

Christmas Oratorio

Johann Sebastian Bach
Christmas Oratorio BWV 248
Combattimento Consort Amsterdam
Cappella Amsterdam
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The Christmas Oratorio, an organic cycle

Interview with Jan Willem de Vriend by Frits de Haen

Jan Willem de Vriend shares his thoughts on the *Christmas Oratorio*: 'The Combattimento Consort Amsterdam has always performed the complete *Christmas Oratorio* with only two exceptions. On these two occasions the concert hall did not want a complete performance and the choice was left to us which movements to leave out. However, this is in fact an impossible choice, as in my view the work forms a single entity. So, it has happened on occasion that we have performed four cantatas. And even though prior to the concert we thought that on the one hand it would be fine to finish earlier, as it turned out – and I think I can speak for all my colleagues – after the performance we felt it a great pity after all, not to have included those two cantatas. During a performance of the complete cycle we have become accustomed to pausing between each cantata, to insert just a short break of around five minutes before beginning the following cantata. Incidentally, this is just one of the ways to divide up the work; I could also imagine that the cycle could be spread out, that one decides: "This morning I will perform one, then this evening another, with another cantata the following day." Nevertheless, the point is that even when a performance is spread out over a number of days, as happened in Bach's time, the work still continues to function as a unified whole. I am absolutely convinced that the churchgoers of the time had a far greater retention of the music, that the music remained more firmly entrenched in their memory until the following church service. Just compare how it is these days. After the concert, you may be sitting in your car and you switch on the radio to hear if there are any traffic jams reported, so you keep hearing fragments of music and as a result of this a large part of your recent musical experience is erased. I myself am glad that after performing a work it stays in my head for some time. Perhaps this was much more often the case in those days. As far as this is concerned, the effect of such a cantata would have been far stronger and of longer duration back then. Something similar also applies in the case of the various tonalities. In view of the fact that even temperament was nowhere near as widely in use in those days, a much greater differentiation was experienced between the various keys with their individual characteristics. With the advent of modern tuning, this entire sensibility to the different keys has vanished.'

The Christmas Oratorio: can it be classed as a true oratorio?

'Naturally the *Christmas Oratorio* does not have the unity of an Italian oratorio, for instance, with its through-composed character and its opera-

like form with a dramatic element. In actual fact the work simply consists of six separate cantatas for the Christmas feast days, for 1 January as New Year's Day and the Feast of the Circumcision, for the following Sunday and finally for the Feast of the Epiphany. However, it was Bach himself, after all, who very clearly indicated in the manuscript that he considered the work to be an oratorio. And of course he provided the work with a fine overall structure, displaying balance between keys and thereby also creating a unified whole. This relationship between the keys is an extremely strong one. Like the third and sixth cantatas, the first cantata is in D major. This is a brilliant tonality, emphasising splendour, majesty and might. This festive grandeur is further emphasised through Bach's inclusion of timpani and trumpets. The second cantata is in the key of G major, which forms a logical connection as the subdominant of D. The tonality of G major emphasises humility. A major, the dominant of D major, is employed in the fifth cantata; it is the key that is the furthest removed in step from the starting point, hierarchically placed one step higher – perhaps a reference to the light that has appeared. The tonality of F major, which is the central key in the New Year's cantata, is rather out of place in this perfect cadence of D-G-A-D. This key does indeed bear little relationship to D major; however, it has a very strong association with nature, rusticity and with the shepherds. This pastoral aspect is further highlighted by the horns, which symbolise nature and the hunt.'

The three cantatas for the Christmas feast days

'The first cantata bears the title 'Jauchzet frohlocket, auf, preiset die Tage', a jubilant cantata in which trumpets and timpani are symbolic of the festive element. A striking aspect is the unison character of the opening chorus with its descending instrumental figures whereby the music descends from heaven, as it were. As a fitting quote to highlight this, I have noted down a text in my score from 2 Chronicles 5, verse 13, which aptly conveys the atmosphere. It reads: "The trumpeters and singers joined in unison to give praise and thanks to the Lord. Accompanied by trumpets, cymbals and other instruments they raised their voices in praise to the Lord (...)." We know that amongst Bach's personal effects there was a bible in which he had made a note next to this text: "God in His grace is always present with devotional music." The opening movement fits in so wonderfully with this text!

A striking element throughout the entire *Christmas Oratorio* is the role of the alto, representing the figure of Mary the Mother of God; in the first cantata this role is allocated to the oboe d'amore. There is a splendid example of word painting in the closing chorus 'Ach mein herzliebes

Jesulein' (Ah, my beloved Jesus-child, IX), in which the three trumpets are heard in a sort of fanfare of angels directed below, literally as a 'Vom Himmel hoch da komm ich her' (From heaven above to earth I come). In contrast to this the second cantata has a totally different character. This symbolises the two worlds, with the flute providing the connection between the earthly and heavenly spheres. In general, the flute is only to be heard in the first three cantatas; one could say until heaven has truly arrived on earth. A truly extraordinary aria in this cantata is 'Schlafe, mein Liebster, genieße der Ruh' (Sleep now, my dearest, enjoy now thy rest, XIX). Here again, the alto represents Mary, as the archetype of the faith. However, a far more striking aspect is the ambivalent character of this aria, with the continual opposition between 'schlafe – wache' (sleep – keeping watch). On the one hand it is a lullaby (in which the octaves in the continuo are symbolic of perfection); however, on the other hand it also contains the warning element of the 'wache' (keeping watch) in equal measure. In the chorus 'Ehre sei Gott' (Glory to God, XXI) Bach gives musical expression to the text in a special manner. For instance, the figure in the continuo G-A-B-G is played one note higher each time and this continues throughout the whole octave, literally 'through all (the notes)', or diapason, as the ancient Greeks put it – it is a wonderful image to symbolize perfection, to illustrate God's glory. What happens at a certain moment in the winds is nothing short of genius: it is as if the Holy Spirit descends in a sort of golden shower, an image found in paintings of the eighteenth-century. We have reached the following point in the story: the child is sleeping, and calm and peace are expressed with the descent of the Holy Spirit. Bach depicts this in such an evocative manner. At first the oboes continue to play in a low register, but ultimately it is as if the gates of heaven open, revealing a glimmer of heaven's light. Studying the manuscript one suddenly thinks: "Of course, naturally!" One is always so fixated on the music as it sounds, one tends as a matter of course to focus on the actual, concrete sound. However, studying the manuscript, one realises that it is simply a painting that is totally expressed in music – it is as if an actual ray of light shines at that point in the music. And the funny thing is that it is not actually necessary to do anything more as a conductor, if one is rehearsing this with an orchestra and explains it. Then it happens of its own accord, which is a wonderful experience, everyone just understands how it is! That particular chorus also ends in an extraordinary manner: Bach seems to add an extra bar in order to create an even greater climax on the word 'Wohlgefallen' (a sign of favor) – Bach highlights this in such an illustrative manner that it seems as if a storm arises in this extra bar. It almost has something admonishing, something

reproving about it. In the closing chorus of this cantata the four oboes form a sort of heavenly quartet, a divine music that merges with the earthly, giving one a glimpse of the divine light. Eventually in the third cantata, the closing movement of the three cantatas that are connected to the Christmas feast days, we return to D major and the trumpets are once more given a prominent role. The shepherds imitate each other in a descending and ascending line in 'Laßet uns nun gehen' (Let us now go, XXVI). In the continuo Bach anticipates in brilliant fashion the chorus 'O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden' (A sacred head, now wounded), which he was later to use in the *St. Matthew Passion*.

A pastoral cantata for New Year's Day

'The fourth cantata, composed for New Year's Day, is not only anomalous regarding the choice of key. In this cantata Bach assigns a prominent role to the natural horns. They represent the shepherds, the rustic element, with their practical inability to play completely in tune. Incidentally, here we once again encounter a technique that Bach was later to use in the *St. Matthew Passion*, namely the writing of an accompaniment in the strings, as a type of halo, when the text 'Immanuel, o süßes Wort' (Immanuel, O sweetest word) appears (in the recitative XXXVIII). This Immanuel idea emphasises the soul with faith, the belief that God is with us. In the aria 'Flößt, mein Heiland, flößt dein Namen' (Doth, my Savior, doth thy name, XXXIX) a wonderful echo effect occurs. The echo technique has a long tradition in the history of music; the echo symbolises unrequited love. Bach naturally assumed that his audience was well informed about this use of the echo – for instance, he knew that they would be familiar with the story of Orpheus. Just consider how he fulminated against the abolishment of Greek lessons at the schools, thinking: how can one develop oneself if one has never studied Greek? The tenor aria 'Ich will nur dir zu Ehren leben' (I would but for thine honor live now, XLI) is especially abounding with energy with its many semiquaver runs: it seems to want to give rise to the feeling that one enters a building and is received into a community.'

Epiphany

'The fifth cantata sketches the history prior to the arrival of the three Wise Men. Bach achieves a fine, dramatic effect with the chorus 'Wo, wo, wo ist der neugeborne König der Juden' (Where doth the newborn babe, the king of the Jews lie, XLV), with on the one hand the chorus passages which represent the Wise Men, and on the other hand the alto as Mary the Mother of God, who provides an answer to the question



where the Messiah is to be found. The exclamation 'wo, wo?' (where, where?) of the Wise Men is depicted with short notes, a rhetorical device known as an abruptio. In the ascending figures with the text 'Wir haben seinen Stern gesehen' (We have indeed his star now witnessed) one can see a reference to the light, or also to the resurrection. In the terzetto the alto is set apart from the soprano and the tenor. When they express their desire for the coming of the Messiah, it is the alto who interrupts: 'Schweigt, schweigt' (Hush, hush). It is as though the alto reprimands the other two for the fact that they are not yet able to comprehend the whole word, the name Jesus; there is no question that he is yet to come, look carefully: he has already arrived! Incidentally, with the repetition of the word 'schweigt' (hush) Bach is also employing one of the rhetorical devices: a repetitio, a word that is repeated with emphasis.

The sixth cantata revolves around the Epiphany, the appearance of the three Wise Men from the East and Herod's efforts to discover where the Messiah is to be found. Its title, 'Herr, wenn die stolzen Feinde schnauben' (Lord, when our boastful foes blow fury) can be linked to Psalm 120: 'Lord, save me from lying lips and deceiving tongues.' He depicts the memory of Christ's enemies and combines this with faith in God. The number 120 can be found in the overall structure of this cantata, which is subdivided into two groups of 120 bars. The opening movement of the final cantata is also in D major, the forthright, open key that we discussed earlier. However, the problem here is that one gets a fugue that is covered by the sound of all the brass. In trying to achieve an open texture, one always comes up against the same problem. Even if the musicians are asked to play softer, for instance, it is impossible to create the same transparency as in the first chorus of the *Christmas Oratorio*. Finally one reaches the point where one concludes that perhaps it is not such an issue for concern: after all, if anyone knew how one should compose, it was Bach. Perhaps it actually fits well with the text 'Wir wollen dir allein vertrauen' (We would make thee our sole reliance), after all. It is as if Bach simply worked the pain and dejection that he was feeling in Leipzig into his composition. In this way it provides a fine contrast to the 'Jauchzet, frohlocket' (Triumph, rejoicing of the opening chorus.)

A highpoint in the oeuvre of an extremely devout composer

10 'Naturally, there is the conception of Bach being a thoroughly religious man. Bach is always very much associated with his religious works. In my view, this is deserving of further comment. It is impossible to deny that

his oeuvre is strongly permeated by religion: it was not without reason that he concluded a monumental work like the *Well-Tempered Clavier* with the note 'Soli Deo Gloria', as he did on more occasions – as a sort of expression of gratitude to God for the fact that he had completed the work. And take a secular work such as *The Art of Fugue*. The fugue takes a central position; it is frequently viewed as the compositional technique that is the most ordered with regard to bars and numbers, as the most divine form that exists. It best symbolises the image of a form that strives after God, that strives to attain perfection. In this way it becomes evident that the religious aspect plays a part in many of Bach's works. On the other hand, however, our image of Bach as a religious composer does bear modification to some extent. In a letter written to his old school friend Georg Erdmann in 1730, thus not long before the *Christmas Oratorio* was composed, Bach clearly implies that he actually wanted to leave Leipzig, that his happiest period was the one spent at the court in Cöthen, a period of four years during which he did not compose a single sacred work. Elsewhere, there is more evidence that the image of Bach as a purely Lutheran composer is due for revision. And not just on the basis of his extreme idealisation of his Cöthen period. For instance, he applied for a position at the Catholic court of Dresden and furthermore, the background behind his Leipzig application speaks volumes. For, not only was he Leipzig's third choice – everyone knows the story of how he was only appointed after Telemann and Graupner had first turned down the position – but for his part, Bach did not come instantly to his decision either. Ultimately he decided to accept the offer for entirely practical reasons. The main reason was that his sons had to study and Leipzig offered them many opportunities. For this reason he put up with the fact that he was underpaid in Leipzig and that everything was far too expensive in that city. And that religious aspect of his, for him that could equally be a part of other music, for instance the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, a harpsichord concerto or the Violin Partitas. I can only view that religious aspect as something that is universal: the idea that there is something else in life – something that we call a God, that can be worshipped through our emotions. Something incomprehensible that one can call upon, that one can talk to, ask help from. I don't know if it is a person, or if it is represented by an actual image, but it is something higher that one respects – it can be called upon to give aid, to accompany one through life's journey. But also to share one's amazement at the birth of a child or to give comfort at the death of a loved one. This is something truly universal – I believe that it is justifiable to assert that everyone can identify with this in some way.'

Religiosity and performance

'I think that there is no such thing as an authentic performance. For every work is composed for the listeners of the time, with their own particular background. As a listener nowadays, one intuitively feels that this is something extremely special, something very precious, one of the greatest things that one can comprehend in the field of music. You start to work on a piece and notice that it has a religious text. It is frequently said: first there was religion, then there was music. Now I myself believe that especially in those times, certainly up until the Enlightenment, religion was something far more essential in the life of the people. It was a guiding principle; it was always referred to, more than is usual nowadays. I think that in Bach's case, first there was the music. And this music is so heavenly, and so fantastic, that consequently one can say that the music together with the text reveals something that we nowadays would call a religious experience. A religious feeling, a religious longing that can provide us with an extremely deep, intense experience. As my point of departure I view religion as being one of two things: something that people experience together, or what I am now referring to, a word given to the fact that something more exists beyond our ability to communicate in words that contain a particular code. However, I am not capable of expressing this verbally, I can only attempt to express it in music.'

A ten-year journey

'Each time that we perform the *Christmas Oratorio* we begin to work on it beforehand with what is actually a very constant group, with most of the musicians having taken part in the performances of the past ten years. It is precisely as a result of this, but also because of the various soloists with whom we have performed the work, that we have discussed it once again every time during the rehearsals. This has unearthed a mine of information: everyone has his or her own experiences to share and that gives us plenty of material for discussion. It is a privilege to have been able to perform such a magnificent work for the past ten years.'



