

BachBeat

The Newsletter of the Bach Cantata Choir



October 2008

Vol.2, No.1

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The Bach Cantata Choir is a legally organized non-profit corporation under Oregon law and is a registered 501(c)(3) corporation with the IRS. Donations to the choir are fully deductible for income tax purposes.

Newsletter

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The *BachBeat* newsletter is published cyclically by the Bach Cantata Choir.

www.bachcantatachoir.org

My time at the Oregon Bach Festival

By Ralph Nelson – Artistic Director

As many of you know, I was able to spend almost three weeks at the Oregon Bach Festival this summer participating in what is known as the “Conducting Master Class.” This was an opportunity for me to learn from maestro Helmuth Rilling, professors Tom Davis (CalPoly) and Tim Sawyer (Northwestern, Minneapolis), and conductors such as Anton Armstrong (St. Olaf) and Nicholas McGegen (Philharmonia Baroque, Berkeley), as well as members of the orchestra and chorus. It was an amazing experience.

The main focus in our conducting classes was an examination of J.S. Bach’s *St. John Passion*. We took it apart pretty much note for note and word for word over the course of twelve hours without Rilling, then another twenty hours with the maestro. We also worked on two Bach concerti and the *Orchestral Suite in B Minor* with Nicolas McGegen.¹ The study of the *St. John* was particularly meaningful for me, since it was (and now really is) one of my favorite works—and a work that I thought I knew well. However, when Rilling began to show us all the symbols and motifs, we quickly realized that what most of us knew about the work only touched the surface!

At times, I realized that I had so much to learn about Bach; but at other

times, I was very proud of the work that we have done at the BCC, and that our “solutions” to various performance problems were right on the money. I chuckle at how many times I would look at a passage and say to myself—“you had better subdivide into eight here”—only to hear Rilling say, “this is difficult, you must subdivide this place...”

I’d like to focus on some important things that I know many of you will be interested in:

1. **Chorales:** Rilling believes that the chorales were hymns sung by the people, and they should be sung in a straightforward manner. Different dynamics are fine, but crescendos would have been too “fancy” for the congregation. Unlike some scholars, he firmly believes the chorales were sung by the congregation. I’m proud that our concerts feature singing by the congregation.

2. **Continuo:** We had many sessions with the continuo players. In church cantatas, cello, bass, maybe bassoon, and positif organ are used. Harpsichord is not used in church cantatas, but it is used in chamber pieces. String bass almost always doubles cello, even in recitatives, unless bassoon is used instead of cello—then bass doubles bassoon. OBF bass players all have extenders, because Bach apparently had a five-string bass. Bassoon is used instead of cello if the movement has all double reeds (e.g., last year we had some three-oboe pieces—bassoon would then be used, doubled by the string bass, with the positif organ). Bassoon and cello never play together except in final chorales, unless Bach actually wrote

Member Spotlight



Maria Powell – Violin

Maria Powell, a violinist in the BCC Chamber Orchestra, got her musical start in life very early. She studied violin and piano through the parochial school music program at the Holy Redeemer School here in Portland. She says that “most of the nuns at Marylhurst taught one of us ‘Powell sisters’—myself, my sister Lisa on the cello, or Nina on the viola. I have always been grateful that my parents gave us the opportunity to take lessons and receive the gift of music.”

She went on to receive an excellent musical education: playing in the Portland Youth Philharmonic (then called the Portland Junior Symphony) from 1973-1978, she also studying with Lalos Balogh, who was at one time principal violinist of the Oregon Symphony. From 1978-1982, she played in the Stanford Symphony at Stanford University, and was concertmistress for most of that time. Maria spent a decade playing with (among others) the Portland Chamber Orchestra and the Portland Civic Theater. In addition to the BCCCO, she currently plays with the Vancouver Symphony, the Rose City Chamber Orchestra, and the beloved Mocks Crest orchestra, who present Gilbert and Sullivan operas every June at the University of Portland.

Maria thoroughly enjoys playing second violin, as she delights in the rhythmic and harmonic lines. She has known BCCCO concertmaster Mary Rowell, as well as cellist Dale Tolliver and contrabassist Garrett Jelesma for a long time, and has shared many musical moments with them over the years. Dale once told her: “You’re the only happy second violinist I know.” Maria goes on to say that she “feels privileged to play with the BCC—I appreciate the purity of sound and marvel at the simplicity to be found within the complex lines. It is a challenge to play this style; I’m always working on clarity in my sound and on correct emphasis and phrasing. The BCC is a great complement to playing large symphonic works with the VSO. I receive the best of both worlds and feel spiritually fulfilled at BCC concerts.”

distinct parts for them.

