

# WIGMORE HALL

Tuesday 19 April 2022 7.30pm

## Gabrieli Consort & Players

**Paul McCreesh** director

**Rowan Pierce** soprano

**Tim Mead** countertenor

**Hugo Hymas** tenor

**Matthew Brook** bass

**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

**Rebecca Miles** recorder

**Ian Wilson** recorder

**Joel Raymond** oboe

**Oonagh Lee** oboe

**Zoe Shevlin** bassoon

**Jean-François Madeuf** trumpet

**Katie Hodges** trumpet

**Russell Gilmour** trumpet

**Adrian Bending** timpani

**Jan Waterfield** harpsichord

**William Whitehead** organ

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**Johann Sebastian Bach** (1685-1750)

Sinfonia from *Am Abend aber desselbigen Sabbats* BWV42 (1725)

Mass in G minor BWV235 (?1738-9)

*Interval*

Fantasia super 'Christ lag in Todesbanden' BWV695 (?before 1708)

Easter Oratorio 'Kommt, eilet und lauffet' BWV249 (1725 rev. 1735)

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During Eastertide, a Lutheran congregant in **Bach's** Leipzig would have encountered a large variety of different sorts of music. After the 40-day fasting period over Lent, during which no elaborate music was allowed in church, Leipzig's Easter celebrations, starting with the Vespers service on Good Friday, offered a sudden explosion of musical sound. This feast for the ears over the Easter weekend and subsequent Sundays would have included a passion performance, cantatas, Mass settings, organ preludes, motets, psalms, hymns and more.

Our programme today presents an enticing cross-section of these musical offerings for the Easter liturgy. Bach's *Easter Oratorio* started its life as a cantata for Easter Sunday, first performed in April 1725; Bach only renamed it as an oratorio in a revised version of 1735. In this later form, the piece offers an extended reflection on the miracle of Jesus's resurrection. Its musical language is Italianate throughout, drawing on operatic, concerto and dance styles in a way that Bach's listeners would have been amply familiar with from weekly exposure to his music in church. There were, of course, no recordings (or many published scores) available in Bach's time, making it difficult for the average congregant to become deeply familiar with individual pieces. But any regular Leipzig churchgoer would have been steeped in the sounds of Bach's cantatas, passions and oratorios to the extent that their musical idioms would have been immediately meaningful to them. The opening sinfonia of BWV249, for instance, emulates the Italian concerto style; its triple metre, diatonic fanfare motives and festive scoring for trumpets and drums would have evoked the celebratory mood of Easter morning from the moment the music struck up. Unusually, this is followed by another purely instrumental movement, an *Adagio* built on prominent sighing motives in the solo oboe (or flute), before the festive mood returns in the first chorus. The piece's second aria, meanwhile, 'Sanfte soll mein Todeskummer', is a slumber aria familiar from contemporary Italian opera, with prominent pastoral overtones in the drone bass and circulating motives in the flutes.

For Bach's listeners, such affective markers would have been so thoroughly familiar as to need no explanation. Moreover, they would have known their biblical narratives, the voices of individual soloists who sang each week, and of course the shape of the liturgy within which this music was embedded. They would have approached these pieces as part of a larger ritual, in which the musical elaborations fulfilled a particular function of enhancing a congregant's faith experience. In many ways, then, their listening stance was fundamentally different from a concertgoer today. And yet, perhaps there is something that connects us to these early 18th-century listeners more than we might think. For many of Bach's pieces in fact go above and beyond what a basic liturgical setting might require. There are a lot of notes; a lot of artfully

wrought musical elaboration that offers an overall experience of sonic overabundance, of the music outstripping its designated function of presenting a verbal statement in enhanced form.

This is not just the case in those two opening instrumental movements of the *Easter Oratorio* – an unabashed celebration of the power of musical sound to affect and delight beyond any associated verbal content. We find that same sonic overabundance in the opening sinfonia of BWV42, a cantata written for the first Sunday after Easter. Scholars suspect that this music originally came from an instrumental concerto. Its two groups of strings and woodwinds introduce two distinct themes that are then imaginatively juxtaposed, exchanged and intermingled. The movement's copious musical ideas, with its contrasting lyrical middle section, constitute a vibrant musical universe in its own right, independent of the subsequent cantata movements and their theological content.

