

# BETHLEHEM PRESS



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**“Mr. Bach Comes to Call,” conducted by Bach Choir of Bethlehem artistic director Greg Funfgeld, 3 p.m. Feb. 25, Zoellner Arts Center, Bethlehem.**

## **‘Bach Comes to Call’ on 10th anniversary**

**[Thursday, February 22, 2018](#) by [MAKENNA MASENHEIMER Special to The Press in Focus](#)**

Children and their families get a glimpse into composer J.S. Bach’s personal life in the 10th anniversary performance of “Mr. Bach Comes to Call,” 3 p.m. Feb. 25, Baker Hall, Zoellner Arts Center, Bethlehem.

The Bach Choir of Bethlehem, the Bach Festival Orchestra and Touchstone Theatre are collaborating on a theatrical journey through more than 20 works by Bach in the annual “Family Concert” conducted by Bach Choir artistic director Greg Funfgeld

Bach, the Baroque era composer (played by Mark McKenna), time-travels with three choir boys (Silas Taylor, Arts Academy Charter School; Ethan Silver, Springhouse Middle School; Matilda Snyder, Southern Lehigh Intermediate School) to a present-day piano lesson of 12-year-old Elizabeth (Abriana Ferrari, homeschooled). Bach Choir member Shannon Aloise plays Anna Magdalena Bach, wife of J.S. Bach. Together, they explore moments in the composer’s life and repertoire.

The film version, written by Susan Hammond of Classical Kids and produced by Green Treks Network and Touchstone Theatre, was broadcast nationally on PBS in 2008. Touchstone Theatre ensemble member and cofounder Bill George returns to direct the new production.

“The collaboration process between the Bach Choir and Touchstone Theatre is one of the more fascinating features of this production of ‘Mr. Bach Comes to Call,’ says George. It was thirteen years ago that Greg [Funfgeld] gave birth to the idea of translating the popular CD to the stage. In other words, The Bach Choir and Touchstone have been working on this production, in one

form or another, for a good while. That is a remarkable phenomenon, and a great opportunity to perfect a work.”

“I never like using the word ‘perfect’ anywhere close to the act of making art, as art is always moving, changing, subject to different forces. But enduring collaborations allow performers-creators to go deeper, and I think that’s the case with this most recent mounting of ‘Mr. Bach Comes to Call,’ a charming children’s introduction to classical music and the biography of J.S. Bach. The Bach Choir and Touchstone are dedicated to such enduring creative collaborations.”

McKenna praises George, stage manager Emma Ackerman and his fellow cast members. He enjoys discovering “surprising facts” about Bach’s life.

“Bach’s passion for musical expression was powerful. It was a true joy for him to communicate through the playful organization of distinct and varied sounds to create amazing emotional journeys,” says McKenna. “He was a connoisseur of listening and he was a master at using time to blend, contrast and pattern his musical imagination. So, my work is to imagine how someone with his playful, adventurous passion might behave. Bill George’s sense of rhythm is a great help in this process and Mary Wright, our costume designer, is also essential in transforming my appearance,” says McKenna.

Funfgeld takes on the challenge of merging classical music with a theatrical story.

“Directing this concert is quite different. It’s more like an operetta. There are cues that have to be coordinated with the actors; timing that’s very important between The Choir, The Bach Festival Orchestra and the cast. I even have a few lines, which I have memorized, and get to interact with the gifted members of our cast. You might say I’m wearing a few more ‘hats’ than if it was a traditional concert but that’s a fabulous opportunity and great fun,” says Funfgeld.

Funfgeld has several favorite moments in the show.

“I really love all of the music in ‘Mr. Bach Comes to Call.’ The excerpt from ‘Cantata 21’ is so touching, filled with pathos and emotion. It comes at a point in the drama where Bach is talking about the death of his first wife. The music is amazing. ‘Cantata 21’ is one of the most favorite cantatas for the members of The Choir. We all love it.

“We do part of the third movement of the ‘Fifth Brandenburg Concerto,’ which has a great harpsichord solo that I love to play. It’s full of energy and exuberance. There are three movements from Bach’s ‘Orchestral Suites,’ including the ‘Suite for Solo Flute and Strings.’ Again, astonishing music. Finally, there’s the ‘Adventures in Music,’ which combines ‘Pop! Goes the Weasel’ with a Christmas Carol and one of Bach’s ‘Gigues’ from one of his ‘French Suites’ for keyboard. It’s a real romp and incredible fun for everybody.”

Funfgeld and George stress the courage and perseverance Bach exhibited throughout his life.

Says Funfgeld, “His music expresses all the wonder of the world, profound joy and equally profound sorrow. He was always trying to learn and come up with new ideas, new ways of

expressing himself and his thoughts. He put all his emotions into his music and that music is now a gift to every one of us to find love, and hope, joy and peace. Bach has so much to tell us and to teach us. I hope parents and grandparents bring their children and grandchildren, what a gift to give them. It's going to be great fun, but it has a lot of meaning, too."

Says George, "Bach worked with children, and as he says in the play, 'Ach! It keeps me young!' For me, the great thing about working with children is that they are experiencing Bach's life, his music, often for the first time. They are seeing it with fresh eyes, and it is a priceless gift to be able to share it with them."

Tickets: [bach.org](http://bach.org); 610-866-4382, ext. 115 or 110