timpani, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 oboes d'amore, 2 violins, viola, continuo.

1. CHORUS

The exuberant opening chorus, in fast triple time, symbolic of the Holy Trinity, is taken directly from the secular cantata BWV 214, written to celebrate the birthday of Queen Maria Josepha on December 8th 1733. The rather specific secular words of the original cantata, which greeted the Queen on her birthday, 'Tönnen ihr Pauken!' (Sound the Drums!) are replaced with the more generic 'Jauchzet, frohlocket', the timpani retaining, however, their prominent place in the texture. The music, in D Major, is in ternary (ABA or Da Capo) form with the slightly more reflective middle section in the relative key of B Minor. The striking orchestration to the opening of the first chorus is a consequence of its original secular text, in which first drums and then trumpets are urged to celebrate. The opening lines of the chorus are, unusually, in unison. (As the master of counterpoint and fugue, Bach very rarely used unison writing.) It is entirely to be expected that Bach should turn the music written to open the celebrations of the birthday of royalty, into something more durable such as the opening of this work, celebrating the nativity of Christ, King of Heaven. [D.C. means Da Capo, a popular Baroque convention whereby the music is written in binary form with two distinct sections, but with the opening, or A, section of the movement repeated at the end, making overall for a ternary (ABA) structure.]

Jauchzet, frohlocket, auf, preiset die Tage,
rühmet, was heute der Höchste getan!
Lasset das Zagen, verbannet die Klage,
stimmet voll Jauchzen und Fröhlichkeit an!

Rejoice, be cheerful, arise, praise the days,
Give glory to what the Highest has done!
Abandon faint-heartedness, banish lamentation,
Sing in exultation and joyfulness!

Dienet dem Höchsten mit herrlichen Chören,
Laßt uns den Namen des Herrschers verehren!
(D.C.)

Serve the most High with glorious choirs,
Let us honour the name of the Lord!
(D.C.)

2. EVANGELIST – TENOR (Throughout the work.)

Text: St Luke 2: v 1, 3 - 6

Es begab sich aber zu der Zeit, daß ein Gebot von dem Kaiser Augusto ausging, daß alle Welt geschätzt würde. Und jedermann ging, daß er sich schätzen ließe, ein jeglicher in seine Stadt. Da machte sich auch auf Joseph aus Galiläa, aus der Stadt Nazareth, in das jüdische Land zur Stadt David, die da heißet Bethlehem; darum, daß er von dem Hause und Geschlechte David war: auf daß er sich schätzen ließe mit Maria, seinem vertrauten Weibe, die war schwanger. Und als sie daselbst waren, kam die Zeit, daß sie gebären sollte.

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that the world should be taxed. And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judæa, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; because he was of the house and lineage of David: to be taxed with Mary, his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

3. RECITATIVE – ALTO

In this recitative the alto outlines the hopes of the world. Accompanied by two oboes d'amore, Bach saves the highest pitches for the final phrase painting the words using both the alto's notes and the oboes'.

Nun wird mein liebster Bräutigam,
nun wird der Held aus Davids Stamm
zum Trost, zum Heil der Erden
einmal geboren werden.

Nun wird der Stern aus Jakob scheinen,
sein Strahl bricht schon hervor.
Auf, Zion, und verlasse nun das Weinen,
dein Wohl steigt hoch empor!

Now my dearest bridegroom,
Now the hero from David's line will be born, for the
comfort and salvation of the earth.

Now the star from Jacob will shine,
his rays are already beaming upon us.
Arise, Zion, leave your weeping,
Your prosperity is ascending on high!

4. ARIA – ALTO

This aria, in quick triple time, which is based on the age-old wedding metaphor of the church as bride and Christ as bridegroom, is taken directly from Cantata BWV 213, where it appears with different words under the title 'Ich will dich nicht hören' ('I do not want to hear you'). Interestingly the arias in Cantata 213 were alternately written in sharp and flat keys – the constantly alternating tonality being Bach's clever way of illustrating the opposing options of Hercules at the crossroads. For their inclusion in the Christmas Oratorio, they are all transposed into new keys, which are all tonally related to each other, rather than being disparately at odds.

Bereite dich, Zion, mit zärtlichen Trieben,
den Schönsten, den Liebsten bald bei dir zu
sehnl!

Deine Wangen müssen heut viel schöner
prangen, eile, den Bräutigam sehnlichst zu
lieben!
(D.C.)

Prepare yourself, Zion, with tender desires,
soon to see the most beautiful, the dearest with you!

Today your cheeks must glow with greater beauty,
Hasten to your bridegroom with ardent passion!
(D.C.)

5. CHORALE

The text of this chorale is by the prolific Lutheran hymn writer and poet, Paul Gerhardt (1607-1676). The melody, by Hans Leo Hassler, is perhaps better known as the very popular Passion Chorale, 'O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden' – 'O head, all bloodied and wounded'. Bach uses this chorale melody five times in the St Matthew Passion, harmonising it in four different ways. Here is it harmonised in yet a fifth way ending with an imperfect cadence, which leaves a sense of incompleteness. It is an interesting choice given its Passiontide associations, made more so when you learn that the final movement in Part VI is the same chorale. In doing this, Bach frames the entire Christmas Oratorio, front and back, with the one tune which all Lutherans associate with the crucifixion, placing this one strategically, and poignantly, between the optimism of the alto recitative and aria, and the Evangelist's announcement of Jesus' birth. It stands out here like a prophetic musical warning of the events to come in Jesus' life. The music is questioning and hesitant to begin with, but grows in confidence towards the end.

Wie soll ich dich empfangen und wie begeg'n ich dir?
O aller Welt Verlangen, o meiner Seelen Zier!
O Jesu, Jesu, setze mir selbst die Fackel bei,
damit, was dich ergötze, mir kund und wissend sei!

How shall I receive you and how shall I welcome you?
O desire of all the world, O joy of my soul!
O Jesu, Jesu, place your flame by me,
that I may know what delights you!

6. EVANGELIST

Text: St Luke 2: v 7

Und sie gebar ihren ersten Sohn und wickelte ihn in Windeln und legte ihn in eine Krippen, denn sie hatten sonst keinen Raum in der Herberge.

