

Orchestra Seattle and Seattle Chamber Singers

George Shangrow, Music Director

present

A Baroque Christmas

Magnificat Primo
-Claudio Monteverdi

Magnificat
-Antonio Vivaldi

Magnificat
Et exsultavit
Et misericordia
Fecit potentiam
Esurientes
Suscepit Israel
Sicut locutus
Gloria

Intermission

Magnificat
-Johann Sebastian Bach

Magnificat
Et exsultavit
Quia respexit — Omnes generationes
Quia fecit mihi magna
Et misericordia
Fecit potentiam
Deposuit
Esurientes
Suscepit Israel
Sicut locutus
Gloria

Friday, December 6, 1991, 8:00pm
Sunday, December 8, 1991 3:00p.m.
University Unitarian Church, Seattle, Washington

Saturday, December 7, 1991, 8:00pm
St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Mount Vernon, Washington

This concert is sponsored by
Classic KING-FM 98.1

Text Translation

Magnificat anima mea Dominum

Et exsultavit spiritus meus in Deo salutari meo

Quia respexit humilitatem ancillae suae: ecce enim
ex hoc beatam me dicent omnes generationes

Quia fecit mihi magna qui potens est, et sanctum
nomen eius

Et misericordia a progenie in progenies timentibus
eum

Fecit potentiam in brachio suo: dispersit superbos
mente cordis sui

Deposuit potentes de sede et exaltavit humiles

Esurientes implevit bonis, et divites dimisit inanes

Suscepit Israel puerum suum, recordatus
misericordiae suae

Sit locutus est ad patres nostros Abraham et semini
eius in saecula

Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto. Sicut erat in
principio, et nunc, et semper, et in saecula
saeculorum. Amen

My soul doth magnify the Lord

And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour

For he hath regarded the humility of his handmaid:
for behold, from henceforth all generations shall call
me blessed

For He that is mighty hath magnified me, and holy is
His name

And his mercy is from generation to generation on
them that fear Him

He hath shown strength in His arm: He hath scat-
tered the proud in the imagination of their hearts

He hath put down the mighty from their seat and
hath exalted the humble

He hath filled the hungry with good things and the
rich He hath sent away empty

He hath holpen His servant Israel, remembering His
mercy

As He spake to our forefathers, to Abraham and his
seed forever

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the
Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now and
ever shall be, world without end. Amen

OrchestraSeattle and Seattle Chamber Singers

George Shangrow Music Director

Messiah

With the George Shangrow Chorale

Soloists

Catherine Haight, soprano Sara Hedgpeth, mezzo
Stephen Wall, tenor Brian Box, bass

Dec 18, 20, 23, 8:00 pm Dec 22, 3:00 pm

First Free Methodist Church, SPU Campus, Queen Anne

Tickets \$12/\$10

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Program Notes

by
Reverend Dr. Rebecca Parker

Among the many delights of Bach's music is the brilliant way in which Bach gives musical expression to a religious sensibility. As an interpreter of the themes of Christian theology Bach goes beyond the illustrative drama we enjoy in Handel, to become a profound commentator on the meaning of the texts he sets. The subtlety and sensitivity of Bach's religious insight transcends dogmatism — his music is not a vehicle to give expression to a truth higher than art. In his work we find a perfect integration of belief and aesthetic, so much so that we might say in Bach's music it is revealed that belief itself is an aesthetic, a way of feeling and structuring the world that is simultaneously intellectual, emotional, and sensual.

In this capacity to create a highly integrated icon of structures of religious feeling Bach stands at the pinnacle of tradition. Luther, the theologian whose rebellious exuberance inaugurated the reformed tradition Bach was part of, was a great lover of music, who composed hymn tunes in between his battles with the Catholic church.

"God has preached the gospel through music, too, as may be seen in Josquin, all of whose compositions flow freely, gently, and cheerfully, are not forced or cramped by rules, and are like the song of the finch," Luther is reported to have said. The protestant spirit is in favor of freedom and cheer (at least in its natal innocence) hostile to constrictive rules. Luther's family and friends often gathered to sing, and Josquin des Prez (d. 1521) was a particular favorite. It is Luther to whom traditionally the saying has been ascribed:

He who loves not women, wine, and song

Remains a fool his whole life long.

The theological understanding of music attributed to music the power to shape the state of the soul. Thus joyful music created a joyful soul. If music were inelegant, corrupt, unintegrated, dogmatic, restrictive, these unpleasant qualities would pollute the soul exposed to the music.

