

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 18 December 2023
7.30pm

Bach Christmas Cantatas and Magnificat

London Handel Players

Adrian Butterfield director, violin
Hilary Cronin soprano
Jessica Cale soprano
Hugh Cutting countertenor
Charles Daniels tenor
Jerome Knox bass

Oliver Webber violin I
Naomi Burrell violin II
Rachel Byrt viola
Sarah McMahon cello
Cecelia Bruggemeyer double bass
Silas Wollston harpsichord, organ
Rachel Brown flute
Katy Bircher flute

Joel Raymond oboe, oboe
d'amore
Oonagh Lee oboe
Nathaniel Harrison bassoon
Neil Brough trumpet
Peter Mankarious trumpet
Katherine Lodge trumpet
Ben Hoffnung timpani

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) *Bereitet die Wege, bereitet die Bahn!* BWV132 (1715)

Süsser Trost, mein Jesus kommt BWV151 (1725)

Gloria in excelsis Deo BWV191 (?1743-6)

Interval

Magnificat in D BWV243 with Christmas interpolations (c.1732-5)



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Christmastide was, unsurprisingly, an especially busy and important time for a church musician in 18th-century Saxony and this programme features works for that time of year, culminating in the work which he wrote for his first Christmas in Leipzig 300 years ago in 1723, the *Magnificat*.

Bereitet die Wege, bereitet die Bahn BWV132

Bach wrote this work in Weimar in 1715 for the fourth Sunday in Advent on 22 December, just three days before Christmas. He had been appointed concertmaster at the court the year before and wrote cantatas once a month.

The text was written by the court poet, Salomo Franck, and the words of the opening soprano aria are a quotation from the prophet Isaiah, 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord', referred to by John the Baptist in the Gospel of the day. The bass aria that follows the tenor recitative takes the question that the priests ask John, 'Who are you?', and turns it into a rather stern one that Jesus asks of us all. An accompanied recitative leads into an alto aria with an obbligato violin part that beautifully depicts an image of flowing baptismal water. The closing chorale is lost, but BWV164 includes a setting of the same text so this will be included instead.

Süsser Trost, mein Jesus kömmt BWV151

Süsser Trost was written for the third day of Christmas in 1725 and was set to a text by Georg Christian Lehms. The opening aria for soprano, flute and strings is an intimate lullaby that provides comfort to the baby Jesus but which also reminds us of the reassurance Jesus's arrival gives to us. It has a sharply contrasted gavotte-like middle section that describes the joy of Jesus's arrival, and this joy is taken up by the bass soloist in the following recitative. The mood changes in preparation for the second, alto aria which is a meditation on the lowliness and humility of Jesus's entry into the world, the singer accompanied by unison upper strings. The opening falling phrases aptly describe Jesus's meekness, but this is then sharply contrasted with a rising seventh for the word 'hope'. The second, tenor recitative that follows reverses the progression of the first and leads into a final celebratory chorale.

Gloria in excelsis Deo BWV191

This work is the only surviving church cantata by Bach set to a Latin text rather than a German one. The manuscript is dated Christmas Day but it is uncertain for which year in the 1740s it was intended. It is a shortened and adapted version of the 'Gloria' section of the *Missa* (Kyrie and Gloria) in *B minor* which Bach had sent to Augustus III, the new Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, in 1733, and which was later to become incorporated into the *B minor Mass* which he completed in his final years.

The opening 'Gloria - Et in terra pax' section is almost identical to the original but the other two movements are parodies of the 'Domine Deus' and 'Cum sancto' with adapted texts and slight changes of form. These modifications, however, were not carried over into the completed *B minor Mass*.

Instead of the usual four-part vocal scoring for his cantatas, this work shares the five-part texture of both the *Missa in B minor* and the *Magnificat*. The inclusion of full sections of wind and brass ensures a wonderful sense of joy and celebration for the day of Jesus's birth.

Magnificat BWV243

The *Magnificat*, Mary's song of praise to God, has been an integral part of evensong in the Christian Church for several centuries. In the Lutheran liturgy of Bach's time it was usually sung by the whole congregation in Luther's German plainchant as part of the Protestant aim to strengthen the relationship between the believer and God through the use of the vernacular. Yet for major feast days it was frequently set to be sung by the choir in Latin, often with an elaborate instrumental accompaniment.