And she brought forth her first born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

7. RECITATIVE (*words indented*) AND CHORALE

The words of this chorale were written by Martin Luther himself in 1524. The chorale melody is taken from the hymn 'Gelobet seist du, Jesu Christ' ('Praised be Thou, Jesus Christ'). In this unique hybrid structure of recitative combined with chorale, Bach gives to the soprano four chorale phrases, each being preceded and succeeded by an instrumental ritornello, which frame the entire movement, whilst the chorale statements are extended by the bass's additional explanatory comment. Two oboes d'amore accompany the words.

Er ist auf Erden kommen arm,
 Wer will die Liebe recht erhöh'n,
 die unser Heiland für uns hegt?
daß er unser sich erbarm.
 Ja, wer vermag es einzusehen, wie ihn
 der Menschen Leid bewegt?
und in dem Himmel mache reich.
 Des Höchsten Sohn kömmt in die Welt,
 weil ihm ihr Heil so wohl gefällt,
und seinen lieben Engeln gleich,
 so will er selbst als Mensch geboren
 werden.
Kyrieleis!

He came poor upon the earth,
 Who can increase the love which the Saviour
 cherishes for us?
To take pity on us.
 Yes, who can understand how the suffering of man
 moves him?
Make us rich in heaven.
 The son of the Highest came into the world,
 because its salvation was so pleasing to him,
And the equal of his dear angels,
 So he wishes to be born as man Himself.
Lord have mercy!

8. ARIA – BASS

This aria with obbligato trumpet, is taken directly from Cantata 214 where it appears with different words under the title 'Kron und Preis gekrönter Damen' ('Crown and praise the crowned maidens') and hailed the 'great woman Maria.' Syncopation is used heavily as a rhythmic device to propel this aria forwards with momentum and energy.

Großer Herr, o starker König, liebster Heiland
o wie wenig achtest du der Erden Pracht!
Der die ganze Welt erhält, ihre Pracht und Zier
erschaffen, muß in harten Krippen schlafen.
(D.C.)

Great Lord, O powerful King, dearest Saviour
How little you care for the splendour of the earth!
He who sustains the whole world, created its splendour
and ornament, must sleep in a hard crib.
(D.C.)

9. CHORALE

Text: Martin Luther, 1535

The first part concludes with the first appearance of the popular chorale melody 'von Himmel Hoch da komm ich her' ('From Heaven above I hither come'). This is a bright end to the first part and reminds us of the opening chorus as fanfare-type passages with trumpets and timpani interpolate each line.

Ach mein herzliebes Jesulein,
mach dir ein rein sanft Bettelein,
zu ruhn in meines Herzens Schrein,
daß ich nimmer vergesse dein!

Oh my dearest baby Jesus,
Make a pure soft bed,
To rest in the shrine of my heart,
That I may never forget you!

PART 2 THE ANNUNCIATION TO THE SHEPHERDS

Omitted

PART 3 THE ADORATION OF THE SHEPHERDS

Omitted

PART 4 THE CIRCUMCISION AND NAMING OF JESUS

Scoring: 2 horns, 2 oboes, 2 violins, viola, continuo.

36. CHORUS

In this fourth part the emphasis changes. The music and words are now directed at giving praise to Jesus rather than to God. This opening chorus is taken directly from Cantata 213, where it appears with different words under the title 'Lasst uns sorgen, lasst uns wachen' ('Let us Provide, Let us Keep Watch'). The music now moves to F Major – the relative key of the tonic minor (D minor) of Part 3. Yet again the section opens with a fast triple time chorus. A new instrumental sound, that of a pair of French horns, colours the opening chorus. As befits the subject of Jesus' naming, and the ceremony of circumcision, this opening chorus has a more formal air of courtly celebration than the corresponding choruses which open parts 1 and 3, being less concerned with the giving of praise, and more attendant on the time-honoured ritual which is to follow. The music for the choir is largely homophonic and comes in blocks, separated by instrumental ritornelli.

Fallt mit Danken, fällt mit Loben
vor des Höchsten Gnadenthron!
Gottes Sohn will der Erden Heiland und Erlöser
werden,
Gottes Sohn dämpft der Feinde Wut und Toben;
Fallt mit Danken, fällt mit Loben
vor des Höchsten Gnadenthron!

Fall down with thanks, fall down with praise
before God's throne of grace!
God's son will be the saviour and redeemer of the
earth,
God's son subdues the rage and fury of your foes;
Fall down with thanks, fall down with praise
before God's throne of grace.

37. EVANGELIST

Text: St Luke 2: v 21

Und da acht Tage um waren, daß das Kind
beschnitten würde, da ward sein Name genennet
Jesus, welcher genennet war von dem Engel, ehe
denn er im Mutterleibe empfangen ward.

And when eight days were accomplished for the
circumcising of the child, his name was called
Jesus, which was so named of the angel before he
was conceived in the womb.

38. RECITATIVE WITH CHORALE – SOPRANO AND BASS

This recitative with chorale is the first part of an evolving ternary structure. Number 39, the duet for soprano with an offstage soprano, comes in the middle of two recitatives which have accompanying chorale melodies woven into their texture. The echo aria (39) represents a type of "trope" or insertion between the two soprano/bass ariosi (38 & 40), each of which constitutes a half of a larger movement, the resulting triptych representing a form unique in Bach's music. This tripartite structure, symbolic of the Holy Trinity, is yet another example of Bach's concern for musical architecture and symbolism that places his creation of the Christmas Oratorio far beyond the mere opportunistic and haphazard recycling of pre-existing material. (The St John Passion is also full of examples of musical architecture which have deeply symbolic and spiritual meanings.) The words of the soprano and the bass are again surrounded by sustained string chords which move very slowly. The music becomes rather darker during the second of the bass passages, and Bach illustrates some of the key words and phrases (bittern Kreuzes Stamm, Ungemach, Was jagte mir zuletzt der Tod) with diminished chords and unexpected shifts of harmony.

