



BACH CHOIR NEWS

A PUBLICATION OF THE BACH CHOIR OF BETHLEHEM, INC.

VOLUME 51, NUMBER 1, SUMMER 2026

Experience Germany & Bachfest 2027 WITH THE BACH CHOIR *by Cheryl Dungan*

IN JUNE 2027, we invite our Guarantors and patrons to join us for a special journey to Germany, centered around our participation in Bachfest Leipzig. Created especially for our patron community, this unique experience offers the opportunity to hear the Bach Choir in the very place where Johann Sebastian Bach lived and worked, while exploring the rich musical and cultural heritage of Leipzig and Dresden.

The experience begins in Dresden, where guests will enjoy exceptional dining, guided exploration, a visit to the Mendelssohn House, and a private organ presentation inside the magnificent Frauenkirche before continuing to Leipzig. The days continue with visits to the Thomaskirche, the Bach Archive, and a special excursion to the Bach Museum in Eisenach, balanced with ample time to explore the wonders of Leipzig and the city's inviting squares.

There are places where history feels preserved behind glass in a museum, and there are places where it still lives, breathes,



Jens Schlueter/
Bachfest Leipzig 2024

and comes alive. Leipzig, and their annual celebration at Bachfest, is one of them. Johann Sebastian Bach walked the streets of Leipzig, crossed its market squares, and

stood watch over the Thomaskirche, the historic venue with vaulted ceilings that remain the same breathtaking scene to this day.

Please turn to page 3.

Let Freedom Sing *by Glenn Koehler*

THIS MAY, THOUSANDS OF CHORISTERS CAME TOGETHER, not in one of the many concert halls or churches where they spend countless hours rehearsing each year, but

beneath the bright lights of one of the nation's premier minor league ballparks. For one evening, Coca-Cola Park traded bats and gloves for sheet music and song, becoming the unlikely setting for one of the Lehigh Valley's most memorable celebrations of music and community.

Long before the first note was sung, it was clear this would be no ordinary concert. Along the concourse, a Revolutionary War reenactor greeted families and posed for photographs, a reminder that the evening was as much about history as it was about harmony. Children darted through the stadium in matching choir shirts, their excitement reaching a crescendo each time a camera for the giant video board found them. Every



Glenn Koehler

appearance on the jumbotron was met with cheers from teammates, parents, and grandparents scattered throughout the stands.

Please turn to page 5.

INSIDE...

Your Support in Shaping the Heart of the Choir Campaign	2
Ensuring a Legacy of Music	2
Guarantor Spotlight	3
Sounding Bach: Reflections on 250 Years of Music in Bethlehem	5
2026-2027 Season	7
Newsletter Update	8



Your Support in Shaping the



HEART OF THE BACH CHOIR by Leela Breithaupt

LAST FALL, WE INTRODUCED THE HEART OF THE BACH CHOIR CAMPAIGN, a \$2 million, multi-year effort to strengthen the people and programs that make our music possible. At its heart, this campaign is about people – those who create the music, those who sustain it, and those whose lives are enriched by it.

We have been deeply encouraged by the generous response from across the Bach Choir community. Early leadership from our Board of Managers, patrons, and long-time supporters has helped us achieve nearly 40% of our campaign goal, through gifts and pledges. Their commitment reflects a shared belief in the Choir's future and an understanding that our greatest strength lies in our singers, musicians, educators, staff, volunteers, and supporters.

These early gifts are already making an impact. They are helping provide a foundation for our 2027 Leipzig Choir Tour and future travel opportunities while strengthening cornerstone

programs such as Bach at Noon, Bach to School, and our annual Bach Festival. In addition, a significant endowment gift has made possible the creation of a new Conducting Fellowship – an exceptional educational opportunity that will help cultivate the next generation of artistic leaders while providing additional artistic support for our organization and singers.

While we celebrate this important progress, there is still much work to do. Over the next two years, every gift will play a vital role in helping us reach our \$2 million goal and secure the future of the Bach Choir.

We invite you to join this effort with a generous gift to the Heart of the Bach Choir Campaign. Together, we can ensure that future generations of singers, students, and audiences continue to experience the joy, inspiration, and sense of community that have defined the Bach Choir for more than a century.

