



**DIRECTOR'S SERIES**

Bach's  
*Christmas Oratorio*

BWV 248

Parts 1, 2, 3, 5, 6

Saturday, December 13, 2025  
**National Presbyterian Church**  
4101 Nebraska Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20016

**WASHINGTON BACH CONSORT**

*Dana Marsh, Artistic Director*





# PROGRAM

*Christmas Oratorio* BWV 248  
Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

## Part I. On the First Day of Christmas

Chorus  
Evangelist  
Recitative (alto)  
Aria (alto)  
Chorale  
Evangelist  
Chorale & Recitative (bass)  
Aria (bass)  
Chorale

Aria (alto)  
Recitative (alto)  
Chorale  
Evangelist  
Chorale  
[Opening chorus repeated]

— *Intermission* —

## Part II. On the Second Day of Christmas

Sinfonia  
Evangelist  
Chorale  
Evangelist/Angel  
Recitative (bass)  
Aria (tenor)  
Evangelist  
Chorale  
Recitative (bass)  
Aria (alto)  
Evangelist & Chorus of Angels  
Recitative (bass)  
Chorale

## Part V. On the Sunday after New Year's Day

Chorus  
Evangelist  
Chorus & Recitative (alto)  
Chorale  
Aria (bass)  
Evangelist  
Recitative (alto) & Evangelist  
Evangelist  
Trio Aria (soprano, alto, tenor)  
Recitative (alto)  
Chorale

## Part III. On the Third Day of Christmas

Chorus  
Evangelist  
Chorus of Shepherds  
Recitative (bass)  
Chorale  
Duet (soprano, bass)  
Evangelist

## Part VI. On Epiphany

Chorus  
Evangelist/Herod  
Recitative (soprano)  
Aria (soprano)  
Evangelist  
Chorale  
Evangelist  
Recitative (tenor)  
Aria (tenor)  
Recitative à 4 (soprano, alto, tenor, bass)  
Chorale

**Hannah De Priest**, *soprano*  
**Sylvia Leith**, *alto*  
**Thomas Cooley**, *tenor & Evangelist*  
**Tyler Duncan**, *bass*

**Dana Marsh**, *conductor*

**Mary Ann Gardner, Suzanne R. & Robert L. McDowell Jr., and Reverend Elizabeth L. Carl**, *underwriters*



# MUSICIANS

## **Soprano**

Hannah De Priest, *soloist*  
Amy Broadbent  
Sara MacKimmie  
Margot Rood  
Laura Choi Stuart

## **Alto**

Sylvia Leith, *soloist*  
Rhianna Cockrell  
Barbara Hollinshead  
Roger O. Isaacs  
Lucy McVeigh

## **Tenor**

Thomas Cooley,  
*Evangelist/soloist*  
Andrew Bearden Brown  
David Evans  
Rob Petillo  
Andrew Sauvageau  
Matthew Loyal Smith

## **Bass**

Tyler Duncan, *soloist*  
Mark Duer  
Michael Manganiello  
Ross Tamaccio  
Jason Widney

## **Violin I**

Andrew Fouts,  
*concertmaster*  
Marlisa del Cid Woods  
Carmen Johnson-Pájaro  
Leslie Nero

## **Violin II**

Freya Creech  
Gersh Chervinsky  
Jimena Burga Lopera  
Parastoo Heidarinejad

## **Viola**

Risa Browder  
Isaiah Chapman  
Marika Holmqvist

## **Violoncello**

John Moran  
Wade Davis

## **Violone**

Jessica Powell Eig

## **Flute**

Colin St-Martin  
Gina Eichman

## **Oboe**

Geoffrey Burgess  
Margaret Owens  
Sarah Schilling  
Sarah Weiner

## **Bassoon**

Anna Marsh

## **Trumpet**

Josh Cohen  
Dillon Parker  
Douglas Wilson

## **Timpani**

Michelle Humphreys

## **Harpsichord**

Leon Schelhase

## **Organ**

Adam Pearl

## **Rehearsal Pianist**

Joy Schreier

*This performance is presented in cooperation with Washington Performing Arts.*

# TEXT & TRANSLATIONS

## PART I

**ORATORIUM** welches die heilige Weyhnacht über in beyden Haupt-Kirchen zu Leipzig musiciret wurde. Anno 1734.

**Am 1sten Heil. Weyhnacht-Feyertage, frühe zu St. Nicolai und nachmittage zu St. Thomæ.**

### **Coro – Tutti**

Jauchzet, frohlocket, auf, preiset die Tage,  
Rühmet, was heute der Höchste getan!  
Lasset das Zagen, verbannet die Klage,  
Stimmet voll Jauchzen und Fröhlichkeit an!  
Dienet dem Höchsten mit herrlichen Chören,  
Laßt uns den Namen des Herrschers verehren!

### **Evangelist**

*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.*

### **Recitativ**

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 empör!

### **Aria**

Bereite dich, Zion, mit zärtlichen Trieben,  
Den Schönsten, den Liebsten bald bei dir zu sehn!  
Deine Wangen  
Müssen heut viel schöner prangen,  
Eile, den Bräutigam sehnlichst zu lieben!

### **Choral**

Wie soll ich dich empfangen  
Und wie begegn' 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.

**ORATORIO** that was performed musically over the Christmas season in the two principal churches in Leipzig, 1734.

**On the first day of Christmas, early at St. Nicholas and in the afternoon at St. Thomas.**

### **Chorus – All**

Shout, exult, arise, praise the days [of Christmas],  
Glorify what the Most High this day has done!  
Leave off faintheartedness, ban lamenting;  
Break forth into song, full of shouting and rejoicing!  
Serve the Most High with glorious choirs;  
Let us revere the ruler's name!

### **Evangelist**

*But it happened at that time that a commandment went out from the emperor Augustus that all the [Roman] world be appraised. And everyone [from Judea] went, that he might have himself appraised, each one to his [ancestral] city. Then Joseph too made out to go up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, into the Jewish region to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, this, because he was of the house and lineage of David, so that he might have himself appraised with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was pregnant. And while they were there, the time came that she should give birth.*

### **Recitative (alto)**

Now will my most beloved bridegroom,  
Now will the champion from the tribe of David—  
For the consolation, for the salvation of the earth—  
At last be born.  
Now will the star out of Jacob shine;  
Its stream of light is already breaking forth.  
Arise, Zion, and forsake weeping now;  
Your well-being lifts on high!

### **Aria (alto)**

Make yourself ready, Zion, with tender desires,  
To see the Most Handsome, the Most Beloved,  
Soon at your side! This day your cheeks  
Must sparkle much lovelier;  
Hurry on, to love the Bridegroom most ardently!

### **Chorale**

How shall I receive you,  
And how shall I meet you,  
O desire of all the world,  
O decoration of my soul?  
O Jesus; Jesus, set  
The torch next to me yourself,  
So that whatever brings you enjoyment  
May be manifest and known to me.