Immanuel, o süßes Wort!
Mein Jesus heißt mein Hort,
mein Jesus heißt mein Leben.
Mein Jesus hat sich mir ergeben,
mein Jesus soll mir immerfort
vor meinen Augen schweben.
Mein Jesus heißet meine Lust,
mein Jesus labet Herz und Brust.

S Jesu, du mein liebstes Leben,
B Komm! Ich will dich mit Lust umfassen,

S meiner Seelen Bräutigam,
B mein Herze soll dich nimmer lassen,

S der du dich vor mich gegeben
B Ach! So nimm mich zu dir!

S an des bittern Kreuzes Stamm!

Auch in dem Sterben sollst du mir das Allerliebste sein;
in Not, Gefahr und Ungemach
seh ich dir sehnlichst nach.
Was jagte mir zuletzt der Tod für Grauen ein?
Mein Jesus! Wenn ich sterbe,
so weiß ich, daß ich nicht verderbe.
Dein Name steht in mir geschrieben,
der hat des Todes Furcht vertrieben.

Immanuel, o sweet name!
My Jesus is my strength,
my Jesus is my life.
My Jesus has devoted himself to me,
my Jesus shall float before my eyes for ever.
My Jesus is my desire,
my Jesus cheers heart and breast.

Jesus, you, my dearest life,
Come! I will embrace you with delight,

bridegroom of my soul,
my heart shall never leave you,

who gave yourself for me
Ah! Then take me to you!

on the tree of the bitter cross!

Even in death you will be the dearest of all to me;
in despair, danger and hardship
I look to you with the utmost longing.
After all what dread can death strike into me?
My Jesus! When I die,
then I know that I shall not perish.
Your name is written in me,
it has driven out the fear of death.

39. ARIA – SOPRANO AND ECHO SOPRANO

This beautiful and deeply moving aria, with its gentle pizzicato bass line, is taken directly from Cantata 213, where it appears with different words under the title 'Treues Echo dieser Orten' ('True Echo of These Places'). Known as the "Echo Aria", the movement is for soprano with obbligato oboe. The voice of humankind is represented by a second soprano, who provides the echo from an off-stage location. The relationship between the parts is complicated and sophisticated, the oboe also being included in the echo passages. Being true chamber music it is also a masterclass in compositional skill. Across just three parts Bach distributes the most beautiful melody, a bass line, and implies all the harmony which is necessary. Every note of this aria is essential and not one is superfluous. (There is a moving scene in Peter Shaffer's screenplay for the film Amadeus in which Antonio Salieri says, with both envy and admiration, of Mozart's music, "Displace one note and there would be diminishment, displace one phrase and the structure would fall." Such a statement is absolutely applicable to this wonderful aria.)

Flößt, mein Heiland, flößt dein Namen
auch den allerkleinsten Samen
jenes strengen Schreckens ein?
Nein, du sagst ja selber nein!
Sollt ich nun das Sterben scheuen?
Nein, dein süßes Wort ist da!
Oder sollt ich mich erfreuen?
Ja, du Heiland sprichst selbst ja!

My saviour, does your name instil
even the slightest seed
of that bitter terror?
No, indeed you yourself say no!
Shall I now fear death?
No, your sweet word is there!
Or should I rejoice?
Yes, you the saviour say yes!

40. RECITATIVE WITH CHORALE – SOPRANO AND BASS

The music for this movement of the oratorio is noticeably more cheerful than that written for no 38, and the strings have considerably more movement as the music alternates between arioso and secco recitative.

S	Jesu, meine Freud und Wonne,	Jesu, my joy and pleasure,
B	Wohlan, dein Name soll allein	Well, your name alone
S	meine Hoffnung, Schatz und Teil,	my hope, treasure and gift,
B	in meinem Herzen sein.	shall be in my heart.
S	mein Erlösung Schmuck und Heil,	my redeemer, adornment and salvation,
B	So, will ich dich entzückt nennen,	So, I will call your name in delight,
S	Hirt und König, Licht und Sonne.	shepherd and king, light and sun.
B	wenn Brust und Herz zu dir vor Liebe brennen.	when breast and heart burn with love before you.
S	ach! wie soll ich würdiglich,	Ah! How shall I with due respect,
B	Doch Liebster, sage mir:	But, most dear one, tell me:
S	mein Herr Jesu, preisen dich?	praise you, my Lord Jesus?
B	Wie rühm ich dich, wie dank ich dir?	How do I praise you, how do I thank you?

41. ARIA – TENOR

This aria is taken directly from Cantata 213, where it appears with different words under the title 'Auf meinen Flügeln sollst du schweben' ('On My Wings Shall you Fly'). The tenor is accompanied by two solo violins, and with its passages of imitation and chains of suspensions between the two, the music is reminiscent of Bach's double violin concerto written whilst in his previous position at Cöthen between 1717 and 1726.

Ich will nur dir zu Ehren leben, mein Heiland, gib mir Kraft und Mut, daß es mein Herz recht eifrig tut!	I will live only to honour you, my saviour, give me strength and courage, that will give life to my heart!
Stärke mich, deine Gnade würdiglich und mit Danken zu erheben! (D.C.)	Give me strength to exalt your grace with due respect and thanks. (D.C.)

42. CHORALE

Text: Johann von Rist, 1642

The melody, as well as the harmony, for this chorale, is by Bach. It is more usually known under the title 'Hilf, Herr Jesu, laß gelingen' ('Help, Lord Jesus, send good speed'). Again the instrumentation of the opening chorus from this part is returned for the final movement creating more cyclic unity. As for numbers 9 and 23, Bach treats the chorale melody as a series of separate statements with interpolations of pairs of French horns and oboes in joyous mood.

Jesus richte mein Beginnen
Jesus bleibe stets bei mir,
Jesus zäume mir die Sinnen,
Jesus sei nur mein Begier,
Jesus sei mir in Gedanken,
Jesu, lasse mich nicht wanken!

Jesus guide my beginning
Jesus remain with me always,
Jesus restrain my senses,
Jesus be my only desire,
Jesus be in my thoughts,
Jesu, let me not waver!

PART 5 THE JOURNEY OF THE MAGI

Scoring: 2 oboes d'amore, 2 violins, viola, continuo.