Donate to the Heart of the Choir campaign, because legacy is not something we inherit – it is something we create together.

Give a gift of cash, by check, or from your IRA, DAF, or donate appreciated stocks, securities, or other assets. Visit [Bach.org/donate](https://bach.org/donate) to make a secure online donation, or contact us at 610-866-4382 ext. 113 to donate by phone.



ENSURING A LEGACY OF MUSIC by Donald Wertman

THE BACH CHOIR'S NEW GUARANTOR IN PERPETUITY PROGRAM offers an opportunity to create a lasting legacy of support for the Choir beyond our lifetimes.

For 61 years, Bach's *Mass in B Minor* has been part of my life, beginning with my first performance as a member of the Choir. Since then, I have participated in many more performances, and through the Choir I even met my wife. Now, as a member of the Board of Managers and a longtime Guarantor, I remain deeply grateful for the joy, inspiration, and community the Bethlehem Bach Choir has brought to my life.

I know many of you share a similar bond with this remarkable organization and cannot imagine a world without the Bach Choir's music and mission. That is why Chris and I have chosen to become Guarantors in Perpetuity through the Heart of the Choir Capital Campaign.

By establishing an endowment gift or

designating a bequest that will continue your annual Guarantee beyond your lifetime, you ensure that the Choir will receive ongoing support each season in the amount of your annual commitment. Your legacy gift will help sustain the Choir's artistic excellence and preserve its mission for future generations.

The question is simple: will we help ensure that future audiences, singers, and students can experience the same joy and inspiration we have known? I hope you will consider joining us in making that commitment.

We are happy to help you learn how to become a Guarantor in Perpetuity. Contact the Development Director, Cheryl Dungan, at Cheryl@Bach.org or 610.866.4382, ext.113.



Guarantor Spotlight — by Cheryl Dungan

CAROL SHINER WILSON, PH.D.

CAROL SHINER WILSON AND HER LATE HUSBAND DAN, moved to Bethlehem from Allentown six years ago to reside at Moravian Village. Dan was a historian of medicine at Muhlenberg College, and Carol retired as Dean of the College for Academic Life there. Like so many of our Guarantors, Carol is a fascinating person with a broad range of interests in addition to her deep appreciation for Bach's music and the heritage of the Bach Choir.

Carol shares that "It is a joy to be at a Bach performance. It stirs the soul, and every performance seems fresh. I am moved by the range of emotions elicited as I close my eyes and listen: sorrow, grief, elation, quiet joy, compassion, reverence. This is only possible because of the dedicated community of talented musicians and the gifted Artistic Director, Chris Jackson, who pour their hearts and souls into excellence in performance and education, supported by the terrific Bach Choir staff, who convey warmth and joy in fulfilling their part of the Choir's mission.

Dr. Wilson's own current scholarly research, presentations and publications focus on the pioneering fiber artist Mildred T. (Milly) Johnstone (1900-88), also a rebel in the Bethlehem Steel class into which she married. Husband Bill (1898-1983), whom

she considered more appreciative of the arts than his peers, sang first bass in the Choir for eight years and served with distinction on the Executive Board.

Milly was a tireless advocate for the Choir, always publicizing it and hosting distinguished individuals and ordinary folks from the arts and academe."

Carol commented that as a Guarantor, she is "So happy to be a small part of the Bach orbit. This inspiring organization makes everybody feel they belong."

Carol's recent article "Stitching the Steel, Making Peace with the Wolf," appeared in the PMHB, published by the Historical Society of PA. Presentations at the National Museum of Industrial History and the Allentown Art Museum are available through YouTube. Examples of Milly Johnstone's needlepoints are available through the COLLECTIONS, Allentown Art Museum.



Germany & Bachfest 2027 cont. from page 1



Three centuries later, the city continues to gather each year in celebration of his life and masterpieces, transforming concert halls, churches, and public squares into a living tribute to one of our greatest composers.

Join us for what can only be considered the trip of a lifetime as the Bach Choir honors the 300th anniversary of the *St. Matthew Passion* as the sole North American ambassadors in this multinational celebratory performance.