The Christmas Oratorio: of Sacred and Secular Praise

Frits de Haen

Johann Sebastian Bach's sacred music output cannot be viewed independently from the sustained period in which he lived and worked in Leipzig, from 1723 until his death in 1750. There Bach produced a great quantity of music for use in the city's four major churches: first and foremost the St. Thomas Church and the St. Nicholas Church, but also the New Church and the smaller St. Peter's Church. But his long association with the Hanseatic city does not mean that he was always enthusiastic about working there, or that he did not make serious attempts to investigate other possibilities. A letter dated 28 October 1730 to his childhood friend Georg Erdmann leaves no room for doubt about this. Explaining that his decision to abandon the court of Cöthen for Leipzig had chiefly been a matter of necessity, he explicitly requests Erdmann for another position. His former friend could perhaps help him as, then the Russian envoy to Danzig, he himself occupied a not unimportant post.

In his letter Bach writes, "From my youth you observed my vicissitudes closely until I left for Cöthen, where I became Kapellmeister. That town had a gracious sovereign who not only loves music, but possesses skills in the art, and it was in his company that I imagined spending the rest of my life. It so happened, however, that this Serenissimus married a princess of Berenburg, after which the impression arose that his interest in music cooled somewhat, particularly since the new female sovereign turned out to be amusical. At God's disposition a vacancy then arose in Leipzig for the position of Director Musices and cantor of the school affiliated with the St. Thomas Church. Initially it did not seem to me fitting to exchange the position of Kapellmeister for that of cantor, and for that reason it took three months for me to make the decision. The position in question was portrayed so favourably to me, however, that in God's name I ultimately took the chance (also because my sons turned out to be gifted for study) and betook myself to Leipzig, underwent the proficiency test and accepted the new position that in God's will I still hold. However, since I have come to the conclusion that (1) this position is in no way as favourable as it was represented to me, (2) many additional earnings have fallen away, (3) Leipzig is a particularly expensive city to live in and (4) a curious government is in control that has little affection for music, and my lot is almost

continuous exasperation, jealousy and persecution, I am forced with the help of the Almighty to seek my fortune elsewhere. Would your noble Excellency know of or be able to discover a fitting position for an old faithful servant of times gone by, then in all humility I beseech you for your generous commendation.'

That this plea had no practical result is sufficiently well known: Bach spent the rest of his life in Leipzig. But the letter casts clear light on his frustration with the Leipzig city administration. Bach's discontent was not about a specific issue, it was rather a multiplicity of various factors. It appears that he had misjudged the real situation in the Hanseatic city. The school suffered direly from a lack of space - three classes were taught in the same room, which also served as a refectory. Another source of Bach's resentment was that he was expected to perform supervisory duties and, much to his annoyance, teach Latin as well. He was also dissatisfied with his salary, particularly in comparison with what he had earned in Cöthen. But most annoying of all was perhaps the lack of discipline and the low level of music making. To make matters even more complicated Bach was responsible to various authorities. All this resulted in a series of simmering conflicts that escalated during the 1720s. Ultimately, on 23 August 1730, he wrote a lengthy letter to the city administration headed by the words 'Brief but absolutely necessary report about the performance of good church music, in addition to a number of unprejudiced objections regarding its decline'. A substantial letter, it remains to this day a hugely important source of information for the performance practice of Bach's music, as the composer is highly explicit in it about the number of singers and instrumentalists he wishes to have at his disposal. As far as we know, the city did not deign to respond directly to Bach's plea, and it was barely two months later that Bach wrote the letter to Erdmann cited above in an attempt to change the course of his life. If his childhood friend sent him a response it has not survived. The appointment in June 1730 of Johann Matthias Gesner as new principal of the Thomas School did bring some degree of relief to Bach: the composer knew Gesner from Weimar, where he had been deputy principal of the gymnasium. Gesner implemented a number of changes, had the building renovated and attempted to instil an improved sense of discipline in the students. Thus, in his relatively brief period as principal (until 1734), he created a status quo that was acceptable to the composer. After Gesner's departure, however, conflicts between Bach and the authorities again flared up.

Perhaps because of Gesner's appointment Bach for the time being reconciled himself to his situation and, in subsequent years, concentrated on a number of large-scale sacred choral works, such as new versions of the *St. John Passion* and the *St. Matthew Passion* as well as the *Christmas Oratorio*. It is not without reason that Robin A. Leaver establishes a link in this book (see p. 57) between on the one hand these larger works and on the other Bach's phase of life as well as the composition of the last of his cantatas. The necrology dating from 1754 by his son Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach lists five volumes of cantatas, of which three have survived. The first two date from Bach's first two years in Leipzig, i.e. 1723-24 and 1724-25, while the third was composed between 1725 and 1727. As for the two lost cycles, the last word has not yet been said. Because not a single cantata has been recovered from these volumes, it has been argued that they never existed. On the other hand Christoph Wolff, writing in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* of 2001, holds on to the necrology of 1754 and the five volumes mentioned in it, until positive proof surfaces of the non-existence of the fourth and fifth cycles. If these two cycles indeed existed, then they must have been composed in 1728-29 or sometime later. Whatever the case, Bach wrote the major part of his cantatas before 1729, and an authority such as Wolff therefore considers Bach's evolution as a composer of cantatas effectively complete by 1735, the year in which the *Christmas Oratorio* was completed.

It would be inaccurate to draw a strict line between Bach's cantatas and the *Christmas Oratorio*. The fact is, although usually referred to as an oratorio, these six works by Bach 'For holy Christmas' can certainly be described as cantatas. Unlike a 'real' oratorio, which has a uniform, complete story, the *Christmas Oratorio* is a collection of separate pieces. Its dramatic impetus for dialogue between the various characters being only slight - far less so than in the passions - the accent is thus to a far greater degree on the reflective. Despite the lack of a clear, unambiguous dramatic context, the cantatas are nevertheless centred on the nativity; they also perform a liturgical function for the six feast days for which they were composed. With their festive libretti, apparent right from the start with 'Jauchzet, frohlocket, auf, preiset die Tage' (Triumph, rejoicing, rise, praising these days now), they provide outstanding potential for a festive interpretation. That the *Christmas Oratorio* also contains a cantata for the first Sunday in the new year has everything to do with the fact that the cycle was composed for the

Christmas season of 1734-35. That year there was no Sunday between Christmas and New Year, because 26 December fell on a Sunday; hence a cantata was added instead for the 'Octave of Christmas', i.e. the first Sunday after New Year.

Descriptions of the *Christmas Oratorio* often make mention of Bach's parody technique. In current usage the term parody refers to a 'jocular imitation of a (literary) work in which the form and tone remain more or less preserved, while the substance is framed in such a way that it is made effectively laughable', or a 'poor, weak imitation that signifies or represents the example only inadequately and absurdly'. Music theory, however, takes an entirely different stance. In it the word has acquired another meaning altogether. The word 'parody' is in this case not the equivalent of the Greek *παρωδία*, but is derived from the word *παρωδός*, meaning literally 'separate from (i.e. not belonging to) the song'. In that sense it refers to the technique whereby existing material is used again in a new composition. Since the sixteenth century this had become particularly frequent practice among composers, who often took a well-known melody or polyphonic complex as a point of departure chiefly for settings of masses (hence the innumerable parodies based on the popular song *L'homme armé*, – no fewer than forty have survived from between 1450 and the end of the seventeenth century). In a period in which concepts such as copyright or plagiarism had not yet been invented and the status of art as something original and unique had not crystallized, it was quite normal for composers to draw on existing material. It is sufficiently well known, for instance, that Bach himself studied and arranged a great number of works by Antonio Vivaldi and even reworked some of his own material in later compositions.

In the *Christmas Oratorio* Bach made much use of the parody technique, which in later years was not always greatly appreciated. For Wilhelm Rust (1822-1892), then Chief Editor of the Bach-Gesamtausgabe, the presumed re-hashing of spiritual music for secular objectives was complete anathema (only later did it emerge that the music had taken the reverse course) and ordained: "That which is truly sacred must remain sacred." Rust was referring in this connection to the *Christmas Oratorio* – not unjustly, because the number of parallels between Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* and secular pieces is striking. The *Christmas Oratorio* may even be called a prime example of the parody method, particularly with its strong references to the secular cantatas BWV 213, 214 and 215. The first four cantatas of the *Christmas Oratorio*,

for instance, contain no fewer than six extracts from the cantata *Hercules auf dem Scheidewege* (BWV 213). The first three cantatas of the *Christmas Oratorio* also contain four extracts from the cantata *Tönet, ihr Pauken, erschallet* (BWV 214), including the opening chorus 'Jauchzet, frohlocket' (Triumph, rejoicing). Moreover, part of the cantata *Preise dein Glücke, gesegnetes Sachsen* (BWV 215) served as a model for the aria 'Erleucht auch meine finstre Sinnen' (Illumine, too, my gloomy spirit) from the fifth cantata, while the lost sacred cantata BWV 248a may in its entirety have been the point of departure for the sixth cantata of the *Christmas Oratorio*. Aside from the last cantata, all were written for the ruling house of Saxony in 1733 and 1734, respectively for the birthday of the Saxon prince Friedrich Christian on 5 September 1733, that of the Saxon Electress Maria Josepha on 8 December of the same year, and the commemoration of the election of Elector Friedrich August as August III of Poland on 5 October 1734.

Overview of extracts in the *Christmas Oratorio*:

<i>Christmas Oratorio</i>	<i>Secular source</i>
I/1 Jauchzet, frohlocket	BWV 214, 1 Tönet, ihr Pauken!
I/4 Bereite dich, Zion	BWV 213, 9 Ich will dich nicht hören
I/8 Großer Herr, o starker König	BWV 214, 7 Kron und Preis gekrönter Damen
II/15 Frohe Hirten, eilt, ach eilet	BWV 214, 5 Fromme Musen! Meine Glieder
II/19 Schlafe, mein Liebster, genieße der Ruh	BWV 213,5 Schlafe, mein Liebster, und pflege der Ruh
III/24 Herrscher des Himmels	BWV 214, 9 Blühet, ihr Linden in Sachsen
III/29 Herr, dein Mitleid, dein Erbarmen	BWV 213, 11 Ich bin deine, du bist meine
IV/36 Fallt mit Danken, fallt mit Loben	BWV 213, 1 Lasst uns sorgen, lasst uns wachen
IV/39 Flößt, mein Heiland	BWV 213, 5 Treues Echo dieser Orten
IV/41 Ich will nur dir zu Ehren leben	BWV 213, 7 Auf meinen Flügeln sollst du schweben
V/47 Erleucht auch meine finstre Sinnen	BWV 215, 7 Durch die von Eifer entflammten Waffen
VI/54 Herr, wenn die stolzen Feinde schnauben	BWV 248a (lost)
VI/56 Du Falscher, suche nur den Herrn zu fällen	BWV 248a (lost)
VI/57 Nur ein Wink von seinen Händen	BWV 248a (lost)

VI/61 So geht! Genug, mein Schatz	BWV 248a (lost)
VI/62 Nun mögt ihr stolzen Feinde schrekken	BWV 248a (lost)
VI/63 Was will der Höllen Schrekken nun	BWV 248a (lost)
VI/64 Nun seid ihr wohl gerochen	BWV 248a (lost)

The question who wrote the libretto for the cycle cannot be answered with any certainty. Although the name Picander is often mentioned, the remarkable fact remains that the *Christmas Oratorio* is missing from the list of works published under his name at the time. One argument supporting Picander's authorship, however, is that some of the libretto had to be written for music that already existed: the fact that in terms of the number of syllables and mood the libretto and music had to combine seamlessly makes it probable that composer and librettist worked together intensively. And Bach and Picander did just that. Picander - a pen name for Christian Friedrich Henrici - lived from 1700 to 1764, much of it in Leipzig. Writing poems and libretti for cantatas, he was best known for his libretto for Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*. It was the great Bach musicologist Christoph Wolff who put forward the idea that Bach, together with the librettist, perhaps wrote these parodies in some kind of 'tandem' process, i.e. not really *after* one another, but rather simultaneously, as a means of serving two masters at the same time: both the secular ones of Saxony and the heavenly ones - and thus also as a means of preventing occasional works such as the cantatas for the court of Saxony (or at least movements of them) from falling into oblivion. Whether or not it was Picander or someone else who wrote the words, the librettist may perhaps at the same time have been writing texts in praise of both a secular and a sacred ruler - an intriguing idea that moreover puts in perspective the customary 'successive' parody method.

It was with the performances on 25 December 1734 of its first part (in Leipzig's St. Nicholas Church in the morning and the St. Thomas Church in the afternoon) that the *Christmas Oratorio* received its première. Regarding the manner of performance we have only tangential information. The dissatisfaction that Bach had expressed several years earlier in his letter to the Leipzig city administration, which was responsible for the churches, it can properly be deduced, however, that he had a number of criticisms about the circumstances in which he was forced to work. It was not only the extent of them that impelled him to put forward proposals for change, he was also unimpressed by the capabilities of certain musicians: 'My modesty prohibits me from saying anything of the truth about their capacities and musical knowledge. One must, however, consider that they are partly

retired and partly fail to practise to the extent that may be desired.' It cannot therefore be concluded that the *Christmas Oratorio* received the kind of première that Bach would have liked, let alone one that this monumental work deserves.

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First Part

Christmas Day

Luke 2: 1 & 3 – 7

I Chorus

Jauchzet, frohlocket, auf, preiset die Tage,
rühmet, was heute der Höchste getan!
Lasset das Zagen, verbannet die Klage,
stimmet voll Jauchzen und Fröhlichkeit an.
Dienet dem Höchsten mit herrlichen Chören,
laßt uns den Namen des Herrschers verehren!

II Recitative (Evangelist)

Es begab sich aber zu der Zeit, daß ein Gebot von dem Kaiser Augusto ausging, daß alle Welt geschätzt würde. Und jedermann ging, daß er sich schätzen ließe, ein jeglicher in seine Stadt. Da machte sich auch auf Joseph aus Galiläa, aus der Stadt Nazareth, in das jüdische Land zur Stadt David, die da heißet Bethlehem; darum, daß er von dem Hause und Geschlechte David war: auf daß er sich schätzen ließe mit Maria, seinem vertrauten Weibe, die war schwanger. Und als sie daselbst waren, kam die Zeit, daß sie gebären sollte.

III Recitative (Alto)

Nun wird mein liebster Bräutigam,
nun wird der Held aus Davids Stamm
zum Trost, zum Heil der Erden
einmal geboren werden.
Nun wird der Stern aus Jakob scheinen,
sein Strahl bricht schon hervor.
Auf, Zion, und verlasse nun das Weinen,
dein Wohl steigt hoch empor!

IV Aria (Alto)

Bereite dich, Zion, mit zärtlichen Trieben,
den Schönsten, den Liebsten bald bei dir zu sehn!
Deine Wangen müssen heut viel schöner prangen,
eile, den Bräutigam sehnlichst zu lieben!

V Chorale

22 Wie soll ich dich empfangen
und wie begegn' ich dir?
O aller Welt Verlangen,

I Chorus

Triumph, rejoicing, rise, praising these days now,
Tell ye what this day the Highest hath done!
Fear now abandon and banish complaining,
Join, filled with triumph and gladness, our song!
Serve ye the Highest in glorious chorus,
Let us the name of our ruler now honor!

