

Season Crescendo Climaxes in a Magnificent Bach Festival by David Ruhf

IN HIS EXCELLENT COMMENTARY ABOUT BACH'S LIFE AND MUSIC, the English conductor Sir John Eliot Gardiner often makes note of the consonance of Bach's music throughout the liturgical year with the seasons of the agrarian year. One definitely notices those cycles of death, redemption, and rebirth in this year's Bach Choir season: our banner concerts for the year have followed this trajectory as we revisited some of the larger works in the Bach *oeuvre*. Beginning with the first three cantatas of the *Christmas Oratorio* in mid-Advent, we continued seasonal observances with cantatas offered at Bach at Noon, culminating in our Spring Concert, which featured the *St. John Passion* within the context of Holy Week. As we continue into spring, those who have been joining us all year will have to wait just a little bit longer for the last stop on this special journey, when The Choir revisits Bach's ebullient and joyful *Easter Oratorio* at our 109th Bethlehem Bach Festival.

In a sense, our entire season has been a crescendo to the events of the Festival, which will feature incandescent performances of a wide repertoire of Bach's musical alchemy, from elegant and feisty chamber performances of the music of love, set in Italian by Bach and Handel, in the Saal of the Moravian Museum, to concerts featuring the full Choir and Orchestra in two of Bach's most iconic works: the *Easter Oratorio* and his musical *summa*, the *Mass in B Minor*. Along the way, our patrons will have the opportunity to join The Choir in singing the chorales that serve as the seeds of inspiration for so much of Bach's output in two relaxed and informal settings. They'll also have the opportunity to hear, in our Distinguished Scholar Lecture, from the most distinguished Bach scholar alive, Dr. Christoph Wolff (his talks are, alone, worth the trip to Bethlehem for our out-of-town guests).

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Bel Canto and The Bach Choir – A Marriage Made in Heaven by Bridget George

"THE CHORAL EQUIVALENT OF A MARRIAGE MADE IN HEAVEN" said Steve Siegel in a *Morning Call* feature on the new alliance between the Bel Canto Children's Chorus and The Bach Choir. For his part, Greg Funfgeld announced the new development to Bach Choir singers at rehearsal as "we are having a baby!", and Bel Canto Director Joy Hirokawa declared "It was like the planets aligned." The metaphors, familial and cosmic, fit the excitement that singers, staff, and board members feel about the "new birth" this artistic collaboration represents for both organizations. The metaphors also recognize the history, hard work, and vision that went into making such a collaboration possible. Tremendous thanks go to Hal Black and Jennifer O'Donnell, our two board presidents, without whom we could not have had a successful delivery!

Pondering this "marriage", I think back to some of the most beautiful phrases in the marriage prayers at my own wedding, asking that the marriage be both a "fortress for well-being" and "threading lights of Thine abounding grace." The exploration of what each of our choirs has to give the other is rooted in shared experience and deep respect – Bel Canto sang in The Bach Choir's performance of Britten's *St. Nicolas*; on our CD *A Child's Christmas in Bethlehem*; in a pre-concert performance at the 2015 Bach Festival; and as part of our 2016 Youth Choirs Festival. Artistic directors Funfgeld and Hirokawa share a way of working that involves challenging and encouraging each and every singer to be their best and to perform with a true understanding of the context of each piece of music learned – its language, musical invention, and spirit. There is also a shared organization-wide vision of expanding our life-long commitment to the choral art. Not content with excelling in the educational outreach and community engagement of *Bach to School*,

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DEAR FRIENDS:



THE BACH CHOIR OF BETHLEHEM was founded in 1898 – 118 years ago. This year is our 109th Festival. What an astonishing pair of statistics! We've been enjoying a stimulating and deeply satisfying season "with Bach at the heart of it" – including memorable performances of the *Christmas Oratorio*, a superb Gala concert by the Bach Collegium Japan, our Family Concert that brought us together with four outstanding youth choirs, and – most recently – a performance of the *Saint John Passion*, heard for the first time in America in 1888, sung by the Bethlehem Choral Union (predecessor of The Bach Choir of Bethlehem) in, of all places, our beloved little town of Bethlehem!