Traveling with fellow supporters of the Bach Choir creates opportunities to deepen friendships, exchange stories, and experience these historic cities through

a shared love of music. The tour concludes with a celebratory dinner alongside members of the Choir, bringing together performers and patrons in the spirit of the community that has sustained the Choir, the love of Bach, and a travelling tradition that has spanned generations.

Whether you join us in Germany or contribute to support our new Choir Touring Fund, you become part of a legacy that extends far beyond a single journey.

Tours do more than take us abroad – they deepen artistic excellence, strengthen cultural connections, and bring Bethlehem's rich musical tradition back to the place where Bach lived and worked.

Together, we make it possible for the Bach Choir to serve as a cultural ambassador, sharing our musical heritage on the international stage while creating transformative experiences for our singers and inspiring audiences around the world.

Join Us! The deadline to register for our exclusive Patron Tour is July 31st. Get more info and register at bach.org/2027-tour.



SOUNDING BACH: *Reflections on 250 Years of Music in Bethlehem*

by Dr. Sarah Eyerly, Barnette Distinguished Scholar Lecture at the 118th Bethlehem Bach Festival

BACH CHOIR MEMBER PHIL TURTON recently shared an observation that has remained with me: “Without Zinzendorf,” he wrote, “there is no Herrnhut. Without Herrnhut there is no

Moravian Church. Without the Moravian Church there is no Bethlehem. And without Bethlehem there is no Bach Choir of Bethlehem.” It is a remarkable compression of three centuries of history, and it captures precisely the historical lineage I want to reflect on here.

The Bach Choir did not arise in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, by accident. When Bach’s music began circulating here around the turn of the nineteenth century, this was a community already organized around the conviction that music could bear theological meaning, that it required disciplined collective effort, and that it belonged at the center of community life rather than at its margins. The Moravians did not simply help to preserve Bach’s music; they cultivated the conditions under which Bach could be performed and appreciated.

Likewise, the musical history of Bethlehem and the story of the founding of the Bach Choir are inseparable from this community’s strategic role in this country’s founding era. As we celebrate the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, these historical convergences illuminate something essential about the relationship between American national history and the history of music in this community.

During the Revolutionary period, Bethlehem stood at a crucial crossroads – between Pennsylvania and New Jersey, between colonial settlements and the Native communities within and beyond the line of the Walking Purchase. Armies, political leaders, and hundreds of ordinary citizens passed through Bethlehem as this new nation took shape.

Among those who passed through Bethlehem in those years was John Adams, who visited twice in 1777 while serving as

The Moravians did not simply help to preserve Bach’s music; they cultivated the conditions under which Bach could be performed and appreciated.

delegate to the Second Continental Congress. He encountered not merely a town of strategic importance, but a community whose soundscapes and musical practices left a lasting impression on him. In his letters to his wife Abigail, Adams described Bethlehem as a “curious and remarkable town.” He marveled at the “fine sett [sic] of mills” along the Monocacy Creek, yet he was equally struck by its music: hymns sung by Moravian brothers and sisters in the Old Chapel, accompanied by a Tannenberg organ, and Bethlehem’s lively culture of chamber music performed by ordinary Moravians, men and women playing with great skill instruments imported from Europe or made by hand in Bethlehem itself.

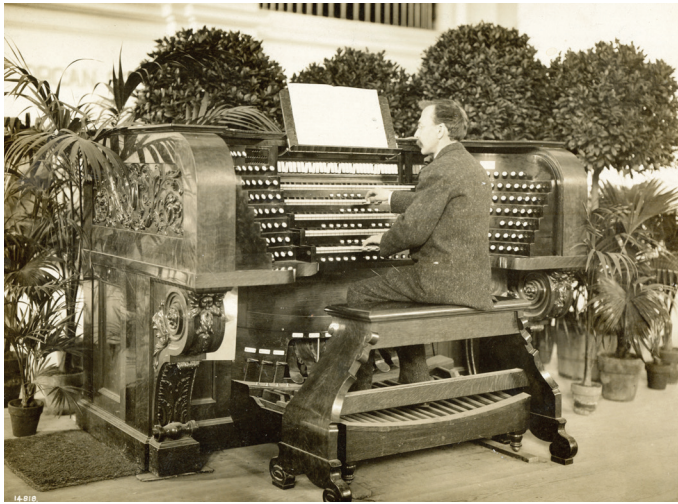
Although his visits coincided with some of the most turbulent months of the Revolutionary War, what Adams chose to describe in his letters home to Abigail was the music he heard; this was a community that would remain audible in his memory long after. For what he had encountered was the way eighteenth-century Moravians, drawn from extraordinarily diverse geographic and ethnic backgrounds, had forged a distinctive religious community through music. Music was not an ornament to their faith; it was its primary language.

