

# Classical preview

By Steve Siegel, Special to The Morning Call

## Bach Choir Bach at Noon

The new year is always a time for celebration, whether that means recognizing highlights of the past year or looking forward to all the good things (hopefully) to come. In that vein, the first Bach at Noon program of 2020 honors the 15th anniversary of the first Bach at Noon concert, which took place Jan. 11, 2005, with a repeat of the identical program.

The concert takes place Tuesday, Jan. 14 at Central Moravian Church in Bethlehem. Following the series' familiar format of presenting both an instrumental work and a choral work, the 50-minute program features the Brandenburg Concerto No. 1, BWV 1046, paired with Cantata 65, "Sie werden aus Saba alle kommen" (They will all come forth out of Sheba). Vocal soloists, joining members of the Bach Choir and Bach Festival Orchestra, are tenor Lawrence Jones and bass-baritone David Newman.



Lawrence Jones

Bach's Brandenburg Concertos, as they have come to be known because of their dedicatee, are among the most perfect examples of the Baroque concerto that we have today. Few works in the history of music match their tireless invention, their colorful instrumentation, or the tremendous demands they make on performers.

And yet, at the time of their composition, they were all but ignored. In 1717, Bach was hired as the Kapellmeister (music director) for the court of Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Köthen, a position that allowed him lots of creative freedom and good pay. Nearly all of Bach's great instrumental works date from his tenure in Leopold's employ, including the six Brandenburg concertos.



David Newman

That's all swell, except for the fact that the Brandenburgs weren't written for Prince Leopold. By the early 1720s, the prince's military expenses led to huge budget cuts in Bach's orchestra. When the prince married a woman who could care less about music, Bach saw the handwriting on the wall, and began to look for a job elsewhere. Thinking he had a shot at a post under Margrave Christian Ludwig of Brandenburg-Schwedt, he dedicated a volume of six concertos to him, "on spec," as we would say today.

There is no record Bach ever got a reply (perhaps he was better at composing than writing cover letters), but he ended up accepting a lucrative combination of posts in Leipzig, where he lived the rest of his life. But what happened to those concertos? Apparently, the manuscripts were sold for the equivalent of \$20 in today's money, and promptly went off the radar, only to be rediscovered and published in 1849, nearly 130 years after their composition.

The first concerto is, like all of Bach's concertos, indebted to the methods of the Italians. Vivaldi was particularly attractive to Bach, who eagerly copied out Vivaldi's scores in order to understand his use of contrast, rhythmic propulsion, and orchestration. One unique, non-Italian idea in the Brandenburg Concerto No. 1 is Bach's use of hunting horns. The sound of the horns stands out, but Bach manages to make them blend into the ensemble through the use of multiple winds.

Cantata 65 was composed for the Epiphany, an important cycle of days in the church calendar as it is the climax of the Advent/Christmas season. It is likely Bach composed numerous works for the Epiphany, yet only three survive. The text for Cantata 65 combines the prophecy from the book of Isaiah with the gospel of Matthew, relating the tale of the Wise Men from the East.

The work uses Bach's established cantata structure with one exception. He begins with an imposing chorus and ends with a plain chorale, sandwiching a pair of linked recitative-arias between them but also inserting an additional chorale as the second movement. One especially notable feature is Bach's use of a pair of horns along with the expected oboes, strings and continuo. The horns provide an atmosphere of celebration, immediately apparent in this instance as they enter with a striking fanfare-like call above a single continuo chord.

Subsequent Bach at Noon concerts are scheduled for Feb. 11, March 10, and April 14, at Central Moravian Church in Bethlehem. The Bach at Noon Summer Series will be presented on June 9, July 14, and Aug. 11, at St. John's Lutheran Church in Allentown.

**Bach at Noon**, 12:10 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 14, Central Moravian Church, 73 W. Church St., Bethlehem. Admission: free; free-will offering. 610-866-4382, [www.bach.org](http://www.bach.org)