At a dinner following the *Saint John*, I had the great pleasure of sitting with the supremely gifted young tenor, Isaiah Bell – his sublime artistry, technical mastery, and keen mind have been gifts to us all – his performances of the arias in the *John Passion* were masterful! In the course of our conversation, Isaiah shared with me something that Martha Graham wrote to Agnes Demille – I found the exact quote online and want to share it with you:

There is a vitality, a life force, a quickening that is translated through you into action and because there is only one of you in all time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and will be lost. The world will not have it. It is not your business to determine how good it is nor how valuable it is nor how it compares with other expressions. It is your business to keep it yours clearly and directly, to keep the channel open. You do

not even have to believe in yourself or your work. You have to keep open and aware directly to the urges that motivate you. Keep the channel open. No artist is pleased. There is no satisfaction whatever at any time. There is only a queer, divine dissatisfaction, a blessed unrest that keeps us marching and makes us more alive than others.

I have read this dozens of times and will continue to ponder these provocative words and the truths they impart. As we move from Christmas, to Spring, to Festival, I've been drawn to these words – we keep marching...there is a divine dissatisfaction that propels us...an inquisitiveness and a desire to more deeply understand all that Bach has to teach us – about music, art, faith, discipline, devotion, commitment, expression. There is a responsibility here for the musicians who prepare these musical offerings to share with all who will listen. But there is also a responsibility to those who listen – to invest deeply, thoughtfully, with open hearts and minds, with a different but equally important discipline and rigor.

I'm glad YOU are part of this creative process of singing and playing and listening and pondering – join us this year – don't miss a note! What an encounter we will have. Read more about that, and about our incredible guests, in this issue of *Bach Choir News* and make plans to join us – see you in May!

Yours ever,

Greg Funfgeld,
Artistic Director and Conductor

The mission of The Bach Choir of Bethlehem and its Bach Festival Orchestra is to perform the works of Johann Sebastian Bach and to promote and encourage appreciation of the aesthetic and spiritual value of Bach's music, while striving for the highest standards of musical excellence. This mission is to be achieved by engaging our audience – locally, nationally, and internationally – through education and performance, including works by composers who influenced Bach and were influenced by him.

DEAR FRIENDS:



A FEW MONTHS AGO I read an Op-Ed piece by David Brooks in the *New York Times* titled "When Beauty Strikes". In this piece Mr. Brooks describes a lost, humanistic worldview in which "...beauty is a big transformational thing." He goes on to say that once we understood that "...beauty conquers the deadening aspects of routine; it educates the emotions and connects us to the eternal...it arouses thought and spirit." He notes that people doing art, whether amateur or professional, were striving to get better, to "...reach excellence and deepen the voyage of life." In today's world, he reflects, happiness is often measured by economists, art is driven by technique and the quest for relevance, and art advocates must argue for support on the grounds of economic development. Mr. Brooks closes hoping that we regain an appreciation for the link between "...the beautiful, the true and the good."

This piece came to mind recently when I was discussing the relative merits of the art scenes in New York City and the Lehigh Valley with one of our soloists. I was imagining that it must be wonderful to be part of such a lively, diverse, cutting edge community as exists in a large metropolitan center like New York.

He, on the other hand, reminded me that our soloists, all talented, sophisticated artists, like to come to Bethlehem to sing with The Choir not only for the excellence of the music, but also because the people here love to make music for its own sake. For the artists in our Choir, he summarized, this is not just another gig.

All of this reaffirms to me that The Bach Choir has its mission statement correct when it talks about furthering both the spiritual and aesthetic appreciation of J.S. Bach's music. Clearly our volunteer choristers demonstrate their striving for excellence and a deeper understanding with each rehearsal and each performance. We on the Board are pleased that this quest has not been lost on like-minded groups, such as the Bel Canto Children's Chorus, who sought us out to join with us. In fact, it is this striving that the Board shares as well.

See you at festival where we all can be struck by the beauty of The Bach Choir's art.

Harold G. Black
President

Season Crescendo cont.



Tom Caravaglia

We'll also be able to share in the beauty of Bach's orchestral music refracted through the kaleidoscopic prism of Paul Taylor's revelatory choreography in a performance, with the Bach Festival Orchestra, of his Taylor 2 Dance Company. Our guest trumpet soloist, Terry Everson will offer Bach's ecstatic (and frighteningly difficult) *Second Brandenburg Concerto* with the Bach Festival Orchestra, bringing "virtuosity and musicality that are simply stunning," which will provide wonderful contrast to the performance heard earlier this season by Guy Ferber (playing on a period instrument) with the Bach Collegium Japan at our Gala concert. Additionally, there will be events that should serve to quell any anxieties about the future of

Bach performance: our casual *Zimmermann's Coffee House* soirée, offered by auditioned high school and college musicians (with festive food and drink) in Moravian College's Peter Hall.

