



*Symphony*  
SYMPHONY CHOIR  
OF CAPE TOWN

presents

# *Christmas with Bach*

Bach - Magnificat  
Handel - Dettingen Te Deum

Cape Town City Hall

6 December 2025 at 7 pm

7 December 2025 at 3 pm

*Soloists:*

*Antoinette Huysen    Lente Louw*

*Elsabé Richter    Willem Bester*

*William Berger*

**Conducted by Levi Alexander**

## A note from our Director

The Symphony Choir of Cape Town prides itself on presenting choral works that are seldom performed - pieces that fall outside the realm of the “old faithful” classics yet richly deserve more frequent staging. These are works that choral enthusiasts long to hear live, that singers and orchestral players dream of adding to their musical bucket lists, and that newcomers have the joy of discovering for the first time.

The Handel was composed 281 years ago (1744) and the Bach 293 years ago (1732), yet both sound as vibrant and stirring today as when they first resonated through candlelit churches of the Baroque era. For many years, their music has graced Christmas playlists around the world – now, at last, we experience these magnificent works live and in full splendour.

As Artistic Director of the Symphony Choir, I am proud to have introduced a tradition of presenting a major, formal Christmas work each December – music that is not commercial in nature, but which invites deep reflection on the mystery and meaning of the Nativity. The SCCT alternates annually between performances with full symphony orchestra and those with baroque forces, a tradition that celebrates both grandeur and authenticity.

In an increasingly secular world, Christmastide has too often become a season of excess and distraction. Through the music and text of this programme, we invite you to rediscover a gentler, more contemplative vision of the Nativity story – a journey that leads the listener from awe to joy, from reflection to renewal. May this evening’s music inspire you to embrace once again the wonder, tenderness, and triumph of the Incarnation.

The performance opens with the unaccompanied voices of the Symphony Choir singing one of the most profound texts of the Gospel of John: “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.” Though this setting by John Stainer is most often associated with the Passion, in this context, we hear it through a Christmas lens – an eternal message of divine love and hope.

The two principal works of the programme are both hymns of praise. First, Handel’s *Te Deum*, a resounding proclamation of thanksgiving traditionally sung at Matins, and then Bach’s *Magnificat*, Mary’s joyful song as she receives the news that she is to bear the Messiah.

The second half opens with Paul Manz’s serene Advent carol *Peace Be to You*. Where the *Te Deum* reminds us of Christ’s majesty, this half turns our hearts toward His coming and the peace He brings.

The Symphony Choir of Cape Town wishes you a most glorious Christmastide – filled with love, hope, and joy. May you rest well, find time with family and friends, and be renewed for a new year that holds great promise.

**Levi Alexander** - Music Director of the Symphony Choir of Cape Town

## PROGRAMME

**John Stainer: God so Loved the World**

**G F Handel: Dettingen Te Deum, HWV 283**

**Interval – 30 minutes**

**Paul Manz: E'en So, Lord Jesus, Quickly Come**

**J S Bach: Magnificat in D Major, BWV 243**

**For today's performance we will be accompanied by a  
Baroque orchestra under the direction of  
Lucia Di Blasio Scott**

## PROGRAMME NOTES

### **John Stainer: God so Loved the World**

**John Stainer** (1840–1901) was an English composer, organist and scholar, best known for his church music, particularly *The Crucifixion*. He served as organist at St Paul's Cathedral and later became Professor of Music at Oxford.

*God so Loved the World* is one of the most beloved movements from John Stainer's *Crucifixion* (1887). Written for choir and organ, the work was intended for parish church performance during Lent or Passiontide. The serene motet sets words from John 3:16-17, encapsulating the central message of Christian faith – the boundless love of God revealed through the sacrifice of Christ. Stainer's music combines Victorian lyricism with devotional simplicity. This movement remains a staple of church and concert choirs, admired for its warmth, balance and enduring spiritual power.

