



Bach Choir hosts “Coronation of King George II”

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LISA JO SAGOLLA
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The Bach Choir of Bethlehem is inviting local audiences to be part of the American premiere of “Coronation of King George II.”

The ceremonial choral concert, performed by Canada’s Theatre of Early Music, under the baton of its founding artistic director, Daniel Taylor, is the featured event at the Choir’s fundraising gala on Oct. 26.

“The service itself – and I do consider it a service, though we won’t have a sermon – follows the structure and the script that was first presented at the coronation of King George II in 1727,” explained Taylor.

“They’ll be bells ringing, a trumpet fanfare, a drum procession. Then we go into the various choral anthems, and we also have audience participation. They need to yell ‘God Save the King’ over and over. And I rehearse them ahead of time, so that they’re ready. Because they are not just our audience, but rather the spectators, like they would have had at an actual coronation.”

The production also includes a local performer portraying the Archbishop, Canadian contemporary dancer Bill Coleman in the mute role of the King, and 20 singers from the choir joining Taylor’s choristers in several pieces.

“There’s an incredible wealth of music in this concert,” said the choir’s artistic director and conductor Greg Funfgeld. “They’re doing the one coronation anthem that I think everyone who knows choral music loves, and that’s Handel’s ‘Zadok, the priest.’”

“It starts with the orchestra playing pianissimo and builds to this incredible crescendo and when the choir comes in, with the trumpets and timpani, it’s really one of the most hair-raising moments in music.

“And they’re doing a Parry piece called ‘I was glad,’ which is one of the great English anthems of the 20th century. The sopranos go up to a high B-flat at the end, and there’s a magnificent organ part. It’s a thrilling thing to hear.”

A counter-tenor with a major international reputation and a music professor at the University of Toronto, Taylor granted himself leeway in choosing the musical selections for his coronation concert.

“The lion’s share of the music – the Handel, and the pieces we’re doing by Purcell and Tallis – that was all performed at the original coronation. But I’ve included some other music as well, and have tried to be very specific about which composers and why.

“ I thought it would be interesting to look at other composers who worked with royalty after that time, so we have the echoes of the music that has come before in what we hear now. That’s why I added the Parry piece. I also added a hymn by the British composer John Tavener, and a piece by John Joubert, a great South African choral composer, who moved to England.”

The concert will be performed in St. John’s Lutheran Church in Allentown, which Funfgeld deems a “perfect” venue for the event. “It’s like a little Westminster Abbey,” he said. “There’s gorgeous stone, stained glass windows, statues, a big pipe organ, and the acoustics are amazing.”

But why should today’s audiences want to join in celebrating England’s King George II? Aside from the chance to hear the exciting choral music written for his coronation, “it’s good for people to remember that George II wasn’t British, he was German,” explained Taylor.

“And if it wasn’t for immigration, the Brits would never have had this tremendous king. I’d like to remind people that there was once this great German king who went to Britain where [the German-born] Handel – one of the greatest composers who ever lived – wrote music for him. I think that’s an excellent way to begin a story.”