## TEXT & TRANSLATIONS *(continued)*

### **Evangelist**

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

### **Choral und Recitativ**

**Er ist auf Erden kommen arm,**

Wer will die Liebe recht erhöhen,  
Die unser Heiland vor 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.**

### **Aria**

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.

### **Choral**

**Ach mein herzliebes Jesulein,**

**Mach dir ein rein sanft Bettelein,**

**Zu ruhn in meines Herzens Schrein,**

**Daß ich nimmer vergesse dein!**

### **Evangelist**

*And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger, for they otherwise had no space in the lodgings.*

### **Chorale & Recitative (bass)**

**He [God's messiah] has come on earth poor,**

Who will properly extol the love  
That our Savior feels for us?

**That he might have mercy on us,**

Indeed, who is capable of perceiving it,  
How human suffering moves him?

**And might make [us spiritually] rich, in heaven,**

The Son of the Most High comes into the world  
Because its salvation pleases him so well

**And [might make us] equal to his beloved angels.**

That he himself wants to be born as man.

**Lord, have mercy.**

### **Aria (bass)**

Great Lord, o mighty King,  
Most beloved Savior, o how little

Do you regard the earth's splendor!

He, who upholds the entire world,  
[Who] has created its splendor and decoration,  
Must sleep in harsh mangers.

### **Chorale**

**Oh my beloved little Jesus,**

**Make for yourself a perfectly soft little bed,**

**To rest in the shrine of my heart,**

**That I may never forget you!**

## PART II

**Am 2. Heil. Weyhnachts-Feyertage.**

**Frühe zu St. Thomæ. Nachmittage zu St. Nicolai.**

### **Sinfonia**

### **Evangelist**

*Und es waren Hirten in derselben Gegend auf dem Felde bei den Hürden, die hüteten des Nachts ihre Herde. Und siehe, des Herren Engel trat zu ihnen, und die Klarheit des Herren leuchtet' um sie, und sie furchten sich sehr.*

### **Choral**

**Brich an, o schönes Morgenlicht,  
Und laß den Himmel tagen!**

**Du Hirtenvolk, erschrecke nicht,**

**Weil dir die Engel sagen,**

**Daß dieses schwache Knäbelein**

**Soll unser Trost und Freude sein,**

**Dazu den Satan zwingen**

**Und letztlich Friede bringen!**

**On the second day of Christmas.**

**Early at St. Thomas. In the afternoon at St. Nicholas.**

### **Sinfonia**

### **Evangelist**

*And there were in the same vicinity shepherds in the field, by the live-stock pens; they guarded their flocks by night. And look, the Angel of the Lord approached them, and the radiance of the Lord lit up around them, and they were very afraid.*

### **Chorale**

**Break forth, [Lord,] oh lovely morning light,  
And let heaven [rise like the] dawn!**

**You shepherd folk, do not be alarmed;**

**For the angels tell you**

**That this helpless little boy**

**Shall be our comfort and joy,**

**[Shall] vanquish Satan, too,**

**And finally bring peace!**

**Evangelist**

*Und der Engel sprach zu ihnen*

**Engel:** Fürchtet euch nicht! Siehe, ich verkündige euch große Freude, die allem Volke widerfahren wird; denn euch ist heute der Heiland geboren, welcher ist Christus, der Herr, in der Stadt David.

**Recitativ**

Was Gott dem Abraham verheißen,  
Das läßt er nun dem Hirtenchor  
Erfüllt erweisen.  
Ein Hirt hat alles das zuvor  
Von Gott erfahren müssen;  
Und nun muß auch ein Hirt die Tat,  
Was er damals versprochen hat,  
Zuerst erfüllet wissen.

**Aria**

Frohe Hirten, eilt, ach eilet,  
Eh ihr euch zu lang verweilet,  
Eilt, das holde Kind zu sehn!  
Geht, die Freude heißt zu schön,  
Sucht die Anmut zu gewinnen,  
Geht und labet Herz und Sinnen!

**Evangelist**

*Und das habt zum Zeichen: Ihr werdet finden das Kind in Windeln gewickelt und in einer Krippe liegen.*

**Choral**

Schaut hin, dort liegt im finstern Stall,  
Des Herrschaft gehet überall.  
Da Speise vormals sucht ein Rind,  
Da ruhet itzt der Jungfrau'n Kind.

**Recitativ**

So geht denn hin, ihr Hirten, geht,  
Daß ihr das Wunder seht!  
Und findet ihr des Höchsten Sohn  
In einer harten Krippe liegen,  
So singet ihm bei seiner Wiegen  
Aus einem süßen Ton  
Und mit gesamtem Chor  
Dies Lied zur Ruhe vor:

**Aria**

Schlafe, mein Liebster, genieße der Ruh,  
Wache nach diesem vor aller Gedeihen!  
Labe die Brust,  
Empfinde die Lust,  
Wo wir unser Herz erfreuen!

**Evangelist**

*Und alsobald war da bei dem Engel die Menge der himmlischen Heerscharen, die lobten Gott und sprachen:*

**Chor der Engel**

*Ehre sei Gott in der Höhe und Friede auf Erden und den Menschen ein Wohlgefallen.*

**Evangelist**

*And the angel said to them:*

**Angel:** Fear not! Look, I announce to you great joy, that will befall to all people [in the world]; for to you this day is born in the city of David the Savior, who is Christ, the Lord.

**Recitative (bass)**

[A worldwide blessing] that God had pledged to Abraham,  
He now lets be shown to the chorus of shepherds  
As fulfilled.  
A [lowly] shepherd [Abraham]  
Had to learn all this from God in the first instance;  
And now, too, a shepherd has to [be the] first to come to know  
as fulfilled  
The deed that he [God] promised back then.

**Aria (tenor)**

Joyful shepherds, hurry, ah hurry,  
Ere you tarry too long;  
Hurry on, to see the gracious child!  
Go, the joy is all too lovely;  
Seek to gain the refinement [of this child];  
Go and refresh [your] hearts and minds!

**Evangelist**

*And take this for a sign: you will find the child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.*

**Chorale**

Behold, therein lies in the dark stable  
[God's messiah], whose dominion extends over all [the world].  
Where formerly an ox sought food,  
There [Mary] the Virgin's child now rests.

**Recitative (bass)**

So go forth, then, you shepherds; go,  
That you may see the marvel [of Christ's advent].  
And when you find the son of the Most High  
Lying in a harsh manger,  
Then sing for him by his cradle  
In a sweet tone  
And with [your] whole choir  
This lullaby:

**Aria (alto)**

Sleep, my most beloved, enjoy your rest,  
Awake after this for the flourishing of all [in faith].  
Refresh your breast,  
Feel the delight  
[There] where we gladden our hearts!

