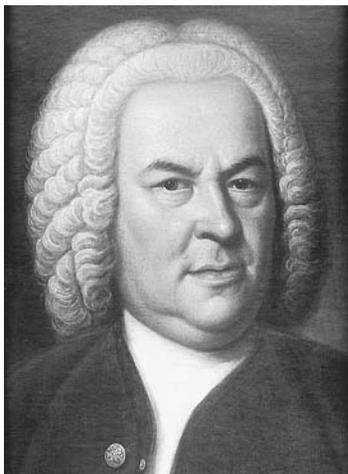


Ambitious Plans and Musical Splendor: Johann Sebastian Bach in the 1730s

Markus Rathey



During the early 1730s Johann Sebastian Bach was occupied with two seemingly unrelated projects. One involved the electoral court in Dresden. Bach was dissatisfied with his position as cantor at St. Thomas's in Leipzig, which he had held at this point for about a decade. He tried to convince the Court to award him the prestigious title of "Court composer." To that end, between 1732 and 1735 he composed at least eight cantatas for the court in the Saxon capital Dresden:

examples include *Schleicht, spielende Wellen* (Glide, playful waves, BWV 206) for the birthday of the Elector of Saxony and King of Poland August III; the "Hercules-Cantata" *Laßt uns sorgen* (Let us take care, BWV 213) for the birth of Prince Friedrich Christian of Saxony; and a cantata for the birthday of the wife of August III, Maria Josepha, *Tönet ihr Pauken!* (Sound, you drums, BWV 214). The sheer number of cantatas shows how desperately Bach wanted to impress the court in Dresden.

The second large scale project Bach pursued in the first half of the 1730s can be called "The Oratorio Project." During this period Bach composed three large scale works he labeled "Oratorios." He had already composed large scale vocal works in the 1720s; for example his *St. Matthew Passion* from 1727 and his *St. John Passion* in its early version from 1724 and its interesting revision from 1725 (which was recently recorded by the Yale Schola Cantorum). But these pieces grew out of the tradition of the liturgical passion of the 16th and 17th centuries and neither was considered to be an "oratorio," defined as a large scale, mostly dramatic composition – the sacred sister of the Opera, with the major difference that the oratorio wasn't staged. Musically, however, the two genres are very similar.

During the early 1730s Bach composed pieces for the three larger feasts of the ecclesiastical year: the *Ascension Oratorio*, BWV 11 (1735), the *Easter Oratorio*, BWV 249 (sometime in the 1730s), and the *Christmas Oratorio*, BWV 248 (1734/35). Bach's interest in the genre reflected back onto his previously composed passions: while working on the oratorios he embarked on major revisions in the two passions in 1732 (*St. John*) and 1736 (*St. Matthew*). A last piece that has to be considered in this context is the *Mass in B Minor*, or

rather the first two parts of it (Kyrie and Gloria). The composition was also written around the same time (1733). Even though it is not an oratorio, it is a large work and it fits right into Bach's interest in expanding the scale of his compositions at that time.

As I indicated earlier, the two projects, the "Dresden project" and the "Oratorio Project," are only seemingly unrelated. In fact, the two projects are intrinsically intertwined. The first two parts of the *Mass in B Minor* were originally composed as a part of Bach's application for the post of "court composer." They serve, therefore, a similar purpose as the secular cantatas composed at about the same time. Bach wrote in his dedicatory letter, "To Your Royal Highness I submit in deepest devotion the present small work of the science which I have achieved in musique, with the most wholly submissive prayer that Your Highness will look upon it with Most Gracious Eyes, according to Your Highness's World-Famous Clemency and not according to the poor composition; and thus deign to take me under Your Most Mighty Protection." Bach's application was initially not successful; it was not until 1736 that he was awarded the title (and it comes as no surprise that exactly at that time Bach stops composing congratulatory cantatas for the Dresden court!).

The oratorios and secular cantatas are related in yet another way. Most of the musical material for the *Christmas Oratorio* was originally composed for secular cantatas. In particular, material from cantatas 213 and 214 (see above) was reused in the oratorio, and provided with a new, now sacred, text. In other words, the "Oratorio Project" and the "Dresden Project" share a lot of the same musical material. A last connection (though probably not intentionally) was made rather late in Bach's life. When he completed the *Mass in B Minor* around 1748/49, he used one movement from the *Ascension Oratorio* (1735) for the *Agnus Dei* by replacing the originally German text with the words from the Latin mass.