II Recitative (Evangelist)

It occurred, however, at the time that a decree from the Emperor Augustus went out that all the world should be enrolled. And everyone then went forth to be enrolled, each person unto his own city. And then as well went up Joseph from Galilee from the city of Nazareth into the land of Judea to David's city which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and of the lineage of David to be enrolled there with Mary, who was betrothed to be his wife, and she was pregnant. And while they were in that place, there came the time for her to be delivered.

III Recitative (Alto)

Now is my dearest bridegroom rare,
Now is the prince of David's stem
As earth's redeeming comfort
Here born in time amongst us.
Now will shine bright the star of Jacob,
Its beam e'en now breaks forth.
Rise, Zion, and abandon now thy weeping,
Thy fortune soars aloft.

IV Aria (Alto)

Prepare thyself, Zion, with tender affection,
The fairest, the dearest soon midst thee to see!
Thy cheeks' beauty Must today shine much more brightly,
Hasten, the bridegroom to love with deep passion.

V Chorale

How shall I then receive thee
And how thy presence find?
Desire of ev'ry nation,

o meiner Seelen Zier!
O Jesu, Jesu! setze
mir selbst die Fakkell bei,
damit, was dich ergötze,
mir kund und wissend sei!

VI *Recitative (Evangelist)*

Und sie gebar ihren ersten Sohn, und wickelte ihn in Windeln und legte ihn in eine Krippen, denn sie hatten sonst keinen Raum in der Herberge.

VII *Chorale (Soprano) & Recitative (Bass)*

Er ist auf Erden kommen arm,
Wer will die Liebe recht erhöhen,
die unser Heiland vor uns hegt?
daß er unser sich erbarm,
Ja, wer vermag es einzusehen,
wie ihn der Menschen Leid bewegt?
und in dem Himmel mache reich
Des Höchsten Sohn kömmt in die Welt,
weil ihm ihr Heil so wohl gefällt,
und seinen lieben Engeln gleich
so will er selbst als Mensch geboren werden.
Kyrieleis!

VIII *Aria (Bass)*

Großer Herr, o starker König,
liebster Heiland, o wie wenig
achtetest du der Erden Pracht!
Der die ganze Welt erhält,
ihre Pracht und Zier erschaffen,
muß in harten Krippen schlafen.

IX *Chorale*

Ach mein herzliebes Jesulein,
mach dir ein rein sanft Bettelein,
zu ruhn in meines Herzens Schrein,
daß ich nimmer vergesse dein!

O glory of my soul!
O Jesus, Jesus,
Set out for me thy torch,
That all that brings thee pleasure
By me be clearly known.

VI *Recitative (Evangelist)*

And she brought forth her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him within a manger, for they had no other room in the inn for them.

VII *Chorale (Soprano) & Recitative (Bass)*

He is to earth now come so poor,
Who will the love then rightly praise
Which this our Savior for us keeps?
That he us his mercy show
Yea, is there one who understandeth
How he by mankind's woe is moved?
And in heaven make us rich
The Most High's Son comes in the world
Whose health to him so dear is held,
And to his own dear angels like.
So will he as a man himself be born now.
Kyrieleis!

VIII *Aria (Bass)*

Mighty Lord, O strongest sovereign,
Dearest Savior, O how little
Heedest thou all earthly pomp!
He who all the world doth keep,
All its pomp and grace hath fashioned,
Must within the hard crib slumber.

IX *Chorale*

Ah my belove'd Jesus-child,
Make here thy bed, clean, soft and mild
For rest within my heart's own shrine,
That I no more fail to be thine!

Second Part
Boxing Day
Luke 2: 8 – 14

X Sinfonia

XI Recitative (Evangelist)

Und es waren Hirten in derselben Gegend auf dem Felde bei den Hürden, die hüteten des Nachts ihre Herde. Und siehe, des Herren Engel trat zu ihnen, und die Klarheit des Herren leuchtet um sie, und sie fürchten sich sehr.

XII Chorale

Brich an, o schönes Morgenlicht,
und laß den Himmel tagen!
Du Hirtenvolk, erschrecke nicht,
weil dir die Engel sagen,
daß dieses schwache Knäbelein
soll unser Trost und Freude sein,
dazu den Satan zwingen
und letztlich Friede bringen!

XIII Recitative (Evangelist)

Und der Engel sprach zu ihnen: (*der Engel*) Fürchtet euch nicht, siehe, ich verkündige euch große Freude, die allem Volke widerfahren wird. Denn euch ist heute der Heiland geboren, welcher ist Christus, der Herr, in der Stadt David.

XIV Recitative (Bass)

Was Gott dem Abraham verheißen, das läßt er nun dem Hirtenchor erfüllt erweisen. Ein Hirt hat alles das zuvor von Gott erfahren müssen. Und nun muß auch ein Hirt die Tat, was er damals versprochen hat, zuerst erfüllet wissen.

XV Aria (Tenor)

Frohe Hirten, eilt, ach eilet,
eh' ihr euch zu lang verweilet,
eilt, das holde Kind zu sehn!
Geht, die Freude heißt zu schön,
sucht die Anmut zu gewinnen,
geht und labet Herz und Sinnen!

XVI Recitative (Evangelist)

Und das habt zum Zeichen: Ihr werdet finden das Kind in Windeln gewickelt und in einer Krippe liegen.

XI *Recitative (Evangelist)*

And there were shepherds in that very region in the field nearby their sheepfolds, who kept their watch by night over their flocks. And see now, the angel of the Lord came before them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid.

XII *Chorale*

Break forth, O beauteous morning light,
And bring day to the heavens!
Thou shepherd folk, be not afraid,
For thee the angel telleth
That this the helpless little boy
Shall be our comfort and our joy,
Here for to conquer Satan
And peace at last to bring us!

XIII *Recitative (Evangelist)*

And the angel spake unto them: (*Angel*) Be not afraid, see now, I proclaim to you news of great gladness, which all the nations of the world will learn. For to you today is the Savior born, who is Christ, the Lord, in the city of David.

XIV *Recitative (Bass)*

What God to Abraham did promise, this hath he to the shepherd choir revealed and proven. A shepherd all this once before of God to learn was destined. And now as well a shepherd must the deed of yore he promised us be first to see completed.

XV *Aria (Tenor)*

Joyful shepherds, haste, ah hasten,
Ere ye here too long should tarry,
Haste, the gracious child to visit!
Go, your gladness is too fair,
Seek his grace's inspiration,
Go and comfort heart and spirit.

XVI *Recitative (Evangelist)*

And let this be your sign: ye will discover the babe in swaddling clothes there wrapped and in a manger lying.

XVII *Chorale*

Schaut hin, dort liegt im finstern Stall,
des Herrschaft gehet überall!
Da Speise vormals sucht ein Rind,
da ruhet itzt der Jungfrau'n Kind.

XVIII *Recitative (Bass)*

So geht denn hin, ihr Hirten, geht,
daß ihr das Wunder seht:
Und findet ihr des Höchsten Sohn in einer harten
Krippe liegen, so singet ihm bei seiner Wiegen
aus einem süßen Ton und mit gesamen Chor
dies Lied zur Ruhe vor!

IXX *Aria (Alto)*

Schlafe, mein Liebster, genieße der Ruh,
wache nach diesem vor aller Gedeihen!
Labe die Brust, empfinde die Lust,
wo wir unser Herz erfreuen!

XX *Recitative (Evangelist)*

Und alsobald war da bei dem Engel die Menge der himmlischen Heerscharen, die
lobten Gott, und sprachen:

XXI *Chorus*

Ehre sei Gott in der Höhe! und Friede auf Erden, und
den Menschen ein Wohlgefallen.

XXII *Recitative (Bass)*

So recht, ihr Engel, jauchzt und singet,
daß es uns heut so schön gelinget!
Auf denn! Wir stimmen mit euch ein,
und kann es so wie euch erfreun.

XXIII *Chorale*

Wir singen dir in deinem Heer
aus aller Kraft Lob, Preis und Ehr,
daß du, o lange gewünschter Gast,
dich nunmehr eingestellt hast.

XVII *Chorale*

Look there, he lies in manger drear
Whose power reacheth ev'rywhere!
Where fodder once the ox did seek,
There resteth now the Virgin's child.

XVIII *Recitative (Bass)*

So go then there, ye shepherds, go,
That ye this wonder see:
And when ye find the Highest's Son within an austere manger lying,
Then sing to him beside his cradle
In tones that sweetly ring and with assembled choir
This song of slumber bring!

XIX *Aria (Alto)*

Sleep now, my dearest, enjoy now thy rest,
Wake on the morrow to flourish in splendor!
Lighten thy breast, with joy be thou blest,
Where we hold our heart's great pleasure!

XX *Recitative (Evangelist)*

And suddenly there was with the angel the multitude of the host of heaven, there
praising God and saying:

XXI *Chorus*

Glory to God in the highest and peace on the earth now and
to mankind a sign of favor.

XXII *Recitative (Bass)*

'Tis meet, ye angels, sing and triumph,
That we today have gained such fortune!
Up then! We'll join our voice to yours,
We can as well as ye rejoice.

XXIII *Chorale*

We sing to thee amidst thy host
With all our strength, laud, fame and praise,
That thou, O long desired guest,
Art come into this world at last.

Third Part

Third Day of Christmas

Luke 2 : 15 – 20

XXIV Chorus

Herrscher des Himmels, erhöere das Lallen,
laß dir die matten Gesänge gefallen,
wenn dich dein Zion mit Psalmen erhöht!
Höre der Herzen frohlockendes Preisen,
wenn wir dir jetzo die Ehrfurcht erweisen,
weil unsre Wohlfahrt befestiget steht.

XXV Recitative (Evangelist)

Und da die Engel von ihnen gen Himmel
fuhren, sprachen die Hirten untereinander:

XXVI Chorus

Lasset uns nun gehen gen Bethlehem und die
Geschichte sehen, die da geschehen ist, die
uns der Herr kund getan hat.

XXVII Recitative (Bass)

Er hat sein Volk getröst, er hat sein Israel erlöst, die Hülf aus Sion hergesendet und
unser Leid geendet. Seht, Hirten, dies hat er getan; geht, dieses trifft ihr an!

XXVIII Chorale

Dies hat er alles uns getan, sein groß Lieb zu zeigen an;
des freu sich alle Christenheit und dank ihm des in Ewigkeit. Kyrieleis!

XXIX Duet (Soprano & Bass)

Herr, dein Mitleid, dein Erbarmen
tröstet uns und macht uns frei.
Deine holde Gunst und Liebe,
deine wundersamen Triebe
machen deine Vätertreu wieder neu.

XXX Recitative (Evangelist)

30 Und sie kamen eilend und funden beide, Mariam und Joseph, dazu das Kind in der
Krippe liegen. Da sie es aber gesehen hatten, breiteten sie das Wort aus, welches zu
ihnen von diesem Kind gesaget war. Und alle, für die es kam, wunderten sich der

XXIV Chorus

Ruler of heaven, give ear to our stammer,
Let these our weary refrains bring thee pleasure,
As thee thy Zion with psalms doth exalt!
Hear thou our hearts, though, exultant with praises,
As we to thee here our homage now render,
For our salvation stands strong and secure!

XXV Recitative (Evangelist)

And when the angel went away from them up to heaven,
said the shepherds one to another:

XXVI Chorus

Let us now go quickly to Bethlehem and this
event now witness which hath here taken place, that
which the Lord made known to us.

XXVII Recitative (Bass)

He brought his people hope, he hath his Israel redeemed, his help from Zion he
hath sent us and all our suff'ring ended. See, shepherds, this thing hath he done;
Go, this thing go and see!

XXVIII Chorale

This hath he all for us brought forth, His great love to manifest;
Rejoice thus all Christianity and thank him in eternity. Kyrieleis!

XXIX Duet (Soprano & Bass)

Lord, thy mercy, thy forgiveness,
Comforts us and sets us free.
Thy most gracious love and favor,
Thy most wonderful affection
Here make thy paternal faith new again.

XXX Recitative (Evangelist)

And they went forth quickly and found there both Mary and Joseph, and the child
lying in the manger. When they, however, had ceased their looking, they spread forth
the saying which had been told unto them concerning this child. And all to whom it

Rede, die ihnen die Hirten gesaget hatten. Maria aber behielt alle diese Worte und bewegte sie in ihrem Herzen.

XXXI *Aria (Alto)*

Schließe, mein Herze, dies selige Wunder
fest in deinem Glauben ein!
Lasse dies Wunder, die göttlichen Werke,
immer zur Stärke
deines schwachen Glaubens sein!

XXXII *Recitative (Alto)*

Ja, ja, mein Herz soll es bewahren, was es an dieser holden Zeit zu seiner Seligkeit
für sicheren Beweis erfahren.

XXXIII *Chorale*

Ich will dich mit Fleiß bewahren,
Ich will dir leben hier,
dir will ich abfahren,
mit dir will ich endlich schweben
voller Freud, ohne Zeit
dort im andern Leben.

XXXIV *Recitative (Evangelist)*

Und die Hirten kehrten wieder um, preiseten und lobten Gott um alles, das sie
gesehen und gehöret hatten, wie denn zu ihnen gesaget war.

XXXV *Chorale*

Seid froh dieweil,
daß euer Heil
ist hie ein Gott und auch ein Mensch geboren,
der, welcher ist
der Herr und Christ
in Davids Stadt, von vielen auserkoren.

XXXVb *Chorus*

Herrscher des Himmels, erhöere das Lallen,
laß dir die matten Gesänge gefallen,
wenn dich dein Zion mit Psalmen erhöht!
Höre der Herzen frohlockendes Preisen,
wenn wir dir itzo die Ehrfurcht erweisen,
weil unsre Wohlfahrt befestiget steht.

came wondered at the story which had been reported to them by the shepherds. But Mary kept to herself then all these sayings, and she pondered them within her heart.

XXXI *Aria (Alto)*

Keep thou, my heart now, this most blessed wonder
Fast within thy faith alway!
And let this wonder, these godly achievements,
Ever as comfort
Of thy feeble faith abide!

XXXII *Recitative (Alto)*

Oh yes, my heart shall ever cherish All it at this most gracious time to its eternal
bliss with certain signs of proof hath witnessed.

XXXIII *Chorale*

I will thee steadfastly cherish,
For thy sake my life make,
In thee I will perish,
With thee will I one day hover
Full of joy for alway
There when life is over.

XXXIV *Recitative (Evangelist)*

And the shepherds then turned back again, glorifying and praising God for all the
things which they had seen and had heard, just as it had been told to them.

XXXV *Chorale*

Be glad this while,
For now your health
Is here as God and as a man born to you,
The one who is
The Lord and Christ
In David's city, out of many chosen.

XXXVb *Chorus*

Ruler of heaven, give ear to our stammer,
Let these our weary refrains bring thee pleasure,
As thee thy Zion with psalms doth exalt!
Hear thou our hearts, though, exultant with praises,
As we to thee here our homage now render,
For our salvation stands strong and secure!

Fourth Part

New Year's Day (Feast of the Circumcision)

Luke 2 : 21

XXXVI *Chorus*

Fallt mit Danken, fällt mit Loben
vor des Höchsten Gnaden-Thron!
Gottes Sohn will der Erden
Heiland und Erlöser werden,
Gottes Sohn
dämpft der Feinde Wut und Toben.