**Evangelist**

*And immediately there was with the angel the mass of the heavenly army formations [of angels] who lauded God, declaring:*

**Chorus of Angels**

*May honor be to God on high, and peace on earth, and to humankind [God's] great pleasure.*

## TEXT & TRANSLATIONS *(continued)*

### **Recitativ**

So recht, ihr Engel, jauchzt und singet,  
Dass es uns heut so schön gelinget!  
Auf denn! Wir stimmen mit euch ein;  
Uns kann es so wie euch erfreun.

### **Choral**

Wir singen dir in deinem Heer  
Aus aller Kraft Lob, Preis und Ehr,  
Dass du, o lang gewünschter Gast,  
Dich nunmehr eingestellet hast.

### **Recitative (bass)**

Quite right, you angels; shout and sing  
That [with] this day [of Christ's advent] we have come so  
beautifully to prosper.  
Arise, then! We join in with you [in shouting and singing];  
It [Christ's advent] can gladden us and you.

### **Chorale**

[Lord Jesus,] we sing to you, along with your army  
[of angels],  
With all [our] might, "laud, praise, and honor,"  
That you, oh long desired guest [on earth],  
Have now presented yourself.

## PART III

Am 3 Heil. Weynachts-Feyertage.  
Frühe zu St. Nicolai.

On the third day of Christmas.  
Early at St. Nicolas.

### **Coro — Tutti**

Herrscher des Himmels, erhöere das Lallen,  
Lass dir die matten Gesänge gefallen,  
Wenn dich dein Zion mit Psalmen erhöht!  
Höre der Herzen frohlockendes Preisen,  
Wenn wir dir itzo die Ehrfurcht erweisen,  
Weil unsre Wohlfahrt befestiget steht!

### **Chorus — All**

Ruler of heaven, give heed to our [well-intentioned]  
babbling;  
Let the [church's] feeble songs be pleasing to you  
When your [Christian] Zion extols you with psalms.  
Hear the hearts' exultant praising  
When we now show you reverence  
Because our welfare is made certain.

### **Evangelist**

*Und da die Engel von ihnen gen Himmel fuhren, sprachen die Hirten untereinander:*

### **Evangelist**

*And when the angels departed from them into heaven, the shepherds declared to one another:*

### **Chorus**

*Lasset uns nun gehen gen Bethlehem und die Geschichte sehen, die da geschehen ist, die uns der Herr kundgetan hat.*

### **Chorus of Shepherds**

*"Let us now go into Bethlehem and see the story that has happened there, which the Lord has made known to us."*

### **Recitativ**

Er hat sein Volk getröst,  
Er hat sein Israel erlöst,  
Die Hülf aus Zion hergesendet  
Und unser Leid geendet.  
Seht, Hirten, dies hat er getan;  
Geht, dieses trifft ihr an!

### **Recitative (bass)**

He [the Lord God] has comforted his people,  
He has redeemed his [Christian] Israel,  
Sent salvation out of Zion,  
And ended our suffering.  
Look, shepherds, this he has done;  
Go, you will come upon this.

### **Choral**

Dies hat er alles uns getan,  
Sein gross Lieb zu zeigen an;  
Des freu sich alle Christenheit  
Und dank ihm des in Ewigkeit.  
Kyrieleis!

### **Chorale**

All this he has done for us  
To show his great love;  
For this let all of Christendom be glad  
And thus thank him in eternity.  
Lord, have mercy!

**Aria**

Herr, dein Mitleid, dein Erbarmen  
Tröstet uns und macht uns frei.  
Deine holde Gunst und Liebe,  
Deine wundersamen Triebe  
Machen deine Vätertreu  
Wieder neu.

**Evangelist**

*Und sie kamen eilend und funden beide Mariam und Joseph, dazu das Kind in der Krippe liegen. Da sie es aber gesehen hatten, breiteten sie das Wort aus, welches zu ihnen von diesem Kind gesaget war. Und alle, für die es kam, wunderten sich der Rede, die ihnen die Hirten gesaget hatten. Maria aber behielt alle diese Worte und bewegte sie in ihrem Herzen.*

**Aria**

Schliesse, mein Herze, dies selige Wunder  
Fest in deinem Glauben ein!  
Lasse dies Wunder, die göttlichen Werke,  
Immer zur Stärke  
Deines schwachen Glaubens sein!

**Recitativ**

Ja, ja, mein Herz soll es bewahren,  
Was es an dieser holden Zeit  
Zu seiner Seligkeit  
Für sicheren Beweis erfahren.

**Choral**

Ich will dich mit Fleiss bewahren,  
Ich will dir  
Leben hier,  
Dir will ich abfahren,  
Mit dir will ich endlich schweben  
Voller Freud  
Ohne Zeit  
Dort im andern Leben.

**Evangelist**

*Und die Hirten kehrten wieder um, preiseten und lobten Gott um alles, das sie gesehen und gehöret hatten, wie denn zu ihnen gesaget war.*

**Choral**

Seid froh dieweil,  
Dass euer Heil  
Ist hie ein Gott und auch ein Mensch geboren,  
Der, welcher ist  
Der Herr und Christ  
In Davids Stadt, von vielen auserkoren.

*Chorus 1. ab initio repetatur*

**Duet (soprano, bass)**

Lord, your compassion, your mercy  
Comforts us and sets us free.  
Your gracious favor and love,  
Your wondrous impulses,  
Make your paternal faithfulness  
New again [every morning].

**Evangelist**

*And they [the shepherds] came hurrying and found both Mary and Joseph, [and] in addition the child [who was] lying in the manger. But when they had seen it [the infant, Jesus], they spread the word that had been told to them of this child. And all who met with it [the word] were surprised at the account that the shepherds had told them. But Mary kept all these words and turned them over within her heart.*

**Aria (alto)**

My heart, seal this blessed marvel [of Christ's advent]  
Steadfastly within your faith.  
Let this marvel, the divine deeds,  
Be ever [a means] for [increasing] the strength  
Of your weak faith.

**Recitative (alto)**

Yes, yes, my heart shall safeguard  
What it, at this merciful/gracious time [of Christ's advent]  
Has experienced as certain proof  
For its [eternal] blessedness [of salvation],

**Chorale**

I will safeguard you [in heart and mind] with diligence;  
I will live to you  
Here [on earth];  
To you will I [go when I] depart [this life];  
With you will I [like an angel] hover [in heaven] at last,  
Full of joy,  
Without [earthly] temporality,  
There in the afterlife.

**Evangelist**

*And the shepherds returned [to the field] again, praising and lauding God for all that they had seen and heard, [which was] just as had been told to them.*

**Chorale**

Be joyful therefore,  
Because your salvation  
Has been born here [on earth as] a god and also a  
human being;  
He who is  
The Lord and Christ,  
[Born] in [Bethlehem,] the city of David, [Jesus, the  
servant,] chosen [by God] from [among] many.

