

WIGMORE HALL

Wednesday 13 March 2024
7.30pm

Anna Dennis soprano
Anita Monserrat mezzo-soprano
Samuel Boden tenor
Edward Grint bass
Arcangelo

Jonathan Cohen director,
harpsichord, chamber organ

Théotime Langlois de Swarte
violin I, leader

Agata Daraškaitė violin I

Emma Williams violin I

James Toll violin II

Beatrice Philips violin II

John Crockatt viola

Jonathan Byers cello

Tim Amherst double bass

Rachel Chaplin oboe, oboe da caccia

Sarah Humphrys oboe, oboe da
caccia

Katie Lewis oboe

Inga Maria Klaucke bassoon

Ursula Paludan Monberg horn

Martin Lawrence horn

Thomas Dunford lute

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Brandenburg Concerto No. 1 in F BWV1046 (1721)

*I. • II. Adagio • III. Allegro • IV. Menuet -
Trio - Polacca - Trio II*

Ach Gott, vom Himmel sieh darein BWV2 (1724)

Interval

Concerto in E for violin, strings and continuo BWV1042 (by 1730)

I. Allegro • II. Adagio • III. Allegro assai

Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern BWV1 (1725)



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From 1717 until 1723, Johann Sebastian Bach was employed by Prince Leopold of Cöthen. While some movements of the Brandenburg Concertos originate from Bach's earlier years in Weimar, their assembly as a collection can be dated to this period. The full presentation score, dedicated to the Margrave of Brandenburg, Christian Ludwig, drips in sycophancy: 'I have taken the liberty of rendering my most humble duty to Your Royal Highness with the present Concertos, which I have adapted to several instruments,' wrote Bach on 24 March 1721. Was Bach sniffing out a new job?

The Margrave had his own wing in the Berlin City Palace which included a *Kapelle* occupied with fantastic musicians. Once Frederick I died in 1713, and his heir Frederick William abolished the court ceremonial, many of the musicians who found themselves unemployed ended up in the orchestra maintained by the Margrave. Peter Wollny even argues that it formed an 'unofficial *Hofkapelle* of the Prussian royal family'. Bach's collection was perfect for such royal environs.

The Concerto No. 1 in F is elaborately and joyfully scored. Bolstering the strings and basso continuo are three oboes, two corni da caccia – which, in the words of Nicholas Kenyon, 'burble exuberantly' – and piccolo violin. The exchanges between the different instrumental groups are characteristic of Bach's festive writing, and the rhythmic interplay and pulsating motives create a glorious sense of dance. The *Adagio* features a haunting duet for oboe and the piccolo violin, and the *tutti* strings become a groaning chorus over the bassline. Then the third movement banishes all melancholy, somehow outdoing the first movement in joyfulness. Bach closes the Concerto with an unusual 'appendage': a French-style *Menuet* with three trios. The second trio is a *Polacca* of swirling strings, while the third brings back the hunting calls of the horns and the oboes in quacks of arpeggios.

Bach's Violin Concerto in E BWV1042 is also thought to originate from Bach's period in Cöthen. The first movement is an impressive *da capo*-like structure, and the Italian motivic matter is promptly subjected to typical counterpoint. The central movement is largely based on an ostinato, over which the chromatically expressive solo violin oscillates between weeping and singing. Bach closes the Concerto with a lively rondo, in which the episodes – including sections of fabulously silly bariolage and quick-witted chattering – increase in virtuosity.

Ach Gott, vom Himmel sieh darein BWV2 was first performed on 18 June 1724 in Leipzig. It was the second cantata of Bach's chorale cantata cycle. The chorale was a popular melody from 1524 that had been set by Schütz and Pachelbel (and would later inspire Mozart and Mendelssohn). The chorale text draws on Martin Luther's 1524 hymn 'Ach Gott, vom Himmel sieh darein', itself a paraphrase of Psalm 12 – a warning for Lutherans to be wary of false teachings and to stick close to the Word.

The opening movement plumbs the listener into an archaic soundworld: four trombones double the voices in *stile antico* (a motet-style that Bach would return to twice more later that year). The *cantus firmus* resides in the alto

– a feature found in only one other Bach cantata. The overall effect and musical architecture capture the eschatological distance described in the text – God is called to look down from heaven.

The tenor recitative opens with the chorale, which is followed in canon at the octave – the strictest of counterpoint – by the continuo. It's an excellent pun for the didacticism expressed. But, wait: why would Bach use his beloved counterpoint to express the teaching of *vain* thoughts? All is made clear at the last note of the imitation. Instead of perfectly following the tenor, the continuo plummets to a dissonant chord on A-flat – what *should* have been a D. In other words, Bach spells out the deceit of the text in the interval of the *diabolus in musica*. The subtle colours of text-setting continue as Bach paints sepulchres and the stench of dead bones through deep-in-the-soil tessitura and large diminished leaps.