Also, those attending the second Festival weekend are invited to add a particularly compelling epilogue to their visit with the finals of our Bach Vocal Competition for Young American Singers co-sponsored by The Bach Choir and the American Bach Society. We originally made the acquaintance of such ascendant singers as Meg Bragle, Dashon Burton, and Laura Atkinson, the

splendid mezzo soprano who wowed the audience at our Spring Concert, through this august competition.

One of the cantatas in the Friday afternoon performance, *Herr Christ der einge Gottessohn* (Lord Christ, Only Son of God) and the *Easter Oratorio* were both written in the 1724–1725 liturgical year (his second year in Leipzig), an excellent vintage for Bach, apparently! The two works will be a study in contrasts, from the radiance of *Herr Christ*, an intimate gem (featuring the virtuosic recorder playing of Tricia Van Oers) to the trumpet and drums regality of the *Easter Oratorio*. These performances will offer a snapshot of Bach working at the heights of his powers, seeking to impress his new employers and, indeed, the entire musical scene of Leipzig. The climax of a climactic Festival program, of course, is Bach's epic *Mass in B Minor*, which The Choir performs every year. This towering masterpiece sits at Bach's summit, and will ring out from Lehigh University's campus on South Mountain in the midst of high spring. Our seasonal journey with Bach reaches its terminus surrounded by the sights, smells, and, most importantly, sounds of rebirth. The sheer variety and magnitude of what's on offer at this year's Festival astounds. The opportunities to hear and see it all, among the devoted and kind fellow-travelers of The Bach Choir Family, are precious and rare. We hope you'll join us for what promises to be two weekends of aesthetic, musical, and spiritual magnificence.

Bel Canto cont.

Bach at Noon, Family Concerts, and Choral Scholars, we wanted to develop longer-term relationships with young artists and have more impact on the training of the next generation of choral singers.

So let me introduce you to our new baby and inspire you to help it grow and flourish under The Bach Choir umbrella:



The Bel Canto Children's Chorus of The Bach Choir of Bethlehem – Joy Hirokawa, founder and artistic director

- **Who** we are: A community based not-for-profit choir for children and youth that was established in 1993 in the Upper Perkiomen Valley and now has its operational center at The Bach Choir's headquarters in Bethlehem.
- **What** we do: Perform regionally, nationally, and internationally. We have appeared on numerous NAFME and ACDA conference programs, and have toured internationally to Canada, Italy, Ireland, and Central Europe.
- **Our repertoire** is very diverse, drawing from all historical periods of Western music, as well as world music, jazz, American folk music, and ethnic musics of all kinds. **Our Spring Concert on May 7, 3pm at the Charter Arts School**, features the Lehigh Valley premiere of *Anne Frank: A Living Voice* by Linda Tutas Huagen.
- **Where** and **when** we rehearse: We are pleased to be in residence next year at The Charter Arts School. Rehearsals are Thursday nights. We also have an Intermediate/Preparatory Choir that meets on Monday nights at Nativity Lutheran Church in Allentown.
- **Our singers** come from a wide area across the region and are girls and boys ages 7–18.
- **How do I audition?** No previous training necessary! Nothing to prepare! We are looking for children and youth currently in grades 1–10 who are motivated, have a good ear, and love the sense of community that comes from singing with people!
- **Call Kim Sehn** Bel Canto administrator for an audition appointment! 215–541–4242 or at administrator@belcantochildren.com
- **Check us out** on the web at belcantochildren.com



Bel Canto Announces a Unique Summer Program: *Choral Village*

We are pleased to announce a unique week long opportunity for middle school aged youth in the Lehigh Valley! The *Choral Village* will intentionally bring together youth of diverse racial, socio-economic, faith, gender, and ethnic backgrounds in an effort to learn about each other. This program will include teambuilding activities, musical experiences, and artistically expressive choral performance to learn community building through choral singing. The name is derived from the African proverb, "It takes a whole village to raise our children. It takes a whole village to raise one child." The program will run from July 25–29, 2016 in Bethlehem. Check it out! <http://www.belcantochildren.com/#!choral-village/v6tnf>

A Bach Choir Alumna

Shares a View from the Audience *by Karen Cocca*



IT WAS AUGUST OF 1985 when I nervously walked into the Fellowship Hall at First Presbyterian Church to audition for the new conductor of The Bach Choir of Bethlehem. I was a young mother with a five-year-old son and a three-month-old daughter. I had studied voice at The Curtis Institute of Music, but was years removed from that remarkable experience and felt completely out of shape, vocally and physically.