XXXVII *Recitative (Evangelist)*

Und da acht Tage um waren, daß das Kind beschnitten würde, da ward sein Name
genennet Jesus, welcher genennet war von dem Engel, ehe denn er im Mutterleibe
empfangen ward.

XXXVIII *Recitative (Bass) & Duet (Soprano & Bass)*

Immanuel, o süßes Wort!
Mein Jesus heißt mein Hort,
mein Jesus heißt mein Leben.
Mein Jesus hat sich mir ergeben,
mein Jesus soll mir immerfort
vor meinen Augen schweben.
Mein Jesus heißet meine Lust,
mein Jesus labet Herz und Brust.

(Soprano)

Jesu, du mein liebstes Leben,
meiner Seelen Bräutigam,
der du dich vor mich gegeben
an des bittern Kreuzes Stamm!

(Bass)

Komm! Ich will dich mit Lust umfassen,
mein Herze soll dich nimmer lassen, ach!
So nimm mich zu dir!
Auch in dem Sterben sollst du mir
das Allerliebste sein;
in Not, Gefahr und Ungemach
seh ich dir sehnlichst nach.
Was jagte mir zuletzt
der Tod für Grauen ein?

XXXVI *Chorus*

Fall and thank him, fall and praise him
At the Highest's throne of grace!
God's own Son will of earth the
Savior and Redeemer be now,
God's own Son
Stems our foe's great wrath and fury.

XXXVII *Recitative (Evangelist)*

And when eight days were accomplished that the child be circumcised, was his name then called Jesus, which was so named by the angel, before he was conceived within his mother's womb.

XXXVIII *Recitative (Bass) & Duet (Soprano & Bass)*

Immanuel, O sweetest word!
My Jesus is my shield,
My Jesus is my being,
My Jesus is to me devoted,
My Jesus shall I ever hold
Before my eyes suspended.
My Jesus is my joyful rest,
My Jesus soothes my heart and breast.

(Soprano)

Jesus, thou, my life beloved,
Of my soul the bridegroom true,
Thou who didst for me surrender
To the bitter cross's tree!

(Bass)

Come! I would now with joy embrace thee,
My heart shall nevermore release thee,
Ah! Take me to thyself!
E'en in my dying shalt thou my
Most cherished treasure be;
In need, in dread and sore distress
I'll look and yearn for thee.
What cruelty at last
can death then hound me with?

Mein Jesus! Wenn ich sterbe,
so weiß ich, daß ich nicht verderbe.
Dein Name steht in mir geschrieben,
der hat des Todes Furcht vertrieben.

XXXIX *Aria (Soprano & Echo-soprano)*

Flößt, mein Heiland, flößt dein Namen
auch den allerkleinsten Samen
jenes strengen Schreckens ein?
Nein, du sagst ja selber nein!
Sollt ich nun das Sterben scheuen?
Nein, dein süßes Wort ist da!
Oder sollt ich mich erfreuen?
Ja, du Heiland sprichst selbst ja!

XL *Recitative & Chorale (Bass & Soprano)*

Recitative (Bass)

Wohlan, dein Name soll allein in meinem Herzen sein!
So will ich dich entzükket nennen, wenn Brust und Herz zu dir vor Liebe brennen.
Doch Liebster, sage mir: Wie rühm ich dich, wie dank ich dir?

Chorale (Soprano)

Jesu, meine Freud und Wonne, meine Hoffnung, Schatz und Teil,
mein Erlösung, Schmuck und Heil, Hirt und König, Licht und Sonne,
ach! wie soll ich würdiglich, mein Herr Jesu, preisen dich?

XLI *Aria (Tenor)*

Ich will nur dir zu Ehren leben,
mein Heiland, gib mir Kraft und Mut,
daß es mein Herz recht eifrig tut!
Stärke mich, deine Gnade würdiglich
und mit Danken zu erheben!

XLII *Chorale*

Jesus richte mein Beginnen,
Jesus bleibe stets bei mir;
Jesus zäume mir die Sinnen,
Jesus sei nur mein Begier.
Jesus sei mir in Gedanken,
Jesus, lasse mich nicht wanken!

My Jesus! When I die here,
I know that I shall never perish.
Thy name is written deep within me,
It hath the fear of death now banished.

XXXIX *Aria (Soprano & Echo-soprano)*

Doth, my Savior, doth thy name have
E'en the very smallest kernel
Of that awful terror now?
No, thyself thou sayest 'No.'
Ought I now of death be wary?
No, the gentle word is here!
Rather, ought I greet it gladly?
Yes, O Savior, thou say'st 'Yes.'

XL *Recitative & Chorale (Bass & Soprano)*

Recitative (Bass)

O joy, thy name shall now alone within my bosom dwell!
Thus will I call thy name with rapture when breast and heart for thee with love are burning.
But, dearest, tell me now: How thee to praise, how thee to thank.

Chorale (Soprano)

Jesus, my true joy and pleasure, my true treasure, share and hope,
My salvation, crown and health, King and shepherd, sun and radiance,
Ah, how shall I worthily, my Lord Jesus, give thee praise?

XLI *Aria (Tenor)*

I would but for thine honor live now;
My Savior, give me strength of will,
That this my heart with zeal may do.
Strengthen me Thy mercy worthily
And with gratitude to honor!

XLII *Chorale*

Jesus order my beginning,
Jesus bide alway with me,
Jesus bridle my intention,
Jesus be my sole desire,
Jesus be in all my thinking,
Jesus, let me never waver.

Fifth Part

Sunday after New Year's Day

Matthew 2 : 1 – 6

XLIII *Chorus*

Ehre sei dir, Gott, gesungen,
dir sei Lob und Dank bereit't.
Dich erhebet alle Welt,
weil dir unser Wohl gefällt,
weil anheut unser aller Wunsch gelungen,
weil uns dein Segen so herrlich erfreut.

XLIV *Recitative (Evangelist)*

Da Jesus geboren war zu Bethlehem im jüdischen Lande zur Zeit des Königes Herodis,
siehe, da kamen die Weisen vom Morgenlande gen Jerusalem und sprachen:

XLV *Chorus & Recitative (Alto)*

(Chorus)

Wo ist der neugeborne König der Jüden?

(Alto)

Sucht ihn in meiner Brust,
hier wohnt er, mir und ihm zur Lust!

(Chorus)

Wir haben seinen Stern gesehen im Morgenlande,
und sind kommen, ihn anzubeten.

(Alto)

Wohl euch, die ihr dies Licht gesehen,
es ist zu eurem Heil geschehen!

Mein Heiland, du, du bist das Licht,
das auch den Heiden scheinen sollen,
und sie, sie kennen dich noch nicht,
als sie dich schon verehren wollen.

Wie hell, wie klar muß nicht dein Schein,
geliebter Jesu, sein!

XLVI *Chorale*

Dein Glanz all Finsternis verzehrt, die trübe Nacht in Licht verkehrt.

Leit uns auf deinen Wegen, daß dein Gesicht

Und herrlichs

Licht wir ewig schauen mögen!

XLIII *Chorus*

Glory to thee, God, be sung now,
Thee be praise and thanks prepared,
Thee exalteth all the world,
For our good is thy desire,
For today is our ev'ry wish accomplished,
For us thy favor brings such splendid joy.

XLIV *Recitative (Evangelist)*

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the land of Judea in the days when Herod was the king, behold, there came the wise from the East to Jerusalem, who said:

XLV *Chorus & Recitative (Alto)*

(Chorus)

Where doth the newborn babe, the king of the Jews, lie?

(Alto)

Seek him within my breast,
He dwells here, mine and his the joy!

(Chorus)

We have indeed his star now witnessed where morning riseth and are come now to give him worship.

(Alto)

Blest ye, who have this light now witnessed,
It is for your salvation risen!

My Savior, thou, thou art that light,
Which to the nations shall shine also,
And they, they do not know thee yet,
As they e'en now would pay thee honor.
How bright, how clear must then thy rays,
Belove'd Jesus, be!

XLVI *Chorale*

Thy light all darkness doth consume, The gloomy night to day transform.
Lead us upon thy pathways, That we thy face
And glorious light
For evermore may witness!

XLVII *Aria (Bass)*

Erleucht auch meine finstre Sinnen,
erleuchte mein Herze durch der Strahlen klaren Schein!
Dein Wort soll mir die hellste Kerze
in allen meinen Werken sein;
dies lasset die Seele nichts Böses beginnen.

XLVIII *Recitative (Evangelist)*

Da das der König Herodes hörte, erschrak er, und mit ihm das ganze Jerusalem.

XLIX *Recitative (Alto)*

Warum wollt ihr erschrecken?
Kann meines Jesu Gegenwart euch solche Furcht erwecken?
O! solltet ihr euch nicht vielmehr darüber freuen,
weil er dadurch verspricht, der Menschen Wohlfahrt zu verneuen.

L *Recitative (Evangelist)*

Und ließ versammeln alle Hohepriester und Schriftgelehrten unter dem Volk
und erforschte von ihnen, wo Christus sollte geboren werden. Und sie sagten
ihm: Zu Bethlehem im jüdischem Lande; denn also stehet geschrieben durch den
Propheten: Und du Bethlehem im jüdischem Lande, bist mitnichten die kleinest
unter den Fürsten Juda; denn aus dir soll mir kommen der Herzog, der über mein
Volk Israel ein Herr sei.

LI *Terzetto (Soprano, Alto, Tenor)*

Soprano: Ach, wenn wird die Zeit erscheinen?

Tenor: Ach, wenn kömmt der Trost der Seinen?

Alto: Schweigt, er ist schon würklich hier!

Soprano/Tenor: Jesu, ach so komm zu mir!

LII *Recitative (Alto)*

Mein Liebster herrschet schon. Ein Herz, das seine Herrschaft liebet und sich ihm
ganz zu eigen gibet, ist meines Jesu Thron.

LIII *Chorale*

Zwar ist solche Herzensstube
wohl kein schöner Fürstensaal,
sondern eine finstre Grube;
doch, sobald dein Gnadenstrahl
in denselben nur wird blinken,
wird es voller Sonnen dünken.

XLVII *Aria (Bass)*

Illumine, too, my gloomy spirit,
Illumine my bosom with the beams of thy clear light!
Thy word shall be my brightest candle
In all the works which I shall do;
My soul shall this keep from all wicked endeavor.

LVIII *Recitative (Evangelist)*

And thus when Herod the king had heard this, he trembled, and with him the whole of Jerusalem.

XLIX *Recitative (Alto)*

Wherefore would ye be frightened?
Can my dear Jesus' presence then in you such fear awaken?
Oh! Should ye not by this instead be moved with gladness,
That he thereby hath pledged to make anew mankind's well-being!

L *Recitative (Evangelist)*

And assembling all the high priests and scribes from amongst the people, did he then inquire of them, where the birth of Christ was supposed to happen. And they said to him: In Bethlehem in the land of Judea; for even thus is it written by the prophet: And thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Judea art by no means the least among the princes of Judah; for from thee shall to me come the ruler, who shall over my people Israel be master.

LI *Terzetto (Soprano, Alto & Tenor)*

Soprano: Ah, when will that time appear then?

Tenor: Ah, when will his people's hope come?

Alto: Hush, he is already here!

Soprano/Tenor: Jesus, ah, then come to me!

LII *Recitative (Alto)*

My dearest ruleth now. The heart which his dominion loveth and gives itself to him entirely shall be my Jesus' throne.

LIII *Chorale*

Though in truth my heart's poor lodging
Is no lovely royal hall,
Rather but a dreary chamber,
Yet, when once thy mercy's beams
Bring to it the merest glimmer,
It seems as though with sun to shimmer.

Sixth Part

Epiphany

Matthew 2 : 7 – 12

LIV *Chorus*

Herr, wenn die stolzen Feinde schnauben,
so gib, daß wir im festen Glauben
nach deiner Macht und Hülfe sehn!
Wir wollen dir allein vertrauen,
so können wir den scharfen Klauen
des Feindes unversehrt entgeh'n.

LV *Recitative (Evangelist)*

Da berief Herodes die Weisen heimlich und erlernet mit Fleiß von ihnen, wenn der Stern erschienen wäre? Und weiset sie gen Bethlehem und sprach:
(*Herodes*) Zieheth hin und forschet fleißig nach dem Kindlein, und wenn ihr's findet, sagt mir's wieder, daß ich auch komme und es anbete.

LVI *Recitative (Soprano)*

Du Falscher, suche nur den Herrn zu fällen,
nimm alle falsche List, dem Heiland nachzustellen;
der, dessen Kraft kein Mensch ermißt, bleibt doch in sichrer Hand.
Dein Herz, dein falsches Herz ist schon,
nebst aller seiner List, des Höchsten Sohn,
den du zu stürzen suchst, sehr wohl bekannt.

LVII *Aria (Soprano)*

Nur ein Wink von seinen Händen
stürzt ohnmächt'ger Menschen Macht.
Hier wird alle Kraft verlacht!
Spricht der Höchste nur ein Wort,
seiner Feinde Stolz zu enden,
o, so müssen sich sofort
Sterblicher Gedanken wenden.

LVIII *Recitative (Evangelist)*

Als sie nun den König gehöret hatten, zogen sie hin. Und siehe, der Stern, den sie im Morgenlande gesehen hatten, ging vor ihnen hin, bis daß er kam und stund oben über, da das Kindlein war. Da sie den Stern sahen, wurden sie hoch erfreuet und gingen in das Haus und funden das Kindlein mit Maria, seiner Mutter, und

LIV *Chorus*

Lord, when our boastful foes blow fury,
Help us to keep our faith unshaken
And to thy might and help to look!
We would make thee our sole reliance
And thus unharmed the cutting talons
And clutches of the foe escape.

LV *Recitative (Evangelist)*

Then did Herod summon the wise men in secret, and with diligence he learned from them when the star was to appear. And he sent them forth to Bethlehem and said: (*Herod*) Go ye forth and search with diligence for the baby, and when ye find him, bring me word, that I as well may come and worship him.

LVI *Recitative (Soprano)*

Thou liar, seek nought but the Lord's destruction,
Lay ev'ry cunning snare and pitfall for our Savior;
He, whose great pow'r no man can gauge, abides in hands secure.
Thy heart, thy lying heart e'en now,
Along with all its guile, to God's own Son
Whom thou dost strive to fell is fully known.

LVII *Aria (Soprano)*

But a wave of his own hand will
Bring down feeble human might.
Here is all dominion mocked!
Speak the Highest but one word,
His opponents' pride to finish,
Oh, then surely must at once
Change its course all mortal purpose.

LVIII *Recitative (Evangelist)*

And as soon as they had heard the king, they went their way. And lo, the star, which in the East they had seen already, went before their way, until it came and stood above that place where the baby was. And when they saw the star, they rejoiced with great gladness and went into the house and found there the baby with Mary, his mother, and

fielen nieder und beteten es an und täten ihre Schätze auf und schenkten ihm Gold,
Weihrauch und Myrrhen.

LIX Chorale

Ich steh an deiner Krippen hier, o Jesulein, mein Leben;
ich komme, bring und schenke dir, was du mir hast gegeben.
Nimm hin! es ist mein Geist und Sinn,
Herz, Seel und Mut, nimm alles hin, und laß dir's wohlgefallen!

LX Recitative (Evangelist)

Und Gott befahl ihnen im Traum, daß sie sich nicht sollten wieder zu Herodes
lenken, und zogen durch einen andern Weg wieder in ihr Land.