3. **Recitatives:** Rilling’s style right now (but not always the case in many of his recordings) is as follows: Recitatives are accompanied “secco”—meaning that the cello, bass, and organ hold the notes (or chords) for no more than one quarter-note, no matter what the actual value of note is in Bach’s score. This is done so that the congregation can hear the words better, especially in churches with significant ring-time. An interesting note is that all the cantatas written before Bach moved to Leipzig (1723) had recitatives that end with an arioso—but Leipzig cantatas have recitatives without ariosos.

4. **Vibrato:** The OBF chorus uses some vibrato—and frankly in my opinion it sometimes gets in the way. When that happens, the choir directors simply say “no vibrato” for this passage, and *voilà*—the problem almost always goes away. The strings play with very little vibrato, and sometimes with none at all.

5. **Phrasings:** I was surprised by some things I heard. The chorus was asked to articulate (almost with “h’s” or tonguing), much more than I would have expected. This was really true on the “Sanctus” of the *B Minor Mass*. Many times words were totally split and even stopped in the middle—on the *Crucifixus* of the *B Minor Mass*, it was definitely, “Cru...Chi...fi-hix-hus”. I’m not sure I like it this way, but I may experiment with tonguing or more articulation.

Obviously, Rilling’s methods are not total “gospel.” There are other great Bach specialists, including John Elliot Gardner, Joshua Ripkin, Ton Koopman, Masaaki Suzuki (and in the past decades Karl Richter and Nicolas Harnoncourt) that have different theories. But I think we can start with some of Rilling’s methods, because so much of what he does makes a lot of sense. For the most part, he is quite open to other methods, but he flatly dismisses the “OVPP”—one voice per part—movement, mainly because he felt Bach never did it that way, and his argument is quite convincing based on how many instrumental and choral parts we still have in existence. For example, in the *St. John* there still exist three sets of Violin 1 parts—Rilling says, “now, why three sets? He must have wanted five or six players, or he would not need these sets. He didn’t just go to Kinkos and make the parts. Remember that the Bach Family had to make these parts—Anna (Magdalena—Bach’s second wife) and the girls ruled the paper, and that took hours; the boys copied the parts. What do you think Anna would have said if she found out Sebastian had not used these? Trust me, he used three parts!” ♪

¹ The BCC Chamber Orchestra will perform the *B Minor Suite* on Sunday, February 1, 2009.

Heinrich Schütz (1585-1672) - A Brief Biography

By Lorin Wilkerson – Bass

Heinrich Schütz, perhaps the most influential composer of the early German Baroque, came to a life of music despite strong wishes to the contrary on the part of his family. A stroke of good fortune started him on the road-- a music-loving nobleman, Landgrave Moritz of Kassel, was staying at an inn in Weissenfels owned by young Heinrich's well-to-do father. Upon hearing the boy's angelic voice, the Landgrave was so impressed that he immediately offered to take the boy with him to Kassel to have him educated and trained as a musician. Eventually his parents agreed, but they had other plans for the boy: he was to become a lawyer.

Heinrich showed immense ability immediately, but in 1608 his parents made him enroll in the university at Marburg to study law with his brother. He did so reluctantly, but after only a year the Landgrave gave his depressed young protégé the funds to go and study with the famous Giovanni Gabrieli (1557-1612) in Venice. Once again his parents could not refuse, and Heinrich remained there as Gabrieli's pupil for four years. After another brief stint at law school it became obvious that the man (he was 28 by then) was destined for something other than law, and in 1617 he was appointed Kappellmeister in Dresden at the court of the immensely important Elector of Saxony. This occurred only after a fierce struggle amongst the noblemen for the services of the brilliant musician, which struggle the Landgrave gave up after he feared it might lead to war with the much more powerful Elector.¹

Schütz went on to compose a large number of extremely important church works, starting with his *Psalms of David* (frontispiece seen in the illustration) in 1619. He was the first German composer to utilize the Italian style so skillfully, and he also composed a number of secular works, including the first German opera, *Daphne*, which sadly no longer exists. He returned to Italy in 1628 to study with the great Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643). It is said that the two men bonded more than musically, as they both had a shared sense of grief over the deaths of their wives; Schütz himself would never remarry.² He brought to Germany the polychoral style, which uses more than one choir in different places throughout the church, as well as the *concertato*, a style of music which gave equal weight to both voices and instruments. He learned from Gabrieli various styles of motet writing, and J.S. Bach would have undoubtedly known of Schütz and probably studied his work.

