

FIREWORKS!

SUNDAY, MAY 14, 2006 — Mother's Day — 3:00 PM
TOWN HALL

ORCHESTRA SEATTLE
SEATTLE CHAMBER SINGERS
George Shangrow, conductor

GEORG FRIDERIC HANDEL (1685–1759)
Music for the Royal Fireworks, HWV 351

Ouverture: Adagio—Allegro
Bourrée
La Paix
La Réjouissance
Menuet I—Menuet II

CARL PHILIP EMMANUEL BACH (1714–1788)
Symphony in D Major, W. 183 No. 1

Allegro di molto
Largo
Presto

– Intermission –

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685–1750)
Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied, BWV 225

Coro
Aria (with chorale)
Lobet den Herrn—Cori unisoni

ROBERT KECHLEY (1952*)
Running Passages (for 23 solo instruments)

March—Encounters on the Run
Breather
Fun Run

WORLD PREMIERE

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GEORG FRIDERIC HANDEL***Music for the Royal Fireworks*, HWV 351**

Handel was born in Halle, Germany, on February 23, 1685, and died in London on April 14, 1759. He composed this work in early 1749; its official premiere took place in London on April 14 of that year. The version most often performed calls for 3 oboes, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 3 horns, 3 trumpets, timpani, harpsichord and strings.

The treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, signed on October 18, 1748, ended the War of Austrian Succession, which had begun in 1740 and within a year had involved most of the powers in Europe. To celebrate the end of hostilities, King George II of England planned a festive evening the following April in London's Green Park, to feature music specially written for the occasion, followed by a massive fireworks display.

George II was the king who purportedly began the tradition of standing during the "Halleluiahs Chorus" of Handel's oratorio *Messiah*, and it was to this composer whom he turned to create music for the outdoor festivities. Handel immediately acquiesced and even gave in to the monarch's edict not to include any stringed instruments in his orchestra, assembling a massive band of double reed instruments, brass and percussion.

Handel's work begins with a grand overture in the French style, with a slow, regal introduction leading to a vigorous fugal allegro in triple meter, all in glorious D major. There follows a suite of shorter dances: a *bourrée* in D minor, a movement celebrating "the peace" and another the "rejoicing" made possible by the treaty. The work concludes with a pair of minuets, the first in D minor and the second providing a resounding conclusion in D major.

Handel resisted a public dress rehearsal, but the occasion turned out to be a great success: an estimated 12,000 people flocked to Spring Gardens at Vauxhall, causing one of London's first traffic jams when carriages bottlenecked at London Bridge. At the official premiere, Handel's music was overshadowed by the subsequent fireworks display, in which one of the adjoining pavilions caught fire. The composer conducted the work's first indoor performance—for which Handel rescored the work to include strings—on May 27, 1749 at Thomas Coram's Foundling Hospital.

CARL PHILIPP EMANUEL BACH***Symphony in D Major*, W. 183 No. 1**

C.P.E. Bach was born at Weimar on March 8, 1714 and died in Hamburg on December 14, 1788. This symphony was one of four composed in 1775 and 1776 and published as a set in 1780; the exact circumstances of its first performance is unknown. The score calls for pairs of flutes, oboes and horns, one bassoon (with an ad libitum part for second bassoon), harpsichord and strings.

The fifth of six children of J. S. Bach and his first wife, Maria Barbara Bach, Emanuel (as he came to be known) attended St. Thomas' School in Leipzig (where his father was Cantor) and later studied law at the University of Frankfurt-an-der-Oder. After graduation, however, he became employed as a musician for Crown Prince Frederick (later Frederick the

Great) of Prussia. After nearly 30 years, the king gave Emanuel Bach permission to succeed his godfather, Georg Philipp Telemann, as director of church music for the city of Hamburg, where the composer remained until his death.

Arguably the most talented—and certainly the most prolific—of Johann Sebastian Bach's children who took up composing as a career, Emanuel produced 52 concertos and 22 Passions, in addition to chamber music, cantatas, oratorios and songs. During his years in Hamburg he also composed several symphonies, including a set of six for strings alone and a set of four that added winds. Of this latter group, the first is the most remarkable, despite its relative brevity. The opening movement, in D major, features asymmetrical 7-bar phrases, unexpected harmonic shifts and humorous pauses. A brief slow movement follows without pause—after a surprising transition to E-flat major: two flutes spin out an aria-like melody over richly orchestrated accompaniment from violas and cellos, with violins providing a pizzicato commentary. The finale, a whirlwind presto in 3/8 time and D major, affords listeners further delightful surprises.

—Jeff Eldridge

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH***Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied*, BWV 225**

Bach was born in Eisenach, Germany, on March 21, 1685, and died in Leipzig on July 28, 1750. The circumstances under which he composed this motet, for double SATB chorus, are unclear.

