

J. REILLY LEWIS • MUSIC DIRECTOR

WASHINGTON BACH CONSORT

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C O N C E R T

S E A S O N

CHRISTMAS IN LEIPZIG

THE WASHINGTON BACH CONSORT
J. REILLY LEWIS, MUSIC DIRECTOR

Sunday, December 4, 2011 at 3:00 p.m. | National Presbyterian Church Washington, DC

ORCHESTRA

<i>Violin I</i>	<i>Cello</i>	<i>Bassoon</i>
Claire Jolivet*	Loretta O'Sullivan*	Anna Marsh
Amelia Roosevelt	Doug Poplin	
Caroline Levy		<i>Horn</i>
	<i>Violone</i>	Todd Williams
<i>Violin II</i>	Patricia Neely	Paul Hopkins
Annie Loud*		
Edmond Chan	<i>Theorbo</i>	<i>Harpsichord/</i>
Leslie Nero	William Simms	<i>Continuo Organ</i>
		Joseph Gascho
<i>Viola</i>	<i>Oboe/Recorder</i>	
Martha Perry	Debra Nagy*	
Michael De Sapio	Stephen Bard	* <i>principal</i>

CHORUS

<i>Soprano</i>	<i>Tenor</i>
Katelyn Aungst	Luke Frels
Rachel Carlson	Robert Petillo
Robin Smith	Jason Rylander
Laura Choi Stuart	
<i>Alto</i>	<i>Bass</i>
Kristen Dubenion-Smith	Jon Bruno
Joanna Koslowsky	Steven Combs
Charlotte Woolley	Richard Giarusso

PROGRAM NOTES

Among Bach's chamber music are four orchestral suites modeled on a type of "overture-suite" popular in Germany in the 1730s and 1740s, when German courts had a great taste for French style. While precise dates of origin for these works are unknown, they appear to come from Bach's Leipzig period (1723–1750), although they were probably not conceived as a set.

The third suite, BWV 1068, was ultimately scored for three trumpets, timpani, two oboes, strings, and continuo. Scholars now believe, however, that this well-known setting may actually represent an expansion of an earlier version for strings and continuo alone, which is the one presented here. The overture is in the traditional French style: a slow section, characterized by regal dotted rhythms, is followed by a faster section in which individual lines imitate each other. The second movement is the one that has made this suite so famous, the simple yet eloquent "Air," popularly called the "Air on the G String." The work then continues with a number of dances, in the traditional manner. Conspicuously missing, however, are allemandes, courantes, and sarabandes. Instead, Bach writes a pair of gavottes, a bourrée, and a final gigue, whose energetic tempo and skipping rhythms produce a fitting conclusion.

Johann Kuhnau (1660–1722), was a German organist, composer, writer on music, lawyer, and scholar. From 1684 he served as organist at the St. Thomas Church in Leipzig. In 1701 he was appointed cantor at the two main churches (St. Thomas and St. Nicholas) and teacher at the St. Thomas School—positions he retained until his death. Perhaps because he was regarded so highly, the town council did not settle on a successor until 1723, when J.S. Bach was ultimately (and somewhat reluctantly) appointed to the position.

Although better known for his keyboard works, Kuhnau also wrote vocal pieces. In his ensemble cantatas, elaborate choruses alternate with recitatives, arias (often of the da capo type), and occasionally chorales. *Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern* is a cantata based on the sixteenth-century chorale by Philipp Nicolai, traditionally assigned to the twentieth Sunday after Trinity. The hymn itself is based on Psalm 45, a mystical royal wedding song, interpreted Christologically.

Kuhnau's concern for correct rhetorical declamation of the text is evident throughout the cantata, as is his mastery of contrapuntal writing. Individual sections are relatively short. Of special note is the section "For unto us a child is born . . .," since listeners will readily call to mind Handel's setting of the same text.

Kuhnau is often remembered for his opposition to Telemann's activities as director of the Leipzig opera, which threatened the cantor's monopoly on music in the city. Nevertheless, he must have been open to some of the new Italian styles, as is evident from the writing in this cantata—for example, the Corelli-like string accompaniment in the first tenor aria, the energetic string passages in the second one, and the static string accompaniment of the following recitative (*Ich huld'ge dir*).