If there was ever a place in America where a Bach choral society might take root and flourish, sustaining a festival now in its 118th year, it was here in Bethlehem. The Moravians were among the most prolific producers of music in early America:

from chamber music to choral oratorios, contrafacts of popular songs and operas, to pieces for solo keyboard and wind ensemble. But this was also a community whose music reached far beyond its European origins. Among the most remarkable of the Moravians’ musical legacies are hundreds of hymns composed in Indigenous North American languages and multiple other world languages and dialects. By the end of the eighteenth century, music in the European style was being composed by Moravians speaking Mohican, Lenape, Inuktitut, Arawak, and the creoles of the Danish West Indies. The musical culture of Bethlehem was not simply European music performed in an American setting; it was the result of a sustained practice of listening across difference, and it was from this soil that Bethlehem’s Bach tradition would eventually grow.



Nicholas Garrison, Jr., “A View of Bethlehem from the southwest,” (c. 1784). Watercolor on paper. Moravian Archives, Bethlehem, PA.



J. Fred Wolle, founder and conductor of The Bach Choir of Bethlehem playing the largest organ in the world (at that time) at the St. Louis World's Fair, 1904. This organ was later housed at the John Wanamaker's Store, Philadelphia, PA.

The figure who harnessed this community's diverse musical legacy for Bach was John Frederick Wolle, born in Bethlehem in 1863. His musical formation was thoroughly Moravian: he played wind instruments, strings, organ, and piano, and participated in the Trombone Choir. His first encounter with Bach came not through performance, but through reading. As Wolle later recalled, a teacher loaned him several volumes of Grove's Dictionary: "I began to read through the A's and then the B's and then the name of Bach held my attention. I read that Bach had composed the Passion music. Not only were the Biblical stories the same as I had heard in my own church every Holy Week, but chorales, I found, were introduced throughout the Passion music which were the same I had been hearing in the Moravian Church." It was a recognition of kinship, a young Moravian musician encountering in Bach the very theological and musical language he already knew.

In July 1884, Wolle traveled to Munich to study organ, and it was there that he first heard the *St. John Passion*. Several years later, on June 5, 1888, he conducted the Bethlehem Choral Union in what has been confirmed as the work's American premiere. Full orchestral parts were unavailable in the United States; the ensemble could only obtain string parts from England. The performance therefore consisted of a string quartet, piano, and Wolle conducting from the organ, improvising wind and brass lines from Bach's figured bass. It was an apt demonstration of the resourcefulness of Bethlehem's musical culture.

After the *St. John* and a subsequent performance of the *St. Matthew Passion*, Wolle turned his attention to the *Mass in B Minor*, and the Choral Union refused to participate. Declaring the work too difficult, the singers chose to dissolve the ensemble rather than undertake the challenge, and with it the project of Bach performance in Bethlehem might well have ended. But what followed makes clear that this story cannot be told solely as a history of institutions or conductors. It is also a history of individuals who, at precisely the right moment, recognized how to build upon the deeper musical traditions of this community.

Among those individuals, none was more decisive than Ruth Porter Doster. She had joined the Choral Union in 1888. When Wolle's *Mass* project stalled, she assembled her own musical salon,



an entirely Moravian form of sociability, and recruited singers from Catasauqua, Hellertown, and Schoeneck. She then presented Wolle with a committed nucleus of singers and declared with striking directness: "Fred, teach us the *Mass*." After months of rehearsals, the first complete American performance of Bach's *Mass in B Minor* took place on March 27, 1900, the 150th anniversary of Bach's

death. The premiere also launched a new chapter in Bethlehem's musical history: the founding of the Bach Choir, the first choir of its kind in America devoted to studying and performing the works of Bach.