Bach's inexhaustible strategies for musical elaboration are evident, too, in his Mass setting BWV235. This setting is on a much smaller scale than his famously colossal Mass in B Minor; only the *Kyrie* and *Gloria* portions of the Mass ordinary are included here. Yet there is, again, a lot of music to expand on (or distract from) the verbal ritual. Bach's *Kyrie-Christe-Kyrie* sequence explores three ways of being dazzlingly contrapuntal in music: the first *Kyrie* presents a rich texture of vocal and instrumental parts replete with heart-rending suspensions; the *Christe* unfolds in four-part fugal imitation; and the concluding *Kyrie* ups the ante by presenting another fugue with a more extensive, chromatically charged subject, lasting twice as long as the opening section. In the subsequent 'Gloria', there is a lot of text to get through, which Bach subdivides into separate movements, each with its own distinctive affective fingerprint – from the mellow lyricism in the 'Domine fili' for solo alto to the plangent eloquence of the oboist in the 'Qui tollis'.

The overabundant quality of much of this music becomes perhaps most immediately apparent in those genres based on chorale melodies. The Easter hymn 'Christ lag in Todesbanden' was one of the core hymns of the Lutheran tradition. In his Fantasia BWV695, Bach takes this tune and surrounds it with a filigree of two imitative voices in the style of a two-part keyboard invention. The hymn tune is clearly audible in slow note values in the middle of the texture: but what are all those extra notes doing there? There is a clear sense here of musical artistry making claims for itself, inviting a mode of listening beyond the purely functional: asking us to listening for inventive inspiration, virtuosic skill and the beautiful things that musicians can create in sound.

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# Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

## Sinfonia from *Am Abend aber desselbigen Sabbats* BWV42 (1725)

### Mass in G minor BWV235 (?1738-9)

*Liturgical text*

#### *Coro*

Kyrie eleison,  
Christe eleison,  
Kyrie eleison.

#### *Chorus*

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

#### *Coro*

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

#### *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*

Gratias agimus tibi propter  
magnam gloriam tuam.  
Domine Deus, Rex coelestis,  
Deus Pater omnipotens.

#### *Aria*

We give thanks to thee for thy  
great glory.  
O Lord God, heavenly King, God  
the Father Almighty.

#### *Aria*

Domine Fili unigenite Jesu  
Christe.  
Domine Deus, Agnus Dei, Filius  
Patris,  
Qui tollis peccata  
mundi,  
Miserere nobis.

#### *Aria*

O Lord the only begotten Son,  
Jesus Christ;  
O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son  
of the Father,  
that takest away the sins of the  
world,  
have mercy upon us.

#### *Aria*

Qui tollis peccata  
mundi,  
Suscipe deprecationem nostram.  
Qui sedes ad dexteram  
Patris,  
Miserere nobis.  
Quoniam tu solus sanctus,  
Tu solus Dominus,  
Tu solus altissimus  
Jesu Christe.

#### *Aria*

Thou that takest away the sins  
of the world,  
receive our prayer.  
Thou that sittest at the right  
hand of the Father,  
have mercy upon us.  
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

## Fantasia super 'Christ lag in Todesbanden' BWV695

(?before 1708)

## Easter Oratorio 'Kommt, eilet und laufet' BWV249

(1725 rev. 1735)

*attr. Picander*

#### *Sinfonia*

#### *Adagio*

#### *Duet with chorus*

Kommt, eilet und laufet,  
Ihr flüchtigen Füße,  
Erreicht die Höhle, die Jesum  
bedeckt!  
Lachen und Scherzen  
Begleitet die Herzen,  
Denn unser Heil ist auferweckt.

#### *Recitative*

O kalter Männer Sinn!  
Wo ist die Liebe hin,  
Die ihr dem Heiland schuldig seid?  
Ein schwaches Weib muss euch  
beschämen!  
Ach, ein betrübtes Grämen  
Und banges Herzeleid  
Hat mit gesalznen Tränen  
Und wehmutsvollem Sehnen  
Ihm eine Salbung zgedacht,  
Die ihr, wie wir, umsonst  
gemacht.