*The first chorus is repeated from the beginning.*

## PART V

**Am Sonntage nach dem Neuen Jahr.  
In der Kirche zu St. Nicolai.**

**Coro – Tutti**

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.

**Evangelist**

*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:*

**Chorus und Recitativ**

*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.*  
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!

**Choral**

**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!**

**On the Sunday after New Year's.  
At St. Nicholas Church.**

**Chorus – All**

May honor, God, be sung to you,  
May laud and thanks be extended to you.  
All the world exalts you,  
Because our well-being pleases you,  
Because today  
The wish of all of us has come true,  
Because your blessing [or salvation] gladdens us so gloriously.

**Evangelist**

*When Jesus was born at Bethlehem in the Jewish region at the time of King Herod, look: there came the wisemen of the Orient to Jerusalem, saying:*

**Chorus & Recitative (alto)**

*Where is the newborn King of the Jews?  
Seek him in my breast;  
Here he dwells, to my and his delight!*  
*"We have seen his star in the Orient and are come to worship him."*  
Well for you, you [foreigners] who have seen this light;  
It is [also] for your salvation [that this light has] come about!  
You, my Savior, you are the light  
That shall shine also to the gentiles,  
And they [the gentiles], they do not know you yet,  
[At a time] when they [nevertheless] already want to revere you.  
How bright, [then,] how clear must not your luminosity be,  
Beloved Jesus!

**Chorale**

**Your luster consumes all darkness,  
Turns the murky night into light.  
Lead us along your pathways,  
That we may see your face  
And glorious light  
Eternally!**

**Aria**

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.

**Evangelist**

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

**Recitativ**

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.

**Evangelist**

*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.*

**Aria Terzetto**

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

**Recitativ**

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

**Choral**

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

**Aria (bass)**

Light up, too, my dark inclinations,  
 Light up my heart  
 With the clear luminosity of [your] streams [of light]!  
 Your word shall be the brightest candle to me  
 In all my [good] works;  
 This will let the soul embark upon anything evil.

**Evangelist**

*When Herod the King heard this [that a king of the Jews was portended], he was alarmed, and with him the whole [population of] of Jerusalem.*

**Recitative (alto) & Evangelist**

Why would you [Herod and Jerusalem] be alarmed?  
 Can the presence of my Jesus  
 Arouse such fear in you?  
 Oh! Should you not,  
 To the contrary, be glad about that,  
 Because he promises [with his presence] thereby  
 To renew the welfare of humankind.

**Evangelist**

*And [Herod] had all the chief priests and scripture experts [from] among the people gather, and inquired of them, where [the] Christ was expected to be born. And they told him: "At Bethlehem in the Jewish region; for so it is written by the prophet, '[Thus declares the Lord:] And you Bethlehem in the Jewish region are by no means the least significant [city] among the princes of Judah; for out of you shall come to me the leader who would be a [divine] ruler over my people Israel.'"*

**Trio Aria (soprano, alto, tenor)**

Ah, when will the time [of the kingdom of God] appear?  
 Ah, when is [God's messiah,] the consolation of  
 Those who [shall] belong to him, coming?  
 Be silent!—he really actually already here!  
 Jesus, ah, then come to me!

**Recitative (alto)**

My most beloved already [in infancy] rules [as messiah].  
 A heart [of mine] that loves [this messiah's] dominion,  
 And wholly gives itself to him to possess,  
 Is the throne if my Jesus.

**Chorale**

True, such a heart's-chamber is  
 Certainly no beautiful princely hall,  
 [But] rather a dark [sin-filled] pit;  
 Yet, [Jesus,] as soon as your stream of grace  
 Will merely flicker within this same [heart],  
 It [the heart] will seem full of sun.

PART VI

Am Feste der Offenbarung Christi.  
Frühe zu St. Thomæ. Nachmittag zu St. Nicolai.

**Coro – Tutti**

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.

**Evangelist**

*Da berief Herodes die Weisen heimlich und erlernet mit Fleiss von ihnen, wenn der Stern erschienen wäre. Und weiset sie gen Bethlehem und sprach:*

**Herodes:** Ziehet hin und forschet fleissig nach dem Kindlein, und wenn ihr's findet, sagt mir's wieder, dass ich auch komme und es anbet.

**Recitativ**

Du Falscher, suche nur den Herrn zu fällen,  
Nimm alle falsche List,  
Dem Heiland nachzustellen;  
Der, dessen Kraft kein Mensch ermisst,  
Bleibt doch in sicherer Hand.  
Dein Herz, dein falsches Herz ist schon,  
Nebst aller seiner List, des Höchsten Sohn,  
Den du zu stürzen suchst, sehr wohl bekannt.

**Aria**

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.

**Evangelist**

*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.*

**Choral**

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 dir's wohlgefallen!

On Epiphany.  
Early at St. Thomas. In the afternoon at St. Nicholas.

**Chorus – All**

Lord, when our insolent enemies snort [like war horses],  
Then grant that we, in steadfast faith,  
Might look to your strength and salvation!  
We will put our trust in you alone,  
Thus we can escape  
The enemy's sharp clutches unharmed.

**Evangelist**

*Then Herod convened the wisemen secretly, seeking to learn fully from them, with diligence, when the star might have [first] appeared. And, directing them to Bethlehem, [he] declared:*

**Herod:** "Set out and search diligently for the little child, and when you find it, report this to me, so that I, too, may come and worship it."

**Recitative (soprano)**

You deceitful one, [Herod,] just try to bring down [Jesus,] the Lord;  
[Just go ahead and] use every [bit of] deceitful cunning  
To lie in wait for the Savior;  
He [the Lord Jesus] whose might no human comprehends,  
Remains nonetheless in [the Most High's] sure hands.  
Your heart, your deceitful heart,  
Together with all its cunning, is already very well known  
To the Most High's son, [God's messiah] whom you seek to overthrow.

**Aria (soprano)**

Just one wav from his [the Most High's] hands  
Overthrows the power of impotent humankind.  
Here [with God] all [human] might is derided!  
If the Most High decrees just one word  
To put a stop to the insolence of his enemies.  
Oh, then [their] mortal thoughts  
Must turn immediately [to naught].

**Evangelist**

*Having heard the king, then, they set out. And look: the star that they had seen in the Orient went forth before them, until, having come [to Bethlehem], it settled over [the place] where the little child was. When they saw the star, they became exceedingly glad and went into the house and found the little child with Mary its mother, and bowed down and worshiped it, and opened their treasures, giving it gold, frankincense, and myrrh.*

**Chorale**

Here I stand at your manger,  
Oh little Jesus, [you who are] my life;  
To you I come, bringing and presenting as gifts  
What [endowments] you have given me.  
Accept [this], it is my spirit and inclination,  
Heart, soul, and courage; accept [this] all,  
And let it please you greatly!

**Evangelist**

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.

**Recitativ**

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!

**Aria**

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.

**Recitativ**

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

**Choral**

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.