Augustine argues that music has the power to create in the soul a state of grace or a state of corruption depending on whether or not it embodies rhythms and structures of wholeness or disruption. Bach was well acquainted with these theories of music, and appears to have been quite

interested in them, judging by the books in his library. Among his books was one by a contemporary physician who translated the theological notion to physiology. He contended that the body's cardio-vascular system was a network of vibrations. If the body's internal rhythms were out of sorts a person would be ill. Health was restored when the body's blood vessel vibrated in harmony. Music, this physician believed, had the power to heal the body. An appreciation of Bach's music is deepened when we understand that he composed from a perspective that understood music to have the power to make the sick well, and to bring souls into a state of grace.

Bach's setting of the Magnificat text gives evidence of Bach's ability to embody the meaning of grace, and to create music that functions to impart grace to the listener. The Magnificat text is the canticle sung by Mary in the Gospel according to Luke at the moment when she greets her kinswoman Elizabeth. Each woman — one old, past the age of child bearing, and one young, and virginal — is expecting to give birth to a child who could not possibly be. The women, like certain foremothers before them, Hannah and Sarah, who also gave birth when it was impossible for them to do so, are caretakers of a mysterious knowledge. Their knowledge is that the impossible can and does happen. Mary, on discovering she is pregnant goes to visit Elizabeth who also has conceived. When Elizabeth sees Mary, the babe she is carrying leaps for joy in her womb, and Mary responds with her song of joy.

The Magnificat text celebrates the way in which God turns the world upside-down. Its recurring theme is that the Divine conspires to reverse the ordinary established structure, to disrupt the flow of determinism and fate, and to inaugurate surprising transformations. The powerless become powerful, and the powerful are debased. The hungry have a feast and the rich find themselves empty-handed. All that is considered unimportant, useless, or degraded becomes the locus of supreme value. As women they experienced themselves to be outcasts from society. The mysterious secret they bear is that they are not outcasts at all, but co-conspirators with the Divine Disrupter.

Bach's Magnificat was first performed on Christmas Day, 1723, during evening

Vespers. The music celebrates the cosmic reversal that Christmas commemorates. The all-powerful, supreme, transcendent God has abandoned heaven in favor of earth. The King of the Universe abnegates the throne in order to materialize as a helpless infant wondered at by animals, peasants, and incomprehensible to all but the powerless, rejected, and disenfranchised. The Christian vision is essentially a comic notion: that nothing is the way we expect it to be. Bach's music carries this theme.

The opening chorus is buoyant, exuberant, and celebratory, and is followed by a warmer, more intimately gracious aria which leads into a third movement that is even more interior, dark. The descent of God to earth is thus, perhaps, musically symbolized as a movement into depth. One can imaginatively superimpose the brilliant choir of angels singing to the shepherds over the opening chorus which comes to the ear like a burst of light, and the subsequent journey of the shepherds to kneel in the dark interior of the barn is echoed by the movement to closeness and intimacy that happens in the music.

Bach's setting of the third movement text, "For God has regarded the oppressed state of his (sic) servant, and henceforth I will be called blessed by all generations," is particularly marvelous. All but the last two words are sung by solo soprano in a beautiful melody intertwined with the oboe d'amore. On the last two words (omnes generationes—all generations) the chorus enters becoming the many generations lauding Mary. One can almost visualize the flowering growth of a family tree as each entrance climbs up step-wise, over and over again. The dramatic reversal of Mary from solitary obscurity to communal reverence is thus celebrated with musical power.

The fourth movement gives expression to profound confidence and trust. The only aria to use a bass soloist, the music embodies a feeling of being "grounded." The foundation accompaniment in the cello and double-bass functions as a ground bass as its ritornello theme is repeated throughout the movement, evoking a sense of security.

Bach sets the text "and his (sic) mercy is from generation unto generation to them that fear him" by emphasizing the contrast between fear and mercy. When the singers sing "timentibus" the music is harmonically

Program Notes

Continued

confused. But the tremulousness is followed by melodic consolation from the strings and flutes.

Movements six, seven, and eight form a thematic unit, at the center of the whole Magnificat. Here the Christmas theme of the dramatic reversals effected by God are given their most obvious and marvelous treatment in the text and the music. The Chorus enters to sing "He has shown strength in His arm" with a fist clenching theme. When the proud are scattered Bach disperses the "dispersit" between different sections of the chorus and orchestra creating a musical image of disjunction. The movement comes to a climax and then is dramatically closed with a sudden adagio setting of the words "the imagination of their hearts." In this way the music caricatures the proud as supremely pompous. The sound puffs up with great dignity, but the listener is well-advised to recollect that pride cometh before a fall.