LXI Recitative (Tenor)

So geht! Genug, mein Schatz geht nicht von hier, er bleibet da bei mir, ich will ihn
auch nicht von mir lassen. Sein Arm wird mich aus Lieb mit sanftmutsvollem Trieb
und größter Zärtlichkeit umfassen; er soll mein Bräutigam verbleiben, ich will ihm
Brust und Herz verschreiben. Ich weiß gewiß, er liebet mich, mein Herz liebt ihn
auch inniglich und wird ihn ewig ehren. Was könnte mich nun für ein Feind bei
solchem Glück versehren! Du, Jesu, bist und bleibst mein Freund; und werd ich
ängstlich zu dir flehn: Herr, hilf! so laß mich Hülfe sehn!

LXII Aria (Tenor)

Nun mögt ihr stolzen Feinde schrecken;
was könnt ihr mir für Furcht erwecken?
Mein Schatz, mein Hort ist hier bei mir.
Ihr mögt euch noch so grimmig stellen,
droht nur, mich ganz und gar zu fällen,
doch seht! mein Heiland wohnt hier.

LXIII Recitative (Soprano, Alto, Tenor & Bass)

Was will der Höllen Schrecken nun, Was will uns Welt und Sünde tun,
da wir in Jesu Händen ruhn?

LXIV Chorale

Nun seid ihr wohl gerochen an eurer Feinde Schar,
denn Christus hat zerbrochen, was euch zuwider war.
Tod, Teufel, Sünd und Hölle sind ganz und gar geschwächt;
bei Gott hat seine Stelle das menschliche Geschlecht.

fell before him and worshipped him and opened up their treasures then and gave to him gold, incense, and myrrh.

LIX Chorale

I stand before thy cradle here, o Jesus-child, my being,
I come now, bring and offer thee what thou to me hast given.
Take all! It is my spirit, will,
Heart, soul and mind, take all to thee, and let it serve thy pleasure!

LX Recitative (Evangelist)

And God then warned them in a dream that they should not go again unto Herod,
and they went by another way back to their country.

LXI Recitative (Tenor)

Then go! 'Tis well, my treasure leaveth not, he bideth here with me, I will not ever
let him leave me. His arm will in his love with soft affection's warmth and deepest
tenderness embrace me; he shall remain my faithful bridegroom, I will my breast
and heart assign him. I know full well he loveth me, my heart, too, loves him
fervently and shall always adore him. what harm to me could any foe amidst such
fortune do now? Thou, Jesus, art fore'er my friend; and when in fear I cry to thee:
'Lord, help!'; let me thy help behold!

LXII Aria (Tenor)

Now may ye boastful foes be frightened;
Ye can in me what fear awaken?
My store, my hoard is here by me.
Be ye unbounded in your fury
And threaten me with utter ruin,
Beware, my Savior dwelleth here!

LXIII Recitative (Soprano, Alto, Tenor & Bass)

What hope hath hell's own terrors now, what harm will world and sin us do, while
we in Jesus' hands rest sure?

LXIV Chorale

Now are ye well avenged upon your hostile host,
For Christ hath fully broken all that which you opposed.
Death, devil, hell and error to nothing are reduced;
With God hath now its shelter the mortal race of man.

Aspects of Liturgy, Theology and Unity in the Christmas Oratorio

Robin A. Leaver

We hear much music at Christmas-time. It has become part of our mid-winter culture. There was so much of it around by the early twentieth century that a special liturgical form was invented in order to include a wide variety of Christmas music – the service of lessons and carols, made famous by the choir of King’s College, Cambridge, England, that has become popular throughout the world. But the opposite is true with regard to the origins of Bach’s *Christmas Oratorio*, which was composed to fulfill specific liturgical needs. There is also another difference. We hear this magnificent work as a complete whole either in a concert hall, in a church but as a concert rather than worship, or on CDs in the privacy of our personal headphones or the sound systems of our homes. But when the people of Leipzig first heard Bach’s *Christmas Oratorio* in 1734-35 they did so in fulfilment of their membership of the church community in the city. They heard these cantatas not as a complete, independent work but as parts of services of worship, something they did not only during this festive season but also throughout the year. Our experience of the *Christmas Oratorio* is therefore very different from those who heard it when it was first performed.

Bach’s cantatas were not composed as independent mini-oratorios, complete in themselves, but as part of the larger whole of regular worship services, Sunday by Sunday, festival to festival, in the church year in Leipzig. On most days the cantata formed part of the preaching and teaching aspect of the Eucharistic Hauptgottesdienst, though there were slight variations between Sunday and festival usage. The following is the relevant section for the Christmas/Epiphany season:

- ...
- Collect [prayer of the day, chanted in Latin]
- Epistle lection [chanted in Latin on festivals]
- Gradualhymn [hymn of the day] *Gelobet seist du, Jesu Christ*
(All praise to thee, eternal God; Luther, 1524)
- Gospel lection [chanted in Latin]
- Cantata [variously termed = “Stück,” “Motetto,” or “Concerto.”]

- Credal Hymn *Wir glauben all' an einen Gott* (We all believe in one true God; Luther, 1524)
- Pulpit Hymn: *Ein Kindelein so löblich* (A little child so worthy) [= stanza 2 of *Der Tag der ist so freudenreich* (This day is full of joy, German version of the Latin hymn *Dies est laetitiae*, as edited for the Wittenberg *Gesangbuch*, 1529)]
- Sermon, always on the prescribed Gospel lection – which was read in full in German from the pulpit – and customarily lasted not less than one hour!
- etc.

Thus the cantata and the sermon were closely related, both being expositions of the Gospel lection of the day or celebration – one verbal and the other musical. Both were designed to encourage faith and commitment on behalf of the hearers, underscored by the hymnic confession of faith, *Wir glauben all' an einen Gott* (*We all believe in one true God*), that followed the cantata and preceded the sermon. During the ordinary Sundays of the church year, a cantata was heard alternately in each of the two principal churches – this week in the St. Thomas Church, next week in the St. Nicholas Church, and so forth. But on major festivals the respective cantata could be heard in both churches: in the morning Eucharistic Hauptgottesdienst in one church and in afternoon Vespers in the other church. Thus the liturgical context for the cantata at Vespers was slightly different from the Hauptgottesdienst:

- Latin Hymn or Motet sung by the choir
- Cantata
- Hymn: *Vom Himmel hoch* (From heaven above; Luther, 1539)
- Pulpit Hymn: *Ein Kindelein so löblich* (A little child so worthy)
- Sermon, preceded by the reading of the Epistle in German, on which the sermon was always based; again, it lasted one hour!
- Magnificat, on ordinary Sundays sung congregationally in German to *Tonus peregrinus*; on major festivals and special days, such as Christmas Day, a concerted setting sung in Latin, such Bach's *Magnificat* (BWV 243)

The cantata heard in the morning Hauptgottesdienst was closely associated with the Gospel of the day, when repeated at Vespers it was therefore connected with the respective Epistle. Thus the cantata was



usually more closely connected with the Gospel rather than the Epistle of the day. The music of Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* was therefore heard in connection within the two primary infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke's gospels at the morning service of the two principal churches in Leipzig, but at Vespers it was also heard within the context of a wide range of other Biblical lections, including passages from Isaiah, Acts, Galatians, Titus and Hebrews. The Oratorio was thus heard as six cantatas, in the two different churches, over a twelve-day period, according to the following sequence:

25 December 1734 - Christmas Day

Part I performed in the morning in the St. Nicholas Church and repeated in afternoon Vespers in the St. Thomas Church.

26 December 1734 - St. Stephen's Day

Part II performed in the morning in the St. Thomas Church and repeated in afternoon Vespers in the St. Nicholas Church.

27 December 1734 - St. John's Day

Part III only performed in the morning in the St. Nicholas Church; it was not repeated later in the day in the St. Thomas Church.

1 January 1735 - Feast of the Circumcision

Part IV performed in the morning in the St. Thomas Church and repeated in afternoon Vespers in the St. Nicholas Church.

2 January 1735 - Sunday after New Year

Part V only performed in the morning in the St. Nicholas Church; it was not repeated later in the day in the St. Thomas Church.

6 January 1735 - Feast of the Epiphany

Part VI performed in the morning in the St. Thomas Church and repeated in afternoon Vespers in the St. Nicholas Church.

This means that the complete series of the six cantatas was only heard in one of the two churches, the St. Nicholas Church; the congregation in the St. Thomas Church heard only cantatas I, II, IV and VI. Even the regular congregation of the St. Nicholas Church may not have heard all six parts, if their habit was only to attend the morning Hauptgottesdienst. Therefore the congregations of the two principal churches in Leipzig must have had some difficulty in appreciating that

the six cantatas Bach's of *Christmas Oratorio* were created with an overall unity.

Bach's predecessors in the city had simply composed and performed individual cantatas on these occasion of the Christmas/Epiphany season, as indeed Bach himself had done in earlier years. But sometime in 1734 Bach decided that for the next Christmas/Epiphany season instead of six independent cantatas he would compose a unified work that would be heard on these six days. It was a decision that was to have important consequences for the composer. The new six-part work would be modeled on his St. John and St. Matthew Passions, in that like them the *Christmas Oratorio* would also be a consecutive musical exposition of Biblical narratives. Instead of the Passion narratives Bach would set the Infancy narratives of St. Matthew and St. Luke's gospels. But to do so would have meant a significant break in tradition, something that was rarely done in Leipzig. Bach must therefore have secured special permission from Superintendent Salomon Deyling – and perhaps also the church consistory over which Deyling presided – in order to disturb the traditional Gospel lections prescribed for these days:

	<i>Traditional Gospels</i>	<i>Bach's Biblical Sequence</i>
Christmas Day	Luke 2: 1-14	Luke 2: 1, 3-7
Second Day of Christmas	Matt. 23: 34-39	Luke 2: 8-14
Third Day of Christmas	John 21: 15-24	Luke 2: 15–20
New Year	Luke 2: 21	Luke 2: 21
Sunday after New Year	Matt. 2: 13-15	Matt. 2: 1-6
Epiphany	Matt. 2: 1-12	Matt. 2: 7-12

As can be clearly seen, only the single-verse Gospel for New Year's Day remains intact: the Gospels for Christmas Day and Epiphany are at least partially present, but the Gospels for the other days are ignored. There must have been some consternation in official church circles in Leipzig concerning this break with tradition. If so, it would seem that they were won over by Bach's more consistent use of the two primary Infancy narratives.

As Bach approached his 50th birthday, that is, around the age that both his parents had died, he was thinking about the end of his own life and what he would be leaving behind as his musical posterity. It was around this time that he made the definitive score of his *St. Matthew Passion*, and began work on doing the same for his *St. John Passion*, though this was never completed. It is during this same period that he conceived

the idea of a Christmas “Oratorium”, a title that he was to use for three works composed (and/or re-composed) between 1734 and 1738. According to the obituary published after his death, by this time he had probably composed approaching five annual cycles of cantatas, and in working on the scores of his two great Passions it seems that he was drawn to consider larger-scale vocal works, extended cantatas for the other principal festivals celebrating key events in the life of Christ, that is, Christmas, Easter and Ascension. Thus for the Christmas/Epiphany season of 1734-35 Bach composed the cycle of six cantatas to which he gave the collective title *Oratorium Tempore Nativitatis Christi* (BWV 248). During the following four months he composed an extended cantata for the Ascension with the title *Oratorium Festo Ascensionis Christi* (BWV 11). About three years later, probably in 1738, he reworked the Easter cantata he had originally written in 1725 to which he gave the title: *Oratorium Festo Paschatos* (BWV 249).

The Easter and Ascension Oratorios were straightforward, since they would be heard on a single occasion, but the *Christmas Oratorio* was heard, so to speak, in installments. In order to give the six cantatas an overall unity, Bach not only uses consecutively the infancy narratives but also draws attention to the essential unity of the six parts by the use of chorales, similar instrumentation, and arranging the movements in symmetrical patterns that create links between the different cantatas. Underlying the whole Oratorio is a theological dialectic between Incarnation and Atonement: that the import of the birth of Christ is the death of Christ.

The overall concept and design, based as it is on the primary Biblical narratives of the Nativity, clearly must have come from Bach himself. But he must also have worked very closely with the poet who supplied the texts of the non-Biblical recitatives and arias. Who this person was is not known with certainty, though the most likely candidate is Christian Friedrich Henrici (1700-1764), who wrote under the pseudonym of “Picander.” He had collaborated with Bach over many years, supplying libretti for a whole range of vocal works, sacred and secular, including the St. Matthew (1727), and St. Mark (1731 – of which only the libretto is extant) passions, and, more significantly, Picander was also responsible for two other Bach “Oratorios,” those for Easter and Ascension (see above). Picander’s authorship of the libretti of these other works is confirmed by their appearance in the five volumes of his collected poetry published as *Ernst-schertzhafte und satyrische Gedichte* (Leipzig, 1727-1751). But the libretto of the *Christmas*

Oratorio is not found in any of these volumes, which means that his authorship, while most likely, must remain conjectural.

One of the features of the additional poetic movements of the *Christmas Oratorio* libretto is the recurring image of the Bridegroom (see III, IV and LXI), which might be an indication of Picander's authorship, since his *St. Matthew Passion* libretto begins with the imperative that Christ, the "Bridegroom", is to be seen as the "Lamb" who takes away the sin of the world (BWV 244/1). Here, near the beginning of the *Christmas Oratorio* Christ the "Bridegroom" is to be seen as the "Hero of David's line" (der Held aus Davids Stamm), the "Savior of the earth" (Heil der Erden). And in the same way that in the first movement of the *St. Matthew Passion* the message is directed to the "daughters" of Zion, in the early movements of the first cantata of the *Christmas Oratorio* it is Zion itself, as the image the church, that is addressed. These similarities of ideas may well be indications of Picander's authorship but, whatever their origin, they are also strong indicators of how these cantatas were received by the Leipzig congregations.

The principal service in which the six cantatas of the *Christmas Oratorio* were heard was the morning Hauptgottesdienst, that is, the Lutheran eucharistic liturgy. After the main section of the reading and preaching of Scripture, in which the cantata had its place, the service continued with the celebration of Lord's Supper, centering on the Words of Institution, after which the consecrated elements of bread and wine were received individually by the attending congregation. Lutheran eucharistic theology stresses the presence of Christ "in, with, and under" the consecrated elements, which are therefore the means by which Christ enters the life of the individual believer. Thus in the *Christmas Oratorio* – as with many of Bach's other cantatas – there are various references to the indwelling of Christ. Since Christmas is celebrated as the entry of Christ into the world this concept becomes a metaphor for the entry of Christ into the individual worshiper in the eucharistic action.