(over)



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PROGRAM NOTES (cont.)

Kuhnau ends his work with a setting of the chorale (both tune and text). However, he begins with a soprano duet that gives no hint of the chorale tune to come, or that the accompanying string figures have been designed to serve later as basis for the chorale's accompaniment.

While he has been overshadowed by Bach in the judgment of history, Georg Philipp Telemann (1681–1767) was, by far, the more famous of the two composers in his own day. Soon after he entered the University of Leipzig as a law student in 1701, he was asked to compose for the two principal churches in Leipzig, St. Nicholas and St. Thomas. He then founded a collegium musicum, which gave public concerts, and in 1702 he became the director of the Leipzig opera. Two years later, when he was appointed organist and music director at the New Church (previously the purview of the cantor at St. Thomas), he came into conflict with Johann Kuhnau, who consequently complained to the city council that students were abandoning him for the opera.

In 1721 he became cantor at the *Johanneum* and musical director of Hamburg's five main churches. The following year he also became music director of the Hamburg Opera. Writing two cantatas per week, a Passion each year, cantatas for civic occasions, as well as instrumental and operatic works, Telemann composed at an unbelievable pace. While Bach is said to have composed five liturgical cycles of cantatas, Telemann is known to have written at least twenty, with some 1,400 cantatas still extant.

One of the reasons Telemann was so popular is that he embraced the new *galant* trends of what we now call the pre-Classical style: a predominance of major tonalities, a slower harmonic rhythm (the frequency at which harmonies change), transparent counterpoint, imaginative instrumentation, and simple, natural-sounding melodies.

His undated *Deutsches Magnificat* (which uses Luther's German translation of Mary's canticle in Luke 1:46–55) follows the text closely. Its relatively short sections are replete with text-painting, resulting in alternating contrasts of rhythm, texture, and instrumental color. The work begins with a sweet, rhapsodic chorus. A more intimate soprano aria accompanied by recorders follows, which becomes animated at the words "all generations will count me blessed." A second chorus, depicting the grandeur of God's deeds, is followed by a tender, lilting alto aria with oboe obbligato. Agitated unisons and aggressive rhythms (demonstrating Telemann's command of the operatic style) depict God knocking the mighty from their exalted positions, while lyric, rising lines render the text "and has exalted the humble." After a dance-like tenor aria with violin obbligato provides consolation ("He hath filled the hungry with good things..."), the bass aria recalls the prophetic promise made to Abraham. A choral movement ends the work. It begins with the chorale (representing the corporate response of the gathered congregation), then flows directly into an exuberant "Amen."

Only three Bach "oratorios" have come down to us, each of which he entitled "Oratorium": the *Easter Oratorio*, BWV 249 (1725); the *Ascension Oratorio*, BWV 11 (1735), and the *Christmas Oratorio*, BWV 248 (1734–35). Of these, the *Christmas Oratorio* is the only one intended to be performed on different days (the "thirteen days" of Christmas, counted from Christmas Day to the beginning of Epiphany).

Part IV was performed on New Year's Day, whose Gospel reading conveys the account of the circumcision and naming of Jesus. In terms of both its libretto and its musical setting, this cantata is the most self-sufficient one in the oratorio. The first movement is joyful in tone, but unlike the opening movements of Parts I and III, it employs hunting horns instead of trumpets and drums, as is also the case in the "Hercules" cantata from which this movement originates.

Following the choral call to worship, the narrator sings the brief Gospel lesson for the day, emphasizing the name given to the infant. In the following recitative, the bass soloist addresses Jesus in an intimate way, exploring the significance of the child's name for issues of life as well as death. In the middle of the movement, the soprano joins the bass, singing the words to a chorale's opening lines, though to a newly composed melody. To increase the prominence of the soprano melody, Bach reinforces it with the first violins.