The following alto aria is a world away from this dread. Its Italianate dancing is surprisingly gallant in character. But could this be Bach delighting in even more trickery? As the obbligato violin spins fanciful melodic triplets, might these actually represent the doctrines that 'pervert' the Word? It's a rhythmic figure that only occurs in the voice once, on the word 'Rottengeistern' ('barbarous minds'). It's as if Bach's music itself participates in spiritual teaching: it embodies an agency that guides and deceives the listener.

Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern BWV1 was first performed on 25 March 1725. During Bach's Leipzig tenure, Annunciation nearly always occurred during Lent, which in Leipzig was *tempus clausum* – music in churches was forbidden. If, however, Annunciation fell during Holy Week, and therefore celebrated on Palm Sunday, the temporary ban on music was lifted. This cantata was for such an occasion; it also closed Bach's chorale cantata cycle.

The opening movement is cast in F major: there is freshness to the lilting figurations and the concertato violins, conjuring the anticipation of the three kings who follow the star to Bethlehem. The timbre of the horns adds a subtle sense of ceremony to this dancing procession. The chorale melody, sung by the soprano in unison with a horn, is divided in line sections.

The cantata's two arias are particularly special. The first showcases a rare combination of soprano and oboe da caccia (more expected would be an obbligato flute). The pizzicato bassline makes the warmth of the oboe all the more ardent; it's as if the soprano is being heated in love from below – bread baked in a spiritual oven. The tenor aria recalls the joyous dancing of the first movement. The solo-*tutti* contrasts create a dynamic of encouragement: the concertante violins seem to rouse the ripieno strings into devotion (the tenor doing a fine job at marshalling faith, too). Then, unexpected splendour: the closing chorale has an independent second horn part that delights in syncopation and semiquaver elaboration.

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Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Brandenburg Concerto No. 1 in F BWV1046 (1721)

- I.
- II. Adagio
- III. Allegro
- IV. Menuet - Trio - Polacca - Trio II

Ach Gott, vom Himmel sieh darein BWV2 (1724) Ah God, look down from Heaven

Martin Luther, Anonymous,
Liturgical text

<i>Coro</i>	<i>Chorus</i>
Ach Gott, vom Himmel sieh darein	Ah God, look down from Heaven
Und lass dich's doch erbarmen!	and grant us yet thy mercy!
Wie wenig sind der Heiligen dein,	How few in number are thy saints,
Verlassen sind wir Armen;	we wretches are forsaken;
Dein Wort man nicht lässt haben wahr,	thy Word is not acknowledged,
Der Glaub ist auch verloschen gar	faith is also now quite dead
Bei allen Menschenkindern.	among all human kind.

<i>Recitativo</i>	<i>Recitative</i>
Sie lehren eitel falsche List,	They teach vain and false deceit,
Was wider Gott und seine Wahrheit ist;	which is opposed to God and his Truth;
Und was der eigen Witz erdenket,	and what their own minds invent -
- O Jammer! der die Kirche schmerzlich kränket -	O affliction that vexes sore the church -
Das muss anstatt der Bibel stehn.	must usurp the Bible's place.
Der eine wählet dies, der andre das,	One man chooses this, the other that,
Die törichte Vernunft ist ihr Kompass;	foolish reason is their guide;
Sie gleichen denen Totengräbern	they are like unto whited sepulchres,
Die, ob sie zwar von aussen schön,	which indeed appear outwardly beautiful,
Nur Stank und Moder in sich fassen	but are within full of dead men's bones and stench
Und lauter Unflat sehen lassen.	and all uncleanness.

<i>Aria</i>	<i>Aria</i>
Tilg, o Gott, die Lehren,	Destroy, O God, the doctrines
So dein Wort verkehren!	which pervert thy Word!
Wehre doch der Ketzerei	Repress heresy
Und allen Rottengeistern;	and all barbarous minds;
Denn sie sprechen ohne Scheu:	for they say without fear:

Trotz dem, der uns will meistern!	Defy him who would be our master!
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<i>Recitativo</i>	<i>Recitative</i>
Die Armen sind verstört,	The poor are troubled,
Ihr seufzend Ach, ihr ängstlich Klagen	their sighs, their anxious lamenting
Bei soviel Kreuz und Not,	at such affliction and distress,
Wodurch die Feinde fromme Seelen plagen,	through which the foe torments pious souls,
Dringt in das Gnadenohr des Allerhöchsten ein.	reaches the gracious ear of God Almighty.
Darum spricht Gott: Ich muss ihr Helfer sein!	Therefore God speaks: I must be their Helper!
Ich hab ihr Flehn erhört,	I have heard their imploring
Der Hilfe Morgenrot,	the dawn of help,
Der reinen Wahrheit heller Sonnenschein	the bright sunshine of pure truth
Soll sie mit neuer Kraft,	shall with new-found strength,
Die Trost und Leben schafft,	that harbinger of comfort and life,
Erquickten und erfreuen.	revive and gladden them.
Ich will mich ihrer Not erbarmen,	I shall take pity on their plight,
Mein heilsam Wort soll sein die Kraft der Armen.	my healing Word shall give strength to the poor.