43. CHORUS

The fifth is the most lightly scored of the sections of the Christmas Oratorio, and deals with the subject of the arrival of the Wise Men. The words now switch to the gospel of Matthew, the only Evangelist to make any reference to them. The chorus is in DC form and the joyous opening is characterised by antiphonal writing of voices in pairs, which shortly gives way to a fugal passage. The music is constantly changing in texture and driven forwards by semiquaver rhythmic patterns in the instrumental parts (particularly the violins) and frequent phrases in which the sopranos ascend to finish on high notes. Though an earlier form of the music has not been identified, it could have been parodied from a work which is now lost to us.

Ehre sei dir, Gott, gesungen,
Dir sei Lob und Dank bereit'.
Dich erhebet alle Welt,
Weil dir unser Wohl gefällt,
Weil anheut unser aller Wunsch gelungen,
Weil uns dein Segen so herrlich erfreut.

Let honour be sung to you, O God,
Praise and thanks be prepared for you.
All the world exalts you,
Since our well-being was your pleasure,
Since today all our wishes have come to pass,
Since your blessing so gloriously delights us.

44. EVANGELIST

Text: St Matthew 2: v 1

Da Jesus geboren war zu Bethlehem im jüdischen
Lande zur Zeit des Königes Herodis, siehe, da
kamen die Weisen vom Morgenlande gen
Jerusalem und sprachen:

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judæa in
the days of Herod the King, behold, there came wise
men from the east to Jerusalem.

45. CHORUS

Text: St Matthew 2: v2 with interpolations

This sequence is extremely reminiscent of numerous passages from the existing St John and St Matthew Passions, and is parodied from the chorus 'Pfui dich, wie fein zerbrichst du den Tempel' from the (now lost) St Mark Passion of 1731. The chorus, somewhat urgently, take on the role of the Wise Men, in so far that Bach gives to it the words attributed to the wise men in Matthew's gospel. The arioso passages, which comment on and answer this narrative (italics), are given to the alto, accompanied by strings and wind in a quasi-recitative style. This is similar to the way in which Bach sets the words of Christ in the St Matthew Passion. The fact that these words, although non biblical, are addressed directly to Christ, may be considered significant in Bach's choice of word setting. He uses a minor key for this movement.

Wo ist der neugeborne König der Jüden?
Sucht ihn in meiner Brust,
Hier wohnt er, mir und ihm zur Lust!
Wir haben seinen Stern gesehen im Morgenlande
und sind kommen, ihn anzubeten.

Say where is he that is born King of the Jews?
Seek him within my breast,
he lives here, to his and my delight!
For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to
worship him.

Wohl euch, die ihr dies Licht gesehen,
Es ist zu eurem Heil geschehen!
Mein Heiland, du, du bist das Licht,
Das auch den Heiden scheinen sollen,
Und sie, sie kennen dich noch nicht,
Als sie dich schon verehren wollen.
Wie hell, wie klar muß nicht dein Schein,
Geliebter Jesu, sein!

Happy are you, who have seen this light,
it has appeared for your salvation!
My Saviour, you, you are the light,
that shall shine also for the heathens,
and they, they do not yet know you,
yet they already wish to honour you.
How bright, how clear must your radiance be,
beloved Jesus!

46. CHORALE

The words of this chorale are by Georg Weissel (1590-1635). They are the fifth stanza of the hymn 'Nun, liebe Seele, nun ist es Zeit' ('Now Dear Soul, Now it is Time'). The music is characterised by chromatic harmonic progressions and syncopation in the inner parts. Bach illustrates the words 'Die trübe Nacht' with a particularly 'troubled' harmonic progression based on a chromatically rising bass line.

Dein Glanz all Finsternis verzehrt,
Die trübe Nacht in Licht verkehrt.
Leit uns auf deinen Wegen,
Daß dein Gesicht
Und herrlichs Licht
Wir ewig schauen mögen!

Your radiance destroys all darkness,
the troubled night is transfigured with light.
Lead us on your paths,
so that your face
and glorious light
might always be visible to us!

47. ARIA – BASS

This aria is plundered from the earlier aria 'Durch die von Eifer entflammten Waffen', found in the secular cantata 'Preise dein Glücke' (BWV 215). For plaintive oboe d'amore and bass solo, the aria is reflective, despite its optimistic text. The minor key tonality, surprisingly, is perpetuated in this movement and in the next one.

Erleucht auch meine finstre Sinnen, erleuchte
mein Herze durch der Strahlen klaren Schein!
Dein Wort soll mir die hellste Kerze in allen
meinen Werken sein; dies lasset die Seele nichts
Böses beginnen.

Illumine my dark thoughts as well, illumine my heart
through the rays of your clear brilliance!
Your word shall be the brightest candle for me in all my
doings; this will never let my soul initiate evil.

48. EVANGELIST

Text: St Matthew 2: v 3

Bach draws attention to the word 'erschrak' (troubled) with a high and tortuous leap for the Evangelist.

Da das der König Herodes hörte, erschrak er und
mit ihm das ganze Jerusalem.

When Herod the King had heard these things, he was
troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

49. ARIOSO OR ACCOMPANIED RECITATIVE – ALTO AND TENOR

The words of this arioso recitative are punctuated by short, abrupt interjections from the strings. Again, the word 'erschrecken' (afraid) is treated in the same way as the word of similar sentiment in the previous movement. Again a minor key is used.

Warum wollt ihr erschrecken?
Kann meines Jesu Gegenwart euch solche Furcht
erwecken?
O! Solltet ihr euch nicht vielmehr darüber freuen,
weil er dadurch verspricht, der Menschen
Wohlfahrt zu verneuen.

Why are you afraid?
Can the presence of my Jesus awaken such fear in you?
O! Should you not rather much more rejoice over this,
since he has promised through this to renew the happy
destiny of humanity.

50. EVANGELIST

Text: St Matthew 2: v 4 - 6

The second half of this recitative, when the words of the prophet are being quoted, has (uncharacteristically) a fixed pulse and is accompanied by a bass line of regular moving quavers.