In the following echo aria (originating, like the previous movement, in Cantata 213, "Hercules at the Crossroads") the soprano soloist takes up the idea of the fear of death in relation to the name and person of Jesus. While the playful music (with its unpredictable echoes) may strike modern ears as irreverent, it must be heard within the context of the time-honored tradition in Bach's day of composing sacred dialogues. As in its original secular setting, Bach succeeds in creating an atmosphere of suspense, the text vacillating between "yes" and "no."

The movement that follows parallels the earlier one for bass and soprano: the bass soloist again addresses Jesus, affirming the primacy of Jesus' name in all of life, while the soprano interjects phrases of the words to the hymn started in the ear-



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lier movement, though the music is again newly composed. This time, however, there is a continual alteration between recitative (bass) and arioso (soprano/bass duet) sections, so that the effect is that of a love dialogue. As in the earlier companion movement, the first violins double the soprano's melody to reinforce it.

In a technically demanding da capo aria for tenor, two violins, and continuo, Bach employs energetic figures to depict the zealous efforts to which the poet commits himself. The sentiment parallels that of the original model (BWV 213/7), where Virtue predicts the hero's future successes. "Zealous achievement" is also an apt characterization of Bach's choice of form, for in a rare departure from his usual approach, Bach sets the solo aria as a fugue—a complex musical structure in which a distinctive musical idea is treated imitatively by all participating voices according to prescribed procedures. In particular, this movement demonstrates the composer's technical prowess by means of fugal devices such as theme inversion and stretto (overlapping of subject entries).

The cantata ends with an elaborate setting of a chorale text, a supplicatory prayer stressing the centrality of Jesus' name in the life of the Christian believer, a concept suited for emphasis at the beginning of a new year. The hymn's lines (whose music is probably an invention of Bach's) are embedded in a rich orchestral fabric that features concerto-like interplay between the three instrumental groups: corni da caccia, oboes, and strings.

Melvin Unger holds the Riemenschneider Chair in Music and is Director of the Riemenschneider Bach Institute at the Baldwin-Wallace College Conservatory of Music, Bereah, OH. Notes on the *Christmas Oratorio* are based on his book *J. S. Bach's Major Works for Voices and Instruments: A Listener's Guide*, Scarecrow Press, Lanham, MD, 2005.

TEXT & TRANSLATIONS

Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern

Chorale

Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern
Voll Gnad und Wahrheit von dem Herrn,
Die süsse Wurzel Jesse.
O guter Hirte, Davids Sohn,
Mein König und mein Bräutigam,,
Du hast mein Herz umfangen,
Lieblich, freundlich,
Schön und prächtig, gross und mächtig,
Reich an Gaben,
Hoch und wunderbar erhaben.

How lovely shines the morning star
Full of grace and truth from the Lord,
The sweet root of Jesse.
You, son of David from Jacob's stem,
My king and my bridegroom,
You have enveloped my heart,
Sweetly, lovingly,
Beautiful and splendid, great and honourable,
Rich with gifts,
High and marvelously sublime.

Tenor Recitative

Allein, heut wird der Grosse klein,
Der Sohn, aus Gott geboren,
Wird heut ein Menschensohn,
Als hätt' der Himmelsherr
Sein Himmelreich verloren.
Er wird ein rechtes Opferlamm,
Weil er als Davids höchster Stamm.
In Davids eigener Stadt
Nur einen Stall zur Herberg hat.

Alone, today the great becomes small,
The Son, born as God,
Today becomes the Son of Man,
As though the Lord of heaven
Had lost his heavenly realm.
He becomes a true sacrificial lamb,
Since he, from David's most high lineage,
In David's own town,
Has but a stall as his dwelling.

Chorus

Uns ist ein Kind geboren,
Ein Sohn ist uns gegeben,
Welches Herrschaft ist auf seiner Schulter,
Und er heisset Wunderbar, Rat, Kraft,
Held, ewig Vater, Friedefürst.

For a child is born to us,
A son is given to us,
And the government shall be upon his shoulders,
And he shall be called wonderful, counselor, power,
Hero, everlasting father, the prince of peace.

(over)

