JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Magnificat, BWV 243 Cantata 140-Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme





DIANE HIGGINBOTHAM, soprano JACQUELINE PIERCE, mezzo-soprano WILLIAM HAYS, continuo organ

GENE TUCKER, tenor DANIEL PRATT, baritone MARK SHUMAN, continuo cello

THE HOLY TRINITY BACH CHOIR AND ORCHESTRA

FREDERICK GRIMES, Director · NANCIANNE PARRELLA, Assistant Director

BACH VESPERS AT HOLY TRINITY

Since 1904, when Holy Trinity opened its doors for worship in the present location, the congregation has been interested in good music. For many years, Holy Trinity participated in the fashionable practice of presenting oratorios and other large scale choral works with organ accompaniment. While these oratorios were a great contribution to the musical life of the city, they were not necessarily any more outstanding than those given each week in any one of a dozen or more churches in Manhattan.

By 1968, when Holy Trinity was to celebrate its 100th anniversary as a congregation, there seemed to be a need for a music program that offered something more individual, something specifically Lutheran. The answer was obvious—Bach. The cantatas were an immediate success, attracting large crowds even from the first.

This was the first time in America that Bach cantatas had been presented on a regular basis as part of religious services on the appropriate days of the church year for which they were written. Bach, as cantor of St. Thomas Church (Lutheran) in Leipzig from 1723 to 1750, was responsible for preparing a cantata for each Sunday based on the Gospel lesson of the day.

The Bach program has continued to grow each season until now in the Thirteenth Season it is often impossible to find a seat (even on the floor!) for the Sunday afternoon services.

MAGNIFICAT (BWV 243)

Johann Sebastian Bach's Magnificat (BWV 243a and BWV 243) exists in two versions. The earliest (BWV 243a), rarely performed today, was probably written for and first performed on Christmas Day 1723, Bach's first Christmas in Leipzig. That version, in E-flat, contained not only the twelve movements into which the Magnificat is normally divided, but four additional movements using non-liturgical Christmas texts. The composer later revised the work into the form presented here (BWV 243). The exact date of the new version is not known, but it was almost certainly before 1736. The year 1733, the date of the Mass in b minor (BWV 232), has been proposed as a possibility because of the similarity of the treatment of the oboes in the two works.

BWV 243 contains few, but significant, changes from BWV 243a. The key was lowered a half-step to D major, probably to allow the use of D trumpets, then more common than E-flat instruments; two flutes were added to the instrumentation; the four non-liturgical movements were removed, possibly because the composer did not wish to restrict the work to Christmas and because he wished it to be available for performance in Roman Catholic services as well as Protestant; and changes were made in the orchestration of certain movements.

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THE HOLY TRINITY BACH CHOIR

Soprano:
Pamela Coburn
Cynthia Richards Hewes
Diane Higginbotham*
Joyce McDonald
Suzan Pratt
Martha Scoppa*

Alto:
Rose Anderson
Carol Baker
Evelyn A. Flory
Jacqueline Pierce*

Tenor:
Scott Breiner
David Britton
Robert Collett
Stephen Endress
Gene Tucker*

Bass:
Daniel N. Colburn
James Neal
Daniel Pratt*
Neil Raber

*Soloists

THE HOLY TRINITY BACH ORCHESTRA

Trumpet:
Norman Smith
Paul Randall
Lee Soper
Timpani:

impani: Fred Hauptmann Flute:
Marianne Weaver
Susan Hyman
Oboe and Oboe d'amore:
Mark Hill
Stephen Taylor

English Horn:
Marc Schachman
Violin:
Suzanne Ornstein
Eriko Sato
Viola:
Margaret Middleton

Cello:
Mark Shuman
Double Bass:
Andrée Brière
Organ:
William Hays
Nancianne Parrella

SIDE 2

Cantata 140 – Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme

Chorus 2. Recitative 3. Duet
 Chorale 5. Recitative
 Duet 7. Chorale

The text of the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), unlike that of much of Bach's church music, does not lend itself to a setting similar to an operatic scene. Bach, nonetheless, took his usual care to compose music reflecting the meaning of the individual words and phrases. The music of the first two movements, Magnificat and Et exultavit, demonstrates the joy and exuberance inherent in the text. The third movement accordingly becomes introspective. Note that humilitatem ("lowliness") is always set to a descending melodic scale. The choir reenters suddenly with the fourth movement, Omnes generationes, because many voices are needed for "all generations" to call the Virgin blessed. The

SIDE 1

Magnificat, BWV 243

1. Chorus 2. Aria 3. Aria 4. Chorus 5. Aria 6. Duet 7. Chorus 8. Aria

9. Aria 10. Trio (Martha Scoppa, second soprano) 11. Chorus 12. Chorus

fifth movement, Quia fecit, is no doubt set as a solo with little accompaniment to display the power of the one true God who needs no assistance. Et misericordia is set as a pastorale accompanied by flutes to illustrate the mercy and concern of God, The Good Shepherd. The chorus and the trumpets appear again in Fecit potentiam to represent the power of God's arm. The sudden break and its ensuing silence near the end of the movement "scatters the proud," while the grandiose final eight measures very likely show the pomposity in the hearts of the proud and haughty. The eighth movement, Deposuit, with its rapid descending scale passages, depicts the mighty being thrown down.

Flutes, the traditional instruments of shepherds who feed their flocks, are used in Esurientes to "feed the hungry with good things;" the abrupt ending of the movement with a solitary final note sends the rich away empty. The tenth movement, Suscepit Israel, is the only movement of the work to use borrowed thematic material. There, the oboes play, in long note values, the ninth Psalm tone, a commonly used setting for the Magnificat in eighteenth-century Germany. The numbers of the choruses are once more necessary to represent the seed of Abraham in Sicut locutus est, and rejoicing is easily heard in the Gloria Patri. The work concludes with a restatement of the opening theme of the first movement, thus closing the circle, that perfect geometrical figure so appropriate to show the perfection of the Holy Trinity.

CANTATA 140 – WACHET AUF, RUFT UNS DIE STIMME

Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme (BWV 140) was first performed on the twenty-seventh Sunday after Trinity, November 25, 1731, and was probably composed only a few days prior. Its late date is explained by the fact that there were twenty-seven Sundays after Trinity only twice while Bach was in Leipzig, 1731 and 1742. The composer assigned the work to his cycle of chorale cantatas, most of which had been composed in 1724-1725. The gospel for Trinity 27 is Matthew 25:1-13, the parable of the wise and foolish virgins. The unknown librettist, therefore, chose Philipp Nicolai's chorale of 1599, Wachet auf, with its obvious imagery of a wedding, as the text for the first, fourth, and final movements. Free poetry, much of it referring to passages in Song of Solomon, forms the text of the remaining movements. The composer set the first movement as a chorale fantasia using the chorale tune in the soprano. The second movement, a secco recitative for tenor, announces the approach of the bridegroom. The third movement is a duet wherein the bride (the Christian soul) welcomes her bridegroom (Christ). The fourth movement again uses the chorale tune with its second stanza of text. This movement was later transcribed by the composer as an organ solo and published as one of the six Schübler Chorales. In the fifth movement, a recitative for bass, the bridegroom assures the bride of his concern and protection. Because the bridegroom represents Christ, Bach set this recitative with an accompaniment of strings, a technique he had used only a few years earlier in the St. Matthew Passion and which has been likened by some to a musical halo. The sixth movement is a duet of rejoicing between the wedding couple, and the work closes with a simple statement of the final stanza of the chorale.

Notes by William Hays

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