During the first decade of his service as Cantor of St. Thomas' Church in Leipzig—one of the most important musical posts in Germany—Bach wrote five of his six German motets for special occasions (mostly funerals). In them, Bach employed the same types of texts, derived from chorales and from the Bible, that he used in his early cantatas, which served as his primary models for these compositions. The melodic and harmonic treatment of the voices, the rich polyphonic texture and—most importantly—the prominence of the chorale melodies, can be found in both the motets and the cantatas. The motets were virtually the only vocal compositions by Bach that were never completely forgotten. C. F. Zelter reports in a letter to Goethe how his singers loved to perform the motet *Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied*, and when Mozart heard this work in 1789 in Leipzig, "his whole soul seemed to be in his ears" (Rochlitz). The persistence of these works was due not only to the superb musical qualities of the motets, in which Bach presents—through his consummate treatments—both the biblical messages and their interpretive commentaries with unparalleled power, but also to the deep, unshakable faith shining from them that brought to later generations a spiritual sustenance badly needed during perilous times.

The most monumental, and probably the most technically challenging, of Bach's motets is *Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied* ("Sing to the Lord a new song"), written for double chorus in the fast-slow-fast form characteristic of an instrumental concerto. It might have been written

around 1745 and performed for a New Year's service on January 1, 1746, at which the signing of the Dresden Peace Treaty the previous December was celebrated. Some scholars, however, think that the work was written much earlier (perhaps in 1727) and that it was first performed on May 12 of that year, as part of a birthday celebration for the Elector Friedrich August "The Strong" of Saxony. Unlike earlier composers, Bach does not employ in this work a chorus of higher voices contrasted with one of lower voices, but uses two evenly balanced mixed vocal ensembles, probably made up originally of only one to three singers per part.

The motet's extensive first movement, a thanksgiving song based on the first three verses of Psalm 149, takes the form of a freestyle vocal prelude followed by a fugue. In the "prelude" (*Singet dem Herrn*), the two choirs engage in a dialogue in which the second choir begins by urging, with monosyllabic exclamations, the first choir to sing; the first choir responds with florid musical garlands of rejoicing. The 50-some repetitions of the word "Singet," the vigorous rhythms, and the antiphonal use of the two choirs, give the impression of praises echoing exuberantly throughout the world. As Goethe said of Bach's music, "it is as if the eternal harmony were conversing with itself." These exhortations continue into the beginning of the lengthy fugue subject, *Die Kinder Zion sei'n fröhlich* ("Let the children of Zion be joyful"), which begins in the first choir (with soprano, then alto, then tenor and finally bass entrances). The fugue later begins again with the voices of both choirs, singing together, entering in reverse order (bass, tenor, alto and soprano). The fugue's theme is accompanied at first by a continuation of the musical material that appeared prior to the fugue: the saints, as a community, go on praising God while individual "children of Zion" magnify the Lord with dance, drums and harp. The voices dance joyfully through the long melismas (music featuring many notes per syllable) on the word "Reigen" (dance), and the first movement closes with striking "timpani figures" that emphasize the word "Pauken" (drums).

In the contemplative and comforting middle movement, two musical pieces are sung simultaneously by the two choirs in alternation. The third stanza of Johann Gramann's 1530 chorale, *Nun lob', mein Seel, den Herrn* ("Now bless, my soul, the Lord"), based on Psalm 103, is sung homophonically by the second chorus in a simple harmonization. The opening phrases of this tune bring to mind the well-known melody "Old Hundredth," to which the words of Psalm 100 ("Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow") are often set. The source of the text sung by the first chorus, to a completely different melody and in a more polyphonic texture, remains unknown. Throughout the movement, the individual phrases of the chorale are interrupted by the first chorus, which quotes the first movement and comments on the chorale text.

The jubilant third movement sets the second and sixth verses of Psalm 150. In the opening section of the movement, the choirs of heaven and earth echo one another; in the closing section, the choirs join into a single four-part ensemble for a festive four-voice fugue whose

unusually long theme dances up through the parts from bass to soprano in lively 3/8 time. This energetic fugue resembles the *Pleni sunt coeli* section of Bach's Mass in B Minor, which is also in triple meter and features sixteenth-note melismas. The fugue is clearly divided into 32 + 4 + 40 + 4 + 32 measures, thus creating a symmetrical ABCBA structure, within which "everything that hath breath" praises the Lord.

—Lorelette Knowles

ROBERT KECHLEY *Running Passages*

Robert Kechley was born in Seattle in 1952. Running Passages, which receives its world premiere this afternoon, is the result of a commission by Orchestra Seattle made possible by the City of Seattle Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs. The score calls for a chamber orchestra consisting of 23 solo instrumentalists: flute (doubling piccolo), oboe (doubling English horn), clarinet, alto saxophone, bassoon, contrabassoon, horn, trumpet, trombone, tuba, keyboard (one player doubling on harpsichord and piano), a large percussion battery (performed by a single player), 6 violins, 2 violas, 2 cellos and string bass.

The music of Robert Kechley is familiar to audiences of Orchestra Seattle and the Seattle Chamber Singers through the numerous works of this composer that have been premiered by both ensembles. These range from arrangements of brief folk songs and hymns to major symphonic and choral works, including the delightful Symphony No. 2 ("Ferdinand the Bull"), a setting of Psalm 100 for organ, chorus and orchestra (performed in September of 2000 by OSSCS at Benaroya Hall), a flute concerto (premiered by Jeffrey Cohan and Orchestra Seattle in February 2002), and most recently a trumpet concerto (written for soloist Brian Chin and Orchestra Seattle, who premiered it at Town Hall in May 2004).