One could even speculate that Bach might have composed the oratorios around 1734 with a future position in Dresden in mind, but there is no proof of that—indeed it is rather unlikely, since the oratorios, which were performed in Dresden,



are significantly more opera-like than the liturgical oratorios Bach had composed in Leipzig. However, it is interesting to observe how Bach's interest shifts from cantatas (which were mostly composed in the 1720s) to other, larger scale, works in the 1730s.

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Spotlight on Current Events

Chiaroscuro: Venetian Vespers, Savage Altars, Flashing Water Concert by Yale Schola Cantorum

Yale Schola Cantorum, the University's acclaimed chamber choir directed by Simon Carrington, will continue the *Chiaroscuro* theme for the fifth year with *Venetian Vespers, Savage Altars, Flashing Water*, contrasting old and new in dramatic juxtaposition. The concert will take place at 8 pm on Saturday, November 8 in Sprague Memorial Hall in New Haven (470 College St.) It will be repeated in New York at Saint Thomas Church, Fifth Avenue on November 12 at 7:30 pm as part of the Concerts at Saint Thomas Series.

The baroque specialist Brian Clark, who assembled the music for the choir's highly regarded recordings of the Biber *Vespers* and the Bertali *Missa Resurrectionis*, has drawn together a Venetian Vespers sequence with psalms and motets by Monteverdi and his leading contemporaries Rigatti, Grandi and Legrenzi. Schola Cantorum, with soloists from Yale's voice program in Early Music, Oratorio, Song and Chamber Ensemble led by James Taylor, will be joined by the Yale Collegium Players directed by Robert Mealy. This sequence will be interspersed with two contemporary works by Yale faculty composers for the choir and instrumentalists from the Yale School of Music.

Ingram Marshall's *Savage Altars* for choir, soloists, tape, and violin and viola obbligato

contrasts the comforting but admonitory words of the Magnificat with the chronicle by the Roman historian Tacitus of the discovery of the remains of massacred Roman soldiers and their enemies' "savage altars" nearby. The composer creates radiant surfaces but continually probes them, catching the ear off guard. Joan Panetti's *To the Flashing Water say: I am* is the second of her pair of Rilke settings for Schola Cantorum and chamber ensemble. An intensely dramatic and expressive nine minute setting for choir and 15 instruments, its notes and characters are so acutely chosen that Ms. Panetti's language is full of surprises, fresh and personal.



The *Chiaroscuro* concert is presented by Yale Institute of Sacred Music. The New Haven concert is free; no tickets are required. More information is available at 203/432-5062 or online at www.yale.edu/schola. Tickets to the New York performance are available online at www.saintthomaschurch.org.

Two Other ISM Series are Kicking Off in November

The poet **Jacqueline Osherow** will open the Yale Literature and Spirituality Series with a reading in the Divinity Bookstore on Monday, November 3 at 4:15pm. A reception follows. She is the author of five books of poems, most recently *The Hoopoe's Crown* from BOA Editions. She has



been awarded grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, the Ingram Merrill Foundation and the Witter Bynner Prize from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. Her work has appeared in many journals and anthologies. She is Distinguished Professor of English and Creative Writing at the University of Utah.



The first speaker on the Liturgy Symposium Series will be **Matthew Myer Boulton**, Assistant Professor of Ministry Studies at Harvard Divinity School.

In his teaching and research, Prof. Boulton explores ways in which Christian worship founds and forms Christian life. This exploration draws together his interests in the history and practices of Christian liturgy; theology and public life; biblical interpretation and proclamation; and the performing arts, including theater, music, and film. He is the author of *God Against Religion: Rethinking Christian Theology Through Worship* (Eerdmans, 2008) and a co-editor and contributor to the volume *Doing Justice to Mercy: Religion, Law, and Criminal Justice* (University of Virginia Press, 2007). He is an ordained minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

