

WIGMORE HALL

Friday 9 February 2024
7.30pm

Leipzig 300: Marking the 300th anniversary of Bach's appointment in Leipzig

Julia Doyle soprano

Helen Charlston alto

Nicholas Mulroy tenor

Matthew Brook bass

John Crockatt solo viola

Dunedin Consort

John Butt director, harpsichord

Huw Daniel violin I

Sarah Bevan-Baker violin I

Anna Curzon violin II, viola

Emilia Benjamin violin II, viola

Francesca Gilbert viola

Jonathan Manson cello

Hannah Turnbull violone

Frances Norbury oboe d'amore,
recorder

Oonagh Lee oboe d'amore,
recorder

Catriona McDermid bassoon

Stephen Farr organ

Christoph Graupner (1683-1760)

Overture in E flat GWV429 (c.1735-7)

*I. Allegro • II. L'Intrepidezza • III. Rigaudon •
IV. Air en Loure • V. Gavotte • VI. Pastorale •
VII. Menuet • VIII. L'Inesporabilità*

Georg Philipp Telemann (1681-1767)

Viola Concerto in G TWV51:G9 (c.1712)

I. Largo • II. Allegro • III. Andante • IV. Presto

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Gleichwie der Regen und Schnee vom Himmel fällt BWV18
(c.1713-5, rev. 1724)

Interval

Johann Sebastian Bach

Jesus schläft, was soll ich hoffen BWV81 (1724)

Georg Philipp Telemann

Jauchzet dem Herrn, alle Welt TWV7:20

Johann Sebastian Bach

Leichtgesinnte Flattergeister BWV181 (1724)



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Georg Philipp Telemann, Christoph Graupner, Johann Sebastian Bach. That was the sequence through which the Leipzig selection committee moved to fill their *Thomaskantor* vacancy in 1723 - Bach was third choice, after Telemann preferred Hamburg and Graupner proved unable to secure his release from Darmstadt. Tonight, we hear music from all three, joining JS Bach in February 1724 for three remarkable cantatas.

Christoph Graupner was an extraordinarily prolific composer, and we open with one of his 85 orchestral suites or *Ouvertures*. Although more conservative in its instrumentation than some of his others - a conventional string orchestra rather than violas d'amore or chalumeaux - his invention comes through in the evocatively-titled and witty *L'Intrepidezza* ('Fearlessness') and *L'Inesporabilità* ('Implacability') which stand out as bookends of a more conventional and familiar sequence of *Rigaudon, Air en Loure, Gavotte, Pastorale* and *Menuet*.

The first half of this programme is as much about the viola as it is about Leipzig. **Telemann's** concerto was the first for the instrument and typical of his exploratory instincts to break new ground in terms of instrumentation and form. In four movements, it follows the model of Arcangelo Corelli rather than Antonio Vivaldi's preference for concertos in three movements. One of the challenges to which Telemann rises throughout this concerto is the viola's middling position within the string sound in terms of pitch - carefully paring the orchestral textures back to allow the deeply expressive middle and lower registers of the instrument to sing and to dance in astonishingly limber fashion.

The first of three **Bach** cantatas this evening continues the viola showcase. Stripping out the violins, it stars four violas in a sinfonia that conjures the snow and rain of the cantata's text. First composed in Weimar around 1715, Bach decided for the Leipzig repeat of BWV18 to add recorders, doubling the violas up the octave. After the dreich bluster of the *Sinfonia*, we move through a bass recitative into a strikingly-structured setting of words from Martin Luther's Litany. Tenor and bass are successively interrupted by a repeated tolling soprano entry that invites all four parts to implore the Lord to hear their prayer. After this inflexible and somewhat archaic material, the soprano is freed in the cantata's only aria to enjoy a lyrical mediation on the treasure that is God's word, accompanied by unison violas and recorders. The cantata closes with a chorale that prays that God's word may never be taken from them.

After the interval, we turn to our attention to BWV81, which was first performed on 30 January 1724 for the rarely-seen Fourth Sunday of Epiphany. Here Bach takes inspiration from the story in Matthew's Gospel of Jesus sleeping in a fishing boat on the Sea of Galilee and having to wake to calm both his disciples and the storm. The opening alto aria has a rocking motion that suggests the calm of waves and sleep without it ever being a truly comfortable rest.

The seeming peace is shattered by the tenor's aria as tempestuous strings drive on the increasingly angst-ridden singer. The storm on the water and in the hearts of the disciples is calmed by the central arioso that anchors this symmetrically-arranged cantata. As in the Passions, the bass takes on the role of Christ. Here is Christ at his most commanding, verging on the passion that overturns the tables in the Temple. After a short alto recitative, the cantata finds final consolation in the comfort of the second verse of 'Jesu meine Freude'.

Telemann's final contribution to this programme is a triumphal showcase for bass and trumpet, accompanied by strings. He makes virtuosic demands of both in setting the jubilant text of Psalm 100, culminating in an ecstatic alleluia in which trumpet and bass re-echo the final praise to the Lord.

We close with BWV181, which probably had its first outing in the same Sunday service in Leipzig as BWV18 on 13 February 1724. Bach takes an anonymous text that vividly picks up the parable of the sower from the day's Gospel reading. The opening aria's jerky and unpredictable music evokes the fickle and frivolous nature of those who are distracted by the works of the Devil. In the lengthy recitative that follows, the alto highlights how stony ground and stony hearts make for poor conditions for the seed of the word of God.

Next the tenor draws our attention to the entangling enticements of hellish thorns. Many scholars here detect the lack of obbligato in this aria to reinforce this imagery and tonight the violin part is a reconstruction of what Bach might have written - what has survived otherwise is just the vocal part and that of the continuo. The final chorus draws a straightforwardly cheerful conclusion burnished with the addition of a trumpet in its outer sections. At its heart, soprano and alto hymn the Lord's power to create fertile soil with melismatic phrases that entwine as though honeysuckle taking advantage of this bountiful provision.

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