Bach's setting of the *Magnificat* survives in two versions. The first was composed for Vespers on Christmas Day 1723 in Leipzig, soon after his appointment to the post of Kantor there, with four seasonal interpolations. A few years later he revised the score, removing the Christmas music and thus making the work suitable for any festival. He transposed the music from E flat major to D major, replaced the recorders with flutes in 'Esurientes', oboe with oboe d'amore in 'Quia respexit' and trumpet with unison oboes in 'Suscepit Israel'. In tonight's performance we will hear the later D major version, but with the Christmas interpolations.

Bach's setting of the text is masterly. The opening movement employs the largest orchestra available to him and he sets the chorus in five parts rather than the usual four. Beautiful word-painting abounds; he uses a descending phrase to illustrate the word *humilitatem* ('lowliness') in the 'Quia respexit' and in 'Deposuit' there are two complementary phrases, one rising and one falling, to reflect the words *deposuit* and *exultavit*. As in the later *B minor Mass*, Bach avoids full *da capo* structures, rendering the work remarkably concise and dramatic. The last movement, the 'Gloria', starts in dramatic fashion with block chords alternating with rising triplet patterns. The final section follows the long tradition of setting the words 'as it was in the beginning' to a shortened version of the opening music, and brings the work to a rousing conclusion.

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Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Bereitet die Wege, bereitet die Bahn!

BWV132 (1715)

Salomo Franck, Elisabeth
Cruciger

Aria

Bereitet die Wege, bereitet
die Bahn!

Bereitet die Wege
Und machet die Stege
Im Glauben und Leben
Dem Höchsten ganz eben,
Messias kömmt an!

Recitativo

Willst du dich Gottes
Kind und Christi Bruder
nennen,

So müssen Herz und
Mund den Heiland frei
bekennen.

Ja, Mensch, dein ganzes Leben
Muss von dem Glauben
Zeugnis geben!

Soll Christi Wort und
Lehre

Auch durch dein Blut
versiegelt sein,

So gib dich willig drein!

Denn dieses ist der Christen
Kron und Ehre.

Indes, mein Herz,
bereite

Noch heute

Dem Herrn die
Glaubensbahn,

Und räume weg die Hügel
und die Höhen,

Die ihm entgegen stehen!

Wälz ab die schweren
Sündensteine,

Nimm deinen Heiland an,
Dass er mit dir im Glauben
sich vereine!

Aria

Wer bist du? Frage dein
Gewissen,

Da wirst du sonder
Heuchelei,

Ob du, o Mensch, falsch oder
treu,

Dein rechtes Urteil hören
müssen.

Wer bist du? Frage das
Gesetze,

Das wird dir sagen, wer du
bist,

Prepare the ways, prepare the path!

Aria

Prepare the ways,
prepare the path!

Prepare the ways
and level the paths
of faith and life
for the Highest;
the Messiah draws nigh!

Recitative

If you will call yourself a
child of God and
Christ's own brother,

you must freely
acknowledge the Saviour
in your heart and mouth.

Yea, throughout your life
you must give testimony
of your faith!

If Christ's own words and
teaching

are to be sealed through
your blood too,

then accept this gladly!

For this is the Christians'
crown and glory.

Meanwhile, my heart,
prepare

even today,
the way of faith to the
Lord

and remove the hills and
the mountains

which stand in the way!

Roll back the heavy
stones of sin,

receive your Saviour,
that he may be united
with you in faith!

Aria

Who are you? Question
your conscience,

you shall have to, without
hypocrisy,

hear your impartial
sentence,

whether you are false or
true.

Who are you? Consult the
Commandments,

they will tell you who you
are,

Ein Kind des Zorns in Satans
Netze,

Ein falsch und
heuchlerischer Christ.

Recitativo

Ich will, mein Gott, dir frei
heraus bekennen,

Ich habe dich bisher nicht
recht bekannt.