The tight connection between the “projects” makes it worthwhile to look at them, and hear them, together, especially the two largest pieces from that time, the *Christmas Oratorio* (1734) and the *Mass in B Minor* (1733). The ISM undertook a similar thing in the past performing the two Passions by Bach in spring 2006, and framing the performances with lectures and a symposium about their religious and cultural contexts. During the current 2008/2009 season we are exploring Bach’s works from the early 1730s in a similar way. In December 2008 the Yale Camerata (conducted by Marguerite Brooks) will perform all six cantatas of Bach’s *Christmas Oratorio* in two concerts in Battell Chapel: the first three cantatas on December 6 at 8pm and the second three the following day, December 7, at 4pm. While the first three cantatas are heard quite frequently, a performance of all six cantatas is quite rare and listeners will be in for a special treat! There will be a preconcert talk for each performance, to explain the theological and historical context of the oratorio. The lecture on December 6 will be at 7pm in Dwight Chapel and the lecture on December 7 at 3pm in the Slifka Center (80 Wall St.).

On Friday, December 5 (1:30pm –6:00pm), a symposium will explore the *Christmas Oratorio* from a different angle. Five scholars from different disciplines will place Bach’s masterwork in its wider cultural and religious context. The talks, which are geared towards a general audience, will explain the biblical and pagan origins of Christmas and show the reception of the feast in music and the visual arts. One of the leading questions is how not only Bach’s but our own understanding of Christmas came into being. Please see the side bar for the program of the symposium.

In April 2009 the Yale Schola Cantorum (conducted by Simon Carrington) will present the second large piece, which was begun by Bach in the early 1730s and completed towards the end of his life, the *Mass in B Minor*. It will be performed twice in New Haven, on April 24 and 25, 2009, at 8pm in St. Mary’s on Hillhouse Avenue. There will be a preconcert talk for each performance at 7pm in Sheffield-Sterling-Strathcona Hall (1 Prospect St.).

Don’t miss this unique opportunity to experience – and savor – these two monumental masterpieces by Johann Sebastian Bach.

The Christmas Oratorio in Context

Friday, December 5, 2008, 1:30–6:00
Rosenfeld Hall, 109 Grove St., New Haven

Adela Yarbro Collins (Yale)

Older Scripture and Greco-Roman Motifs in the Infancy Narratives of Matthew and Luke

Susan Roll (Saint Paul University)

Christmas: Its Roots and Its Wings

Robin A. Leaver (Princeton, visting at Yale)

Christmas in Leipzig

Meredith J. Gill (University of Maryland)

*“Let Us See This Word That Has Come to Pass”:
the Nativity in the Visual Arts”*

Markus Rathey (Yale)

*How the Angells Learned to Sing “Jingle Bells”:
Christmas and Music*

ALUMNI AND STUDENT NEWS

ALUMNI NEWS

CRAIG CAMPBELL (MM-organ '88) played a recital of organ works at Christ Church Parish in New Haven on October 16, at noon during YDS reunion week. He served as organist-choirmaster there from 1988 until his appointment as organist-choirmaster at St. John’s Episcopal Church in Los Angeles in 1993. Mr. Campbell holds the Bachelor of Music degree in organ performance from The Juilliard School and is currently active as a church musician in his native state of Tennessee. In the past year he has given many recitals including those at The Cathedral of St. Patrick, NYC; All Saints Parish, Kingston on Thames, UK; St. Sulpice Church in Paris; The Cathedral of Saint Philip in Atlanta and at Harvard’s Busch-Reisinger Museum. He has been pursuing organ study with Daniel Roth, titular-organist at St. Sulpice, since 2005. His other major teachers were Vernon deTar, Gerre Hancock and Thomas Murray.

CAROL WILLIAMS (AD '98) is currently the civic organist of San Diego, CA. Please visit her website www.CarolWilliamsNow.com

STUDENT NEWS

Congratulations to **JUDITH DUPRÉ!** Her book, *Monuments: America’s History in Art and Memory* (2007), was recently reviewed to high acclaim in the Summer issue of *Monuments in American Arts*.



Rumi and the Whirling Dervishes at Yale

Battell Chapel was the setting for an unusual presentation of poetry and whirling dervishes on Sunday, October 26.

The internationally recognized sacred Whirling Ceremony, known as SEMA, was preceded by a dramatic reading from the poetry of one of the world's great poet-saint-geniuses, Jelaluddin Rumi. A thirteenth century jurist, theologian, and mystical poet born in what is now Afghanistan, Rumi has been the best-selling poet in the United States for the last few years.

This event centers around the unique expression of a deep love between human and divine, between lover and Beloved, communicated through the remarkable poetry of Rumi and the spiritual practice of whirling that he inspired almost eight hundred years ago.

