



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO BY THEO ANDERSON Greg Fungfeld is in his 35th year as Bach Choir of Bethlehem artistic director-conductor. Copyright - ©Theo Anderson



## Thinking outside the Bach: There's a 'new guise' in town for Bach Choir 111th Festival and its 120th anniversary year

Friday, May 4, 2018 by KATHY LAUER-williams Special to The Press in Focus

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Bach is getting unbuttoned and heading outside this year for the 111th Bethlehem Bach Festival taking place over two weekends May 11-12 and 18-19 in Bethlehem.

New this year, the annual festival is presenting "Bach Outdoors!" a free performance kicking off the festivities at noon both Fridays on Payrow Plaza between the Bethlehem Public Library and City Hall. Organizers hope the new free event will engage people about the music of Bach in an entirely new

way.

The music will be all Bach but in a "new guise," says Greg Fungfeld, Bach Choir of Bethlehem artistic director and conductor.

Fungfeld can't say enough about the performers for the new open-air event that include a cellist who founded "Bach in the Subways," a marimbist who transcribed Bach's cello suites for the percussion instrument, and The Bach Festival Orchestra's own principal violist rocking it out on electric violin.

Bach Festival organizers felt that since it is the 120th anniversary of the Bach Choir of Bethlehem and Fungfeld's own 35th anniversary as artistic director and conductor of the Bach Choir, they felt they should do something new, Fungfeld says.

"We want people to see that even though the Choir's founding is 120-years-old, it is still incredibly

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inspired.”

Funfgeld says the enthusiastic community response to the Bach Choir’s “Bach at Noon” free performances throughout the year inspired the idea of a free event to engage the community.

“It opens up so many possibilities,” he says.

Playing marimba is the Festival artist-in-residence She-e Wu.

Funfgeld calls Wu “a brilliant marimba player” who made her debut with the Philadelphia Orchestra a year ago.

“She loves the music of Bach,” he says.

He says that Wu and her former husband, who is a Bach scholar, worked together transcribing Bach’s cello suites for marimba.

“What they created is quite incredible,” he says. “The last time she played here, she blew people away.”

She will be joined by cellist Dale Henderson.

“He created this amazing thing called ‘Bach in the Subway,’” Funfgeld says. “He started a movement where all over the world on Bach’s birthday cellists go down in the subways and play Bach’s cello suites.”

The performance will include violist Paul Miller, performing on electric violin.

Calling Miller “very funky,” Funfgeld says he’s “one of these guys who is always thinking outside the box and trying new things.”

The outdoor concert featuring some of Bach’s most beloved pieces on cello, along with arrangements for electric violin and marimba, promises to be memorable.

Wu will return with her marimba for “Bach at 8” at 8 p.m. both Fridays in Packer Memorial Church, Lehigh University, to perform Bach’s Third Cello Suite in C Major, BWV 1009, transcribed for marimba.

During the 10:30 a.m. Saturday concerts at Lehigh’s Zoellner Arts Center, Wu will play “Concerto for Marimba and Strings,” written by Eric Ewazen.

Funfgeld says Ewazen is a 21st century composer whose concerto features “lyrical passages and exciting rhythms.”

Also at the 10:30 a.m. Saturday concerts, Funfgeld will play the harpsichord on the Fifth Brandenburg Concerto BWV 1050, accompanied by Elizabeth Field, violin, and Robin Kani, flute.

Funfgeld says the Brandenburg Fifth holds special meaning for him since he played it 35 years at his first Bach Festival.



He says all of the Festival concerts feature "some of Bach's greatest hits," as well as some other Baroque classics.

During "Bach at 8," the Bach Choir and Festival Orchestra will perform Handel's "Ode for Saint Cecilia's Day."

"St. Cecilia is the patron saint of music and the 'Ode' features trumpets, timpani and beautiful choral movements," Funfgeld says.

Following the Friday evening concerts, patrons can join Funfgeld and the performers for champagne and strawberries to celebrate the milestones.

Another highlight of the Saturday morning concert is a performance of Bach's Cantata 21, "Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis."

"Over the years, we have had our choir members write down their favorite cantatas and Cantata 21 is always at the top of the list," Funfgeld says. "It has four really fabulous movements with full orchestra. It is a very rich and lush piece."

Funfgeld is pleased to announce the Festival debut of soprano Cassandra Lemoine, one of six vocal soloists.

"She is a new singer from Canada who has been singing in Europe all year," he says. "She is a wonderful soloist. We like to develop new relationships with young talented singers."

She joins returning soloists Rosa Lamoreaux, soprano; Daniel Taylor, countertenor; Benjamin Butterfield, tenor; William Sharp, baritone, and David Newman, bass,

Other highlights include Friday "Bach at 4" when Bach cantatas and arias can be heard at the Incarnation of Our Lord Church, Bethlehem.

"This little Catholic church on the South Side is a wonderful site," Funfgeld says. "The acoustics there are so beautiful and it offers a more intimate setting."

The next generation of Bach performers will be represented at the popular Zimmermann's Coffee House, 7 - 9:30 p.m. both Saturdays in Moravian College's Peter Hall.

Modeled after Zimmermann's Coffee House of Bach's time in Leipzig, the event offers food and drink with entertainment of Baroque chamber music performed by young musicians chosen by audition.

"Zimmermann's has taken on a life of its own," Funfgeld says. "It sells out every year. This year's performances truly are a banquet."

Bach Festival schedule: [thelehighvalleypress.com](http://thelehighvalleypress.com)

Tickets: Bach Choir office, 440 Heckewelder Place, Bethlehem; [office@bach.org](mailto:office@bach.org) 8018; 610-866-4382