God so loved the world,  
that He gave His only begotten son,  
that whoso believeth,  
believeth in Him should not perish,  
should not perish  
but have everlasting life.  
For God sent not His Son  
into the world to condemn the world,  
God sent not His Son  
into the world to condemn the world,  
but that the world through Him might be saved.  
God so loved the world,  
God so loved the world,  
that He gave his only begotten son,  
that whoso believeth,  
believeth in Him should not perish,  
should not perish  
but have everlasting life.

## **G F Handel: Dettingen Te Deum, HWV 283**

**George Frederick Handel** (1685–1759) was a German-born composer who became a naturalised British citizen and one of the Baroque era’s greatest masters. Renowned for his operas, oratorios, and ceremonial music, including *Messiah* and *Water Music*, Handel combined dramatic power with lyrical grace, profoundly shaping English musical life and tradition.

*Handel’s Dettingen Te Deum* celebrates King George II’s victory over the French at the Battle of Dettingen during the War of the Austrian Succession. It combines ceremonial grandeur with devotional reference. Though written for a military thanksgiving, the work transcends its political occasion through its vibrant energy, majestic choruses, and expressive contrasts. Handel’s setting of the ancient *Te Deum* text (“We praise Thee, O God”) reflects both triumph and humility, mixing martial brilliance with moments of lyrical piety. Trumpets and drums proclaim jubilant praise, while tender solos convey gratitude and awe. Premiered in London’s Chapel Royal, in 1743, the *Dettingen Te Deum* stands among Handel’s great ceremonial works, uniting the splendour of his operatic style with the dignity of sacred worship. It remains a stirring testament to faith, victory and the composer’s genius.

We praise Thee O God,  
We acknowledge Thee to be the Lord.  
All the earth doth worship Thee the Father everlasting.  
To Thee all angels cry aloud,  
The Heavens and all the powers therein.  
To Thee Cherubin and Seraphim continually do cry,  
Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Sabaoth.  
Heaven and earth are full of the majesty of Thy glory.  
The glorious company of the apostles praise Thee,  
The goodly fellowship of the prophets praise Thee,  
The noble army of martyrs praise Thee,  
The holy church throughout all the world doth acknowledge Thee.  
The Father of an infinite majesty,  
Thine honourable, true and only Son,  
Also the Holy Ghost the comforter.  
Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ.  
Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father.  
When Thou tookest upon Thee to deliver man,  
Thou didst not abhor the Virgin's womb.  
When thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death,  
Thou didst open the kingdom of Heaven to all believers.  
Thou sittest at the right hand of God in the glory of the Father.  
We believe that Thou shalt come to be our Judge,  
We therefore pray Thee: help Thy servants,  
whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy precious blood.  
Make them to be number'd with Thy Saints in glory everlasting.  
O Lord, save Thy people, and bless Thine heritage.  
Govern them, and lift them up for ever.  
Day by day we magnify Thee and we worship Thy name, ever world without end.  
Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this day without sin.  
O Lord, have mercy upon us.  
O Lord, let Thy mercy lighten upon us, as our trust is in Thee.  
O Lord, in Thee have I trusted; let me never be confounded.

### **Did you know?**

Handel's lawyer father was not a huge fan of his son's musical ambitions. In fact, when he was a boy, Handel had to sneak to the attic to play a clavichord that had been hidden up there.

## **Paul Manz: E'en So, Lord Jesus, Quickly Come**

**Paul Manz** (1919–2009) was an American composer, organist and educator, renowned for his sacred choral and organ music. Long associated with the Lutheran tradition, his works reflect deep faith and lyrical craftsmanship.

*E'en So, Lord Jesus, Quickly Come* was composed in 1953 and has become a cherished motet in the choral repertoire. Written during a time when Manz's young son was gravely ill, the anthem expresses a heartfelt longing for peace and divine presence. Its text, adapted by his wife, Ruth Manz, from Revelation 22, blends hope and supplication. The music evokes both serenity and longing, culminating in a radiant plea for Christ's return. This poignant anthem, often sung during Advent, reflects Manz's deep faith and the universal human desire for comfort and renewal amid suffering. Its quiet intensity continues to move singers and listeners alike.

