

WIGMORE HALL

Friday 10 December 2021 7.30pm

Gabrieli Consort & Players

Rowan Pierce soprano

Jeremy Budd tenor

Catherine Martin violin

Persephone Gibbs violin

Oliver Webber violin

Ellen O'Dell violin

Rachel Byrt viola

Andrew Skidmore cello

Kate Brooke double bass

Katy Bircher flute

Christopher Palameta oboe

Joel Raymond oboe

Paul McCreesh director

Anna Harvey alto

Morgan Pearse bass

Nahoko Kinoshita oboe

Zoe Shevlin bassoon

Katie Hodges trumpet

Julian Zimmerman trumpet

Richard Thomas trumpet

William Russell trumpet

Elsa Bradley timpani

Jan Waterfield harpsichord

William Whitehead organ

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Allemande. Allegretto grazioso from *Pastorale in F* BWV590 (after 1720)

Süsser Trost, mein Jesus kommt BWV151 (1725)

Sinfonia from *Gott soll allein mein Herze haben* BWV169 (1726)

Mass in G BWV236 (?1738-9)

Interval

Vom Himmel hoch, da komm ich her BWV701 (?1739-42)

Christen, ätzt diesen Tag BWV63 (c.1714-5)

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In Leipzig during the early 18th Century, the cycle of the year was marked by the rich liturgy at the city's churches. In the weeks before Christmas, an air of penitence pervaded the Sunday services. The liturgical colours on the altar and the clergy's vestments were muted. For most of Advent, the usual cantatas for voices and instruments were not performed. Instead sections of the service were sung to the austere tones of plainchant. The Advent hymns broadcast a message of atonement and expectation to the congregation.

Christmas Day, by contrast, was a moment of liturgical celebration. A joyful tone was set by the hymns assigned for that day. Luther's Christmas hymn *Vom Himmel hoch, da komm ich her* narrates the angels' glad tidings as they urge the shepherds to worship the new-born Christ. The melody strides confidently downwards, like the angels descending to the shepherds. Tonight we perform the hymn in one of Bach's organ settings.

Elaborate music for voices and instruments also returned on Christmas Day. In 1723, for his first Christmas in Leipzig, **Johann Sebastian Bach** performed the cantata *Christen, ätzet diesen Tag* BWV63. He had written this piece nine years earlier, during his time at the Weimar court. Its grand scoring—including four trumpets, three oboes and timpani—marked the start of the Christmas festivities. The opening chorus showcases the brass and wind instruments in fanfare figures set to dance rhythms. Within the first recitative and duo, the librettist briefly alludes to the Lutheran belief in the omnipresence of human sin. The first duo is scored like a love duo for soprano and bass, yet its words speak of God's providence and the need to trust him. In the second half of the cantata, the air of jubilation returns. The second duo invites Christians to come to the dance ('kommt zum Reihen'), with bubbling arpeggiated figures and repeated harmonies. Here Bach invokes Lutheran traditions of Christmas dancing. Despite Protestant qualms about the morality of dance, Luther regarded it as a suitable way to celebrate the Word becoming flesh. Indeed one of the verses of 'Vom Himmel hoch' encourages its singers to dance a lullaby around the crib.

As one of the major feasts of the church year, Christmas in Leipzig was marked by the performance of a Lutheran Mass (comprising the Kyrie and Gloria) for concerted voices and instruments. On the previous three Sundays in Advent, the Gloria was either omitted or sung to simple chant. Highly suitable for Christmastide performance is Bach's *Missa brevis* in G major BWV236. Completed in 1738 or 1739, this six-movement work is largely derived from sections of previous cantatas. Scholars are still uncertain why Bach recycled his music in this way: was he short of time to devise something anew, or was he attempting to give greater longevity to music originally written for specific Sundays? Whatever Bach's motives, the *Missa brevis* is of considerable