Ob Mund und Lippen gleich
dich Herrn und Vater
nennen,

Hat sich mein Herz doch von
dir abgewandt.

Ich habe dich verleugnet mit
dem Leben!

Wie kannst du mir ein guts
Zeugnis geben?

Als, Jesu, mich dein Geist
und Wasserbad

Gereinigt von meiner
Missetat,

Hab ich dir zwar stets feste
Treu versprochen;

Ach! Aber ach! Der Taufbund
ist gebrochen.

Die Untreu reuet mich!

Ach Gott, erbarme dich,
Ach hilf, dass ich mit

unverwandter Treue

Den Gnadenbund
im Glauben stets

erneue!

Aria

Christi Glieder, ach
bedenket,

Was der Heiland euch
geschenket

Durch der Taufe reines
Bad!

Bei der Blut- und
Wasserquelle

Werden eure Kleider
helle,

Die befleckt von
Missetat.

Christus gab zum neuen
Kleide

Roten purpur, weisse
Seide,

Diese sind der Christen
Staat.

a child of wrath in Satan's
clutches,

a false and hypocritical
Christian.

Recitative

I shall, my God, confess to
thee openly,

I have till now not known
thee properly.

Although my mouth and
lips have called thee
Lord and Father,

my heart has turned away
from thee.

I have denied thee by my
life!

How canst thou speak
well of me?

O Jesus, when thy spirit
and the water

cleansed me from my
misdeeds,

I did in truth swear
constant faith to thee;

alas! but alas! Baptism's
bond has been broken.

I rue my faithlessness.

O God, be merciful!

Help me, that with
steadfast fidelity

I may ever renew through
faith the covenant of
Grace!

Aria

Members of Christ, ah
consider

what the Saviour has
given you

through baptism's
unsullied water!

Through the springs of
blood and water

your clothes have been
cleansed,

that had been stained by
sin.

Christ gave you new
clothes,

dressed you in crimson
and white silk,

such is a Christian's
finery.

<i>Choral</i>	<i>Chorale</i>
Ertöt uns durch dein Güte, Erweck uns durch dein Gnad; Den alten Menschen kränke, Dass der neu' leben mag Wohl hier auf dieser Erden, Den Sinn und Begehrden Und Gdanken habn zu dir.	Mortify us through thy goodness, awaken us through thy grace; chasten in us the old man, that the new may live here upon this earth, turning his mind and desires and his thoughts to thee.

**Süsser Trost, mein
Jesus kommt BWV151**

(1725)
Georg Christian Lehms,
Nikolaus Herman

**Sweet comfort, my
Jesus comes**

<i>Aria</i>	<i>Aria</i>
Süsser Trost, mein Jesus kömmt, Jesus wird anitzt geboren! Herz und Seele freuet sich, Denn mein liebster Gott hat mich Nun zum Himmel auserkoren.	Sweet comfort, my Jesus comes, Jesus now is born! Heart and soul rejoice, for my dearest God has chosen me now for heaven.

<i>Recitativo</i>	<i>Recitative</i>
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 de 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.	Rejoice, O my heart, for the pain shall now ease, which has for so long oppressed you. God has sent his dearest Son, whom he holds so high and dear, into this world. He leaves the throne of heaven and would deliver all the world from its chains of slavery, and servitude, O wonderful deed! God is made man and desires on earth to be lowlier than we and much poorer.

<i>Aria</i>	<i>Aria</i>
In Jesu Demut kann ich Trost, In seiner Armut Reichtum finden. Mir macht desselben schlechter Stand Nur lauter Heil und Wohl bekannt,	In Jesus's meekness I can find comfort, in his poverty riches. His wretched state reveals to me nought but salvation and well-being,

Ja, seine wundervolle Hand Will mir nur Segenskränze winden.	yea, his wondrous hand will weave me nought but garlands of blessing.
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<i>Recitativo</i>	<i>Recitative</i>
Du teurer Gottessohn, Nun hast du mir den Himmel aufgemacht Und durch dein Niedrigsein 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.	O precious Son of God, thou hast opened heaven wide for me and through thy humble estate hath brought the light of bliss to pass. Since thou now, all alone, hast left thy Father's citadel and throne out of love for us, we would in turn hold thee within our hearts.