The horrifyingly brutal Thirty Years War that had raged in and around the German kingdoms since 1618 finally reached Dresden by 1631. Schütz spent a number of years in exile in Copenhagen during the war, since in Dresden there were no musical activities (hence no pay for musicians) during this time. Before he fled the war, he is known to have given of what little he had to help his impoverished court musicians. After the Peace of Westphalia ended the war in 1648, he returned to the court in Dresden (under a new Elector) and remained active there until his death at age 87. ♪

¹ Freda Pastor Berkowitz, *On Lutes, Recorders, and Harpsichords*. (Atheneum, ©1967), p 115.

² Ibid, p. 199.



Photo Gallery - Cafe Bach



BCC Silent Auction

We will be holding our annual Silent Auction benefit before and after the first concert this season on October 26. As you know, with the exception of our Christmas Oratorio concert, the BCC does not charge admission. Instead, we rely on the generous support of audience members like you to fund our mission of bringing all of Bach's cantatas to Portland, as well as music by many other wonderful composers. In addition to the free-will offerings at each of our concerts throughout the season, the Silent Auction is our main stream of revenue.

We encourage everyone to show up early, stay late, and bid generously to ensure that we can continue to bring you the wonderful music you enjoy at our concerts. The multi-talented members of the BCC choir and orchestra will offer

the fruits of their many skills and abilities in the form of unique goods and services for your bidding.

In addition to bidding at the auction, if you or your friends, family and neighbors have the resources, please consider donating gift certificates for goods and services, as these are some of the most popular items and will greatly enhance the attractiveness of our auction. As a 501(c)(3) corporation, donations to the BCC are tax-deductible to the extent provided by law and regulation. Please email Lorin Wilkerson, Silent Auction Chair, at lorinwilk@yahoo.com if you would like to help out in this way before October 24. We will provide you a receipt for your tax records.

Once again, the Bach Cantata Choir warmly thanks you in advance for your generous support in this endeavor, and you and your families are most cordially invited to attend our inaugural concert on October 26.

2008-09 Concert Season

Sunday, October 26, 2008 2:00pm

Silent Auction Fundraiser

Heinrich Schütz: *Psalm 128*

J. S. Bach: Cantatas 106 & 140 (*Wachet Auf*)

Friday, December 19, 2008 7:30pm

Marc-Antoine Charpentier: *Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus, Agnus Dei*

J. S. Bach: *Christmas Oratorio*, parts 1-3

Tickets required (\$20/\$15 students & seniors). Call 503-224-TIXX or visit www.bachcantatachoir.org to order online.

Sunday, February 1, 2009 2:00 pm

"SuperBach" Sunday

Nicolaus Bruhns: *Muss nicht der Mensch*

J. S. Bach: Cantatas 137 & 159, *Orchestral Suite in B Minor*

Sunday, March 15, 2008 2:00 pm

Lenten Concert

Hans Leo Hassler (1564-1612): *Motet for Two Choirs*

J. S. Bach: Cantatas 12 & 131

Sunday, April 26, 2008 2:00pm

Mendelssohn: *Psalm 43, Heilig, Heilig, Heilig*

William Billings: *Three Fuguing Tunes*

J.S Bach: Cantata 112, *Motet No. 2*

*All concerts are free (with free-will offering) unless otherwise noted.
The audience is invited to join the choir in singing selected chorales.
All concerts are held at Rose City Presbyterian Church at NE 44th and
Sandy Blvd. in Portland, Oregon.*



BACH CANTATA CHOIR
3570 NE MATHISON PLACE
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www.bachcantatachoir.org

**Don't miss the
Silent Auction at
our next concert!**

Sunday, October 26 at 2:00 pm
Doors will open at 1:30 pm... bidding
ends after the concert at 4:00 pm