These eucharistic connections are particularly marked in the meditative poetic insertions into the Biblical narratives of the Nativity, especially in the arias. Zion, that is, the assembled church, is to be prepared and "Eile, den Bräutigam sehnlichst zu lieben! (Hasten to the Bridegroom with most ardent love) (IV). On the one hand, the congregations in Bach's day would have recalled that in the parables of Jesus in the gospels the Bridegroom image is always presented within the context of a marriage feast, which was interpreted as an image of the Lord's

Supper (Abendmahl). On the other hand, reference to Bridegroom/ Bride imagery would have also evoked the intimacy between Christ and the individual soul, commonly expressed in hymns and other church music, which again was understood to be emblematic of the eucharistic encounter. The soprano and bass duet No. XXIX, was probably heard as an implicit dialog between Christ and the individual soul – paralleling explicit expositions in some of Bach’s other cantatas – since it conveys the message that God’s mercy and compassion are constantly renewed (Machen . . . wieder neu), a statement with eucharistic overtones, since it is participation in the Lord’s Supper that the individual is renewed in faith and love. In the terzetto (LI) the question of when can the Savior be expected, is answered by the statement that he is already here, and the response is “Jesu, ach so komm zu mir” (Jesus, ah, then come to me). Again this would have been understood eucharistically by Bach’s original hearers: it is Christ who comes to us in the eucharistic meal (Abendmahl). Then towards the end of the last cantata (LII) the assurance is given that no fears can frighten because “Mein Schatz, mein Hort ist hier bei mir” (My treasure, my refuge, is here with me). This again would have been understood as a reminder that in the Lord’s Supper Christ is present: “Doch seht! Mein Heiland wohnt hier” (But see! My Savior dwells here). Thus for the worshipers of Bach’s day they heard the Biblical narratives, and these interspersing poetic meditations, not as recollections of history but rather as details of an event whose significance is continuous: the “then” of history has become the “now” of the present.

The first three cantatas were performed on consecutive days, 25-27 December, and are linked in a number of symmetrical patterns. The first cantata begins with the celebratory chorus, “Jauchzet, frohlocket, auf, preiset die Tage” (Triumph, rejoicing, rise, praising these days now), with trumpets and timpani (I), and ends with a chorale, “Ach mein herzliebes Jesulein” (Ah my beloved Jesus-child), an upbeat setting, again with trumpets and timpani (IX). The third cantata similarly begins and ends with a celebratory chorus, but this time the music is repeated without alteration, “Herrscher des Himmels” (Ruler of heaven, XXIV and XXXVb), with suitable flourishes for trumpets and timpani. Cantatas one and three therefore frame the second cantata, which is itself carefully arranged in a symmetrical pattern. The second cantata begins with the wonderful Sinfonia in which the groups of woodwinds and strings evoke the pastoral scene of the Bethlehem shepherds (X), and it ends with a reprise of the same pastoral music, except this time it is woven

around the familiar *Vom Himmel hoch* chorale melody “Wir singen dir in deinem Heer” (We sing to thee amidst thy host, XXIII). At the center of the vocal movements of this second cantata is the chorale, “Schaut hin, dort liegt im finstern Stall” (Look there, he lies in manger drear).

The first and third cantatas begin and end with suitable music celebrating the birth of Christ, “of David’s royal line,” with full orchestral and choral resources, including trumpets and timpani, the instruments particularly associated with festive and royal occasions. The second cantata, the center of the first three of the cycle, which deals primarily with the Lucan narrative of the Bethlehem shepherds, begins and ends with an evocation of the pastoral scene with the lighter orchestration of woodwinds and strings. At the center of this middle cantata is the heart of the Christmas story: “And this shall be the sign for you... a child lying in a manger.”

It is particularly significant that there are connections between Bach’s *Christmas Oratorio* and his Passions, and these links are as much theological as they are similar approaches to the setting of Biblical narrative, especially the use of a tenor Evangelist to tell the story. In the first cantata, following the wonderful opening chorus, Bach twice employs a sequence that occurs particularly in his *St. Matthew Passion*: words of Scripture, meditation on the passage, prayer, and chorale. Luke 2: 1,3-6, is a recitative sung by the Evangelist (II). The alto recitative (III) is a meditation on the coming of Christ, which leads into the alto aria (IV), a prayer for preparedness at the coming of Christ. The chorale (V), although sung by the choir nevertheless articulates the response of the congregation. That Bach should use here the melody of the so-called “Passion Chorale” (“Herzlich tut mich verlangen”, Lord, hear my deepest longing) is particularly significant. Here is proclaimed musically the theological understanding that Christ was born to die, that Incarnation leads to Atonement.

The basic pattern is then repeated. The Evangelist sings Luke 2: 7 (VI), which is followed by a meditative recitative with chorale (VII). This chorale is the sixth stanza of Luther’s Christmas hymn *Gelobet seist du Jesu Christ* (All praise to thee, eternal God), with its familiar melody. Here is Bach drawing attention to the liturgy within which these cantatas were heard, the liturgy that called upon the congregation to sing this hymn by Luther in between the Epistle and Gospel readings in the Hauptgottesdienst during the Christmas/Epiphany season. Then follows a sturdy prayer to the infant Christ – he, “Großer Herr, o starker König” (Mighty Lord, O strongest sovereign), through whom all things were created, is the one who lies in a manger (VIII)! That Bach chose to



use trumpet obligato for this movement is perhaps another hint of the Passion. In other cantatas, such as BWV 43, the use of obligato trumpet is often symbolic of the triumph of the cross and resurrection. Thus it seems that Bach is again linking the Incarnation with the Atonement. The prayer is followed by the concluding chorale (IX), stanza 13 of Luther's *Vom Himmel hoch* (*From heaven above*), the most frequently-used Christmas hymn in Leipzig, as elsewhere in Lutheran Germany. The second cantata begins with the famous Sinfonia (X), a depiction of the shepherds that prepares for the following recitative (XI), the words of the Evangelist, Luke 2: 8-9, in which is described the appearance of the angel and the fear of the shepherds. The chorale (XII) anticipates the angel's "Fear not!," and the tenor aria (XV) expresses the consequential joy at the angel's reassurance given to the shepherds (XIII). In between is the meditative comment (XIV) which prepares the way for the announcement of the birth of Jesus (XVI-XVII). In the following two movements (XVIII and XIX) the worshipers are invited to follow the shepherds metaphorically and sing a lullaby to the infant Savior. With the next two movements (XX and XXI) the Gospel narrative returns, and the sudden response of the angels is heard: "Gloria in excelsis Deo." This is a tightly-composed motet – reminiscent of the turba ("crowd") choruses in Bach's Passions – in which "glory . . . in the highest" is contrasted by "peace on earth." The short bass recitative that follows (XXII) is an invitation for worshipers on earth to join with the singing of the angels, an opportunity that is taken up in the closing chorale: "We sing" with the angels (XXIII). By a brilliant stroke of musical genius Bach not only creates a sense of unity between the attending congregation and the singing of the angels, he also brings back the shepherds, whose pipes, first heard in the opening Sinfonia of this second cantata, return to play along with heavenly as well as earthly voices. The melody for the chorale is Luther's *Vom Himmel hoch*, which was last heard as the center-piece of the first three cantatas (XIII). There it was associated with the humanity of the infant Jesus, and is therefore "lowly" pitched in C. Here (XXIII) the divinity of Christ is being celebrated and thus Bach "heightens" this praise by raising the pitch a fifth, to G.

The third cantata begins with where the second cantata ends, echoing the song of the angels. This cantata has a simple structure that follows the sequence of the Gospel narrative. The shepherds go to Bethlehem and the worshipers are encouraged to make the journey with them in faith. The Biblical narrative of Luke 2: 15 (XXV and XXVI) is followed by a meditation on the significance of the coming of Christ into the world

(XXVII). The repeated sequence of movements in the first cantata would suggest that Bach would follow this with a prayer, and then a chorale, but the order is here reversed: first there is a chorale (XXVIII) – another stanza of Luther’s Christmas hymn *Gelobet seist du Jesu Christ*, and again another link with the liturgy within which the cantatas were originally heard – and then there is a prayer, an eloquent duet (XXIX). This is a preparation for what will be found in Bethlehem, that is, Mary, Joseph, “and the Babe lying in a manger” (XXX). The Evangelist ends with the statement: “But Mary kept all these things in her heart.” The following aria and recitative (XXXI and XXXII) are meditations in which the example of Mary is commended to the worshipers – to also ponder these things – a thought further emphasized in the chorale (XXXIII). The Evangelist then concludes the story of the shepherds (XXXIV): they returned “glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.” Bach adds a suitable celebratory chorale and returns to the triumphant music heard at the beginning of cantata three. Thus the first half of the *Christmas Oratorio*, associated with the first three days of Christmas (December 25-27), ends, as it had begun, with a flourish of praise and a fanfare of trumpets.

The last three cantatas of the sequence of six are not as closely connected as are the first three. This is mainly because the first three were heard on consecutive days, whereas the second three were heard over a period of six days (1-6 January, 1735).

The fourth cantata was composed for New Year’s Day 1735, the Feast of the Circumcision of Jesus, also known as the Feast of the Naming of Jesus. This latter association explains the many references to “name” and frequent occurrence of “Jesus” in the libretto. The cantata begins with one of the most extended of all Bach’s choruses, richly orchestrated with particular prominence being given to horns and oboes (XXXVI). Although it is, like many other movements of the *Christmas Oratorio*, a parodied movement (see p. 17), it may well be that Bach was drawn to the use of horns in this context to emphasize the uniqueness of Christ, as he does with the *Quoniam tu solus sanctus* in the Gloria of what was to become the B minor Mass (BWV 232/11). The opening chorus is followed by a short recitative, the voice of the Evangelist, which comprises the complete, but brief, Gospel for New Year’s Day (XXXVII). It is a straightforward recitative in which the words are declaimed in a simple style, and yet there is also some subtle symbolism. The name “Jesus” appears at the midpoint and at the highest pitch of the few measures, illustrating what might be considered the royal “highness” of the person of “Jesus.”

The next three movements (XXXVIII-XL) are linked together in that the bass recitative, with chorale, is interrupted by the soprano aria, *Flösst, mein Heiland (Doth, my Savior, doth thy name have)*, the center-point of the cantata. What began life as a simple echo aria is here transformed into a dialogue in which the Savior confirms the prayers of the believing soul. The resulting intimate dialogue belongs to a long tradition, beginning in sixteenth-century Christ-Soul hymns, continuing in the church music of Andreas Hammerschmidt, among others, as well as in a number of other cantatas of Bach, especially those he gave the specific title "Dialogus." The bass recitatives (XXXVIII and XL) are meditations on the name of Jesus and are combined with the first stanza of Johann Rist's *Jesu, du mein liebstes Leben* (Christ, the life of all beginning, 1642). The stanza refers to the crucifixion, which might be thought to be out of place in an oratorio celebrating the Incarnation. But the Feast of the Circumcision (i.e. New Year's Day), the first shedding of the blood of Christ, was traditionally regarded as prefiguring the crucifixion. Further, the explanation of the name Jesus, "he will save his people from their sins," also points towards the crucifixion. Thus on this Feast of the Circumcision, or Name-day of Jesus, we find another connection between Incarnation and Atonement. The melody of the chorale is otherwise unknown and it is therefore presumed to be Bach's own. The aria *Ich will nur dir zu Ehren* (I would but for thine honor live now, XLI) is an incredibly fine contrapuntal movement in da capo form. The fugal writing is of a high order, with all the instruments, together with the solo voice, sharing the subject in turn in a structure that is further intensified by overlapping imitations and inversions. With its insistence that one should only live for the glory of God in Christ, it anticipates the opening movement of the next (fifth cantata). The concluding chorale (XLII), with instrumental interludes, is set to a melody which again is unknown elsewhere and is therefore possibly the work of Bach. If so, then this cantata has the most unusual feature of including not one but two chorale melodies composed by Bach himself.

Cantata five was composed for the Sunday after New Year, which in 1735 was January 2. As noted above, contrary to traditional practice, Bach did not work with the Gospel for the day, Matthew 2: 13-15 (the flight into Egypt), but chose instead to concentrate on the beginning of the Gospel for the Feast of the Epiphany, Matthew 2: 1-4 (the arrival of the wise men from the East). The libretto alternates between Biblical narrative and poetic devotion. The music of the opening chorus (XLIII), a sectional fugue in da capo form, evokes an image of the procession of the wise men, with its almost incessant "walking" bass

that characterizes the whole movement. At the same time the joyful movement recalls the song of the angels: "Ehre sei dir, Gott," *Gloria in excelsis Deo*. In the following recitative of Biblical narrative (XLIV) the Evangelist tells of the arrival of the wise men and announces their question: "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" The question itself is sung by the chorus in a motet style, and the interchange of recitative and chorus is reminiscent of the turba ("crowd") choruses in Bach's Passions, indeed, some have suggested that it may have been adapted from his no-longer-extant *St. Mark Passion* (BWV 247). Whatever its origin, that Bach chose to write in the Passion-manner, so to speak, is another example of his concern to connect Incarnation with Atonement. As soon as the wise men have announced that they have seen the star, the next two movements (XLIV-XLV) develop the theme of Christ, the light of the world. The following chorale (XLVI) – text by Georg Weissel (1642), set to a melody composed by one of Bach's predecessors in Leipzig, Seth Calvisius (1581) – applies the experience of the wise men to the attending worshipers, that they, too, might be led by the light of Christ, a theme expounded in the ensuing bass aria (XLVII). Three recitatives, mostly biblical narrative, then deal with the answer to Herod's question concerning where this "King" was born, that Christ is born in Bethlehem (XLVIII-L), and the remaining three movements of the cantata develop the theme that for contemporary worshipers Christ is to be searched for not in Bethlehem but rather in their own hearts. The terzetto (LI) has many pints of interest, not least the final vocal phrase of the alto, "er ist schon wirklich hier" ("He is already here"), which is almost identical with the alto voice-part at the words "et incarnatus est" in the Credo of the B-minor *Mass*, and therefore underscores the Incarnation, the principal doctrine being celebrated throughout the Christmas/Epiphany season. The alto continues the statement of faith in the subsequent recitative (LII), and the cantata concludes with a simple four-part chorale (LIII), set to the familiar melody by Heinrich Albert, *Gott des Himmels und der Erden* (God who madest earth and heaven, 1642).