interest in its own right, and also when compared with the cantatas on which it is based. It opens with a Kyrie in austere motet style, with the voices entering in fugue, and the instruments doubling them. In the original version (in Cantata 179) this movement had a scriptural text urging believers to avoid hypocrisy; it therefore transfers well to the Kyrie's call for repentance. The Gloria opens with a joyous choral outburst over long, syncopated phrases; this movement originated as a chorus in Cantata 79, here adapted by Bach superimposing vocal lines over the instrumental introduction. Among the next three arias, 'Quoniam tu solus' is a remarkable transformation from its source. Originally in Cantata 179 this was a stormy, jagged diatribe against hypocrisy. Now in the *Missa brevis*, at a slower tempo and with a sinuous oboe solo, it projects a text praising the holiness of God alone. For the final chorus 'Cum sancto spirito', no earlier version is known, and Bach may have newly written this movement for the work. Not only does the *Missa brevis* offer a festal setting of the communion liturgy suitable for Christmas; in reworking earlier cantatas, it shows how Bach could marry the same music to strikingly different texts.

Bach's skill in reworking his music is again shown in the Sinfonia to Cantata 169. This substantial orchestral movement is better known from his Harpsichord Concerto in E major, although it probably originated as an oboe concerto. In the cantata version, the solo part is for organ, and the exuberant figuration suits this programme's focus on joyous music for Christmastide.

In contrast to the large-scale music that Bach wrote for Christmas Day, his cantata *Süsser Trost, mein Jesu kömmt* BWV151 is modestly scored. Bach wrote the cantata for the 3rd day of Christmas in 1725, perhaps aiming to give relief to his choristers and instrumentalists after several days of taxing festal music. The cantata expounds on how Jesus's birth gives the joy of salvation to the faithful Christian. Although there are no overt references to the Nativity story, the shepherds are indirectly evoked in the opening aria. This is in the pastoral style, with fluttering figures for flute over slow-moving harmonies and a rocking accompaniment for strings and oboe d'amore. The soprano sings of the sweet comfort offered by Jesus's coming, then becomes highly animated for a middle section expressing the joy of heart and soul. (The pastoral overtones are also conveyed in the organ prelude introducing the cantata in tonight's concert, from Bach's *Pastorale* BWV590.) In the final aria, the rich timbre of the oboe d'amore accompanies the alto singing about how Jesus's humility can offer comfort. The small-scale scoring of this cantata enabled Bach to focus on a more introspective aspect of the Christmas message, namely the spiritual relationship between the infant Christ and the believer's heart and soul.

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Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Allemande. Allegretto grazioso from *Pastorale in F BWV590* (after 1720)

Süsser Trost, mein Jesus kommt BWV151 (1725)

Georg Christian Lehms (1-4),
Nikolaus Herman (5)

Aria
Süsser Trost, mein Jesus
kömmt,
Jesus wird anitzt geboren!
Herz und Seele freuet sich,
Denn mein liebster Gott hat mich
Nun zum Himmel auserkoren.

Recitativo
Erfreue dich, mein Herz,
Denn itzo weicht der Schmerz,
Der dich so lange Zeit
gedrückt.
Gott hat den liebsten Sohn,
Den er so hoch und teuer hält,
Auf diese Welt geschicket.
Er lässt den Himmelsthron
Und will die ganze
Welt
Aus ihren Sklavenketten
Und ihrer Dienstbarkeit erretten.
O wundervolle Tat!
Gott wird ein Mensch und will
auf Erden
Noch niedriger als wir und noch
viel ärmer werden.

Aria
In Jesu Demut kann ich
Trost,
In seiner Armut Reichtum finden.
Mir macht desselben schlechter
Stand
Nur lauter Heil und Wohl
bekannt,
Ja, seine wundervolle Hand
Will mir nur Segenskränze
winden.

Recitativo
Du teurer Gottessohn,
Nun hast du mir den Himmel
aufgemacht
Und durch dein Niedrigsein

Sweet consolation, my Jesus comes

Aria
Sweet consolation, my Jesus
comes,
Jesus is now born!
My heart and soul rejoice,
since my dearest God has
now chosen me for heaven.

