

Bach at Noon

The Bach Choir of Bethlehem welcomes 2017 with its first Bach at Noon concert of the year on Tuesday at Central Moravian Church in Bethlehem. The free, 50-minute program follows the series' familiar format presenting choral and instrumental works performed by the members of the Bach Choir and Bach Festival Orchestra.

The program's major choral work is Bach's Cantata 96, "Herr Christ, der einge Gottessohn," with Tricia van Oers on recorder. The work had its Bethlehem Bach Festival premiere in May 2016, and proved to be such a hit that it warranted an encore performance. Scored for recorder, oboes, bassoon and strings, the piece features the lovely, piccolo-like tone of the sopranino recorder, played by Van Oers, evoking the image of Christ as the Morning Star.

Soloists are Katherine Kaiser, soprano; Barbara Hollinshead, alto; Charles Blandy, tenor, and Christopheren Nomura, bass.

Music for the Nativity is the theme for much of the remainder of the program, with works by Johann Walther, Johannes Brahms, Max Drischner and Hugo Distler. Walther was a 16th century German composer, one of the earliest in the Lutheran church. In "Joseph, lieber Joseph, mein," Walther combines German text with the melody from the Latin Christmas hymn "Resonet in laudibus."

When the famed violist Joseph Joachim and his wife, the distinguished mezzo-soprano Amalie Schneeweiss, had a son in 1864, they named him Johannes in honor of their close friend Johannes Brahms. Brahms reciprocated by composing an enchanting cradle song "Geistliches Wiegenlied" (Sacred Lullaby) for his namesake, which Amalie could sing with Joseph playing the viola, Brahms' favorite string instrument.

The 15th century carol "Es ist ein Roess entsprungen" (Lo, How a Rose is Blooming) focuses on Mary, who is compared to the mystical rose praised in the Song of Solomon. Many composers have been enchanted by the piece, including Brahms, who adapted the melody as the basis for his 1896 choral prelude Op. 122, No. 8. The tune was later transcribed for orchestra by Erich Leinsdorf, and by the German composer Hugo Distler as the base for his 1933 oratorio "Die Weihnachtsgeschichte" (The Christmas Story).

Subsequent Bach at Noon concerts are scheduled Feb. 14, March 14, and April 11, at Central Moravian Church.

The Bach at Noon Summer Series, a feature started last year, will be presented on June 13, July 11 and Aug. 8, at St. John's Lutheran Church in Allentown.

• **Bach at Noon,** 12:10 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 10, Central Moravian Church, 73 W. Church St., Bethlehem. Free-will offering. 610-866-4382, www.bach.org.

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