Und ließ versammeln alle Hohepriester und Schriftgelehrten unter dem Volk und erforschte von ihnen, wo Christus sollte geboren werden. Und sie sagten ihm: Zu Bethlehem im jüdischen Lande: denn also stehet geschrieben durch den Propheten: Und du Bethlehem im jüdischen Lande bist mitnichten die kleinst unter den Fürsten Juda; denn aus dir soll mir kommen der Herzog, der über mein Volk Israel ein Herr sei.

And when he had gathered all the chief priests and the scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him in Bethlehem of Judæa: for thus it is written by the prophet: and thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least amongst princes of Juda; for out of thee shall come a governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

51. TRIO – SOPRANO, ALTO, TENOR

Text: unknown

This trio, an unusual combination for Bach in large scale works, is accompanied by a solo violin. It is one of the longest movements in the work.

Ach, wenn wird die Zeit erscheinen?
Ach, wenn kömmt der Trost der Seinen?
Schweigt, er ist schon würrklich hier!
Jesu, ach, so komm zu mir!

Ah, when will the time appear?
Ah, when will the comfort of the faithful come?
Hush, he is truly already here!
Jesus, ah, then come to me!

52. RECITATIVE - ALTO

Mein Liebster herrschet schon. Ein Herz, das seine Herrschaft liebet und sich ihm ganz zu eigen gibet, ist meines Jesu Thron.

My beloved already reigns. A heart that loves his governance and gives itself utterly to him as his own, is my Jesus' throne.

53. CHORALE

The words of this chorale are by the Lutheran poet and hymn writer Johann Franck (1618-1677). It was written in 1655.

Zwar ist solche Herzensstube
Wohl kein schöner Fürstensaal,
Sondern eine finstre Grube;
Doch, sobald dein Gnadestrah
In denselben nur wird blinken,
Wird es voller Sonnen dünken.

Indeed such a heart's closet
may be no ornate princely chamber,
rather a dark pit;
yet, as soon as your beams of grace
only peep within it,
it seems to be full of sunshine.

PART 6 THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI

Scoring: 3 trumpets, timpani, 2 oboes, 2 oboes d'amore, 2 violins, viola, continuo.

54. CHORUS

Part 6 brings a return to the celebratory sound of trumpets and drums, and another dancing, opening, imitative chorus in triple time and in a major key, this time asking God for a strong faith with which to resist all enemies. The music for movements 54, 56, 57, 61, 62, 63 and 64 are from BWV 248a (a church cantata which is lost).

Herr, wenn die stolzen Feinde schnauben,
so gib, daß wir im festen Glauben nach deiner
Macht und Hülfe sehn!
Wir wollen dir allein vertrauen, so können wir den
scharfen Klauen des Feindes unversehrt entgehn.

Lord, when our arrogant enemies snort with rage, then
grant that we in firm faith may look to your power and
help!

We want to trust you alone, then we can escape the
sharp claws of the enemy unhurt.

55. EVANGELIST AND HEROD - BASS

Text: St Matthew 2: v 7 - 8

Da berief Herodes die Weisen heimlich und
erlernet mit Fleiß von ihnen, wenn der Stern
erschieden wäre?

*Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men,
inquired of them diligently what time the star
appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said:*

Und weiset sie gen Bethlehem und sprach:
"Ziehet hin und forschet fleißig nach dem
Kindlein, und wenn ihr's findet, sagt mir's wieder,
dass ich auch komme und es anbete."

"Go and search diligently for the young child: and when
ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may
come and worship him also."

56. ARIOSO OR ACCOMPANIED RECITATIVE – SOPRANO

This recitative, accompanied by strings, is full of angst and venom. Bach writes a number of difficult and non-diatonic intervals for the soprano to negotiate.

Du Falscher, suche nur den Herrn zu fällen, nimm
alle falsche List, dem Heiland nachzustellen; der,
dessen Kraft kein Mensch ermißt, bleibt doch in
sichrer Hand.

You cheat, you only seek the Lord to bring him down,
you use all your false cunning to hunt after the Saviour;
but he, whose power no man can measure, still remains
in safe hands.

Dein Herz, dein falsches Herz ist schon, nebst aller
seiner List, des Höchsten Sohn, den du zu stürzen
suchst, sehr wohl bekannt.

Your heart, your false heart, is already very well-known,
with all your treachery, by the son of the Highest,
whom you seek to cast down.

57. ARIA – SOPRANO

This aria, accompanied by ripieno strings and a single oboe d'amore, perpetuates the unsettled and almost confrontational energy portrayed by the preceding recitative.

Nur ein Wink von seinen Händen stürzt
ohnmächtger Menschen Macht.
Hier wird alle Kraft verlacht!
Spricht der Höchste nur ein Wort, seiner Feinde
Stolz zu enden, O, so müssen sich sofort
Sterblicher Gedanken wenden.

Just a wave of your hand casts down the powerless
strength of men.
Here all might is derided if the highest speaks one word
to put an end to the pride of his enemies, Oh, then at
once must thoughts of mortals be changed.

58. EVANGELIST

Text: St Matthew 2: v 9 - 11

Als sie nun den König gehöret hatten, zogen sie hin. Und siehe, der Stern, den sie im Morgenlande gesehen hatten, ging für ihnen hin, bis daß er kam und stund oben über, da das Kindlein war. Da sie den Stern sahen, wurden sie hoch erfreuet und gingen in das Haus und funden das Kindlein mit Maria, seiner Mutter, und fielen nieder und beteten es an und täten ihre Schätze auf und schenkten ihm Gold, Weihrauch und Myrrhen.

When they heard the king, they departed; and lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, frankincense and myrrh.

59. CHORALE

The words of this chorale are by Paul Gerhardt, and date from 1656.

Ich steh an deiner Krippen hier,
O Jesulein, mein Leben;
Ich komme, bring und schenke dir,
Was du mir hast gegeben.
Nimm hin! es ist mein Geist und Sinn,
Herz, Seel und Mut, nimm alles hin,
Und lass dirs wohlgefallen!

I stand here at your crib
O Little Jesus, my life;
I come, bring and give you
What you have given to me.
Take it! It is my spirit and mind,
Heart, soul and courage, take it all
And may it be pleasing to you!

