LOOKING FORWARD TO THE 2020–21 SEASON
We Will Sing Again – by Bridget George

AS WE MOURN THE CANCELLATION OF THIS YEAR’S BACH FESTIVAL, it has been a great comfort to stay connected with our Choir, Orchestra, and soloists, our dedicated staff and board members, and you, our extended Bach Choir family of Guarantors and audience. It has also been a source of strength to communicate with our colleagues – choral conductors and executive directors across the United States and our dear friends in Leipzig, who are going through the heartrending cancellation of Bachfest Leipzig 2020, which was to have included The Bach Choir of Bethlehem.

In the midst of continuing uncertainty, we look forward with joyful optimism to a spectacular 2020–21 Season – our beloved Greg Funfgeld’s final season as artistic director and conductor. At the request of president Hal Black, I have postponed my retirement from December 2020 to June 2021, after the Bach Festival and the postponed European Tour. We have been hard at work finalizing plans, as well as contingency plans for pandemic factors beyond our control, and are ready with a most beautiful season to renew your spirits. Your support and encouragement will help our plan come to fruition and strengthen the resolve of our Bach Choir and its vision as we hand it on to new leadership in 2021-22.

Greg has programmed three of Bach’s most magnificent works, the Christmas Oratorio Parts 1, 2 & 3; and at Festival, the Saint Matthew Passion as well as our perennial Mass in B Minor to come back to life and astonish us once again. For the Spring Concert in March 2021, we bring you Handel’s Messiah Part Two, which The Choir was so looking forward to singing for the first time in this year’s cancelled concert, and the Duruflé Requiem, one of the greatest choral works of the 20th century.

Our extraordinary guest artists include Yo-Yo Ma, who has chosen The Bach Choir as one of the presenters for his special event Truth, Trust, and Service: How Culture Connects Us. Our Festival artists-in-residence include the full Paul Taylor Dance Company, with us for the first time to present their breath-taking Brandenburgs (first weekend); and classical guitarist Eliot Fisk (second weekend), for his exquisite program with orchestra, postponed from this year’s Festival.

Bach at Noon will go forward in person as soon as we can safely gather, and our significant work with students continues – Bel Canto Youth Chorus, Bach to School, the Bach Chaconne Project, and the Greg Funfgeld Family Concert, a collaboration with Lehigh University Philharmonic and the Dance Department of Lehigh Valley Charter School for the Arts, including Britten’s Young Person’s Guide to the Orchestra.

May we all stay safe and well so that we can embrace the music and each other when we meet and sing again!

2020–2021 Season at a Glance

Bethlehem Bach at Noon: 2nd Tuesdays
12:10–1:00pm • Central Moravian Church
2020 • Sept. 8, Oct. 13, Nov. 10 (110th Bach at Noon)
2021 • Jan. 12, Feb. 9, Mar. 9, Apr. 13

Fundraiser: Yo-Yo Ma presents Truth, Trust, and Service: How Culture Connects Us
Fri., Oct. 16, 2020 • 7pm • Parkland High School

Bel Canto Winter Concert: Sat., December 5, 2020

Christmas Concerts:
Bach Christmas Oratorio Parts 1, 2 & 3
Sat., Dec. 12, 2020 • 8pm
First Presbyterian Church of Allentown
Sun., Dec. 13, 2020 • 4pm
First Presbyterian Church of Bethlehem

The Greg Funfgeld Family Concert
Sun., Feb. 28, 2021 • 3pm • Zoellner Arts Center

Spring Concert: Duruflé Requiem
• Handel – Messiah, Part Two
Sun., March 21, 2021 • 4pm
• First Presbyterian Church of Bethlehem

Bel Canto Spring Concert: Sat., May 1, 2021

113th Bach Festival: Greg Funfgeld’s final Festival
• May 14–15 & 21–22, 2021

Allentown Bach at Noon: June 9, 2021
12:10–1:00pm • St. John’s Lutheran Church

European Tour including Bachfest Leipzig
June 16–25, 2021 • Bethlehem, PA

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Dear Friends:

IN OUR REHEARSALS, we are often struck by the beauty of Bach’s music, or the music of Handel, Mozart and others. As we learn new music or refine music we’ve learned before, I have on many occasions said to the choral artists of The Bach Choir “What do people do who don’t have this music in their lives?” We wonder about that vacuum and reconnect ourselves to sharing our music with any and all who will come and listen. During this pandemic, we’ve asked that question again. “What do people do who don’t have this music in their lives?” We’ve shared Moments of Comfort, a Bach at Noon Watch Party, recordings of concerts from years past. We have a vast treasure of memories – concerts, tours, recordings – all of these have been sources of hope and consolation. The work of others who’ve reached out in similar ways is a great gift, a blessing in our lives. These have been wonderful moments of humor along the way – we are reminded that laughter is, indeed, a wonderful medicine. In the midst of this glorious Spring season, Mother Nature has graced us with glorious colors in trees, shrubs and flowers – signs of new life and hope.