I was greeted warmly by Greg Funfgeld and we exchanged cordial small talk. I knew he was giving me some time to relax before jumping in to the audition. It was a gracious gesture, and I would later learn that it was an authentic part of his nature to be gracious, insightful, and ever encouraging.

There were the usual scales and warm up exercises. I will never forget the sight reading selection – Cantata 65, *Sie Werden Aus Saba Alle Kommen*. I wanted so much to do my solfeggio teacher proud and nail the chorus. Yet three times I twisted and turned the melisma in the very first phrase incorrectly. I was certain I had blown the audition. Imagine my surprise when Greg said, “We rehearse every Monday evening at 7:30 beginning in two weeks.”

I fairly blubbered my response, “I made it?” “Certainly, and welcome!”

I remember every moment of that audition but not one single second of the drive home. I was lost in joy and my mind was racing about what the future would hold. I knew it would be wonderful; I just could never have imagined how profoundly my life would be changed.

My lexicon does not include language to adequately express the heights of wonder

nor the depths of spirituality that marked the journey I began that day. Artistry, energy, friendship, faith...and the music! Oh, the music! Over the course of twenty-five plus years, I was blessed and privileged beyond measure to experience the most glorious music, masterfully played and sung by renowned artists under the leadership of a conductor whose giftedness and spirit elevated the work to something that has rightfully been described as “a treasure”.

At the heart of it all is The Choir. Men and women of diverse backgrounds, joined by love for the music of the great Kapellmeister, Johann Sebastian Bach. I love the way Greg describes Bach to the children at our *Bach to School* educational outreach. He tells them that Bach means “brook” in German, but that people have said his name should have been “ocean” because of how much music he wrote!

We Choir members strive to bring our best selves to this grand undertaking: our voices, our intellect, our emotion, and our spirits. Every singer, first chair. We have sung in the birthplace of our namesake; the churches in which he worked; the great churches and concert halls of Germany, England, the United States. We have added our contribution to the recorded works of Bach and others. We have performed the music of composers whose work inspired him, and the music of those who credit Bach with their own musical inspiration. We have advanced the precious tradition of this organization – The Bach Choir of Bethlehem – and shared its richness with generations past and look forward with promise to the bright future which is

secured by our guarantors. We have shared those precious moments when, without a word, we knew that we had experienced beauty and artistry that transported us to a realm of glory. I have often driven home from a concert in absolute silence, taking the long way, because I needed to stay in those moments, just a while longer; to allow them to wash over me and renew my spirit. It has been transforming and life-giving.

In 2010, I began to have some chronic health issues that invariably found me unable to sing when the Christmas season was upon us. For at least two years, I began the season coming to rehearsals and needing to take a leave of absence. I was distraught at the prospect that my best years, vocally, were behind me. I couldn’t even imagine stepping away from what had become an anchor in my life. But after the second season of absence, I had to look honestly at my circumstances and do the difficult, right thing. I told Greg over lunch that I knew my time was over and I wouldn’t be re-auditioning that year. The tears fell as I said the words, but my heart was full and so incredibly grateful for the time I had. My five-year-old son is now thirty-six, my three-month-old daughter nearly thirty-one. I have three grandchildren.

I am now a member of the audience, and I couldn’t be happier. As a chorister, I heard Daniel Taylor sing the impossibly beautiful *Agnus Dei* from the *Mass in B Minor*. I have now seen and heard him sing it, and it is ethereal, aurally and visually. I watch my colleagues sing each vibrant chorus and every intimate chorale, and I experience it with you all from my new vantage point. The view is spectacular and the music is enthralling. I leave each concert with the same desire for space and time to breathe deeply. There is a bittersweetness to it now, for certain. One can not love something so completely and purely and not feel a sadness when change comes. But it is just that...not an ending, but a change; a new beginning. And oh, the joy of the journey that continues!

Soli Deo Gloria!