*Peace be to you and grace from him  
Who freed us from our sins,  
Who loved us all and shed His blood  
That we might saved be.  
Sing Holy, Holy to our Lord  
The Lord, Almighty God  
Who was, and is, and is to come,  
Sing Holy, Holy Lord!  
Rejoice in heaven, all ye that dwell there-in  
Rejoice on earth, ye saints below  
For Christ is coming, is coming soon!  
For Christ is coming soon  
E'en so, Lord Jesus, quickly come  
And night shall be no more;  
They need no light nor lamp nor sun,  
For Christ will be their All!*

### **What is a motet?**

A motet is a polyphonic\* choral work, usually sacred, typically sung a cappella (without instruments)

(\*Polyphonic = multiple independent vocal lines)

## **Johann Sebastian Bach: Magnificat in D major, BWV 243**

**Johann Sebastian Bach** (1685–1750) a German composer, organist, and violinist of the Baroque period, is widely regarded as one of the greatest composers in Western music history.

Born in Eisenach into a large musical family, Bach was orphaned at a young age and raised by his elder brother. He held several important musical positions during his life, including at the courts of Weimar and Köthen, and later as Thomaskantor (music director) in Leipzig, where he composed many of his most famous works.

Bach's music is known for its intellectual depth, technical mastery, and spiritual power. His vast output includes sacred vocal works such as the *Mass in B minor* and *St Matthew Passion*, keyboard works like *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, and instrumental pieces including the *Brandenburg Concertos*. Though underappreciated in his lifetime, Bach's music has since become central to the classical canon and continues to influence musicians worldwide.

The *Magnificat in D Major, BWV 243* is one of his most radiant and jubilant sacred works, a setting of the Virgin Mary's hymn of praise from the Gospel of Luke: “*My soul doth magnify the Lord.*” Composed originally in 1723 for Bach's first Christmas in Leipzig, the *Magnificat* was later revised in the 1730s – the version most frequently performed today.

Scored for five vocal soloists (SSATB), five-part chorus, and festive orchestration including trumpets and timpani, the work exemplifies Bach's flair for dramatic expression and intricate musical architecture.

The *Magnificat* is structured in 12 concise movements (excluding the doxology), each vividly characterising a verse of the biblical text. The work demonstrates Bach's mastery in balancing solo and choral writing, counterpoint and homophony, and expressive text-setting with structural clarity.

Though relatively short – around 25–30 minutes in performance – the *Magnificat* is a concentrated display of Bach's genius. It is at once a profound expression of faith and a dazzling showcase of Baroque musical brilliance. The work remains a cornerstone of the sacred choral repertoire and continues to inspire both performers and audiences with its vitality, inventiveness, and spiritual depth.

## Text used in today's performance

Magnificat anima mea Dominum.	<i>My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord.</i>
Et exsultavit spiritus meus: in Deo salutari meo.	<i>and my spirit has exulted in God my saviour.</i>
Quia respexit humilitatem ancillae suae:	<i>because he has regarded the lowly state of his slavegirl:</i>
Ecce enim ex hoc beatam me dicent	<i>for look! from now on they will say that I am blessed</i>
Omnes generationes.	<i>Every generation.</i>
Quia fecit mihi magna qui potens est, et sanctum nomen eius.	<i>because he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.</i>
Et misericordia a progenie in progenies timentibus eum.	<i>and his mercy continues from generation to generation for those who fear him.</i>
Fecit potentiam in brachio suo, dispersit superbos mente cordis sui.	<i>He has made known the power of his arm, scattered those who are arrogant in the thoughts of their heart.</i>
Deposuit potentes de sede et exaltavit humiles.	<i>He has put down the mighty from their seats [of power] and raised up those who are lowly.</i>
Esurientes implevit bonis et divites dimisit inanes.	<i>The hungry he has filled with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.</i>
Suscepit Israel puerum suum recordatus misericordiae suae.	<i>He has taken under his protection Israel his boy, and remembered his mercy.</i>
Sicut locutus est ad Patres nostros,	<i>in accordance with what he said to our fathers,</i>
Abraham et semini eius in saecula.	<i>to Abraham and to his seed for ever.</i>
Gloria Patri, gloria Filio, gloria et Spiritui Sancto!	<i>Glory to the Father, glory to the Son, glory also to the Holy Spirit!</i>
Sicut erat in principio et nunc et semper et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.	<i>As it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be and throughout ages of ages. Amen.</i>

### Did you know?

Despite his fame today, Bach never travelled outside of present-day Germany in his entire life.