<i>Aria</i>	<i>Aria</i>
Durchs Feuer wird das Silber rein,	Silver is purified through fire,
Durchs Kreuz das Wort bewährt erfunden.	the Word proved true through the Cross.
Drum soll ein Christ zu allen Stunden	Therefore should a Christian always
Im Kreuz und Not geduldig sein.	bear with patience affliction and distress.

<i>Choral</i>	<i>Chorale</i>
Das wollst du, Gott, bewahren rein	That wouldst thou, God, preserve untainted
Für diesem arg'n Geschlechte;	from this wicked race;
Und lass uns dir befohlen sein,	and let us be commended unto thee,
Dass sichs in uns nicht flechte.	lest this evil tangle with us.
Der gottlos Hauf sich umher findt,	The godless are always to be found
Wo solche lose Leute sind	wherever such wanton folk are
In deinem Volk erhaben.	exalted among thy people.

Interval

Concerto in E for violin, strings and continuo BWV1042 (by 1730)

- I. Allegro*
II. Adagio
III. Allegro assai

Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern BWV1

(1725)
Philipp Nicolai, Anonymous

Coro
Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern
Voll Gnad und Wahrheit von dem Herrn,
Die süsse Wurzel Jesse!
Du Sohn Davids aus Jakobs Stamm,
Mein König und mein Bräutigam,
Hast mir mein Herz besessen,
Lieblich
Freundlich
Schön und herrlich, gross und ehrlich, reich von Gaben,
Hoch und sehr prächtig erhaben.

How beautifully gleams the morning star

Chorus
How beautifully gleams the morning star,
full of the Lord's mercy and truth,
the sweet root of Jesse!
Thou Son of David from Jacob's line,
my King and my Bridegroom,
has taken possession of my heart,
sweet,
friendly,
beautiful and glorious, great and honest, rich in gifts,
highly and most splendidly sublime.

Recitativo
Du wahrer Gottes und Marien Sohn,
Du König derer Auserwählten,
Wie süss ist uns dies Lebenswort,
Nach dem die ersten Väter schon
So Jahr' als Tage zählten,
Das Gabriel mit Freuden dort
In Bethlehem verheissen!
O Süssigkeit,
o Himmelsbrot,
Das weder Grab, Gefahr, noch Tod
Aus unsern Herzen reissen.

Recitative
Thou true Son of God and Mary,
thou King of the elect,
how sweet to us is this Word of Life,
by which the earliest patriarchs
both years and days did number,
which Gabriel with gladness there
in Bethlehem had promised!
O sweet delight, O Bread of Heaven
that neither grave nor peril nor death
can sunder from our hearts.

Aria
Erfüllet, ihr himmlischen göttlichen Flammen,
Die nach euch verlangende gläubige Brust!
Die Seelen empfinden die kräftigsten Triebe
Der brünstigsten Liebe

Aria
Fill, ye heavenly divine flames,
the faithful breast that longs for you!
Our souls feel the strongest desires
of most ardent love

Und schmecken auf Erden die himmlische Lust.

and savour on earth celestial joy.

Recitativo
Ein irdscher Glanz, ein leiblich Licht
Rührt meine Seele nicht;
Ein Freudenschein ist mir von Gott entstanden,
Denn ein vollkommnes Gut, Des Heilands Leib und Blut,
Ist zur Erquickung da.
So muss uns ja
Der überreiche Segen,
Der uns von Ewigkeit bestimmt
Und unser Glaube zu sich nimmt,
Zum Dank und Preis bewegen.

Recitative
No earthly brilliance, no bodily light
can ever stir my soul;
a joyous ray has come to me from God,
because a perfect treasure, the Saviour's Body and Blood,
is there for our delight.
Therefore
the abundant bliss, destined for us since eternity,
and which our faith now embraces,
must move us to thanks and praise.

Aria
Unser Mund und Ton der Saiten
Sollen dir
Für und für
Dank und Opfer zubereiten.
Herz und Sinnen sind erhoben,
Lebenslang
Mit Gesang,
Grosser König, dich zu loben.

Aria
Our mouths and the sound of strings
shall prepare for thee
for ever and ever
thanks and offerings.
Heart and spirits are uplifted
all our life
with song,
great King, to praise thee.

Choral
Wie bin ich doch so herzlich froh,
Dass mein Schatz ist das A und O,
Der Anfang und das Ende;
Er wird mich doch zu seinem Preis
Aufnehmen in das Paradeis,
Des klopf ich in die Hände.
Amen!
Amen!
Komm, du schöne Freudenkrone, bleib nicht lange,
Deiner wart ich mit Verlangen.

Chorale
How truly glad I am
that my treasure is the A and O,
the beginning and the end;
he shall, for his praise,
receive me in Paradise,
for which I clap my hands.
Amen!
Amen!
Come, O lovely crown of joy, tarry not,
I wait for thee with longing.