**Evangelist**

And God commanded them in a dream that they should not direct themselves back to Herod, and [so they] set off on another path back to their country.

**Recitative (tenor)**

So go! Enough [that] my treasure [Jesus] is not taking his leave;  
 He is remaining here with me;  
 I also with not to let him [free] from me.  
 His [saving] arm will embrace me out of love  
 With tenderful impulse  
 And greatest delicacy;  
 He shall permanently remain my bridegroom;  
 Breast and heart I wish to commit to him.  
 I know for certain that he loves me;  
 My heart also loves him intimately  
 And will eternally honor him.  
 Now, with [my experiencing] such good fortune,  
 What kind of enemy could [ever] harm me!  
 You, Jesus, are and remain my friend;  
 And if I should anxiously plead unto you:  
 "Lord, save [me]!", then let me see salvation!

**Aria (tenor)**

[Well] now you insolent enemies do like to horrify;  
 [Yet] what kind of fear could you arouse in me?  
 My treasure, [Jesus,] my refuge is here with me!  
 You do like to act oh so fierce;  
 Just [go ahead and] threaten to bring me down well and truly;  
 But look! My savior dwells here [in my heart].

**Recitative à 4 (soprano, alto, tenor, bass)**

What, now, will hell's horrors want [to do to us Christians],  
 What will [the] world and sin want to do to us,  
 Now that we rest in Jesus's hands!

**Chorale**

Now you [God's chosen Christians] are well avenged  
 Of your band of enemies,  
 For Christ has shattered  
 What was against you.  
 Death, devil, sin, and hell  
 Are well and truly diminished;  
 The human family  
 Has its place with God [in eternity].

— translated by Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed



Scan or go to  
[BachCantataTexts.org/BWV248.2.htm](http://BachCantataTexts.org/BWV248.2.htm)  
 for an annotated translation.

# Reading Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*

Daniel R. Melamed

If you had been a member of the congregations of the St. Thomas or St. Nicholas Churches in Leipzig during the 1734–35 Christmas season, you might have purchased a small booklet with the title “Oratorio that was performed musically over the Christmas season in the two principal churches in Leipzig.” This 24-page publication contained the text of the *Christmas Oratorio* written and compiled by an anonymous (and to date unidentified) librettist, and set to music by Johann Sebastian Bach.

The booklet fulfilled several functions. One was practical: To the extent that such publications generated a profit, those proceeds typically went to the music director, so Bach may have earned income from the sale of the libretto. Another was liturgical: With the printed text in hand, one could follow the words of the musical presentation of the Christmas story and its poetic elaboration. The large congregations of those churches could not reasonably expect to catch every word of the music performed vocally and instrumentally, especially because its poetry was newly written and heard for the first time in Bach's performances.

But printed texts like this also had a devotional function, meant to encourage reflection on a story of obviously central importance to the Lutheran believer. They did this by presenting both the gospel narrative in its familiar prose from Luke's account, and the poems and hymn stanzas written or chosen by the librettist as commentary. These non-gospel texts framed segments of the narrative (heard on six occasions across the 12 days of the Christmas observance) and interrupted it to comment on particular moments in the story. Both the framing numbers and the interpolations guided the reader of the libretto to particular understandings of the story and its theological significance.

The layout and typography of the original printed pages were designed to support this function. The words of gospel prose were presented in relatively large type, clearly labeled “Evangelist” (or occasionally with the name of an interlocutor such as an angel or Herod). These scriptural verses were “run in”—that is, presented continuously and spanning the whole width of the page, just like these notes. Hymn stanzas (labeled “Chorale”) and new poetry (marked “Recitative” or “Aria”) were in distinct typefaces, presented as poetry with shorter lines and (in the case of arias) indented from the left margin. Their headings were actually “ARIA” in all capital letters, distinguishing them and pointing to their significance.

All this would have made it clear to you as a reader that the libretto consisted of a continuous narrative interrupted by other texts, encouraging you to read the nativity story in a way that dwelled on particular moments marked by interpolations of specific kinds. The opening

poetic movement of each part of the oratorio provided a theological starting point for the day's scriptural passage and its elaboration. Owning a copy of the libretto would have encouraged guided meditation on the Christmas story outside the liturgy, but also fulfilled this function during the services in which the six parts of the *Christmas Oratorio* were performed.

And this is where Bach's compositional work came in. The words of the Evangelist are sung in a relatively neutral and declamatory manner, presenting the familiar story in a particularly intelligible way. These simple settings, uniform in their presentation across the entire oratorio, helped mark the gospel narrative as its foundation. The quoted hymn stanzas use melodies that would have been familiar to members of the congregation, and indeed the stanzas themselves, chosen from among the many that made up each complete hymn, were familiar as well. The focus here was on the words of the hymn and their relationship to the gospel texts they followed.

That was true of the settings of the new poetry as well, but those movements went a step further. The poetic opening numbers and the interpolated new poems were set musically in ways that enhanced the librettist's theological guidance of the reader/listener. These most elaborate musical numbers did this by presenting the new poetry as declamatory recitatives, and as more lyrical solo, duet, and choral arias. These kinds of movements were meant to move the listener and contribute to the religious experience of the narrated nativity story. They not only conveyed the substance of the poetic words of commentary, but also clothed them in music designed to add an emotional dimension to the listener's experience.

The text and translation in this program reproduce some of the features of the 1734 print. Both the original German text and the historically-informed translation are laid out to make clear the distinction between gospel narrative (in italics and run in) and interpolated commentary. The commentary movements are distinguished by type style, with chorales in boldface. This presentation of the oratorio's text gives you the opportunity of experiencing the *Christmas Oratorio* like an early 18th-century reader and listener, focusing on the librettist's interpretive construction and Bach's musical reinforcement of it. **Part I** of the oratorio provides a good example of how one might do this.

The work, for the first of the three days over which Christmas itself was celebrated, opens with a movement for all the voices and instruments—one of those new poetic texts marked “Tutti” (“All”). This piece, technically an aria for combined voices, presents themes meant to guide the emotional response of the listener to the

## Reading Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* (continued)

beginning of the Christmas story. Its emphasis is on joy, both mentioning rejoicing and rejecting lamentation (note the explicitly emotional words). It further expresses itself in sounding terms—shout, exult, song, choirs—urging audible praise.

Bach's setting reflects both elements. The joyful emotional character ("affect," in 18th-century terms) is expressed by conventional musical emblems of joy: the use of trumpets and drums, and a dance-like triple meter. Given the early 18th-century view that music like this acted directly on the listener's body to move the affections—to physically bring on an emotional state—a listener theoretically did not even need to read or hear the word "joy" to be made joyful; the characteristics of the music guaranteed it.

And the text's emphasis on sounding praise is reflected, of course, in the musical presentation itself. Bach provides a striking opening instrumental ritornello that singles out drums, strings, and then trumpets and drums, as if consciously pointing to each of the instruments and their sounds in turn. The effect would have been particularly striking to listeners at the time because **Part I** of the *Christmas Oratorio* would have been the first music heard since the start of Advent, as Leipzig observed a so-called "closed time" that prohibited most musical performance during that period.