Bach walked over 400km (from Arnstadt to Lübeck) to hear a concert performed by organist Dietrich Buxtehude. Bach stayed there for several months – much longer than he expected – to absorb as much as he could from the older master

## **Bach and Handel: Two Titans of the Baroque**

**J.S.Bach and G.F.Handel** form the twin creative peaks of the 18th century. Though they were born in the same country in 1685 and knew each other's music, they never met. Both were skilled and inspired beyond their contemporaries in the arts of instrumental and vocal music and in the craftsmanship of Baroque contrapuntal composition. Yet, their music, personal qualities and circumstances of life are so strikingly different that each man's accomplishments stand in brilliant opposition to the other's.

### **Did you know?**

Handel's most famous work, *Messiah* (1741), was composed in an astonishingly short time – **just 24 days**.

#### **Handel donated generously to charity**

The proceeds from his *Messiah* performances often went to orphanages, hospitals, and prisoners' aid. He was one of the first musicians to use music to raise money for social causes

#### **Handel wasn't just a composer; he was also a shrewd entrepreneur.**

He ran his own opera company and produced concerts - even when some of them failed financially, he found ways to bounce back.

#### **Operas made him famous – oratorios made him immortal**

In Handel's time, during Lent (the 40 days before Easter), the performance of operas was forbidden. To avoid the loss of income, Handel began composing oratorios (like *Messiah* and *Samson*), which, because they were biblically based, were permitted. He composed over 40 operas, but **oratorios** ultimately became his enduring legacy.

#### **He suffered a stroke but recovered – and kept composing.**

In 1737 he had a stroke that left him temporarily paralysed and unable to perform. Remarkably, he recovered and returned to composing with renewed vigour.

## **What's the difference between an opera and an oratorio?**

**Opera = Musical theatre** (like a Baroque Broadway show),  
with acting and costumes.

**Oratorio = Sacred concert storytelling** (like a musical sermon performed by choir and soloist), no acting, no fancy costumes.

## **Did you know?**

### **Bach was at the centre of a musical dynasty**

J.S.Bach's great-grandfather was a piper. His grandfather was a court musician. His father was a violinist, organist, court trumpeter, and kettledrum player. At least two of his uncles were composers. He had five brothers – all named Johann – and the three who lived to adulthood also became musicians.

### **J.S. Bach also had 20 children from his two marriages**

Of those who lived past childhood, at least five became professional composers.

### **He brawled with his students**

One of Bach's first jobs was as a church organist in Arnstadt. When he signed up for the role, he was unaware that he also had to teach a student choir and orchestra, a responsibility that Bach hated. Not one to mince words, he one day lost patience with an error-prone bassoonist, Johann Geyersbach, and called him a *zippelfabottist* – that is, a “nanny-goat bassoonist.” Those were fighting words. Days later, Geyersbach attacked Bach with a walking stick. Bach pulled a dagger. The rumble escalated into a full-blown scrum which required the two to be pulled apart.

### **Bach spent 30 days in jail for quitting his job**

When Bach took a job in 1708 as a chamber musician in the court of the Duke of Saxe-Weimar, he again had to assume a slew of responsibilities that he never signed up for. This time, he took it in stride, believing his hard work would lead to his promotion to *kapellmeister* (Music Director). But after five years, the top job was handed to the former kapellmeister's son. Furious, Bach resigned and joined a rival Court. As retribution, the Duke jailed him, but Bach spent his time in jail composing music.

### **Bach lost his eyesight**

Late in life, Bach suffered from serious eye problems and underwent failed surgeries by a controversial eye doctor. He died shortly after, almost blind, likely from complications of the procedure.