Recitative
Rejoice, my heart,
since now the pain yields
that has oppressed you for so
long.
God has sent his dearest son,
whom he holds so high and dear,
to this world.
He leaves his heavenly throne
and wants to rescue the whole
world
from their chains of slavery
and their servitude.
O wonderful deed!
God becomes a man and on
earth is willing
to become even more lowly than
we are and much poorer.

Aria
In Jesus' humility I can find
consolation,
in his poverty I can find riches.
This same mean condition of his
makes me
aware of real health and
prosperity.
Yes, his wonderful hand
will crown me with a garland of
blessing.

Recitative
You dear Son of God,
now you have opened heaven
for me
and through your humble existence

Das Licht der Seligkeit zuwege
bracht.
Weil du nun ganz allein
Des Vaters Burg und
Thron
Aus Liebe gegen uns verlassen,
So wollen wir dich auch
Dafür in unser Herze
fassen.

Choral
Heut schleusst er wieder auf die
Tür
Zum schönen Paradeis,
Der Cherub steht nicht mehr
dafür,
Gott sei Lob, Ehr und Preis.

brought about the light of
blessedness.
Since now you alone
from love towards us have
abandoned
your father's stronghold and throne,
so we want also
because of this to hold you fast
in our hearts.

Chorale
Today he again unlocks the
door
to the beautiful paradise,
the cherub no more stands in
front,
to God be glory, honour and praise.

Sinfonia from *Gott soll allein mein Herze haben BWV169* (1726)

Mass in G BWV236 (?1738-9)

Coro
Kyrie eleison,
Christe eleison,
Kyrie eleison.

Coro
Gloria in excelsis Deo,
Et in terra pax hominibus onae
voluntatis.
Laudamus te,
Benedicimus te,
Adoramus te,
Glorificamus te.

Aria
Gratias agimus tibi propter
magnam gloriam tuam.
Domine Deus, Rex coelestis,
Deus Pater omnipotens,
Domine Fili unigenite Jesu
Christe.

Duetto
Domine Deus, Agnus Dei, Filius
Patris,
Qui tollis eccata
mundi,
Miserere nobis,
Suscipe deprecationem
nostram.

Chorus
Lord have mercy,
Christ have mercy,
Lord have mercy.

Chorus
Glory be to God on high,
and on earth peace to men of
good will.
We praise thee,
we bless thee,
we worship thee,
we glorify thee.

Aria
We give thanks to thee for thy
great glory.
O Lord, heavenly King, God the
Father Almighty.
O Lord, the only-begotten Son,
Jesus Christ.

Duet
O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son
of the Father,
that takest away the sins of the
world,
have mercy upon us.
Thou that takest away the sins of
the world, receive our prayer.

Qui sedes ad dextram
Patris,
Miserere nobis.

Thou that sittest at the right of
the Father,
have mercy upon us.

Aria

Quoniam tu solus sanctus,
Tu solus Dominus,
Tu solus altissimus Jesu
Christe.

Aria

For thou only art holy;
thou only art the Lord;
thou only, O Jesus Christ, art
most high.

Coro

Cum Sancto Spiritu in gloria Dei
Patris, amen.

Chorus

With the Holy Ghost in the glory
of God the Father. Amen.

Interval

Vom Himmel hoch, da komm ich her BWV701

(?1739-42)

**Christen, ätzet diesen
Tag BWV63** (c.1714-5)

**Christians, engrave this
day**

Coro

Christen, ätzet diesen Tag
In Metall und Marmorsteine!
Kommt und eilt mit mir zur
Krippen
Und erweist mit frohen Lippen
Euren Dank und eure Pflicht;
Denn der Strahl, so da einbricht,
Zeigt sich euch zum
Gnadenscheine.

Chorus

Christians, engrave this day
in metal and marble stone!
Come and hurry with me to the
manger
and prove with happy lips
your thanks and your duty;
for the ray that there breaks in
is shown to you as the light of
grace.