The founding of the Bach Choir was not the creation of something new so much as the reawakening of something old. When Wolle first encountered Bach's music, what struck him most powerfully was not its novelty, but its familiarity. The chorales that structure the Passions – the moments at which a community pauses to reflect – were already central to Moravian worship. The interplay of narration, meditation, and communal song that defines Bach's large-scale works had long been embedded in Bethlehem's devotional practices. That same deep commitment to communal song which had so struck visitors to Bethlehem during the American Revolution had endured to found the first American choir devoted to the works of Bach.

The Bach Choir of Bethlehem is not simply a distinguished American choral institution. It is the living expression of a community that has always placed music at its center. When the Choir traveled to Herrnhut in June 2024, critic Laurence Vittes described their singing as "the completion of a circle from the Moravian church in Bethlehem," a circle that began when the first Moravian musicians crossed the Atlantic nearly three centuries ago. Bethlehem's inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List – together with Christiansfeld, Gracehill, and Herrnhut – was done partly in recognition of the global significance of the Moravian's musical contributions.

Indeed, as Phil Turton has written:

"Without Zinzendorf, there is no Herrnhut. Without Herrnhut, there is no Moravian Church. Without the Moravian Church, there is no Bethlehem. Without Bethlehem, there is no Bach Choir."



Let Freedom Sing cont. from page 1

People arrived for many reasons. Some came to hear a child sing in their first community concert. Others came to support a favorite school, church, or community ensemble. Still others simply wanted to experience an event unlike anything the Lehigh Valley had seen before. By the time the performance began, the ballpark had become something more than a sports venue. It had become a gathering place to celebrate our shared history and heritage. More than 30 school, church, and community choirs, joined by the Bach Choir of Bethlehem, filled the field with voices representing generations of singers from across the region. Individually, they came from different towns, different schools, different traditions. Together, we became one choir.

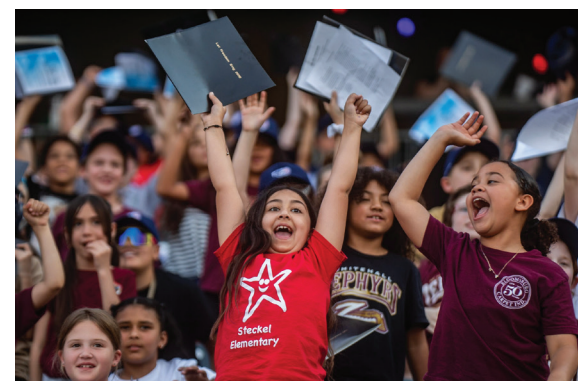
The event marked both LV250 and the nationwide America250 commemoration, celebrating the founding of our nation through one of its oldest communal traditions: singing together. Familiar melodies echoed through the stadium as thousands of choristers and audience members joined in songs that have shaped generations of Americans in one of the largest and most-visible Bach Choir projects in recent history.



Community leaders, elected officials, generous sponsors, educators, volunteers, and arts advocates gathered to celebrate not only the performance itself but the shared belief that music has the power to bring people together. As one middle school choral director reflected afterward, "It was so nice for our chorus students to have a moment to shine in such a large venue, see how singing is an important part of our community, and that they can continue singing throughout their lifespan." More than 20,000 viewers also tuned in to Service Electric's live broadcast, extending the celebration far beyond the ballpark. Together, this remarkable support transformed an ambitious idea into a landmark community event that demonstrated the Choir's ability to serve as a regional convener.

For one evening, baseball yielded to choral music, and a stadium built for competition became a place of shared celebration. It was a fitting tribute to the Lehigh Valley's 250th anniversary, to America's semiquincentennial, and to the enduring truth that some of the most powerful moments are created not by a single voice, but with thousands singing together.

Photography by Glenn Koehler





2026-2027 SEASON

Adventure On!



- **BACH AT NOON** ■ Second Tuesdays 12:10-1pm
St. John's Lutheran Church ■ Downtown Allentown
2026 ■ June 9 July 14 August 11
Central Moravian Church ■ Historic Downtown Bethlehem
2026 ■ September 8 October 13 November 10
2027 ■ January 12 February 9 March 9 April 13

■ 13TH BIENNIAL BACH VOCAL COMPETITION FOR AMERICAN SINGERS

- October 24, 2026 Peter Hall, Moravian University

■ Christmas Concerts ■ A CHRISTMAS CAROL

J.S. Bach – *Christmas Oratorio*, BWV 248/1 –
“Jauchzet, frohlocket!”