60. EVANGELIST

Text: St Matthew 2: v

Und Gott befahl ihnen im Traum, daß sie sich nicht sollten wieder zu Herodes lenken, und zogen durch einen andern Weg wieder in ihr Land.

And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

61. RECITATIVE – TENOR

So geht! Genug, mein Schatz geht nicht von hier, er bleibet da bei mir, ich will ihn auch nicht von mir lassen. Sein Arm wird mich aus Lieb mit sanftmutsvollem Trieb und größter Zärtlichkeit umfassen; er soll mein Bräutigam verbleiben, ich will ihm Brust und Herz verschreiben. Ich weiß gewiss, er liebet mich, mein Herz liebt ihn auch inniglich und wird ihn ewig ehren. Was könnte mich nun für ein Feind bei solchem Glück versehren! Du, Jesu, bist und bleibst mein Freund; und werd ich ängstlich zu dir flehn: "Herr, hilf!", so lass mich Hülfe sehn!

Go then! It is enough that my treasure does not depart from here, he stays here by me, I will not let him leave me. His arm - out of love with desire, full of gentleness and with great tenderness - will embrace me; he will remain my bridegroom, I will dedicate my heart and prayers to him. I know for certain that he loves me, my heart also loves him ardently and will always honour him. What sort of enemy could now do me harm when I am so fortunate! You, Jesus, are and remain my friend; and if I beg you: anxiously: "Lord, help!", then let me see your help!

62. ARIA – TENOR

This purposeful aria is accompanied by two oboes d'amore. Again, Bach chooses a minor tonality to illustrate the words.

Nun mögt ihr stolzen Feinde schrecken; was
könnt ihr mir für Furcht erwecken?
Mein Schatz, mein Hort ist hier bei mir.
Ihr mögt euch noch so grimmig stellen, droht nur,
mich ganz und gar zu fällen! Doch seht, mein
Heiland wohnt hier.

Now you arrogant enemies may try to scare me; what
sort of fear can you arouse in me?
My treasure, my refuge, is here with me though you
may appear ever so fierce and have threatened to cast
me down once and for all!
Yet see, my saviour lives here!

63. RECITATIVE – SOPRANO, ALTO, TENOR, BASS

Each of the six disparate entries in this recitative follows the same melodic shape of a rising fourth followed by a descending arpeggio, but the voices come together, homophonically, harmoniously, and therefore symbolically, for the third line of the text.

Was will der Höllen Schrecken nun,
Was will uns Welt und Sünde tun,
Da wir in Jesu Händen ruhn?

What will the terror of hell do now?
What will the world do for us?
Since we rest in the hands of Jesus

64. CHORALE

The Christmas Oratorio ends with a richly decorated version of the 'Passion chorale' melody with trumpets and timpani, rejoicing in Christ's victory over death, devil, sin and hell, and echoing the bright and optimistic feel of movement 1. This was the melody used for movement number 5, and the chorale which Bach sets on five separate occasions in the St Matthew Passion. This time the words are by Georg Werner and were written in 1648.

Nun seid ihr wohl gerochen
An eurer Feinde Schar;
Denn Christus hat zerbrochen,
Was euch zuwider war.
Tod, Teufel, Sünd und Hölle
Sind ganz und gar geschwächt;
Bei Gott hat seine Stelle
Das menschliche Geschlecht.

Now you are well avenged
On the host of your enemies;
Christ has broken in pieces
What was against you.
Death, Devil, sin and hell
are weakened once and for all;
With God is the place
For the human race.

Musical Director – Peter Parfitt

Peter Parfitt was educated at Bristol Cathedral School where he received his early musical training as a chorister in the Cathedral Choir.

At the age of sixteen he won a scholarship to the University of Durham, where he read Music and Latin and sang in the Cathedral Choir as a Choral Scholar, graduating from the Music Faculty with an honours degree.

In 1987 he obtained his MMus. Following this he spent eight years as a Lay Clerk in the Choir of Winchester Cathedral. During this time he appeared with the choir as a soloist on Radio 3. He also toured with the choir to Brazil, Australia and the USA and gave concerts in Paris, on the south bank, and at the Barbican as well as on television and radio.



Peter held teaching posts at the Chorister School in Winchester, and positions as Director of Music in schools in Hampshire, London and East Sussex before taking up the post of Director of Music at St Margaret's School for Girls in Aberdeen. Peter has directed a number of choral societies and operatic societies and appeared with many others as a soloist. He is an external examiner at A Level for the Oxford and Cambridge examinations board and also for the Scottish Qualifications Authority.

Peter served for twelve years with HM Royal Naval Reserves where he specialised in submarine data communications. Other interests include playing the organ, reading, gardening and cooking.



Soprano – Emma Kirkby

Emma Kirkby feels lucky in many ways: that she met renaissance vocal polyphony while still at school, that she studied Classics and sang with the Schola Cantorum at Oxford, and, best of all, that there she encountered “historical” instruments known to Renaissance and Baroque composers, the lute, harpsichord, and wind and string instruments, whose sound and human scale drew from her an instinctive response. As a schoolteacher and amateur singer she was invited to perform professionally with pioneer groups; and long partnerships followed in Britain and abroad, with ensembles, individual players, and record companies, so that now Emma’s voice and style are recognized worldwide.



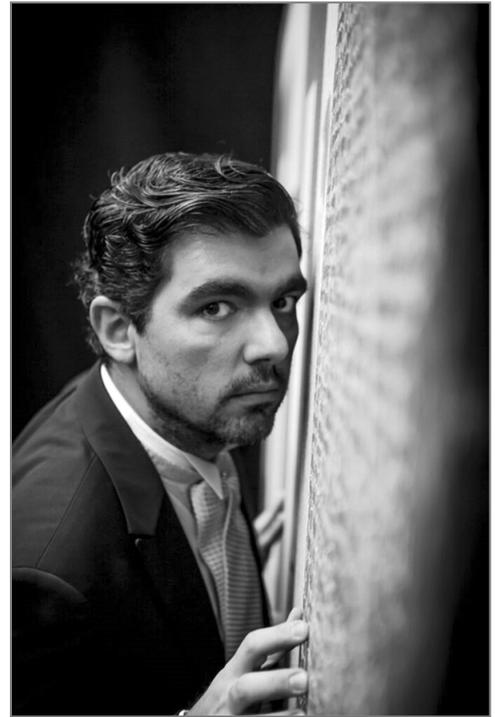
Emma was awarded a DBE in 2007, and in 2011 the Queen’s Medal for Music. Amazed by all this, she is nevertheless glad of the recognition it implies, for a way of music-making that values ensemble, clarity and stillness above volume and display; above all it is a joy to her to see a new generation of singers and players bringing their skills to this endeavour. She is also proud and grateful to be a patron of the Aberdeen Bach Choir.