After the opening number, **Part I** continues with a passage of gospel narrative that sets the scene and leads up to the moment of Jesus's birth. Three movements of commentary follow, all oriented towards anticipation and preparation. A recitative elaborates on this anticipation, putting it in personal terms ("my most beloved bridegroom") and affective ones ("forsake weeping"). A gentle and gracious aria follows with a text ("Make yourself ready, Zion") that takes up the themes of preparation and the marriage metaphor, and whose music evokes tenderness, an emotional state. Finally, a carefully selected hymn stanza asks "How shall I receive you?" bringing this first segment of **Part I** to an end.

Another passage of Evangelist narrative opens the second segment of **Part I**; it announces the birth and its circumstances. As in the first segment, three movements of commentary follow that elaborate on the themes of the gospel words and their emotional implications. The first is a recitative interwoven with lines of a well-known Christmas hymn stanza. Both the hymn and the new poetic text that expands on it refer to the humble condition of Jesus's birth and to his humanity. The aria that follows paradoxically exalts the tiny child as a great king, and equally paradoxically points to Jesus's rejection of earthly things just at the moment of his earthly appearance.


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## Reading Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* (continued)

Bach's musical setting of the aria text invokes royalty and earthly splendor by its solo trumpet and fanfares, even as the text speaks of the rejection of such things.

The chorale stanza that closes this part of the oratorio, drawn from another familiar Christmas hymn, once again contrasts the child in the manger with the splendor implied by trumpets and drums used in the musical setting. The overall result is a first part of the *Christmas Oratorio* that presents two passages of narrative and elaborates on their themes of anticipation, preparation, and the paradoxical lowly status of the newborn Jesus; and that evokes tenderness and splendor as emotional guides to the theological messages of the libretto.

The other parts of the oratorio draw on these same techniques. The gospel verses in **Part II** relate the role of shepherds in the nativity story, and almost every added text refers to them. Bach and his librettist musically recognize this by forgoing an opening chorus, instead beginning with an instrumental *sinfonia* that invokes both of the 18th-century conventions for pastoral music: a lilting string tune (a stylized shepherds' dance called a *Siciliana*), and a woodwind melody with drones (a so-called *musette*, imitating bagpipes). The gospel reference to the manger prompts a series of reflections and an aria explicitly introduced as a lullaby; it invokes the baroque convention of the sleep aria, with a sustained bass pitch and notes grouped in twos. And the introduction of the angels' words of praise ("May honor be to God on high"), along with its splendid setting, lead to a recitative that promises to join the angel chorus. The concluding hymn stanza of praise, performed by the entire ensemble and recalling the opening pastoral music, symbolically does exactly that.

In **Part III** we hear mostly about the shepherds' visit to Bethlehem and their reactions to what they see there, framed by another trumpet-and-drums chorus of rejoicing that once again is explicitly about sounding praise (though modest about it): babble, feeble songs, and psalms. Two themes dominate the interpolated movements. The first is mercy/compassion/love, expressed in a recitative about the comfort and redemption of Israel, a chorale that attributes this divine act to love, and an aria about love and compassion that is cast (musically, at least) as a love duet. The cue for the second comes in the Evangelist's report of Mary's responding "in her heart." This prompts an aria

addressed to the speaker's heart, a recit urging the heart to safeguard what it has experienced, and a chorale stanza promising to safeguard Jesus in that heart. The reference here is to a central tenet of Lutheranism in which Jesus' first advent (his birth narrated here) and his third advent (the second coming, at the end time) frame his second advent: the entering into the heart of the believer.

After an opening chorus of praise, **Part V** begins with a narrative passage, briefly interrupted after it invokes the search for Jesus, that tells of the star of Bethlehem. This prompts a recitative, a chorale stanza, and an aria all on the topics of darkness and light. A gospel passage about Herod and his alarm at the news of the birth is answered by a recitative with the trembling strings that conventionally signified fear and agitation, once again designed to elicit an affective response from the listener. The quotation of a prophesy in the third gospel passage leads to an aria and a recitative declaring that this prophesy is, in fact, already fulfilled. The closing chorale returns to the themes of darkness and light.

**Part VI**, for Epiphany, opens with a chorus about snarling enemies and about God's power, and these themes govern the entire part. First a gospel passage invokes Herod; then a responding recitative and aria both emphasize Herod's deceit and God's might. The narrated arrival of the wisemen at the manger with their gifts is answered by a chorale stanza that reflects on the concept of a gift. The departure of the wisemen prompts a recitative and aria about Jesus, in contrast, metaphorically remaining. To close, an ensemble recitative and chorale once again invoke the topic of God's power introduced at the start of **Part VI**. The chorale stanza chosen for this final movement uses the same melody as the very first inserted chorale in **Part I**, and trumpets and drums musically link this last part to the first as well.

In the course of six parts heard over 12 days, as a reader of the *Christmas Oratorio* you would have experienced its move from the theme of anticipation to a celebration of the consequence of Jesus's birth for the believer. And as a listener to Bach's setting, you would have heard his music reinforcing those themes, guiding your emotional responses, and pointing you to a particular Lutheran understanding of the Christmas story. Equipped with a copy of the text, like a listener in 1734–35, we can try something similar today.

**DANIEL R. MELAMED** is professor emeritus of musicology at the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music. His book *Hearing Bach's Passions* (Oxford University Press), now in an updated paperback edition, is designed for general readers and discusses Bach's passions today against the background of their presentations in the eighteenth century. His most recent book, *Listening to Bach: The Mass in B Minor and the Christmas Oratorio* (Oxford), also for general readers, takes up issues of listening and is illustrated with many recorded examples.

# DANA MARSH, Artistic Director



**DR. DANA T. MARSH** was appointed artistic director of the Washington Bach Consort in 2018. He programs and oversees three series, which together offer over 20 concerts annually. In late 2019, *The Washington Post* opined that Marsh “has honed a company that could go head-to-head with period-performance ensembles anywhere.”

Marsh’s musical education began as a boy chorister at St. Thomas Choir School (New York) and at Salisbury Cathedral (UK). He received his undergraduate degree in organ performance from the Eastman School of Music, with later master’s and doctoral degrees in historical musicology from the University of Oxford.

Acclaimed by *The Washington Post* as “a superb choral conductor, energetic and precise,” and by *Choir & Organ* (UK) as “a flexible and vivacious director of voices,” Marsh has enjoyed guest-conducting collaborations with the Choir of Trinity Wall Street, Trinity Baroque Orchestra and New York Baroque Incorporated, the Choir of St. Thomas Fifth Avenue, Bach Collegium San Diego, Cappella Romana, Studio de musique ancienne de Montréal, Lamèque International Baroque Music Festival, Bach Vespers of Holy Trinity New York, Magnificat (UK), Musica Angelica Baroque Orchestra, and the Portland Baroque Orchestra, among others. In December 2025, he will appear as guest conductor at

Washington National Cathedral to lead the cathedral choirs and baroque orchestra in four performances of Handel’s *Messiah*.