The sixth and final cantata of the cycle was composed for the Feast of the Epiphany, and centers on the second part of the Gospel for the Feast of the Epiphany, Matthew 2: 7-11, following-on from the fifth cantata heard a few days earlier. The cantata libretto develops a simple theme: the contrast between the feigned worship of Herod and the true worship of the wise men. It opens with the customary large-scale chorus (LIV), a da capo movement of complex counterpoint, with festive trumpets and timpani, comprised of two symmetrical sections, each of

exactly 120 measures, with fugal, canonic, and ritornelli sections – a devastatingly artistic indictment of Herod’s insincerity! In the following recitative (LV) the Evangelist recounts the Biblical record of Herod’s response to the wise men, which is intensified in the subsequent recitative and aria (LVI and LVII). Here a “man proposes but God disposes” theme is developed: the designs of Herod are contrasted by the sovereignty of God. The ensuing recitative (LVIII) records the arrival of the wise men in Bethlehem, their worship of Jesus, and the presentation of their gifts. The central movement of the cantata is the following chorale (LIX), the first stanza of Paul Gerhardt’s *Ich stehe an deiner Krippe hier* (I stand before thy manger-bed, 1656), which envisages each worshiper in the scene with the wise men and, by the use of the first person singular, invites them to offer themselves to the infant Jesus. It is a very personal approach to the Biblical narrative. The melody of the chorale is otherwise unknown and thus may well have been composed by Bach, and thus is the third “new” chorale melody in the *Christmas Oratorio*. If Bach is the composer of the melody then its length of 14 measures may be significant. According to the number alphabet, where A = 1, B = 2 etc., B A C H = 14. Bach appears to have employed such number symbolism in other choral works, especially at those points where he wanted to see himself personally involved. Following the chorale the Evangelist recounts the warning given to the wise men in a dream that they should not return to Herod but go directly to their home country (LX), a theme that continues in the following recitative and aria (LXI-LXII). There is an interesting literary image in the libretto here. The wise men leave their treasure with the infant Christ, the libretto expresses the idea that the worshipers carry their treasure with them, that is, the indwelling Christ. The final recitative (LXIII), for all four soloists who enter with a theme that is melodically virtually identical with the fanfare that breaks out towards the end of the otherwise grief-laden aria “Es ist vollbracht” (It is accomplished) of the *St. John Passion* (BWV 245, XXX): “Der Held aus Juda siegt mit Macht” (The hero of Judah triumphs with power) – the victory of the cross. Here the thought is much the same, “What can harm us now that we rest in the hands of this Jesus?” Yet again Bach underscores the connection between Incarnation and Atonement. Then comes the finale chorale (LXIV), a celebratory setting of the melody *Herzlich tut mich verlangen* (Lord, hear my dearest longing, 1601/05), generally known as the “Passion Chorale,” and given much prominence in both Bach’s Passions. That Bach deliberately intended a passion reference here has been called into question. It has been argued



that since the melody was used with other hymn texts, this specific association can no longer be made. But, at least in Leipzig hymnals in use during Bach's time, the other hymn texts sung to this melody all had Passion connections. Here the link is specific. The previous recitative speaks of resting in the "hands of Jesus," recalling paintings in which the infant Christ stands with outstretched hands, already marked by the nails of the crucifixion. The chorale text itself celebrates Christ's victory over death, Satan, sin, and hell, the common theme of crucifixion/resurrection hymns. Further, this "Passion Chorale" melody of the final movement of the *Christmas Oratorio* was heard earlier, in the central movement of the first cantata performed on Christmas Day. Therefore the familiar melody is both the first and the last chorale heard in the complete cycle of cantatas that comprise the *Christmas Oratorio*. The connections between Incarnation and Atonement that have been continuously present throughout all six cantatas are given an emphatic but glorious statement in the movement that brings the complete *Christmas Oratorio* to a close. That Bach should make these Incarnation/Atonement connections is hardly surprising since it is a theme commonly found in the many theological and devotional writings by Lutheran theologians and preachers issued during the period between Luther and Bach.

Would the congregations in Leipzig have understood all these connections when they first heard this remarkable music? The one's connected with chorales and those overtly present in the libretto would certainly be recognized, after all, this is the kind of thing that they would have customarily heard from the Leipzig pulpits. But some of the subtler things, such as the melodic connection with the final recitative (LXIII) and the *St. John Passion* would probably have only been understood by members of Bach's family, his closest students, and perhaps a few others. On the one hand, when we hear this magnificent work today we cannot experience it the way its first hearers did, since it is not possible to put ourselves back in time, and thus much is lost to us because we do not hear it in the way that they did. But on the other hand, our experience may well be richer, since we can hear the work as a continuous whole, and we have access to the fruits of Bach research and perhaps have a better understanding of what the composer had in mind – which is much more than was accessible to the original members of the Leipzig congregations who first heard this cycle of cantatas during the Christmas/Epiphany season of 1734-35.

Robin A. Leaver is Professor of Sacred Music at Westminster Choir College of Rider University, Visiting Professor at the Juilliard School, New York City, and immediate past-President of the American Bach Society. An internationally recognized hymnologist, musicologist, liturgiologist, Bach scholar, and Reformation specialist, Dr. Leaver has written numerous books and articles in the cross-disciplinary areas of liturgy, church music, theology, and hymnology, published in the United States, United Kingdom, Ireland, the Netherlands, Germany, Africa, Korea and Japan. He has made significant contributions to Luther, Schütz and Bach studies, and authored articles for such reference works as the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (1980 and the second edition, 2001), as well as contributions on various aspects of organ music that have appeared in different journals and yearbooks. Dr. Leaver has written or edited four books on Bach and contributed chapters to such collected studies as *The Cambridge Bach Companion* (Cambridge, 1998), *Die Quellen Johann Sebastian Bachs: Bachs Musik in Gottesdienst* (Heidelberg, 1998), and the *Oxford Composer Companions: J. S. Bach* (Oxford, 1999). Dr. Leaver has been an active participant in scholarly symposia and practical workshops throughout Europe, Korea, Japan, New Zealand, Canada, as well as the United States, has written program and record notes, and/or given pre-concert lectures, for the Taverner Choir and Players, London, the Early Music Centre, London, the English Bach Festival, London, the Bach Choir of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, Westminster Choir and Chamber Orchestra, Princeton, New Jersey, etc., and for such conductors as Robert Shaw, Gustav Leonhardt, Andrew Parrot, Joseph Flummerfelt, Greg Funfgeld, Reilly Lewis, Paul McCreesh, among others. He has also worked on liturgical reconstructions of Bach's music, including: *St. John Passion* in the setting of Vespers in Kings College Chapel, Cambridge, England, directed by John Butt; the Bach Epiphany Mass recordings of The Gabrieli Consort & Players, directed by Paul McCreesh (Deutsche Grammophon); Bach Vespers for Advent in Trinity College Chapel, Dublin, Ireland, directed by Andrew Megill; and a reconstruction of the Leipzig Christmas morning liturgy for the Washington Bach Consort, directed by Reilly Lewis. He recently completed a book manuscript: *Luther's Liturgical Music: Principles and Implications*, due for publication.

Mother and Child

Eddy Posthuma de Boer

The *Christmas Oratorio* is Bach's unrivalled exaltation of the miracle of the birth of a child. An extraordinary birth indeed, but what birth isn't? It has inspired me to put together a series of photos linked by the theme "Mother and Child". Being the father of two daughters who have daughters of their own, I have, on several occasions, experienced the surge of maternal instincts that overcomes women during pregnancy. And I have seen how those maternal instincts enable mothers to care for their babies quite naturally once they have been born.

What subject matter could be more pleasing to the photographer than Mother and Child? With births taking place every day, all over the world – and with mankind having no natural enemies – there is enough material to photograph. But although we have no natural enemies, our survival is threatened because we are our own worst enemy. Large numbers of people are continually being threatened by war, racial hatred and genocide, to name but a few of these self-destructive forces. Christmas is a time for wishing each other Peace on Earth, even though wishing this is, sadly, quite often pointless.

Once, in an International Red Cross field hospital in a refugee camp in Congo crammed with ten thousand refugees, I photographed a birth. The surgeon summoned me. It was a difficult birth, and after a moment of deliberation, a Caesarian section was decided upon. Despite a power cut and a minimal amount of daylight, the operation went well: mother and child were saved.

Once a child is ready to be born it *will* be born, and it makes no difference whether it's in a refugee camp or a stable in Bethlehem. But wherever I was in the world – South America, Africa, Asia or Europe – the pride mothers took in their babies, the way they nurtured them, was always the same. With that first kiss our mothers give us, with that first protective embrace, we receive our first draught of *elixir de vie*.

I regularly photographed the Dutch writer Gerard Reve during his lifetime, and when our daughter Eva Maria was born, he sent us a card with the words:

“Beautifully chosen – the names of the first woman & the last: the woman who brought sin and shame into the world and the women who caused it to go. (Quite why sin and shame should come into the world only to have to disappear again I simply would not know. It seems a shame to go to all that trouble, but that’s a subject for another day)...”

Listen and read, but do not forget to look at this album too!

For over fifty years photographer *Eddy Posthuma de Boer* (1931) has roamed endlessly around the world, making a record of human life in more than eighty countries. No one single aspect of the human condition has escaped his attention, and his photography reflects its every shade, from drama to humour.



Biographies

Combattimento Consort Amsterdam

Since its formation in 1982 the Combattimento Consort Amsterdam has dedicated itself to performing repertoire from the period 1600-1800 under the direction of artistic director Jan Willem de Vriend. This repertoire includes not only familiar works but also lesser known masterpieces, which are often only available in manuscript form. Although made up of a relatively small group of musicians, the Combattimento Consort Amsterdam gives a host of performances in large concert halls both in the Netherlands and abroad (Central Europe, Spain, Italy, Denmark, Germany, North and South America, and Japan). At home, the ensemble also performs in smaller concert halls and at private gatherings.

In addition to working with its own soloists, the Combattimento Consort regularly engages artists of international renown. The ensemble has produced numerous CDs and DVDs and can frequently be heard or seen on the radio and television. It has also realised a number of special projects thanks to the invaluable financial support of its Association of Friends. The Combattimento Consort Amsterdam is a close-knit group of musicians ("consort") who dare to engage in the battle ("combattimento") between point and counterpoint. It is a baroque ensemble capable of exploiting contrasts in order to create beauty and intense pleasure, and an ensemble whose musical verve and audacity bridges the gap between the players and the general public...

Cappella Amsterdam

Cappella Amsterdam was founded in 1970 and has, in recent years, established a prominent position for itself in the fields of early, modern and contemporary music under the artistic direction of Daniel Reuss. The choir is particularly drawn to Dutch composers, as evidenced by their regular performances of works by Sweelinck and Lassus as well as by modern composers, plus the many works written specially for Cappella Amsterdam, such as *Chœurs*, four choirs from Jan van Vlijmen's new opera *Thyeste*, directed by Gerardjan Rijnders and premièred by, among others, Cappella Amsterdam and the ASKO Ensemble in September 2005 at La Monnaie in Brussels.

Cappella Amsterdam has sung in many opera productions including: Tan Dun's *Marco Polo* (the CD of which won an Edison award), Rameau's *Les Indes Galantes* (in collaboration with the Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century, conducted by Frans Brüggen) and Jan van de Putte's *Wet*

Snow (in collaboration with the Netherlands Radio Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Micha Hamel). The choir also joined forces with Krisztina de Châtel for the production *Obscura* – a choreography for singers and dances to the music of contemporary composer Hans Koolmees, among others. On the Dutch festival scene, Cappella Amsterdam has performed at the Holland Festival (almost every year since 2000), the Early Music Festival in Utrecht and Festival Musica Sacra in Maastricht. Foreign festival invitations have taken them to Italy, France, Portugal, Japan, Belgium and Germany to perform at Settembre Musica, La Folle Journée, Ars Musica, La Chaise Dieu and Berliner Festspiele. Cappella Amsterdam's versatility has led to many other collaborative projects with, for instance, the Asko/Schönberg Ensemble (conducted by Reinbert de Leeuw and Stefan Asbury), Ebony Band, the Nieuw Ensemble, the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra (conducted by Nikolaus Harnoncourt), the Netherlands Radio Chamber Orchestra (conducted by Peter Eötvös), the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra, the Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century (conducted by Frans Brüggen), the Ensemble Intercontemporain (conducted by Jonathan Nott), the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment (conducted by Gustav Leonhardt), the SWR Vokalensemble and the RIAS Kammerchor.

Jan Willem de Vriend, conductor

Having studied the violin at the conservatories of Amsterdam and Den Haag, Jan Willem de Vriend founded the Combattimento Consort Amsterdam in 1982. In his capacity as violinist and artistic director of this ensemble he has conducted numerous concerts and opera productions both in the Netherlands and abroad. He has also served as guest concertmaster of Camerata Bern and Ensemble Oriol Berlin, and as guest conductor of the Brabants Orkest, the Residentie Orkest, the Arnhem Philharmonic Orchestra, the North Netherlands Symphony Orchestra, the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, the Limburgs Symfonie Orkest, the German RIAS Jugend Orchester, the Deutsche Kammer Philharmonie and the Swedish ensemble Musica Vitae. In collaboration with the Netherlands Radio Chamber Orchestra he has made a couple of radio and CD recordings. Opera has always been of vital importance to Jan Willem de Vriend as evidenced by his productions of Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* (Lucerne Opera House) and Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* (Opéra du Rhin, Strasbourg). In September 2006 De Vriend was appointed chief conductor of the Netherlands Symphony Orchestra.

Malin Hartelius, soprano

One of the most promising Mozart interpreters, the young Swedish soprano Malin Hartelius studied opera, lied and oratorio at the Vienna Conservatoire under Margethe Bence. Soon after starting her career at the Vienna State Opera, she was contracted by the Zurich Opera House and has, since then, sung a number of superb Mozart roles including Pamina, Blondchen and Ännchen. After appearing in the Ludwigsburger Festspiele (1990) and in the Schwetzingen Festspiele (1991), she made her debut at the Salzburger Festspiele in Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*. Malin Hartelius' international breakthrough came with her highly acclaimed performance of Adina in Donizetti's *L'Elisir d'Amore* (in Frankfurt) and her overwhelming success as Blondchen in Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (at the Salzburger Festspiele). Malin has also performed in Munich, Hamburg, Amsterdam, Berlin and Paris and has collaborated with such conductors as Marc Minkowski, Zubin Mehta, Frans Brüggen, William Christie, Nikolaus Harnoncourt, Wolfgang Sawallisch and Sir Charles Mackerras. Recent achievements include contracts with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, the Orchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, the Gewandhaus Orchester and the Cleveland Orchestra as well as the festivals of Dresden and Salzburg for a series of Mozart operas. She can be enjoyed on CD in several Mozart operas, but also in Handel's *Messiah*, Haydn's *Die Schöpfung*, Brahms' *Ein deutsches Requiem* and in John Eliot Gardiner's recording *The Bach Cantata Pilgrimage*.

Kristina Hammarström, mezzo-soprano

Kristina Hammarström's flourishing international career has established her as one of Sweden's leading singers. Her skill as a musician (she is a former violinist) combined with her strong stage presence has earned her praise wherever she performs. Kristina Hammarström has sung the alto parts in most of the Bach and Mozart oratorios with conductors like Manfred Honeck, Philippe Herreweghe and John Nelson. In 2003 she sang Marguerite in Berlioz' *La Damnation de Faust* alongside José van Dam in Düsseldorf. She has also been engaged by the Bastille Opera in Paris and the Vienna Chamber Opera as well as the opera houses of Lausanne, Dublin, Düsseldorf, Strasbourg and Lübeck. In the spring of 2004 she made her debut appearance as Penelope in *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria*, which was performed at La Monnaie in Brussels and then toured to Caen, Luxemburg and New York. In the summer of 2005 she

sang in *Cecilia and the Monkey King* in Drottningholm, following an appearance there in Christophe Rousset's critically acclaimed production of *Tamerlano* in 2000 and 2002. Kristina Hammarström worked with René Jacobs in Luxemburg when she sang Diana in Cavalli's *La Calisto*, with Emanuelle Haïm when she sang Nerone in *Agrippina* (The Chicago Opera Theater) and Octavian in *Der Rosenkavalier* (The Gothenburg Opera). Recent contracts include the roles of Cornelia in Händels *Giulio Cesare* (in Vienna) and Minerva in *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* (at the Staatsoper Berlin), both conducted by René Jacobs.