Recitativo

O selger Tag! o ungemeines
Heute,
An dem das Heil der Welt,
Der Schilo, den Gott schon im
Paradies
Dem menschlichen Geschlecht
verhiess,
Nunmehr sich vollkommen
dargestellt
Und suchet Israel von der
Gefangenschaft und
Sklavenketten
Des Satans zu erretten.
Du liebster Gott, was sind wir
arme doch?
Ein abgefallnes Volk, so dich
verlassen;
Und dennoch willst du uns nicht
hassen;

Recitative

Oh blessed day! Oh
extraordinary today'
on which the saviour of the world,
the Schilo [Messiah], whom God
already in paradise
promised to the human
race,
now reveals himself
fully
and seeks from the
imprisonment and slave
chains
of Satan to rescue Israel.
Dear God, what are we then in
our wretchedness?
A fallen people, who forsake
you;
and nevertheless you do not
choose to hate us;

Denn eh wir sollen noch nach
dem Verdienst zu Boden
liegen,
Eh muss die Gottheit sich
bequemen,
Die menschliche Natur an sich
zu nehmen
Und auf der Erden
Im Hirtenstall zu einem Kinde
werden.
O unbegreifliches, doch seliges
Verfügen!

for before we should lie on the
earth according to our
deserts,
before that the deity must
condescend
to take human nature upon
himself
and on the earth
in the shepherds' stall to
become a child.
Oh incomprehensible but
blessed decree!

Aria

Gott, du hast es wohl gefüget,
Was uns itzo widerfährt.
Drum lasst uns auf ihn stets
trauen
Und auf seine Gnade bauen,
Denn er hat uns dies beschert,
Was uns ewig nun vergnüget.

Aria

God, you have well ordained
what now happens to us.
Therefore let us always trust in
him
and build on his grace,
for he has bestowed on us
what delights us now and for ever.

Recitativo

So kehret sich nun
heut
Das bange Leid,
Mit welchem Israel geängstet
und beladen,
In lauter Heil und Gnaden.
Der Löw aus Davids Stamme ist
erschienen,
Sein Bogen ist gespannt, das
Schwert ist schon gewetzt,
Womit er uns in vor'ge Freiheit
setzt.

Recitative

In this way now today is
transformed
the anxious suffering
with which Israel was distressed
and burdened
into pure salvation and grace.
The lion from the stock of David
has appeared,
his bow is stretched, his sword
is already sharpened,
with which he places us in our
former freedom.

Aria

Ruft und fleht den Himmel an,
Kommt, ihr Christen, kommt
zum Reihen,
Ihr sollt euch ob dem
erfreuen,
Was Gott hat anheut getan!
Da uns seine Huld verpfleget
Und mit so viel Heil
beleget,
Dass man nicht g'nug danken
kann.

Aria

Call and implore heaven,
come, you Christians, come into
the ranks,
you should rejoice on account of
that
which God has done today!
since his graciousness maintains us
and endows us with such great
salvation
that sufficient thanks cannot be
given.

Recitativo

Verdoppelt euch demnach, ihr
heißen Andachtsflammen,
Und schlägt in Demut
brünstiglich zusammen!
Steigt fröhlich himmelan
Und danket Gott vor dies, was
er getan!

Recitative

For this reason be redoubled,
you hot flames of devotion,
and strike in humility ardently
together!
Mount joyfully to heaven
and thank God for what he has
done!

Coro

Höchster, schau in Gnaden an
Diese Glut gebückter
Seelen!
Lass den Dank, den wir dir
bringen,
Angenehme vor dir klingen,
Lass uns stets in Segen gehn,
Aber niemals nicht geschehn,
Dass uns der Satan möge quälen.

Chorus

Highest, look with grace on
this ardour of souls who bow [in
worship].
Let the thanks, which we bring
you,
resound pleasingly before you,
Let us always go with your blessing
but never let it happen
that Satan may torment us.

*Süsser Trost, mein Jesus kommt BWV151 (May 2003) and Christen, ätzet diesen Tag
BWV63 (March 2002) translations by Francis Browne, <http://www.bach-cantatas.com>*