<i>Choral</i>	<i>Chorale</i>
Heut schleusst er wieder auf die Tür Zum schönen Paradeis, Der Cherub steht nicht mehr dafür, Gott sei Lob, Ehr und Preis.	Today he opens wide again the door to beautiful paradise, the cherub stands no more before it, to God be laud and honour and praise.

**Gloria in excelsis Deo
BWV191 (?1743-6)**

Liturgical text

**Glory to God in the
highest**

Part I	Part I
<i>Coro</i>	<i>Chorus</i>
Gloria in excelsis Deo. Et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis.	Glory to God in the highest. And on earth peace, good will toward men.
Part II	Part I
<i>Aria</i>	<i>Aria</i>
Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui sancto.	Glory be to the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.
<i>Coro</i>	<i>Chorus</i>
Sicut erat in principio et nunc et semper et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.	As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Interval

Magnificat in D BWV243 with Christmas interpolations (c.1732-5)

<i>Chorus</i> Magnificat, anima mea, Dominum.	<i>Chorus</i> My soul doth magnify the Lord:
<i>Aria</i> Et exultavit spiritus meus in Deo, salutari meo	<i>Aria</i> And my spirit rejoiceth in God my Saviour.
<i>Chorus</i> Vom Himmel hoch, da komm ich her, Ich bring euch gute neue Mär; Der guten Mär bring ich so viel, Davon ich sing'n und sagen will.	<i>Chorus</i> From heaven above to earth I come, to bear good news to every home; glad tidings of great joy I bring, whereof I now will say and sing.
<i>Aria</i> Quia respexit humilitatem ancillae suae. Ecce enim ex hoc beatam me dicent	<i>Aria</i> For he hath regarded the lowliness of his handmaiden. For behold from henceforth
<i>Chorus</i> Omnes generationes.	<i>Chorus</i> All generations shall call me blessed.
<i>Aria</i> Quia fecit mihi magna, qui potens est, Et sanctum nomen eius.	<i>Aria</i> For he that is mighty hath magnified me, and holy is his name.
<i>Chorus</i> Freut euch in jubiliert; Zu Bethlehem gefunden wird Das herzeliebe Jesulein, Das soll euer Freud und Wonne sein.	<i>Chorus</i> Rejoice and celebrate; in Bethlehem will be found the dearest Jesus child, and he will be your joy and delight.
<i>Duet</i> Et misericordia eius a progenie in progenies, Timentibus eum.	<i>Duet</i> And his mercy is on them that fear him throughout all generations.
<i>Chorus</i> Fecit potentiam in brachio suo, Dispensit superbos mente cordis sui.	<i>Chorus</i> He hath showed strength with his arm, he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
<i>Chorus</i> Gloria in excelsis Deo! Et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis.	<i>Chorus</i> Glory to God in the highest! And on earth peace, good will towards men.

<i>Aria</i> Deposuit potentes de sede Et exaltavit humiles.	<i>Aria</i> He hath put down the mighty from their seat and exalted the humble and meek.
<i>Aria</i> Esurientes implevit bonis, Et divites dimisit inanes.	<i>Aria</i> He hath filled the hungry with good things and the rich he hath sent empty away.
<i>Duet</i> Virga Jesse floruit, Emmanuel noster apparuit; Induit carnem hominis, Fit puer delectabilis. Alleluia.	<i>Duet</i> The branch of Jesse has blossomed, our Emmanuel has appeared; he has assumed mortal flesh to become a delightful boy. Alleluia.
<i>Trio</i> Suscepit Israel puerum suum Recordatus misericordiae suae.	<i>Trio</i> He remembering his mercy hath holpen his servant Israel:
<i>Chorus</i> Sicut locutus est ad patres nostros, Abraham et semini eius in saecula	<i>Chorus</i> As he promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed for ever.
<i>Chorus</i> Gloria Patri et Filio Et Spiritui Sancto, Sicut erat in principio et nunc, Et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.	<i>Chorus</i> Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost: as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be: world without end. Amen.