Counter Tenor – Nicholas Spanos

Nicholas Spanos studied with Aris Christofellis in Greece. He furthered his studies at the University of Maryland School of Music (USA) and at the Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst in Vienna. He has participated actively in many vocal masterclasses taught by prominent teachers, such as Kurt Equiluz, Delores Ziegler, Anna Tomowa-Sintow and Michael Chance.

He has been acclaimed for his appearance in opera, oratorio and recital and has collaborated with the National Opera of Greece, the Athens State Orchestra, Opera Lorraine, the Orchestra of Colours, the Bach Sinfonia (USA), Denmark Radio Symphony Orchestra, Camerata Stuttgart, and the Venice Baroque Orchestra. For many years he has been a regular collaborator with Ex Silentio, Latinitas nostra and Pandolfis Consort Wien Early Music Ensembles.

Nicholas has won a number of prestigious awards including those for his participation in recordings, which include the CD recording of Handel's *Oreste* (2004) and *Tamerlano* (2006) by the German label MDG as well as a CD based on Metastasio's *Olimpiade* libretto, with the Venice Baroque Orchestra (2011) for NAÏVE Records. In 2014 he was the first to revive the role of Ruggiero in Ristori's *Le Fate* with Ensemble Alraune, a production that was made into a DVD.



Tenor – Nathan Vale

Nathan Vale was a Choral Scholar at Wells Cathedral before attending London's Royal College of Music, where he studied in the Benjamin Britten International Opera School as one of the first recipients of the Peter Pears Scholarship. His operatic engagements have included First Prisoner in *Fidelio* for Glyndebourne Festival Opera, Friend of Seneca in *The Coronation of Poppea* for English National Opera, Lurcanio in *Ariodante* at the Bolshoi Opera and Belfiore in *La finta giardiniera* for Opéra de Baugé.



Winner of the 2005 AESS English Song Competition, Nathan's recital engagements have included appearances at the Wigmore Hall, the Three Choirs Festival and a recital with Julius Drake as part of the Temple Recital series. Nathan's concert highlights have included Evangelist in the *St Matthew Passion* with the Northern Sinfonia, Arias in the *St Matthew Passion* with the Orchestra Sinfonica di Milano, Handel's *Ode for St Cecilia's Day* for both the Israeli Camerata and the Riga Chamber Choir, Beethoven's *Choral Fantasia* at the BBC Proms, and Handel's *Israel in Egypt* at the Three Choirs Festival, Hereford.

Current engagements include, Evangelist in Bach's *St John Passion*, Teatro Massimo Palermo, Tito in *La clemenza di Tito* for Opera Baugé, and Handel's *Messiah* in Bath Abbey, Bristol Cathedral and the Usher Hall Edinburgh.

Bass – Dawid Kimberg

Dawid Kimberg was born in Johannesburg and moved to the UK in 2001 to further his studies at the Royal College of Music with Ryland Davies and the National Opera Studio. Dawid's engagements have included Dr Falke in *Die Fledermaus* for Bolshoi Opera, Masetto in *Don Giovanni*, and Morales in *Carmen* for the Royal Opera House Covent Garden, Guglielmo in *Così fan tutte* for Opera Holland Park, Count Almaviva in *Le nozze di Figaro* for Glyndebourne on Tour, Mr Gedge in *Albert Herring* for Théâtre du Capitole du Toulouse and Ned Keene in *Peter Grimes* for Deutsche Oper am Rhein.



His many oratorio performances include the major works of Bach, Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Dvorak, Vaughan Williams, Tippett, Britten, Orff, Puccini, Duruflé and others. In recital Dawid has appeared at the Wigmore Hall and performed Schubert's *Die Schöne Müllerin* and *Schwanengesang* in the Crush Room at the Royal Opera House. He was the 2004 winner of the Great Elm Vocal Awards and the recipient of the Joanhina Award in 2007.

Aberdeen Bach Choir

Soprano

Jill Binns	Sandra Massey
Gill Bishop	Frances McAndrew
Jane Cameron	Rhiannon Morgan*
Clare Carden	Jennifer Morrice
Helen Chisholm	Margaret Nicholson
Isla Chisholm	Tiffany Parsons
Ros Coleman	Edith Power
Amy Cowan	Alison Purvis
Niamh Ellison	Janet Ollason
Kate Graham	Izabella Ratusinska
Yvonne Gray	Bettina Riedel
Cathy Guthrie	Lisa Riedel
Kathleen Haw	Lesley Robertson
Anne Henderson	Alice Ronsberg
Lorna Herbert	Ulrike Sauer-Stammeijer
Janet Hoper	Anne Schmitt
Julia House	Angela Slater
Ruth Howarth	Alyson Smith
Pamela Hoy	Dawn Smith
Annie Humphrey	Karen Smith
Jane Jones	Marta Visocchi
Rike Kemme	Natalie Westoby
Ceri Kindley	Hazel Wilkins
Kerstin Kroeger	Sue Wilson
Margaret Macaulay	

*Echo Soprano

Alto

Kari Aasen
Kate Anderson
Eva Bachmair
Debbie Barber
Libby Brand
Ailsa Cantlay
Rachel Carter
Kathleen Christie
Isabella Cook
Barbara Crane
Pat Cruickshank
Althea Dickens
Rosemary Feilden
Sandra Gates
Helen Goodyear
Ellen Henke
Freda Imrie
Judy Junker
Muriel Knox
Anne Lemon
Janet MacDonald
Mandy MacDonald