Benedict Sheehan – *A Christmas Carol*
– narrated by Jason King Jones

- Saturday, December 12, 2026 at 4pm
Muhlenberg College Egner Memorial Chapel, Allentown
- Sunday, December 13, 2026 at 4pm
First Presbyterian Church of Bethlehem

■ Greg Funfgeld Family Concert MUSIC AND SCIENCE

in collaboration with the Da Vinci Science Center

- Saturday, February 20, 2027 at 5:30 and 7pm
Da Vinci Science Center, Allentown

■ Spring Concert ■ PATH OF MIRACLES

Joby Talbot – *Path of Miracles*

- Sunday, March 21, 2027 at 4pm ■ TBD

■ 119TH BETHLEHEM BACH FESTIVAL

- May 13-16, 2027 ■ Lehigh University & sites
in Historic & South Side Bethlehem

■ BACHFEST Leipzig 2027 Tour

- June 8-15, 2027 ■ BACHFEST Leipzig
- June 6-15, 2027 Patron Tour



Kelly Rocchi, Director
Alaina Swartz, Youth Chorale Conductor
Erica Silver, Da Capo Treble Choir Conductor
Margaret Surdovel, Bach Buddies Conductor

CONCERT SEASON

WINTER CONCERT

- Sunday, November 22, 2026 at 2 and 4:30pm
Wesley United Methodist Church, Bethlehem

BEL CANTO SCHOLARSHIP RECITAL

- Sunday, January 24, 2027 at 4pm
Cathedral Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem

SPRING CONCERT

- Sunday, April 11, 2027 at 4pm
Cathedral Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem

[BACH.org/BelCanto](https://bach.org/BelCanto)



Watch for the Season Brochure later this summer!



The Bach Choir of Bethlehem
440 Heckewelder Place
Bethlehem, PA 18018-5806

NON-PROFIT ORG
US POSTAGE
PAID
LEHIGH VALLEY
PERMIT NO 227



Newsletter Update

THIS ISSUE MARKS THE FINAL PRINTED EDITION of our *Bach Choir News* publication. Beginning later this year, our newsletter will move to a digital format, allowing us to share stories, concert announcements, behind-the-scenes updates, and patron news more frequently. Rather than waiting for the next mailing, you'll receive updates as they happen, bringing you closer to the music, the artists, and the work your support makes possible throughout the year.

Our commitment to keeping you informed remains unchanged. This transition will allow us to offer even more opportunities to celebrate performances, recognize the generosity of our patrons, share news from our education programs, and provide a closer look at the people and partnerships that sustain the Bach Choir of Bethlehem.

The move also reflects our ongoing effort to be thoughtful stewards of the resources entrusted to us. By reducing printing and mailing costs, we can direct more support toward the artistic and educational programs that are at the heart of our mission.

If you are not already receiving our emails, or if your contact information has changed, we encourage you to update your email address with us so you won't miss future editions and important announcements. Thank you for being a part of the Bach Choir family!

Visit BACH.org, select **Want to Stay in the Know** to register.



Bach Choir News
is published by:
the Bach Choir
of Bethlehem
440 Heckewelder Place,
Bethlehem, PA 18018-5806
610.866.4382
BACH.org

Artistic Director & Conductor: Christopher Jackson
Executive Director: Leela Breithaupt
Development Director: Cheryl Dungan
Director of Education & Community
Engagement: Alaina Swartz
Bel Canto Director: Kelly S. Rocchi
Marketing Manager: Glenn Koehler
Production & Orchestra Coordinator: Sara Scott
Administrative Office Manager: Lindsay Liiro
Development Assistant: Celia Lansing
Archivist: Cory Dieterly

Supported in part by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, the Bach Choir of Bethlehem, Inc. is recognized by the U.S. Internal Revenue Service as a tax-exempt organization under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, Tax ID Number 24-0795385. All contributions to The Bach Choir are tax-deductible to the fullest extent of the law. The official registration and financial information for the Bach Choir of Bethlehem may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling, toll-free, within Pennsylvania, 1-800-732-0999.