One measure of well being and health is how we function in unusual and unusually challenging times. I am proud of the way our Bach Choir Family has done this. You, our Guarantors and devoted audience members have been so kind – your e-mails, notes, encouragement and expressions of appreciation inspire us all. Your ongoing love of the music means so much to us. Your continued generosity and support reminds us that Bach’s music will still be here to comfort and sustain us, once we have gotten through this terrible time. We continue to share deeply – our love of the music, our caring for one another, our joys and sorrows – and we are uplifted and ennobled. Thank You! God bless and keep you! We will be together again soon to share the ineffable richness of J.S. Bach and the music we cherish.

Ever grateful,

Greg Funfgeld, Artistic Director & Conductor

FROM THE CONDUCTOR

FROM THE PRESIDENT

DEAR FRIENDS:

WHOEVER COINED THE PHRASE “The elephant in the room” clearly had something like this pandemic in mind. It directs our thinking and actions every day like a big gray pachyderm lumbering through our kitchen to get snacks. And while there is much about this situation that is entirely out of our control, like that elephant shuffling through our bread drawer, we can take steps to carry on the life of The Choir.

The Executive Committee of the Board began meeting in early March to discuss major questions facing The Choir. We were forced to cancel events for which we had long planned and prepared the Spring Concert, the tour to Germany, and even the Bach Festival. These were heartbreaking decisions. At the same time our Finance and Endowment Committees went to work to help assure that The Choir would remain on firm financial footing. We all learned how to use video conferencing, and even held our April board meeting online. Of course the Staff remained hard at it throughout this period. In some respects we felt busier than ever.

They miss “Greg sitting near the piano, welcoming, chatting, catching up with our joys and struggles.” As Tony Villani, in his April review summarizes, “music making is so comforting to the soul!”

The idea of this presentation is rooted in the belief that at a moment when our world is challenged by the pace of change and the divisions it can create, the values that culture promotes – truth, trust, and service – are essential to our survival. Yo-Yo Ma performed Bach’s Cello Suites at The Bach Choir’s Centennial celebration in 1998. Funfgeld notes, “To welcome Yo-Yo Ma back to the Lehigh Valley for this special presentation is a rare privilege and precious opportunity. Yo-Yo Ma’s artistry is recognized and admired around the world. From Sesame Street to great concert halls everywhere, he has touched lives and inspired countless souls.”

Yo-Yo Ma is thrilled to present this singular artist for a very special event and fundraiser, to support our youth and community engagement programs, and to acknowledge and celebrate Artistic Director and Conductor Greg Funfgeld’s final season with The Bach Choir in 2020-21.

Yo-Yo Ma will explore the role culture can play in helping us to imagine and build a better future, drawing on examples from his own life as a musician and citizen. Yo-Yo’s presentation is rooted in the belief that at a moment when our world is challenged by the pace of change and the divisions it can create, the values that culture promotes – truth, trust, and service – are essential to our survival.

Patti Alercia summed up the feelings of many: “I always knew I loved The Choir, but I don’t think I knew how much. We can’t wait to see the audience, to watch their faces, to see them close their eyes while they listen, to hear them cheer for us. We love them. Just like we love what we do.”

For more stories, please check the website under Choir Newsletter.

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THE "CHOIR SPOTLIGHT" is shining on a rather empty set of risers at present. We asked members to tell us how they’re coping with the unexpected interruption to our season. We were overwhelmed with messages of love for Greg, for each other, and for the pleasure of singing for you!

For everyone, the feeling of loss was insurmountable. “Who would have thought that I would be missing my 44th Bach Festival?!... a huge part of my life for almost half a century!” said Mary Pinni. Steve Rivera, one of our newest members wrote, “I’m very disappointed at missing out on what would have been my very first Bach Festival. But more than that, I miss the rehearsals – to meet with my fellow Choir members and have a great time making beautiful music!”

Many shared that feeling of community – and the loss of fellowship. People miss “the energy,” “the labor of love,” and the “privilege of singing with this group.”

So the business of The Choir goes on. We are reaching out with our Moments of Comfort by Greg and members of The Choir and Orchestra. Joy and the Bell Canto Youth Chorus are working on a virtual choir project to wrap up their season. Bridget and her team are well into planning for next year, including the postponed trip to Leipzig and a number of special events for Greg and Bridget’s final year with us. The search for a new executive team has progressed on schedule. And we have stabilized our finances, at least for a while.

The big question remains. When will that behemoth leave our kitchen and allow us to become a choir once again? We do not know, of course, but we will be ready once we have some room to operate. And we do hope that you all continue to stay with us through this very rough patch. Your support is a major inspiration for all that we do.