Working as a vocal soloist and consort singer for 16 years in the US and the UK, he received critical praise: “Marsh gave object lessons in vocal ornamentation as a graceful countertenor” (*LA Times*), with further plaudits as “a powerful and expressive countertenor” (*NY Times*). He undertook Bach aria study with the Dutch bass-baritone Max van Egmond in Amsterdam. He performed as a soloist with the American Bach Soloists, Concert Royal, New York Collegium (under Gustav Leonhardt), Seattle Baroque Orchestra, Musica Angelica Baroque Orchestra, Brabant Ensemble, and the Academy of Ancient Music.

While completing his doctoral research at Oxford, Marsh performed regularly as a principal singer with the Choir of New College, participating in international tours and recordings with the Academy of Ancient Music, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, and the European Union Baroque Orchestra. He recorded 15 discs with New College Choir, one of which won the *Gramophone* award for Early Music in 2008.

Also an academic, Dana Marsh is professor of music and director of the Historical Performance Institute at the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music. He is general editor of the book series *Historical Performance* (Indiana University Press). Previously, he served as assistant director of music and director of chapel music at Girton College Cambridge. He taught early-music history at both Oxford and Cambridge universities and has published research and review articles through the scholarly presses of each: *Early Music* (OUP), *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, *Early Music History* (CUP).

Marsh has also served as canon organist and director of music at Christ Church Cathedral Indianapolis. He has prepared ensembles of young singers for concert and recording engagements with the Los Angeles Philharmonic under Esa-Pekka Salonen and Antonio Pappano. He has recorded in various capacities for Acis Productions, Sony, Universal, Avie, Decca, Erato, Koch International Classics, Signum, and Public Radio International.

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# MEET THE ARTISTS



**HANNAH DE PRIEST** is a fearless performer especially renowned for her “masterful” (*Olyrix*) performances of Baroque repertoire. Consistently described as a “standout” and praised for her “bright, ideally-focused sound, allied to a probing expressive intelligence” (*Chicago Classical Review*), the young soprano enjoys a fast-rising career in North America and Europe. Recent highlights include débuts with the Wrocław Baroque Orchestra (Bach’s *Johannes-Passion*), the Innsbruck Early Music Festival (Gilde, *L’amazzone corsara*), and her Kennedy Center début with Opera Lafayette (*Serpina, La servante maîtresse*). She enjoys a close relationship with the Boston Early Music Festival and has performed lead roles across multiple productions with the company. Her 2025–26 season includes

three operatic tellings of the Orfeo myth; Gluck’s *Orfeo* (Amore, Music of the Baroque), Jacopo Peri’s *Eurydice* (Dafne, Haymarket Opera), and Monteverdi’s *Orfeo* with Ars Lyrica Houston (Proserpina). She also returns to the Boston Early Music Festival for her first title role with the company in Provenzale’s *La Stelidaura vendicante*. On the concert stage, she will perform a new reconstruction of Bach’s *St. Mark Passion* with Chicago’s Bach in the City, Handel’s *Messiah* with the St. Louis Bach Festival, and headline a concert and tour of Handelian cantatas with Les Délices. Her début solo album with the ensemble is set to release in Spring 2026. Hannah has earned acclaim at numerous international competitions, winning 2nd Prize at the Cesti Competition for Baroque Opera in 2021. She is also a laureate of the London Handel Competition, the Handel Aria Competition, Le Concours Corneille, the Bethlehem Bach Festival, and the Luminarts Cultural Foundation Competition. Hannah is thrilled to make her Washington Bach Consort début with this performance. [hannahdepriest.com](http://hannahdepriest.com)



**SYLVIA LEITH**, mezzo-soprano, is a soloist and consort singer. She has appeared as a soloist with the Baltimore Symphony, Winston-Salem Symphony, Lancaster Symphony, Oregon Bach Festival, St. Thomas Fifth Avenue, Bach Choir of Bethlehem, American Classical Orchestra, Bach Akademie Charlotte, New York Choral Society, Cantata Collective, and Baroque Music Montana, among others. Known primarily for her performances of the high baroque works of Bach and Handel, she is equally at home singing repertoire of the Romantic era, including Mahler, Elgar, and Brahms, as well as 20th-century and newly composed works. Upcoming solo engagements in 2025 include Brahms’s *Alto Rhapsody* with Boston Saengerfest Men’s Chorus, Bach’s *Magnificat* at the Washington National

Cathedral, and Handel’s *Messiah* with Tempesta di Mare. Equally dedicated to ensemble singing, Sylvia’s choral credits include Ensemble Altera, Seraphic Fire, Skylark, True Concord, TENET, Lorelei, Bach Collegium San Diego, Ekmeles, the Oregon Bach Festival Chorus, the Crossing, and the Choir of Trinity Wall Street. She is a founding member of the Polyphonists. Sylvia won first prize in the 2024 Bethlehem Bach Aria Competition, and was a 2024 Virginia Best Adams vocal fellow at the Carmel Bach Festival. She holds a bachelor’s degree in German from Yale and a master’s in voice from Boston University. [sylvialeith.com](http://sylvialeith.com)

With an acclaimed international career spanning over two decades, tenor **THOMAS COOLEY** is recognized for his vivid artistry and commanding performances across the Americas, Europe, and Asia. His appearances have taken him to more than 30 US states and prestigious concert halls, including Carnegie Hall, the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Berlin Philharmonie, Konzerthaus Vienna, Tonhalle Zürich, Walt Disney Hall, Tchaikovsky Hall Moscow, Kennedy Center, and Singapore’s Esplanade Hall. Thomas has sung under the batons of renowned conductors including Helmuth Rilling, Donald Runnicles, Teodor Currentzis, Michael Tilson-Thomas, Franz Welser-Möst, Harry Bicket, Bernard Labadie, Osmo Vänskä, Dame Jane Glover, Robert Spano, Thomas Søndergård, Jaap van Zweden, and especially Nicholas McGegan, with whom he has collaborated more than 100 times.



His distinguished orchestral partnerships include the New York Philharmonic, Minnesota Orchestra, St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, Gewandhaus Orchestra Leipzig, Bavarian Radio Symphony, National Symphony, Atlanta Symphony, St. Louis Symphony, Orchestra of St. Luke’s, Singapore Symphony, and Osaka Philharmonic.