#### *Aria*

Seele, deine Spezereien  
Sollen nicht mehr Myrrhen sein.  
Denn allein  
Sich mit Lorbeerkränzen  
schmücken  
Schicket sich vor dein  
Erquickten.

#### *Recitative*

Hier ist die Gruft,  
Und hier der Stein,  
Der solche zugedeckt.  
Wo aber wird mein Heiland  
sein?  
Er ist vom Tode auferweckt!  
Wir trafen einen Engel an,  
Der hat uns solches kundgetan.  
Hier seh ich mit Vergnügen  
Das Schweisstuch abgewickelt  
liegen.

#### *Sinfonia*

#### *Adagio*

#### *Duet with chorus*

Come, hasten and run,  
you who are fleet of foot,  
make for the tomb, where Jesus  
lies hidden!  
Laughter and gladness  
attend now our hearts,  
for our Saviour has been raised up.

#### *Recitative*

O men so cold of heart!  
Where is that love  
which you owe the Saviour?  
A weak woman must put you to  
shame!  
Ah, our sad grieving  
and anxious sorrow  
intended to anoint Him here  
with salty tears  
and melancholy yearning,  
but it was for you, like us, in  
vain.

#### *Aria*

O soul, your spices  
should consist no more of myrrh.  
For only  
with resplendent laurel  
wreaths  
will you still your anxious  
longing.

#### *Recitative*

Here is the tomb  
and here the stone  
which covered it.  
But where might my Saviour  
be?  
He has risen from the dead!  
We met with an angel,  
who made this known to us.  
I see now with joy  
the shroud lying here  
unwound.

*Aria*

Sanfte soll mein Todeskummer,  
Nur ein Schlummer,  
Jesu, durch dein Schweisstuch  
sein.

Ja, das wird mich dort erfrischen  
Und die Zähren meiner Pein  
Von den Wangen tröstlich wischen.

*Recitative*

Indessen seufzen wir  
Mit brennender Begier:  
Ach! Könnt es doch nur bald  
geschehen,  
Den Heiland selbst zu sehen!

*Aria*

Saget, saget mir geschwinde,  
Saget, wo ich Jesum finde,  
Welchen meine Seele liebt!  
Komm doch, komm, umfasse mich;  
Denn mein Herz ist ohne dich  
Ganz verwaiset und betrübt.

*Recitative*

Wir sind erfreut,  
Dass unser Jesus wieder lebt,  
Und unser Herz, so erst in  
Traurigkeit  
Zerflossen und geschwebt,  
Vergisst den Schmerz  
Und sinnt auf Freudenlieder,  
Denn unser Heiland lebet wieder.

*Chorus*

Preis und Dank  
Bleibe, Herr, dein Lobgesang.  
Höll und Teufel sind bezwungen,  
Ihre Pforten sind zerstört.  
Jauchzet, ihr erlösten Zungen,  
Dass man es im Himmel hört.  
Eröffnet, ihr Himmel, die  
prächtigen Bogen,  
Der Löwe von Juda kommt  
siegend gezogen!

*Aria*

My final agony shall be gentle,  
just a slumber,  
O Jesus, due to Thy  
shroud.

Yea, it will refresh me there  
and wipe the tears of my pain  
consolingly from my cheeks.

*Recitative*

Meanwhile we sigh  
with burning desire:  
ah, if only we could  
soon  
see the Saviour Himself!

*Aria*

Tell me, tell me quickly,  
tell me where I might find Jesus,  
whom I love with my soul!  
Come now, come, embrace me;  
for my heart without Thee  
is quite orphaned and distressed.

*Recitative*

We rejoice  
that our Jesus lives again,  
and that our  
heart,  
which once drifted in such sadness,  
now forgets the pain  
and turns to joyful anthems;  
for our Saviour lives again.

*Chorus*

May laud and thanks  
remain, O Lord, Thy song of praise.  
Hell and the devil are vanquished,  
their gates are destroyed.  
Rejoice, ye ransomed voices,  
that ye be heard in heaven.  
Spread open, ye heavens, your  
glorious arches,  
the Lion of Judah shall enter in  
triumph!