Youth Choirs Festival –

A Mesmerizing and Memorable Family Concert *by Bridget George, photography by Ryan Hulvat*

THE BACH CHOIR'S HOPES for its first Youth Choirs Festival on February 28 at Zoellner Arts Center were fulfilled one thousand fold! The four talented youth choirs who joined us – The Bel Canto Children's Chorus of The Bach Choir of Bethlehem, Berks Youth Chorus, Charter Arts Touring Choir, and the Nazareth Area High School Chorale rose splendidly to the challenge of the repertoire they performed with The Bach Choir and Bach Festival Orchestra under Greg Funfgeld's direction. They also delighted a capacity audience with their own selections, providing a wonderful tapestry of world music. At the heart of the program was the Bach motet *Lobet den Herrn* (Praise the Lord) performed by eight singers from each youth choir and sixteen singers from The Bach Choir. What a joy it was to hear these young singers perform Bach's intricate and transcendent music with such accomplishment – certainly an experience they will never forget. The 200 singers on stage and more than 800 people in the audience left the concert with their hearts lifted and an overwhelming sense of hope for the future of these young people and the choral art we love so much.



Opening the concert,
200 singers surround
the audience



Nazareth Area High School Chorale, director Kelly Rocchi



The Bel Canto
Children's Chorus of
The Bach Choir of
Bethlehem, director
Joy Hirokawa

From The Morning Call

Sunday's Bach Choir Family Concert began with nearly 200 vocalists silently filing into Baker Hall at Lehigh University's Zoellner Arts Center. They encircled the audience...Not a pin drop could be heard as The Bach Choir of Bethlehem, along with four local youth choirs performed Randall Thompson's *Ye Shall Have a Song*. Washing over the audience in a vocal wave...Funfgeld introduced the final selection by again weaving a bit of history into the program. The Bach Choir, he said, was founded 116 years ago, and the song the audience was about to hear – Bach's *Mass in B Minor*, "Gloria" – was heard for the first time in America on March 27, 1900 at the Central Moravian Church [Bethlehem]. All performers were back on stage for an incredible rendition of this historic piece, followed by a lengthy curtain call that brought all of the youth directors back and the audience to its feet for a lengthy and much deserved standing ovation." – Jennifer Marangos, *The Morning Call*, 2016

From the Students

I would like to thank you for allowing me to experience this enlightening journey! You are all kind, caring, and talented musicians. Thanks for decreasing my stress and making me feel welcomed. From this gift of participation, I have learned so much and received a memory that I will keep dear to my heart. Thanks again!"

– Lily

Thank you so much for an amazing opportunity to sing with your Choir this past Sunday. It was a crazy experience and I loved every second of it...I've never been a part of such a beautifully sounding Choir...thanks again.

– Ysaac



Charter Arts Touring Choir, director David Macbeth



Berks Youth Chorus, director William Snelling

From a Youth Choir Director

Dear Bach Choir of Bethlehem and Greg – Thank you so much for inviting Nazareth Chorale to the Family concert. It is a huge honor and one that I am very thankful for. To be recognized for hard work and dedication is a wonderful thing. Thank you for pushing me out of my comfort zone. I am noticing that my students are better readers and singers because of the repertoire they studied for this concert. That is a wonderful thing! Thank you for all that you do for music education in the Lehigh Valley... – Kelly Rocchi, director Nazareth Area High School Chorale, 2016



Youth and Bach Choir Motet Singers

Gala Past & Future by Bridget George

THE 2015 GALA, featuring a spectacular concert by Bach Collegium Japan in Central Moravian Church and a fabulous Japanese themed party and auction for our benefactors at the Hotel Bethlehem, was a tremendous success. We exceeded our fundraising goals with net revenue of \$28,300 and kudos go to the co-chairs of the Gala – Paul and Jane Florenz and Ed and Carol Salgado, special events coordinator Andrea Fritchey, decorations mastermind Nanci Funfgeld, and the whole Gala Committee.

Now we look ahead to the 2016 Gala, chaired by the Rt. Rev. Hopeton and Shelia Clennon and Charles and Terry Walter.



Frazer Harrison/Getty Images

SAVE THE DATE

The Bach Choir welcomes
Grammy Award-winning

ROOMFUL OF TEETH

Saturday, November 19
4pm • Foy Hall

6pm Benefactor Cocktails, Dinner
& Auction • Hotel Bethlehem

Dedicated to mining the expressive potential of the human voice, Roomful of Teeth creates beautiful and deeply textured music. The program devised for The Bach Choir Gala includes some of the ensemble's own creations as well as Bach chamber music, and features solos by Dashon Burton, a founding member of the group, who is also one of The Bach Choir's favorite soloists.

