

Queen's Park Singers

Soprano

Catherine Fried, Jenny Garrett, Gillian Hallifax, Jo Hurley, Marianna Hyland, Mary Kavanagh, Susan Kerrison, Barbara Mager, Lucy Mottram, Anna Mumford, Virginie Pappantoniou, Katy Payne, Hannah Robbins, Stella Ruszczynski, Patricia Towey, Frances Wilkinson

Alto

Montserrat Colome, Louise Coopman, Rachel Donnison, Helen Dymond, Frances Freeman, Hinda Golding, Monica Healy, Alicja Kowalczyk, Katherine Lawson, Christine MacLeod, Maria Nowicka, Emma Parsons, Linsay Samii Pour, Stella Refoy, Rachel Robbins, Rebecca Sheridan, Liz Till, Louise Wilkins, Pauline Wong

Tenor

Jay Bannmuller, Colm Doherty, Rupert Gather, Margaret Jackson-Roberts, Glyn Jones, Julie Krausz, Mario Mansilla

Bass

Simon Clark, David Griffiths, Mark Hine, Simon Judge, Jacob Lenson, Jonathan Shinar, Peter Walter, Julian Watts

Piano accompanist Tony Gray

Queen's Park Sinfonia

Violin Jennifer Thorn (Leader), Felicity Forster, Helene Barriere, William Thorp, Clementine Pillai, Tim Ellerby, Ruth Kitching

Viola Maura Presly, Moira Conway

Cello Josie Abbott, Nia Harries

Double Bass Salima Barday

Flute Jak Berry, Kerry-Ann Searle

Oboe and oboe d'amore Nicholas Murray, Judith Roads

Bassoon Emma Selby

Trumpet Owen Bryce, Jonny Abraham, Matthew Hardy

Timpani John Middleton

Keyboard David Podd

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We are very grateful to Father Fergus for permission to use the church, to Joseph Voelker for his assistance with booking accommodation, and to Ruth Kitching for organising the string section of the orchestra.

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Queens Park Singers

J.S. Bach



Christmas Oratorio

Parts 1 and 3, sung in English by Queens Park Singers with

Mary Phillips—soprano

Will Petter—tenor

Virginia Frith—alto

David Till—bass

Queens Park Sinfonia

Directed by Peter Burtt-Jones

J.S. Bach Christmas Oratorio BWV 248 (Parts 1 & 3)

Part 1

CHORUS *Come now with gladness*

RECITATIVE The Evangelist *And it came to pass in those days*

ARIOSO Alto *Behold the Bridegroom, full of grace*

ARIA Alto *Prepare yourself, Zion*

CHORALE *O Lord of all Creation*

RECITATIVE The Evangelist *And she brought forth her first-born son*

RECITATIVE and CHORALE Bass and Choir *Our Lord, who comes to earth below*

ARIA Bass *Mighty Lord, and King of glory*

CHORALE *Ah, dearest Jesus, babe divine*

Part 3

CHORUS *Lord of creation, we lift up our voices*

RECITATIVE The Evangelist *And when the Angels were gone from them into Heaven*

CHORUS *Let us, even now, go to Bethlehem*

RECITATIVE Bass *He comes, the Lord supreme*

CHORALE *Our God hath all these wonders done*

DUET Soprano and Bass *Lord, Thy mercy, Thy compassion*

RECITATIVE The Evangelist *And they came with haste*

ARIA Alto *Keep, O my spirit, this blessing and wonder*

RECITATIVE Alto *Ah, yes! For ever let me cherish those things*

CHORALE *Let me love Thee, King supernal*

RECITATIVE The Evangelist *And the shepherds, after this, returned*

CHORALE *Rejoice and sing!*

CHORUS *Lord of creation, we lift up our voices*

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Queen's Park Singers are performing the work in the English translation by Neil Jenkins published in the New Novello Choral Edition

There will be very short interval between parts 1 and 3. After the performance members of the audience are invited to join the performers for seasonal refreshments in the rotunda.

Johann Sebastian Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* comprises six cantatas, written to be performed on six particular days between Christmas Day and Epiphany (6 January). The two cantatas we are performing today form parts 1 and 3 of the oratorio. They were first performed on 25 and 27 December 1734 in the two main churches of Leipzig, the Thomaskirche and the Nikolaikirche, where Bach was Cantor (music director) from 1723 until his death in 1750.

In the sixteenth century, following the Reformation, services in the Lutheran churches in Germany often included a motet - a short vocal composition which provided a musical commentary on one or more verses of the biblical readings for the day. In Bach's time this genre had developed into a longer and more varied composition, including a number of distinctive sections - choral settings of texts, usually newly written; chorales - traditional texts and melodies to be sung by the whole congregation, similar to the modern Anglican church's practice of hymn-singing; solo recitatives - in some of which the Evangelist narrates the Biblical story, while in others a soloist sings a newly written text offering a personal meditation on the action described by the Evangelist; and arias, again settings of new texts, in which a soloist expands on a central idea or emotion.

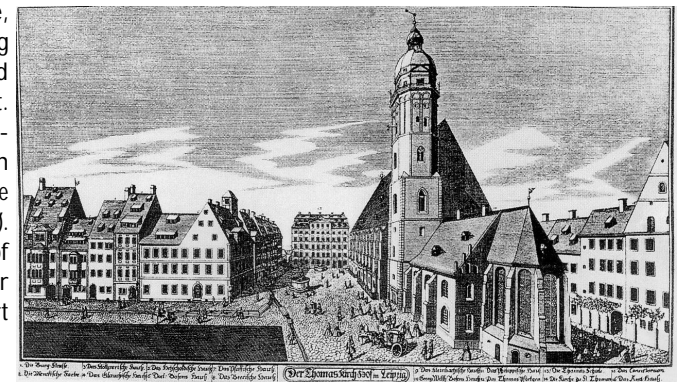
Apart from the chorales involving the entire congregation, these cantatas were sung and played by professional musicians. Sunday-morning services, which included a one-hour sermon and lasted three or four hours, were attended by some 2,000 people.

The texts of the choruses are closely engaged with the action of the narrative, as if it were here and now - commenting directly, as if watching the events unfolding - and even taking part, as when the choir become shepherds in part 3. The music for these texts is markedly vivid and dramatic. For instance, in the first chorus of part 1 Bach builds an atmosphere of rapidly mounting excitement by introducing each instrument in turn - drums, flutes, oboes, trumpets and strings - hard on the heels of its predecessor, playing short sharp phrases packed with vigour to create an intense and overwhelming sound image of expectation in the very process of being realised. In the welter of cascading scales and energising trills, you can almost hear the clack of shoes on cobbles rushing "to meet this glad morn".

The chorale texts, on the other hand, reflect philosophically on the implications of the events described by the Evangelist. They are set to well-known Lutheran hymn tunes - a choice which allowed all present to identify with the meaning of the text and become part of the story. The generally contemplative mood of each chorale is given a distinctive emotional colouring by the exquisite harmonies in which Bach clothes the simple melody.

We are performing the work in English so that everyone involved, performers and audience alike, can readily appreciate the details of the text which Bach set to music so expressively. And, in the communal spirit of the original enterprise, you are invited to join in singing one of the chorales. You will find the words on a sheet on your seat. The tune is one which will be familiar to many (in the Anglican church it is usually sung to the words *O sacred head, sore wounded*). We will have a short rehearsal of the chorale, assisted by the choir and orchestra, before the concert begins.

Peter Burtt-Jones



The Thomaskirche, Leipzig