

# CHRISTMAS ORATORIO

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2003 – 3:00 PM  
MEANY HALL – UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

Jennifer Driscoll-Holmes, soprano  
Kathryn Weld, mezzo-soprano  
Stephen Wall, tenor  
Brian Box, baritone  
ORCHESTRA SEATTLE  
SEATTLE CHAMBER SINGERS  
George Shangrow, conductor

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685-1750)  
*Christmas Oratorio, BWV 248*

## Part One (Cantata for the First Day of Christmas)

Chorus: "Jauchzet, frohlocket!"

Recitative: "Es begab sich aber zu der Zeit"

Recitative: "Nun wird mein liebster Bräutigam"

Aria: "Bereite dich, Zion"

Chorale: "Wie soll ich dich empfangen"

Recitative: "Und sie gebar ihren ersten Sohn"

Chorale: "Er ist auf Erden"

Aria: "Großer Herr, o starker König"

Chorale: "Ach mein herzliebes"

## Part Two (Cantata for the Second Day of Christmas)

Sinfonia

Recitative: "Und es waren Hirten"

Chorale: "Brich an, o schönes Morgenlicht"

Recitative: "Und der Engel sprach zu ihnen"

Recitative: "Was Gott dem Abraham verheißen"

Aria: "Frohe Hirten, eilt, ach eilet"

Recitative: "Und das habt zum Zeichen"

Chorale: "Schaut hin, dort liegt im finstern Stall"

Recitative: "So geht denn hin, ihr Hirten, geht"

Aria: "Schlafe, mein Liebster, genieße der Ruh"

Recitative: "Und alsobald war"

Chorus: "Ehre sei Gott in der Höhe"

Recitative: "So recht, ihr Engel"

Chorale: "Wir singen dir"

## Part Three (Cantata for the Third Day of Christmas)

Chorus: "Herrscher des Himmels"

Recitative: "Und da die Engel von ihnen"

Chorus: "Lasset uns nun gehen"

Recitative: "Er hat sein Volk getröst"

Chorale: "Dies hat er alles uns getan"

Duet: "Herr, dein Mitleid, dein Erbarmen"

Recitative: "Und sie kamen eilend"

Aria: "Schließe, mein Herze"

Recitative: "Ja, ja, mein Herz"

Chorale: "Ich will dich mit Fleiß bewahren"

Recitative: "Und die Hirten"

Chorale: "Seid froh dieweil"

Chorus: "Herrscher des Himmels"

– Intermission –

## Part Four (Cantata for New Year's Day)

Chorus: "Fallt mit Danken"

Recitative: "Und da acht Tage um waren"

Recitative: "Immanuel, o süßes Wort!"

Aria: "Flößt, mein Heiland"

Recitative: "Wohlan, dein Name soll allein"

Aria: "Ich will nur dir zu Ehren leben"

Chorale: "Jesus richte mein Beginnen"

## Part Five (Cantata for Sunday after New Year's Day)

Chorus: "Ehre sei dir, Gott, gesungen"

Recitative: "Da Jesus geboren war zu Bethlehem"

Chorus: "Wo ist der neugebome König der Juden"

Chorale: "Dein Glanz all Finsternis verzehrt"

Aria: "Erleucht auch meine finstre Sinnen"

Recitative: "Da das der König Herodes hörte"

Recitative: "Warum wollt ihr erschrecken?"

Recitative: "Und ließ versammeln"

Trio: "Ach, wenn wird die Zeit erscheinen?"

Recitative: "Mein Liebster herrschet schon"

Chorale: "Zwar ist solche Herzensstube"

## Part Six (Cantata for Epiphany)

Chorus: "Herr, wenn die stolzen Feinde schnauben"

Recitative: "Da berief Herodes die Weisen"

Recitative: "Du Falscher, suche nur den Herrn"

Aria: "Nur ein Wink von seinen Händen"

Recitative: "Als sie nun den König gehöret hatten"

Chorale: "Ich steh an deiner Krippen hier"

Recitative: "Und Gott befahl ihnen im Traum"

Recitative: "So geht!"

Aria: "Nun mögt ihr stolzen Feinde"

Recitative: "Was will der Höllen"

Chorale: "Nun seid ihr wohl gerochen"

Please disconnect signal watches, pagers and cellular telephones. Thank you.  
Use of cameras and recording equipment is not permitted in the concert hall.

**JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH**  
**Christmas Oratorio, BWV 248**

*Bach was born in Eisenach, Germany, on March 21, 1685, and died in Leipzig on July 28, 1750. Bach composed his Christmas Oratorio in 1734, drawing upon music previously used in earlier secular cantatas. The composer led the first performances in Leipzig between Christmas Day and the Feast of the Epiphany in December of 1734 and January of 1735. In addition to vocal soloists and chorus, the six cantatas that comprise the oratorio call for various combinations of two flutes, four oboes (four doubling oboe d'amore, two doubling English horn), bassoon, two horns, three trumpets, timpani, strings and continuo.*

For hundreds of years, Western Christianity celebrated the birth of Jesus and the events surrounding it not with a single feast day, but with a number of special commemorations occurring on various days between December 25 (Christmas Day) and January 6 (Epiphany, the celebration of the coming of the Three Kings). Imagine participating in six celebrations of six different events on six different days: First, the birth of the Christ Child (December 25), then the announcement of the birth to the shepherds by a host of angels (the 26th), the adoration of the baby by the shepherds (the 27th), the circumcision and naming of Jesus (New Year's Day), the coming of the Wise Men from the East (Sunday after New Year's Day), and finally the Magi's worship of the Holy Child (January 6). On each of these days, you enjoy a cantata by Johann Sebastian Bach that recounts one of these stories and comments and reflects upon the events and their meanings for the Christian. Now contract these six days and six cantata performances into a single presentation, on a single afternoon, of the chief events of the Christmas Story and their accompanying interpretative meditations, and you have Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* as you will hear it today. Let it introduce you to and prepare you for the rapidly approaching season of Christmastide, and lead you, as you listen, to ask yourself: "How does the Christmas story end?"

Johann Sebastian Bach was born in 1685 in Eisenach, Germany, into a family that had produced church and town-band musicians for over 150 years. Orphaned at ten, he was raised by an older brother who was an organist, and who taught young Sebastian music. The boy was endlessly curious about every aspect of the art: "I had to work hard," he said; "Anyone who works as hard will get just as far."

Bach began his professional career at 18, when he was appointed organist at a church in Arnstadt. At 23, he became court organist and chamber musician to the Duke of Weimar. During his nine years in this post (1708-1717), he gained fame as an organ virtuoso and composer. From 1717 to 1723, Bach served the Prince of Anhalt-Cöthen, producing suites, concertos, sonatas for various instruments, a great amount of keyboard music, and the six Brandenburg Concertos. Maria Barbara, Bach's wife and the mother of his seven children, died in 1720, and the composer soon married Anna Magdalena, a young singer who proved to be a loyal and understanding wife, and who provided her mate with thirteen more children.

When he was 38, Bach took the position of Cantor of St. Thomas' in Leipzig, one of the most important musical posts in Germany. He taught at the choir school, which trained the choristers of the city's chief churches (he had to teach non-musical subjects as well); he also served as music director, composer, choirmaster, and organist of St. Thomas' Church. In this post, which he held for the rest of his life, Bach produced monumental musical masterworks, including the *Christmas Oratorio*, the *St. Matthew Passion*, the Mass in B Minor, *The Musical Offering*, and *The Art of the Fugue*, though he was occupied by the cares of his large family and circle of friends, the tasks of a very busy professional life, and ongoing struggles with the officials of town, school, and church who never recognized that they were dealing with perhaps the greatest musical genius ever born. Though the composer described himself as living "amidst continual vexation, envy, and persecution . . ." he remained in Leipzig for 27 years. At last, his eyesight failed, and he suffered a stroke followed by a raging fever. He died July 28, 1750, leaving only a very modest material estate, but bequeathing us a wondrous wealth of musical treasures of which this work is a particularly glittering example.

The *Christmas Oratorio* was completed around Christmastime in 1734 when Bach was 49. The work is not an oratorio in the usual sense of being a single work based on a dramatic story from the Bible. It consists instead of a series of lyrical meditations, unified by recitatives that tell the Christmas story as it appears in the books of Matthew and Luke (the writer/compiler of the text remains unknown). The oratorio was never performed under Bach's direction as you hear it today—as a whole and at one time—but in six individual parts, as described above. To this composition, Bach transferred almost completely the greater part of the choruses and arias of two secular cantatas, *The Choice of Hercules* and *Sound, Ye Timpani, Ring Out, Trumpets*, written in 1733, the year before the *Christmas Oratorio* was compiled. In this way, he preserved the best numbers of these ephemeral secular cantatas and assured their annual performance within the framework of the church year. Bach's ability to create a new and beautifully unified work of art out of existing "occasional" compositions is truly remarkable!