Sincerely,

Harold G. Black, President

THE BACH CHOIR OF BETHLEHEM

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Yo-Yo Ma performs Bach’s Cello Suites at Lehigh Country Club – Benefactor Tickets: $150

Includes reserved premium event seating, cocktail reception & charitable contribution

For Benefactor tickets, call 610.866.4382 ext. 110

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All tickets on sale summer 2020.
NOAH’S FLOOD
Brings Hope and Creative Inspiration to Young and Old

by Bridget George

A capacity audience of all ages filled Packer Church and on stage, alongside members of our Bach Choir and Bach Festival Orchestra, Britten’s evocative score was brought to life by professional soloists David Newman and Mag Bragel as Mr. and Mrs. Noah; John Have as the Voice of God; our Bel Canto Youth Chorus concert and preparatory choirs, members of PYT and St. Anne’s School Emmaus as the Chorus of Animals; and musicians of the Young People’s Philharmonic, the Junior String Philharmonic, the Lehigh University Philharmonic, the handbell choir of First Marblehead, last heard as the soprano soloist in the Allentown Symphony performance of Verdi’s Requiem last season, graciously shared her journey to becoming a professional opera singer. Composer Andrea Clearfield joined us to talk about her compositions Tie go la and Shar ki n which we were preparing to perform at our spring concert. The choristers have been particularly intrigued by these pieces which are based on traditional melodies Clearfield recorded during her treks deep in the Nepalese mountains. We hope to include these in next season’s performances.

BEL CANTO NEWS by Joy Hively

Even though our season was cut short, the choristers of Bel Canto have much to celebrate. Noyes Fludde provided musical and theatrical challenges that grew them as musicians and performers. It was especially fun to watch the masks come to life as they were donned by the choristers, and hear merry singing of “Kyrke, Kyrke, Kyrke eleison” as they left rehearsal!

We congratulate three choristers and one former chorister who participated in the American Choral Director’s Association Eastern Region Honor Choirs in early March. Selected through a competitive audition process, these singers traveled to Rochester, NY to perform under the baton of superb guest conductors and present outstanding concerts:

Matilda Snyder, Elementary Honor Choir
Ellia Campbell-Becker, Junior High Honor Choir
Abriana Ferrari, High School Honor Choir
Giavonna Consiglio (former chorister), Musical Theater Honor Choir

In Bel Canto’s annual Spring Festival, March 12th, but we continue to meet weekly during our rehearsal times, providing musical activities, guest speakers, and time to reconnect our community. Soprano Tori Marie Palmertree, last heard as the soprano soloist in The bach choir’s performance of Benjamin Britten’s one-act opera Noyes’s Fludde, might not have entered the church two-by-two, but they certainly left bonded together! It was. Thank you for letting us re-live that delightful afternoon. It’s also a message of hope in these uncertain times.

“Thank you for the chance to experience ‘The Spacious Firmament’ by Thomas Tallis was just what I needed to lift my spirits! We were so excited to hear it. It was the perfect way to end the rehearsal and start the new year.” - Liz Allen

“Bach’s Chaconne”
Bach’s Chaconne

by Bridget George

On March 12th, the Bel Canto Youth Chorus and the Junior String Philharmonic performed a program titled “Bach’s Chaconne.” The program was a tribute to the composer J.S. Bach, who was the subject of a recent symposium hosted by the Bach Festival Orchestra. The concert featured performances of several of Bach’s works, including his famous Chaconne for solo violin.

The program began with the Chaconne for solo violin, performed by Elizabeth Reiser. She was accompanied by the Junior String Philharmonic, conducted by John Hoofman. The performance was received with great applause from the audience.

Next, the Junior String Philharmonic performed a selection of Bach’s works, including his famous Suite No. 3 in G Major for cello. The performance was supported by the Bel Canto Youth Chorus, who joined in for some of the most memorable moments.

The concert concluded with a performance of Bach’s celebrated Cantata No. 140, “O du darzliegendes Leben.” The performance was supported by the Bel Canto Youth Chorus and the Junior String Philharmonic, conducted by John Hoofman.

“Everything was done with such passion and conviction, and the musicianship was simply outstanding. It was a wonderful way to end the season.” - Joy Hively
From Leipzig, we will continue as planned to give concerts in a Vespers Service, and we are honored to sing Bach's Cantata events – the “Motette” in the Thomaskirche on June 19, 2021. This important it was to fulfill our dream of returning to Leipzig before opportunity to perform at the 2021 Bachfest instead. He knew how ciously and generously given The Bach Choir of Bethlehem an Furthermore, Michael Maule, director of Bachfest Leipzig has gra-
LAST YEAR, we launched our two-year Giving Bach Campaign, an integral element of our leadership transition plan. Now more than ever, the success of this campaign is essential to establish a firm foundation under The Bach Choir’s vision for tomorrow.

Like all arts organizations, The Bach Choir will suffer significant and unexpected setbacks as our singers, leadership, and staff adjust to the present and prepare for the future. It is because of your careful stewardship and generous support that The Choir is able to make the necessary adjustments to weather the current situation.

It is our sincere hope that we might see additional gifts and pledges from our Bach Choir family before June 30, 2021. These gifts allow us to continue our plans for a spectacular 2020-21 performance season celebrating the legacy of Greg Funfgeld, and to look forward to years of exciting artistic programming with music that uplifts and renews our spirits.