After Bach died in 1750, his music fell out of fashion. It wasn't until Felix Mendelssohn revived the *St Matthew Passion* in 1829 that Bach's genius was rediscovered by a wider public.

## ABOUT THE PERFORMERS

### LEVI ALEXANDER - Director



**Levi Alexander** graduated *cum laude* with a Masters in Music, specialising in Choral Conducting from Stellenbosch University. He studied for a Bachelor's Degree of Music in baritone saxophone performance and conducting at the SACM (UCT) where he earned his Licentiate Diploma (LTCL). He then went on to complete his Postgraduate Certificate in Education from Rhodes University, specialising in High School Creative Arts and Music Education.

He has been a multi-woodwind-instrumentalist in the musical orchestras of the Gilbert and Sullivan Society and has performed in a number of Wind Ensembles and Bands and is an *ad hoc* saxophonist to the Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra. He is currently a member of True Voices *ad hoc*, Cape Consort *ad hoc* and the St Michael's and All Angels Church Choir.

Levi is currently the Department Head of Music of SACS High School (2021) where he started his tenure in 2015. He became assistant conductor of the Symphony Choir of Cape Town in 2015 and was appointed its Director in 2021. Levi hopes to grow both the SACS Music Department and Symphony Choir of Cape Town, his two primary focus areas, to continue to raise the high standard over the coming years.

### ABIGAIL LE ROUX - Choir Accompanist



**Abigail le Roux** is a music teacher and piano accompanist. She currently teaches at St Cyprian's School and has previously held teaching positions at Westerford High School and Bridge House School in Franschhoek. She holds the degrees of Bachelor of Music and a Master's in Education from the University of Cape Town. In addition to her teaching and performing work, Abigail is an independent researcher whose interests centre on race and politics in education. She is the recipient of several academic awards, most recently the South African Girls' School Association (SAGSA) Action Research Programme Fellowship and the American Educational Research Association (AERA)

International Travel Award, which enabled her to present her Master's research in Philadelphia, USA.

## ANTOINETTE HUYSSSEN - Soprano



**Antoinette Huyssen** is Chorus Master at Cape Town Opera and directs the Cape Town Chamber Choir. She holds a master's degree *cum laude* in classical voice from the University of Cape Town (UCT), a Postgraduate Diploma from UCT and was awarded the Performance Certificate (with distinction) from Trinity College London. Antoinette was Director of Music of the Philharmonia Choir of Cape Town from 2006 to 2012. She lectured in voice at Stellenbosch University from 2016-2021 and was employed as a vocal coach and accompanist at the College of Music, UCT from 2010 until 2017.

As a soprano, Antoinette is a frequent oratorio soloist. Other great passions of hers are historically informed performance practice (HIPP) and ensemble singing. She is a founding member of and a regular performer with the local early music ensemble, the Cape Consort.

## ELSABE RICHTER - Soprano



**Elsabé Richter** has an M. Mus. degree in Vocal Performance from the North-West University, where she studied under baritone Werner Nel. At NWU she was awarded numerous prizes and bursaries, most notably a scholarship for a year's academic study at the Norwegian Academy of Music during her master's degree.

Her repertoire encompasses a wide range of early music, art songs and opera as well as oratorio and other sacred works.

Elsabé was nominated for a 2017 *kykNET Fiësta* Award together with the Cape Town Baroque Orchestra for their Art Festival programme titled 'Handel in die Voorkamer', as well as for a 2017 *WOORDtroFEE* as part of the Cape Town Camerata's production 'Boerneef sing Palissandertaal'. Elsabé is a voice lecturer at

Stellenbosch University and also teaches at La Rochelle Girls' High School. She regularly performs with various ensembles, choirs and orchestras.