*Brad Wells conducted the superb Roomful of Teeth singers
in a plush, enveloping performance* – New York Times, 2015

Choir Spotlight – 2016 Choral Scholars

Oh! The Places They'll Go! by Andrea Fritchey

“BEING A BACH CHOIR CHORAL SCHOLAR has taken me more places than I thought I would go.” These are the words of Madelyn Dundon, who along with Julia Lega, has had the joy of singing with The Bach Choir during the 2015–2016 season. She says, “Not only the exposure to the music of J.S. Bach, but the opportunity to learn and share it with others has been one of, if not *the* greatest experience of my life here in Bethlehem.”

In their time with The Choir thus far, Julia and Madelyn have performed in concerts in Allentown and Bethlehem, have attended and sung in *Bach at Noon* and *Bach to School* performances, and will look forward to performing in the 109th Bethlehem Bach Festival this May.

Reflecting on her time as a Choral Scholar thus far, Julia says “Singing in the Bach Choir has allowed me to grow immensely as a singer. This opportunity has exposed me to incredible pieces of music, and has armed me with the tools and support I need to improve my technique and understanding of the music.”

The Choir is truly blessed with two special Choral Scholars this season!

Madelyn and Julia are both seniors in high school with bright futures ahead of them. Madelyn is a student at Bethlehem Catholic High School, and is active in the school's theater department. She is starring as Ruth in BECA's production of *Wonderful Town* this spring. Outside of school, Madelyn studies piano and voice at Moravian College, is a classically trained ballerina, dancing with Willow Park Dance Academy and Ballet Guild of the Lehigh Valley, and enjoys watching old movies, conducting historical research, and drawing and sketching. Madelyn will attend West Virginia University in the fall as a Musical Theatre major.

Julia is a student at Moravian Academy, and is very active in her school community. She sings in school ensembles, is on the swim team, runs cross-country, and participates in school theatre productions. Outside of school, Julia is a member of our Bel Canto Children's Chorus, and enjoys



Julia Lega



Madelyn Dundon

hiking with friends in her free time. Julia will attend Emory University in the fall, double majoring in Biology and Vocal Performance. After college, she plans to attend medical school to become a practicing physician.

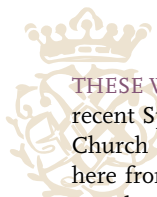
Madelyn and Julia may only be at the beginning of their paths, but all that they have learned thus far will surely follow them to all the places they'll go from here.

Receiving Light — A Journey with Bach

by Guarantor Rev. Arthur R. Lillicrapp, Elk Grove, California

*Rest well, you holy limbs and body,
Which I no longer bewail,
Rest well and bring me also rest.*

– Chorus from the *Passion According to Saint John*



THESE WORDS ENFOLDED ME at the most recent Spring Concert at First Presbyterian Church in Bethlehem, PA. I had traveled here from Sacramento, California and this was the 60th year of attending one of these magnificent Bach Choir concerts. But this year, it was so different than any other.

I can remember sitting on the lawn outside Packer Chapel having a picnic with my late grandmother Grace. At the age of nine, I didn't know Bach at all but the sense of peace and beauty along with great food prepared by the matriarch of our family became the genesis of what was to be a life long journey with music.

Many members of my family on both sides have been in The Bach Choir or supporters of it: Thomas Yerger, the organist and choir director of Lafayette College in the 1930s; Esther, his sister; my mother, Irene, years later as an usher; and my late grandparents, Grace and Arthur Lillicrapp all met here in May with the family to have more than a musical experience.

Great theology from the *Mass*, cantatas, and a continuing connection to hope, beauty and promise filtered down through many decades that included student change, wars, geographical moves and then a life changing event in my late 20s while working in New York City. I became blind from an eye disease that caused acute changes in my corneas.

I was working in New York City in educational television – never wanted to leave that city, but found myself going to Wills Eye Hospital some years later for my first corneal transplant – by Dr. Phillip Spaeth; his parents used to attend the Bach Festival with my grandparents year after year – starting another layer of hospitality around music, family and hope. The experience was transformational for me – so much so that I entered Episcopal Seminary to study for Holy Orders. All this had the common thread of returning to Bethlehem for a healing tonic that was grounded in Reformational theology and incredible music performed by talent that for me, went beyond description.