Throughout the oratorio, the texts from the New Testament are narrated in recitative style by the solo tenor "Evangelist" with continuo (cello and keyboard) accompaniment. The words of individual persons are generally presented by soloists, while those of a group are given to the chorus. The Biblical texts are intermingled with a wonderful variety of pieces: orchestrally accompanied choruses, diversely arranged chorales (mostly familiar Christmas hymns), vocal ensemble numbers (several duets, a trio, and a fugal recitative for quartet), an "echo aria" for soprano, echoing soprano, and oboe, and an amazing assortment of solo arias and recitative-like arioso settings of poetic texts that reflect or comment on the narratives. Nearly all of the six sections begin with a brilliant introductory chorus in a dance-like

Born in England, soprano **JENNIFER DRISCOLL-HOLMES** now resides in British Columbia, where she is an active soloist and teacher. A graduate of the University of British Columbia, she is a student of renowned teacher William Eddy. Miss Driscoll-Holmes is heard frequently in B.C. and in Washington State, receiving particular acclaim for her performances of major oratorios and orchestral repertoire. She has appeared as featured soloist with the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra Seattle and the Seattle Chamber Singers, the Vancouver Bach Choir, Seattle Choral Company and many others, and has been heard nationally in Canada on CBC radio. In January 2003, on the invitation of Ionian University, she traveled to Greece to perform two solo recitals, for which she received glowing reviews, and to conduct a series of master classes. With mezzo-soprano Carolyn Maia, she has made a critically acclaimed CD of Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater* and Baroque vocal duets with Orchestra Seattle under the direction of George Shangrow. This led to the formation of the Sutton Duo and many performances on both sides of the border and in England. Miss Driscoll-Holmes has just completed a five-concert series with the Vancouver Welsh Men's Choir, in a return appearance as featured soloist. In the New Year, she will be performing with Miss Maia in a recital series in Washington State, and together they will sing the world premiere performance of *Green Scythe*, an opera written for them by Mary Rhoads and Sally Mann.

Mezzo-soprano **KATHRYN WELD** has made a name for herself as a gifted and versatile concert singer. As an early music specialist, she has been a featured soloist with such ensembles as the Philharmonia Baroque, under the direction of Nicholas McGegan, Music at St. John's in New York, the Magnificat Baroque Orchestra in San Francisco, and the Portland Baroque Orchestra, with whom she was heard in a live NPR broadcast of *Messiah*. Ms. Weld made her Carnegie Hall debut to critical acclaim in a performance of Bach's Mass in B minor. She has also made two solo appearances with the New York Philharmonic, one with Charles Dutoit conducting de Falla's *Three-Cornered Hat*, and the other under Kurt

Masur's baton in *Peer Gynt*. In Munich, she appeared as a soloist with the Bayerischen Rundfunkchor (Bavarian Radio Choir), the Consortium Musicum of Munich, and the Munich Baroque Orchestra, among others. In the Northwest, she has also appeared with the Oregon Symphony, the Northwest Chamber Orchestra, Seattle Pro Musica, and many others, including numerous performances with OSSCS.

Tenor **STEPHEN WALL** has appeared frequently with Orchestra Seattle and the Seattle Chamber Singers since 1985. He has been featured in leading and supporting roles with Seattle Opera, Portland Opera, Utah Festival Opera, and Tacoma Opera, and has soloed with the symphonies of Seattle, Vancouver, Spokane, Everett, Bellevue, Yakima, Pendleton, Great Falls and Sapporo (Japan). Mr. Wall appears on the OSSCS recording of Handel's *Messiah* and will sing roles in Seattle Opera's forthcoming productions of *Ariadne auf Naxos* and *La Fanciulla del West*.

A native of Washington, baritone **BRIAN BOX** received his Master's degree in vocal performance from Western Washington University in 1985. Mr. Box performs frequently with many Northwest ensembles, including OSSCS, Seattle Choral Company, Seattle Pro Musica, Bellevue Chamber Chorus, and Choir of the Sound, and has performed with Rudolf Nureyev, singing Mahler's *Songs of a Wayfarer* to Mr. Nureyev's dance. He has collaborated with OSSCS in such works as Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, *St. John Passion*, and *Christmas Oratorio*, the world premieres of Huntley Beyer's *St. Mark Passion* and *The Mass of Life and Death*, and is featured on the OSSCS recording of Handel's *Messiah*. The regional winner of San Francisco Opera's 1988 Merola Opera Program, he made his Seattle Opera debut as the Corporal in Donizetti's *Daughter of the Regiment*. For Tacoma Opera, Mr. Box created the role of Franz in Carol Sams' *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*. He has also performed extensively with Seattle Opera's education program and Northwest Operas in the Schools.

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