Mr. Kechley grew up in Seattle and attended the University of Washington, where he studied harpsichord performance with Sylvia Kind and composition with Kenneth Benshoof, Robert Suderberg, William O. Smith, and others. A member of the Seattle Chamber Singers from the early days of the ensemble, he not only sang in the chorus but played oboe and keyboard. Mr. Kechley currently serves as principal harpsichordist for Orchestra Seattle.

The composer has provided the following note about his newest composition:

Running Passages is loosely based on a jog around Seattle's Green Lake. The music combines a sensation of running with various environmental encounters en route.

The first leg of the run ("Encounters on the Run") is preceded by a little fanfare and march (to get pumped up for the challenge). Then we're off with the exhilarating pleasure of running. The music changes character to portray a variety of personal encounters (graceful rollerbladers, a crazy group of skateboarders, snippets of animated conversation, an elderly troupe of slow-moving bicyclists, etc.).

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The second leg (“Breather”) allows the runners time to cool down and take in the sights and sounds of the environment, letting their minds wander. The music exhibits awareness of the body (heartbeat, breathing) in the context of waves lapping on the shore, wind rustling through the trees, birds singing, even clouds looming. All these images are tinged with darkness as the mind and spirit look deeper within during this respite from physical activity.

The last leg (“Fun Run”) provides an opportunity to have fun running—an emotional burst of speed comes from knowing it’s the home stretch. The music is generally jazzy and playful; the middle section is more easygoing as the runner finds his stride—and then that elusive second wind.

The title of the piece comes from an experience I had recently with my son (he is 15). We were walking on our way to the store and the walk became a playful run—and then a game of chase—and I experienced a rite of passage as I found I could no longer catch him! It needn’t have surprised me since he’s already taller than me and his legs are longer, but I had been so used to thinking of myself as faster than him (like when he was 12 or 13) that it threw me for a loop as I poured on the steam and saw him casually looking back to see if I was still there.

It strikes me that all parents experience this with various activities as they see—with a mixture of pride and remorse—their children surpass them physically and mentally. Truly a rite of passage for me and for him.

—Robert Kechley

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Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied, BWV 225

Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied, Die Gemeine der Heiligen sollen ihn loben. Israel freue sich des, der ihn gemacht hat. Die Kinder Zion sei'n fröhlich über ihrem Könige, Sie sollen loben seinen Namen im Reihen; mit Pauken und mit Harfen sollen sie ihm spielen.

—*Psalms 149:1-3*

Chorale (Chorus II) and
Aria (Chorus I)

Wie sich ein Vater erbarmet
Gott, nimm dich ferner unser an,
Über seine junge Kinderlein,
So tut der Herr uns allen,
So wir ihn kindlich fürchten rein.
Er kennt das arm Gemächte,
Gott weiß, wir sind nur Staub,
Denn ohne dich ist nichts getan
Mit allen unsern Sachen.
Gleichwie das Gras vom Rechen,
Ein Blum und fallend Laub.
Der Wind nur drüber wehet,
So ist es nicht mehr da,
Drum sei du unser Schirm und Licht,
Und trügt uns unsre Hoffnung nicht,
So wirst du's ferner machen.
Also der Mensch vergehet,
Sein End, das ist ihm nah.
Wohl dem, der sich nur steif und fest
Auf dich und deine Huld verlässt.

—*from Nun lob, mein Seel, den Herren,
verse 3 (Johann Gramann, 1530);
interpolated aria by an unknown poet*

Lobet den Herrn in seinen Taten, lobet ihn in seiner großen Herrlichkeit!

—*Psalms 150:2*

Alles, was Odem hat, lobe den Herrn Halleluja!

—*Psalms 150:6*

Sing ye the Lord a new refrain; the assembly of saints should be telling his praises. Israel joyful be in him who hath made him. Let Zion's children rejoice in him who is their mighty king; let them be praising his name's honor in dances; with timbrels and with psalt'ries unto him be playing.

As doth a father mercy show
God, take still further now our part,
To his own little children dear,
So doth the Lord to all men,
If as pure children we him fear.
He sees our feeble powers,
God knows we are but dust;
For, lacking thee, nought shall we gain
Of all these our endeavors.
Just as the grass in mowing,
Or bud and falling leaf,
If wind but o'er it bloweth,
It is no longer there,
So be thou our true shield and light,
And if our hope betray us not,
Thou wilt thus henceforth help us.
E'en so is man's life passing,
His end to him is near.
Blest he whose hope both strong and firm
On thee and on thy grace doth rest.

Praise ye the Lord in all his doings, praise ye him in all his might and majesty!

All things which breath do draw, praise ye the Lord, hallelujah!

German text courtesy of Walter F. Bischof
<http://www.cs.ualberta.ca/~wfb/bach.html>

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