The miracle of sight continued for me at Wilmer Eye Hospital in Baltimore with another transplant – the sense of receiving light, a new journey of self-discovery, and a professional pathway of God's own choosing – hospital chaplaincy. I've been a professional hospital chaplain now for over thirty years, and recall memory upon memory of times at these music festivals when pain became peace, sorrow turned into joy, and darkness transformed into light through the linkage of 18th century music in a steel town venue.

Now I don't *believe* in miracles, I expect them! Three years ago I was diagnosed with lymphocytic leukemia. Months of chemo therapy followed. Each time I went to the infusion center in Sacramento, where I was now Manager of Spiritual Care for Kaiser Permanente, I took my ear phones and CD player and listened to the *Sanctus* from the *Mass in B Minor*. Somehow the power that crescendoed in that section of the Ordinary became my spiritual tonic providing a foundation of courage and hope. Whenever I got to the *Sanctus* portion of the *Mass*, it was as though God was lifting me up and through whatever life had brought to a place of invincibility.

One day in the clinic, I had started to move to the music and was being watched by a woman who was also being infused for a cancer diagnosis. When I removed my ear phones, I felt a tap on my shoulder – asking me "What are you listening to?" I told this unknown friend that it was from Bach's *Mass in B Minor* and she looked at me unknowingly. Words wouldn't do it... so right then and there, I placed my ear phones on her, and watched her face as I began the *Sanctus* for her – eyes closing, then tears unfolding, and then a speechless voice asking "who, what, where?" and so much more. She had never heard of the great King – Johann Sebastian...nor anything about the music and its spiritual, empowering center. So for the remainder of the four months left for my chemo therapy, she and I would meet and I would begin playing the *Sanctus* just for her – then the



Kyrie, and then sections of the *Gloria*...and from our journey with cancer, we ventured onto a hope pathway created from Bach's music.

Experiencing these moments over the years has not only sustained my faith but introduced many others to the miracle of spirituality infused with music as only Bach could compose. In addition to training hospital chaplains, facilitating cancer and grief groups and sitting on many hospital committees, nothing motivates my faith journey more than recollections of the momentous times started sixty years ago on the front lawn of Packer Chapel by an Italian New York grandmother who knew that in listening to beauty one could find it for life.

The lady who joined me at the Infusion Center at Kaiser South Sacramento became a deep and wonderful friend who went on her own spiritual journey, finding God in and through the drama of liturgy witnessed in the Episcopal Church in Northern California. Three plus years later, on the 40th anniversary of my ordination last year at St. Martin's Church in Davis, CA, she presented the wine and bread at that service of celebration and asked me to baptize her. Both of us are in remission; both of us believe in the power of hope and know personally that with God all things are, indeed, possible. For her, it is a new beginning that started with Bach...and for me, one that became so powerful again at the Spring Concert this year – 4000 miles away from the place I now call home – in a place that will continue to be my spiritual home as long as I walk on this earth and run in the next.

As the last words of the final chorale of the *Saint John's Passion* invite: "that my eyes may behold you in joy complete, O Son of God, my Savior and my throne of grace!"



The Bach Choir of Bethlehem
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PERMIT NO 227

Allentown Bach at Noon – June, July & August by Bridget George



LAST JUNE AND JULY, our inaugural Allentown *Bach at Noon* performances drew capacity crowds to St. John's Lutheran Church in downtown Allentown. This year we are expanding this summer series in Allentown to three Bach at Noon performances at St. John's on second Tuesdays June 14, July 12, and August 9 from 12:10pm – 1:00pm.

The June 14 performance includes the Bach motet *Lobet den Herrn* (Praise the Lord) with singers from The Bach Choir and the youth choruses featured at our Family Concert; Philadelphia Brass playing arrangements of pieces by Bach and Vivaldi; and Cantata 118, *O Jesu Christ, mein Lebens Licht* (O Jesus Christ, my life and light) in the version accompanied by brass and organ.

The repertoire for July and August will be posted soon, so visit our website for new information, directions, and tips on parking. Bring new friends to experience these noon-time performances in a gorgeous sacred setting with engaging introductions to the music by conductor Greg Funfgeld, and explore some of Allentown's new shops and restaurants after the concert.



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