Celebrated as a leading interpreter of Handel and J.S. Bach, especially in the role of the Evangelist, he has appeared with the Thomanerchor Leipzig, Windsbacher Knabenchor, Dresdner Kreuzchor, Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, Handel and Haydn Society, Tafelmusik, Boston Baroque, and MusicAeterna, and at the Göttingen and Halle Handel festivals. Thomas was a principal artist with the Staatstheater am Gärtnerplatz in Munich from 2002 to 2006 and has portrayed more than 35 operatic roles with institutions including the Bavarian State Opera, Cincinnati Opera, Mark Morris Dance Group, and Göttingen International Händelfestspiele.

Thomas Cooley’s discography spans over 20 recordings on labels including Deutsche Grammophon, Carus, Sony, and Avie Records, which will release his upcoming *St. Matthew Passion* by J.S. Bach with Nicholas McGegan in 2026. He is visiting associate professor of music in voice and historical performance at the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music. [thomascooley.com](http://thomascooley.com)

With a voice described as “honey-coloured and warm, yet robust and commanding” (*The Globe and Mail*), baritone **TYLER DUNCAN** has performed worldwide to great acclaim in both opera and concert repertoire. Throughout his varied career, he has performed with several of the world’s leading orchestras and opera companies, including the New York Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Tafelmusik, the Metropolitan Opera, Minnesota Orchestra, and the Kansas City Symphony. Recent highlights include a concert featuring the works of Martinů with the Bard Music Festival, Mendelssohn’s *Elijah* with the Master Chorale of South Florida, the *Vesperae solennes de confessore* and Haydn’s “Nelson” Messe with Les Violons du Roy, and singing Bach cantatas with the Whidbey Island Music Festival. Tyler recently performed the role of Count Almaviva in Pacific Opera Victoria’s production of *The Marriage of Figaro*, C.P.E. Bach’s *Magnificat* with the Handel and Haydn Society, Beethoven’s 9th Symphony with the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, Bach’s *St. John* and *St. Matthew Passions* with the Oregon Bach Festival, and Haydn’s *Creation Mass* with Music of the Baroque. Other notable engagements include Handel’s *Messiah* with Houston Symphony, New Jersey Symphony, and Symphony Nova Scotia; Handel’s *Theodora* with Trinity Wall St. at Caramoor; Handel’s *Apollo e Dafne* and Bach’s *Ich habe genug* with Arizona Early Music’s Tucson Baroque Music Festival; Brahms’s *Requiem* with Johnstown Symphony; and concerts with Bard Music Festival, Brooklyn Art Song Society, and Aspect Chamber Music. He returned to the roster of The Metropolitan Opera for their new production of Terence Blanchard’s *Champion*. In the 2025–26 season, Tyler returns to the Brooklyn Art Song Society for *Die schöne Müllerin*, makes his Amarillo Opera début as the Count in *Le nozze di Figaro*, and sings the role of Melchior in Lincoln Center Theater’s *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, alongside Joyce DiDonato. He appears in Haydn’s *The Creation* with the Avanti Singers, Mozart’s *Requiem* with the Victoria Symphony, Bach’s *Mass in B Minor* with the Grand Philharmonic Choir, as well as Bach’s *Christmas Oratorio* with the Washington Bach Consort. [tylerduncan.ca](http://tylerduncan.ca)



PHOTO BY ELLIOT MANDEL

# TALKING BACH

Talking Bach is a free pre-concert lecture by noted Bach scholar Michael Marissen and is open to all concert ticket holders. The lecture focuses not only on the musical elements of the works that will be performed, but also on the historical context in which the music was created. These talks are designed to enhance the concertgoers' appreciation and enjoyment of the music they are about to hear.

**MICHAEL MARISSSEN**, the Daniel Underhill Professor Emeritus of Music, retired from Swarthmore College after a distinguished career that began in 1989. He has also served as a visiting professor on the graduate faculties at Princeton University and the University of Pennsylvania and has been a lecturer for the Washington Bach Consort for nearly three decades. His notable publications include *The Social and Religious Designs of J.S. Bach's Brandenburg Concertos* (Princeton, 1995), *Lutheranism, Anti-Judaism, and Bach's St. John Passion: With an Annotated Literal Translation of the Libretto* (Oxford, 1998), *An Introduction to Bach Studies* (Oxford, 1998; with Daniel R. Melamed), *Bach's Oratorios: The Parallel German-English Texts with Annotations* (Oxford, 2008), *Bach & God* (Oxford, 2016), and *Bach against Modernity* (Oxford University Press, 2023). With Daniel Melamed, he is also translating and annotating all the librettos that Bach set to music, freely available at [BachCantataTexts.org](http://BachCantataTexts.org).



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## UPCOMING CONCERTS — SPRING 2026

### The Director's Series

**The Light of Monteverdi**  
*Vespro della beata Vergine* SV 206 (1610)  
Sunday, March 22, 2026, at 4:00 pm  
National Presbyterian Church

**Mass in B Minor**  
*Bach's Great Mass*  
Saturday, April 25, 2026, at 7:00 pm  
National City Christian Church  
Sunday, April 26, 2026, at 4:00 pm  
National Presbyterian Church

### The Chamber Series

**NEW! Annual Celebrity Organ Recital**  
*James O'Donnell plays Bach's Clavierübung III* (1739)  
Friday, February 27, 2026 | St. George's Episcopal Church (Arlington, VA) at 7:00 pm

**Metal & Gut: Two "Violas of Love"**  
*Daniel McCarthy and the Viola d'Amore*  
Friday, March 6, 2026 | Live! at 10th & G (DC) at 7:00 pm  
Saturday, March 7, 2026 | St. Paul's Episcopal Church (Alexandria, VA) at 7:00 pm

**Toccatas & Suites: Bach at the Summit**  
*Adam Pearl, harpsichord*  
Friday, April 10, 2026 | Live! at 10th & G (DC) at 7:00 pm  
Saturday, April 11, 2026 | St. Paul's Episcopal Church (Alexandria, VA) at 7:00 pm

### The Noontime Cantata Series

**Capitol Cantata Series:** Mondays at St. Mark's Capitol Hill (DC) at 12:10 pm  
**Downtown Cantata Series:** Tuesdays at Church of the Epiphany (DC) at 12:10 pm

***Ich will den Kreuzstab gerne tragen*** BWV 56  
Ciacona in E Minor BuxWV 160, Dieterich Buxtehude  
Præludium in G Minor, Vincent Lübeck  
March 2 & 3, 2026

***Nach dir, Herr, verlanget mich*** BWV 150  
*Schmücke dich, o liebe Seele* BWV 654  
*Fantasia super Komm, Heiliger Geist* BWV 651  
April 13 & 14, 2026

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Founded in 1977 by Dr. J. Reilly Lewis and now led by Artistic Director Dr. Dana T. Marsh, the Washington Bach Consort shares the transformative power of music, with the works of Johann Sebastian Bach and other baroque composers at the core. Our professional artists inspire audiences with the highest levels of artistic excellence, enrich the cultural life through historically-informed performances, and provide educational programs in the Washington, DC community and beyond.

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