Kate Mason
Sybil McAleese
Jo McPherson
Theresa Merrick
Frances Milne
Rachel Morland
Lindsey Mountford
Lesley Mowat
Saskia Mucke
Louise Page
Delyth Parkinson
Adele Perry
Margaret Rayner
Jane Rodger
Camille Simpson
Jana Skene
Margaret Spence
Val Thomas
Anne Watson
Anne Wilcox
Clare Wilkie

Tenor

Mike Brooks
Richard Coleman
Paul Davison
Charles Guilianotti
Bruce Irvine

Janet Ogilvie
Paul McKay
James Miller
Alan Scott
Leofric Studd

Bass

Tom Batey
Dave Benson
George Cameron
Pablo Carnicero
David Coleman
Nigel Crabb
Matthew Deddis
Ian Downie
Chris Erni
Keith Gates
Mike Harding
Jim Hardy
John Harle
Roger Hessing

Stefan Horsman
Jim Hunter
Andrew Key
George Lawrence
Andrew Leadbetter
Graham Mountford
Mike Radcliffe
Mark Rodgers
Duncan Shaw
David Way
Fraser Westwood
Conrad Wiedermann
Tobias Wolf
Brian Wilkins

Aberdeen Sinfonietta

Aberdeen Sinfonietta was formed originally as a small ensemble which played regularly in Aberdeen and also toured throughout Scotland. Since then it has substantially increased its membership in order to extend its musical repertoire and to give many of the area's professional and outstanding amateur musicians the opportunity to perform in its concerts.

Aberdeen Sinfonietta now has its own annual series of concerts in Aberdeen's Music Hall, and has established itself as one of the foremost contributors to music-making in this part of Scotland. While the Music Hall is closed for refurbishment, the orchestra is giving its Aberdeen concerts mainly in the High Church, Hilton. The next of these will be on Saturday 19 May, 2018, with Garry Walker as conductor and Anna-Liisa Bezrodny as violin soloist. The programme will be repeated on the following day in the Caird Hall, Dundee.

Violins: Bryan Dargie (Leader)
Teresa Boag
Jean Fletcher
Ruth Kalitski
Rachel Mackison
Jenna Main
Guera Maunder
Aden Mazur
Michaela Wiedermann

Violas: Sandra Campbell
Richard Clark
Jonathan Kightley

Cellos: Alison MacDonald
Louise Cooper
Mary Dargie
Bill Linklater

Double bass: Ray Leonard

Flutes: Margaret Preston
Kathryn Gammie

Oboes/oboes d'amore: Clara Lafuente Garcia
Fiona Gordon

Trumpets: Alan Haggart
Gerry Dawson
Fraser Gale

Horns: Robert Martin
Kevin Cormack

Timpani: Isabel John

Continuo: David Gerrard (Organ)
Alison MacDonald (Cello)

The History of Aberdeen Bach Choir

Founded as the Aberdeen Bach Society by Charles Sanford Terry in 1913 and reconstituted as Aberdeen Bach Choir in 1956, the choir usually performs two main concerts a year, at least one of which normally features a work by J.S. Bach. The repertoire of the choir is comprehensive and varied and past concerts have included works such as:

Missa "Bell'Amfitrit'Altera"; Psalm; Domine Exaudi **Lassus**
Magnificat Quinto Tono **Hieronymus Praetorius**
Vespro Della Beata Vergine 1610; Vespers **Monteverdi**
Nimm von uns Herr du treuer Gott; Jesu, meines Lebens Leben;
Der Herr ist mit mir **Buxtehude**
Polovtsian Dances **Borodin**
Beatus Vir; Domine ad adiuvandum me Festina **Vivaldi**
St Matthew Passion; St John Passion; Mass in B Minor; Christmas Oratorio;
Easter Oratorio; Magnificat in D **Bach**
Magnificat in Bb **Pergolesi**
"Missa Sanctae Theresiae"; "Missa Trinitatis" **Michael Haydn**
"Great" Mass in C Minor; Requiem **Mozart**
Te Deum **Hummel**
Mass in C **Beethoven**
Missa Choralis **Liszt**
Mass in Eb **Schubert**
Mass in F Minor; Motets **Bruckner**
Symphony of Psalms **Stravinsky**
Messe du jubilé **Daniel-Lesur**
The Twelve **Walton**
Messe Solennelle **Langlais**
Hymn to St Cecilia; St Nicolas **Britten**
Chichester Psalms **Bernstein**
Benedictus **Howard Blake**
Russian Requiem **Pekkonen**
The Armed Man **Karl Jenkins**
Te Deum; Magnificat; Berliner Messe; Cantate Domino **Arvo Pärt**
Gloria; Requiem; Magnificat **John Rutter**
Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis; The Lamb **John Tavener**
The Chronicle of Saint Machar (commissioned by the choir) **John McLeod**
Viri Galilæi **Patrick Gowers**

Next concert



29 April 2018

Come and join the Aberdeen Bach Choir on **Sunday 29 April 2018 at 7.45pm in St Machar's Cathedral** when they present *Lo Sposalizio*. This will be a concert to celebrate the centuries-old tradition of Venice's annual carnival and ceremonial Marriage to the Sea.

The concert will feature sacred, secular and instrumental music by Monteverdi, Gabrieli, Rovetta, and contemporaries, as the choir presents a musical reconstruction of this event as it might have sounded in the 1630s. The choir will be accompanied by the specialist period instrument group, His Majestys Sagbutts and Cornetts, and continuo will be provided by theorbo players. There will be ancient Venetian cornett fanfares, plainsong, and multi-part choral music from one of the richest genres of choral music and one of the most exhilarating periods of musical history.

Aberdeen Bach Choir supports musical education in Aberdeen in the following ways:

- Ellie Pirie Scholarship
- James Lobban Conducting Scholarship
- James Lobban Prize for Musicology



**SUPPORTING &
CHAMPIONING
VOLUNTARY MUSIC**

Printed by iceberg Print & Design

Supporting Aberdeen Cyrenians

www.icebergprint.co.uk

Programme cover design by Bill Smith

This concert is made possible by the James Lobban Legacy