## LENTE LOUW - Mezzo-Soprano



**Lente Louw** is an established oratorio, chamber music and ensemble singer. She holds an LLM from North West University, where she began her voice training under Werner Nel. After relocating to Cape Town, she regularly sang under the baton of Barry Smith from 2008 until his retirement in 2015. In 2015 she completed her MMus in Singing Performance at the University of Stellenbosch. With a keen interest in early music, she founded the Lutesong duo with lutenist husband Uwe Grosser in 2017. They have performed at a variety of venues in Cape Town and Germany. The Lutesong Consort now numbers up to 12 singers and lute-family instruments that specialise in vocal repertoire from mostly the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. They regularly perform at the Cape Town Baroque

Festival and the Cape Town Baroque Orchestra. Lente teaches singing at Bishops Diocesan College and Herschel School for Girls in Cape Town.

## WILLIAM BERGER - Baritone



**William Berger** was a member of the Drakensberg Boys' Choir and the inaugural recipient of the Deon van der Walt UNISA/SAMRO bursary at age 17, before commencing his studies at the Royal Academy of Music in London supported by the Kathleen Ferrier Bursary Award and the Oppenheimer Memorial Trust. William has distinguished himself as a performing artist on the international stage and has appeared in both the Royal Opera House, London and Kennedy Center, Washington D.C. He is a regular collaborator with the Cape Town Baroque Orchestra (Monteverdi's *Vespro della Beate Vergine*), the Cape Philharmonic Orchestra (Mahler's *Rückert Lieder*, Bizet's *Les Pêcheurs du Perles*) and Cape Town Opera (*Le Nozze di Figaro*). A former Principal Artist with English National Opera, William Berger was awarded the honour

“Associate of the Royal Academy of Music” in 2009.

In 2025 he appeared as soloist with the CPO in the world premiere of Grant McLachlan's new song cycle for baritone and orchestra, *The Silence of the Day* in Cape Town. He also starred in the title role in Cape Town Opera's production of *The Barber of Seville* and as part of the 2025 Toyota Stellenbosch Woordfees.

## WILLEM BESTER - Tenor

**Willem Bester** is an established concert soloist, ensemble singer and founding member of the Lutesong Consort, the Cape Consort, and the Cape Soloists Choir. He has also studied choral conducting. He specialised in sacred and Early Music and regularly participates in liturgical music-making as well as Early Music programmes.

Willem lectures computer science at Stellenbosch University, where he currently presents courses in low-level programming and advanced algorithms. He is also known as a freelance arts critic and, when his schedule allowed, presented *Cape Diary* on Fine Music Radio. He likes to note that he is the only person alive who has published in both the Lecture Notes in Computer Science and *Huisgenoot*.

## THE SYMPHONY CHOIR OF CAPE TOWN

The Symphony Choir of Cape Town (SCCT) is a non-profit organisation consisting of between 50 and 70 members from all walks of life with a common love of singing, especially of major works.

The Choir was founded in 1972 as an adjunct to the Cape Town Symphony Orchestra and presents major choral performances each year under the baton of well-known guest conductors. Since 1993 the Choir has been an independent body and has promoted and managed its own concerts.



Under the direction of Levi Alexander, the choir aims to provide quality music to the public in conjunction with community

organisations and emerging young soloists and conductors.

The SCCT is always looking for new members. We are a community-based choir, and our members are amateur singers from around Cape Town. We aim to reflect the diversity of our city, and welcome singers of any gender, age, race or creed.

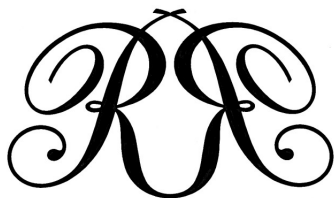
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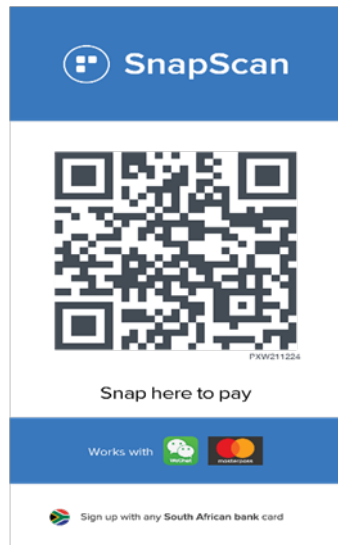
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