The tenor aria presents just this sentiment as the words "he hath put down the mighty from their seat and hath exalted the humble" are sung. The music sweeps downwards as the powerful are dumped out of their thrones, and leaps upwards with the word exaltavit and rests low and still on the words "humiles" (humble).

The fall of the proud and powerful is complete in movement eight. Pomposity has disappeared. The humble poor amble into view, with a foolishly cheerful theme played by pizzicato cellos and flutes. All that is humble, ordinary, and usually forgotten is here displayed as triumphant. Bach's comprehension of the comedy of the Gospels is nowhere else so brilliantly portrayed. Death, darkness, the Roman empire, papal impudence, and all forms of false power are vanquished. The homey prevails. The Zen-like conclusion to this movement tells you what happened to the rich.

The text to the Trio movement nine speaks of God's faithful remembrance of God's promises. Bach evokes the meaning of memory by having the oboes in the background of the singers play slowly an old German Magnificat chant. As the singers sing, their song is haunted by the ancient voices of those who sang before.

Finally the Magnificat comes to a conclusion with grand choruses. The fugal

setting of "As he spake to our forefathers..." continues the evocation of the ancestors who made their appearance in movement nine. The Gloria recalls us to the brilliant sounds of the opening movement. Florid coloratura phrases twists into homophonic acclamations. The words of the Great Thanksgiving prayer that precede the singing of the Sanctus come to mind: "joining our voices with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven who forever sing this unending hymn of praise."

After musically making present past generations, future generations, and the choir of angels, Bach concludes the Magnificat by repeating the music of the opening chorus when the words are sung "as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen." All voices past, present, future, on heaven, and on earth are joined where we began, with praise.

Bach might have enjoyed an epilogue from T. S. Eliot:

"The end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time."

Or, if Bach didn't care for that sentiment, at least he would have liked another line from Eliot,

"You are the music, while the music lasts."



Rev. Dr. Rebecca Parker performed as a cellist in Orchestra Seattle for over ten years, since the second year of its founding. She is currently President of Starr King School for the Ministry, a graduate theological school in the Unitarian denomination located in Berkeley, California.

Antonio Vivaldi

The 20th Century's admiration for Vivaldi has resulted in the extensive cataloguing of huge collections of manuscripts in various European libraries; yet little is known of the man himself. His birth is usually given as an uncertain date between 1675 and

1678. He was the son and pupil of Giovanni Battista Vivaldi, a violinist at San Marco in Venice. He entered the priesthood and, because of his flaming red hair, was dubbed "the Red Priest." Ill health curtailed much of his physical activity, and after the first year, he no longer said mass. In 1703 he was engaged as teacher at the *Seminario musicale dell'Ospitale della Pietà* in Venice, and from 1709 until 1740 held the position of *maestro de' concerti* there. Shortly before his death, he went to Vienna, where he was unsuccessful in an attempt to gain favor with the court of Charles VI, and in 1741 he ended his days there in poverty.

Vivaldi left us 447 concerti for an amazing variety of soloists and combinations of instruments, and some 150 other instrumental works. Apart from his frequently performed *Gloria* and occasional editions made from manuscript, Vivaldi's vocal music is still almost unknown. It includes some 44 operas and 28 secular cantatas, and about 30 pieces of church music, mostly still unperformed in our time. His *Magnificat* hints at the beauty that may yet be heard.

Claudio Monteverdi

Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643) was a giant of music who has been compared to Michelangelo, Wagner, and Verdi. He stands at the junction of two important eras in the history of music: the end of the golden age of Renaissance polyphony, and the rise of opera and early Baroque music. Born in Cremona, the son of a doctor, Monteverdi entered the cathedral at an early age as choirboy, and became the pupil of the celebrated Ingegneri. At the age of 16 he published a book of sacred madrigals; at 22 he entered the service of the Duke of Mantua as a musician.

From 1602 until his move to Venice 11 years later on the death of the Duke, Monteverdi was *maestro de capella*, responsible for all the music at the Mantuan court. During these years Monteverdi composed some of his finest works, including two books of madrigals and the operas *Orfeo* and *Arianna*. In 1610 he published some sacred compositions, including the *Vespers* from which this *Magnificat* is taken.

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