Jörg Dürmüller, tenor

After studying voice in Winterthur and Hamburg, the Swiss lyric tenor Jörg Dürmüller made his opera debut in Bielefeld and Brunswick. From 1997-2000 he served at the Vienna Volksoper, where he established himself as a brilliant tenor in the operas of Mozart and Rossini. He then went on to sing Bajazet in Händel's opera *Tamerlano* at the Komische Oper Berlin. His concert engagements have taken him to many of the world's most prestigious concert halls (including the Royal Albert Hall London – during the BBC Proms, the Auditorio Nacional de España in Madrid, Santa Cecilia in Rome, the Musikverein in Vienna, the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris and the Philharmony in Sao Paolo) as well as to many well-established early music festivals (including Tokyo Summer Festival and the Leipzig Bach Festival). He regularly performs in the operas of Handel and sings the evangelist in Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*. His tour in 2006 with Ton Koopman's Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra also took him to Carnegie Hall, New York. Dürmüller has worked with a host of renowned conductors including Herbert Blomstedt, Christoph Eschenbach, Reinhard Goebel, Christopher Hogwood, René Jacobs, Robert King, Ton Koopman, Vaclav Neumann, Bruno Weil, Simone Young and Hans Zender. In addition to his extensive discography, Jörg Dürmüller has a number of solo radio and television recordings to his name.

Detlef Roth, bass-baritone

The German bass-baritone Detlef Roth (1970) studied voice at the Musikhochschule in Stuttgart under Georg Jelden, and is in his element with both lieder and opera. His career rocketed off in 1992 when he won the famed Belvedere Concours in Vienna – he was still a student at the time. Two years later he was awarded both the first and public prize at the 'Concours pour Voix Wagneriennes' in Strasbourg. He has a busy concert schedule, which started to fill up when he was a student. His repertoire includes roles in: Mozart's *Zauberflöte*, Nicolai's *Lustige Weiber von*

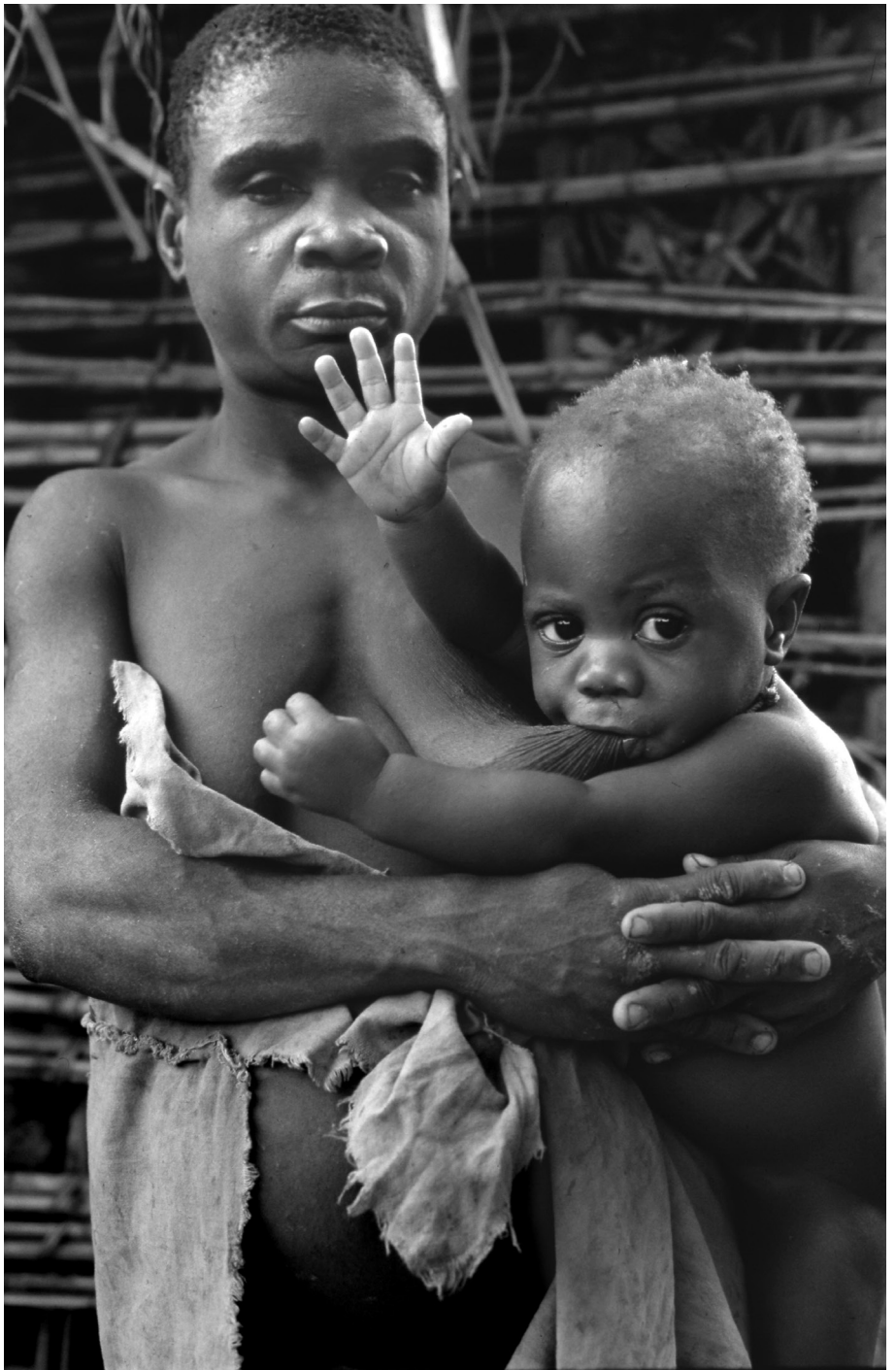
Windsor, Bizet's *Carmen*, Tchaikovsky's *Jevgeni Onegin* and *Pique Dame*, Wagner's *Das Rheingold*, *Die Meistersinger* and *Götterdämmerung*, not to forget his comic roles in Puccini's *La Bohème*, Donizetti's *Elisir d'Amore* and Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*. In 2005 Roth was highly praised for his interpretation of Pentheus in Henze's *Bassariden* with De Nederlandse Opera.

Detlef Roth's career as a lieder and oratorio singer has brought him into contact with major European orchestras and a wealth of renowned conductors (including Riccardo Chailly, Bernard Haitink, Marek Janowski, Lorin Maazel, Valery Gergiev and Simon Rattle) with whom he has performed the works of Mendelssohn, Mahler, Orff and Brahms in addition to various Bach passions. Roth's discography includes Schubert lieder and a role in *Die Zauberflöte* conducted by Sir John Eliot Gardiner.

Daniel Reuss, choirmaster

Since 1990 Daniel Reuss is director and artistic leader of Cappella Amsterdam. In 2003 Daniel Reuss was appointed chief conductor of the RIAS Kammerchor in Berlin. As a guest conductor he works with ensembles such as the Schönberg Ensemble, musikFabrik, Radio Chamber Orchestra, Collegium Vocale Gent, Concerto Köln and the Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin. In 2007, Reuss made his debut at the English National Opera, with Händel's *Agrippina*.

The "Diapason d'or de l'année 2004" was awarded for the CD with compositions of Martin and Messiaen which Daniel Reuss made with the RIAS Kammerchor (Harmonia Mundi). His recording of works by Robert Heppener with the Nederlands Kamerkoor received the Edison Award in the Netherlands. Also released by Harmonia Mundi are CDs with Poulencs *Figure Humaine*, Stravinsky's *Les Noces* and Martin's *Le Vin Herbé*. In summer 2006, at the invitation of Pierre Boulez, he taught and conducted at the summer 2006 Lucerne Festival Academy.



**COMBATTIMENTO
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Conductor Jan Willem de Vriend

Violin

Ronald Hoogeveen
Eva Stegeman*
Reinier Reijngoud**
Chris Duindam
Melanie Jansen
Saskia Bos
Maria del Mar Escarabajal
Baadenhuijsen

Viola

Annette Bergman /
Francien Schatborn
Marjolein Dispa

Cello

Wouter Mijnders
Sanne de Graaf /
Douw Fonda

Double bass

Peter Jansen

Organ

Pieter Dirksen

Chitarrone

Søren Leupold

Oboe/oboe d'amore

Henk Swinnen

Ron Tijhuis

Oboe

Hans Wolters
Marcel Mandos

Bassoon

Jos Lammerse/
Frans Robert Berkhout

Flute

Leon Berendse
Ellen Vergunst

Natural horn

Paul van Zelm
Fons Verspaandonk

Natural trumpet

David Staff
Hans van Loenen
Simon Wierenga

Timpani

Paul Jussen

**CAPPELLA
AMSTERDAM**

Soprano

Andrea van Beek
Marijke van der Harst
Gonnie van Heugten
Marielle Kirkels
Maria Köpcke***
Simone Manders
Valeria Mignaco
Marjo van Someren

Alto

Petra Ehrismann
Sabine van der Heyden
Mieke van Laren
Dorien Liefers
Michaëla Rieni
Inga Schneider
Desirée Verlaan
Åsa Olsson

Tenor

Otto Bouwknegt
Kevin Doss
Jon Etxabe
Steven van Gils
Guido Groenland
Gerben Houba
René Veen
Henk Vels

Bass

Job Boswinkel
Pierre-Guy Le Gall White
Martijn de Graaf
Bierbrauwer
Angus van Grevenbroek
Niklaus Kost
Bart Oenema
Michel Poels
Ludovic Provost

*soloist in LI and XLI

**soloist in XXXI and XLI

*** echo-soprano in XXXIX

First Part: Christmas Day

1. I. Chorus - *Jauchzet, frohlocket, auf, preiset die Tage*
2. II. Recitative (Evangelist) - *Es begab sich aber zu der Zeit*
3. III. Recitative (Alto) - *Nun wird mein liebster Bräutigam*
4. IV. Aria (Alto) - *Bereite dich, Zion*
5. V. Chorale - *Wie soll ich dich empfangen*
6. VI. Recitative (Evangelist) - *Und sie gebar ihren ersten Sohn*
7. VII. Chorale & Recitative (Soprano, Bass) - *Er ist auf Erden kommen arm*
8. VIII. Aria (Bass) - *Großer Herr, o starker König*
9. IX. Chorale - *Ach mein herzliebes Jesulein*

Second Part: Boxing Day

10. X. Sinfonia
11. XI. Recitative (Evangelist) - *Und es waren Hirten in derselben Gegend*
12. XII. Chorale - *Brich an, o schönes Morgenlicht*
13. XIII. Recitative (Evangelist, the Angel) - *Und der Engel sprach zu ihnen*
14. XIV. Recitative (Bass) - *Was Gott dem Abraham verheißen*
15. XV. Aria (Tenor) - *Frohe Hirten, eilt, ach eilet*
16. XVI. Recitative (Evangelist) - *Und das habt zum Zeichen*
17. XVII. Chorale - *Schaut hin, dort liegt im finstern Stall*
18. XVIII. Recitative (Bass) - *So geht denn hin, ihr Hirten, geht*
19. XIX. Aria (Alto) - *Schlafe, mein Liebster, genieße der Ruh*
20. XX. Recitative (Evangelist) - *Und alsobald war da bei dem Engel*
21. XXI. Chorus - *Ehre sei Gott in der Höhe*
22. XXII. Recitative (Bass) - *So recht, ihr Engel, jauchzt und singet*
23. XXIII. Chorale - *Wir singen dir in deinem Heer*

Third Part: Third Day of Christmas

24. XXIV. Chorus - *Herrscher des Himmels, erhöre das Lallen*
25. XXV. Recitative (Evangelist) - *Und da die Engel von ihnen gen Himmel fuhren*
26. XXVI. Chorus - *Lasset uns nun gehen gen Bethlehem*
27. XXVII. Recitative (Bass) - *Er hat sein Volk getröst´*
28. XXVIII. Chorale - *Dies hat er alles uns getan*
29. XXIX. Duet (Soprano, Bass) - *Herr, dein Mitleid, dein Erbarmen*
30. XXX. Recitative (Evangelist) - *Und sie kamen eilend*
31. XXXI. Aria (Alto) - *Schließe, mein Herze, dies selige Wunder*
32. XXXII. Recitative (Alto) - *Ja, ja, mein Herz soll es bewahren*
33. XXXIII. Chorale - *Ich will dich mit Fleiß bewahren*
34. XXXIV. Recitative (Evangelist) - *Und die Hirten kehrten wieder um*
35. XXXV. Chorale - *Seid froh dieweil*
36. XXXVb. Chorus - *Herrscher des Himmels, erhöre das Lallen*

Fourth Part: New Year's Day (Feast of the Circumcision)

1. XXXVI. Chorus - *Fallt mit Danken, fallt mit Loben*
2. XXXVII. Recitative (Evangelist) - *Und da acht Tage um waren*
3. XXXVIII. Recitative (Bass) & Duet (Soprano, Bass) - *Immanuel, o süßes Wort!*
4. XXXIX. Aria (Soprano & Echo-soprano) - *Flößt, mein Heiland, flößt, dein Namen*
5. XL. Recitative & Chorale (Bass, Soprano) - *Wohlan dein Name soll allein*
6. XLI. Aria (Tenor) - *Ich will nur dir zu Ehren leben*
7. XLII. Chorale - *Jesus richte mein Beginnen*

Fifth Part: Sunday after New Year's Day

8. XLIII. Chorus - *Ehre sei dir, Gott, gesungen*
9. XLIV. Recitative (Evangelist) - *Da Jesus geboren war zu Bethlehem*
10. XLV. Chorus & Recitative (Alto) - *Wo ist der neugeborne König der Juden?*
11. XLVI. Chorale - *Dein Glanz all Finsternis verzehrt*
12. XLVII. Aria (Bass) - *Erleucht auch meine finstre Sinnen*
13. XLVIII. Recitative (Evangelist) - *Da das der König Herodes hörte*
14. XLIX. Recitative (Alto) - *Warum wollt ihr erschrecken?*
15. L. Recitative (Evangelist) - *Und ließ versammlen alle Hohepriester*
16. LI. Terzetto (Soprano, Alto & Tenor) - *Ach, wenn wird die Zeit erscheinen?*
17. LII. Recitative (Alto) - *Mein Liebster herrschet schon*
18. LIII. Chorale - *Zwar ist solche Herzensstube*

Sixth Part: Epiphany

19. LIV. Chorus - *Herr, wenn die stolzen Feinde schnauben*
20. LV. Recitative (Evangelist) - *Da berief Herodes die Weisen heimlich*
21. LVI. Recitative (Soprano) - *Du Falscher, suche nur den Herrn zu fällen*
22. LVII. Aria (Soprano) - *Nur ein Wink von seinen Händen*
23. LVIII. Recitative (Evangelist) - *Als sie nun den König gehöret hatten*
24. LIX. Chorale - *Ich steh an deiner Krippen hier*
25. LX. Recitative (Evangelist) - *Und Gott befahl ihnen im Traum*
26. LXI. Recitative (Tenor) - *So geht! Genug, mein Schatz geht nicht von hier*
27. LXII. Aria (Tenor) - *Nun mögt ihr stolzen Feinde schrecken*
28. LXIII. Recitative (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) - *Was will der Höllen Schrecken nun*
29. LXIV. Chorale - *Nun seid ihr wohl gerochen*

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