Rumi also encouraged the creation of a learning community of Sufis, called Mevlevi, which has continued over the centuries to this

day. Opening remarks will be by Faruk Celebi Efendi, world head of the Mevlevi Sufis and 22nd generation descendent of Rumi himself.

Peter Rogen, the reader in English, has performed in Shakespearean theater in New York and established a successful international business career in communications. The reader in Farsi was Nuri Simsekler, assistant professor and head of the Rumi Society at Konya Selcuk University in Turkey, where Rumi lived the second half of his life.

The readings were followed by the 800-year-old Mevlevi Sufi Whirling SEMA Ceremony, symbolizing the cycle of spiritual development possible for a human being. It is recognized by UNESCO as "one of the world's great cultural and spiritual heritages."

The free performance was presented by the Yale Institute of Sacred Music with the support of the Mayor and City of Konya, Turkey and the International Mevlana Foundation.

Are you receiving notification of *Prism* online? The online edition is available long before *Prism* lands in your mailbox. E-mail Albert Agbayani at albert.agbayani@yale.edu to get on the e-mail list.

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BLESSED SACRAMENT CATHOLIC CHURCH, HAMDEN

Organist/Choir director (part-time). Masses celebrated at 4:30 pm on Saturday and at 8:00 am and 10:30 am on Sundays. Choir rehearsals once a week from September until late May/early June. Must be familiar with Catholic liturgy and be able to encourage and support congregational singing. Contact Fr. French at 203-288-1652.

BETHESDA LUTHERAN CHURCH, NEW HAVEN

Director of Music. (part-time). Responsibilities include preparing the choral, piano, and organ music for the two Sunday services, developing a youth choir, and serving as director of the Bethesda Music Series. A Master of Music degree or its equivalent in education and experience is preferred. A background in liturgy and theology is desirable. Minimum salary plus benefits of \$23,000 negotiable depending on experience and educational qualifications. Four Sundays paid vacation, two Sundays of sick leave. For more information, phone (203) 787-2346.

IMMANUEL ST. JAMES EPISCOPAL CHURCH, DERBY

Organist (part-time). An organist is sought for the 10:00 am Sunday service. Please contact Fr. Brower at revgcb@gmail.com, or 203-267-4100, with all inquiries.

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FACULTY NEWS

MARGOT FASSLER, Robert Tangeman Professor of Music History, gave a presentation on the recently completed documentary film *Performing the Passion: JS Bach and the Gospel according to John*, at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in December 2007, joined by co-producer Jacqueline Richard and colleagues, students and alumni of the Yale Institute of Sacred Music and the Yale School of Music; the talk was subsequently published in the *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*; clips from the film featuring a performance by the Yale Schola Cantorum (Simon Carrington, conductor) can be found on the ISM website. This year Fassler was named a Henry Luce III Fellow in Theology and also was offered membership in the Center of Theological Inquiry, Princeton NJ, where she will spend a sabbatical year working on a book about Hildegard of Bingen. Her article "Fulbert après Fulbert" appeared in a new collection edited by Michel Rouche. She gave several scholarly presentations in 2007-08, including at the American Musicological Society (on Hildegard's *Ordo Virtutum*), at Columbia University (on the druids of Chartres), at the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana (on Robert the

Pious); at Princeton University (on medieval drama); at the University of Notre Dame (on liturgy and historiography); at the International Medieval Congress at Leeds (on Hildegard and the Cosmos), at the Society for Oriental Liturgy in Rome (on Coptic chant), at a Conference in Paris on the Abbey of St. Victor (on Victorine sequences), at Harvard University (on the jamb statues of the West Portal of Chartres Cathedral), and at the University of Pennsylvania (on Hildegard).

Last year, **MARKUS RATHEY** published an edition of music theoretical writings by the composer Johann Georg Ahle (1651-1706), who was Johann Sebastian Bach's predecessor as organist at Divi Blasii in Mühlhausen. The texts are an important source for the relationships between music and rhetoric, between music and language, and for the performance practice of the early works by J.S. Bach. After only a few months the edition was sold out and a second and revised edition has been released: *Johann Georg Ahle: Schriften zur Musik. Herausgegeben und eingeleitet von Markus Rathey*, 2nd edition, Hildesheim: Olms, 2008.

Autumn Winds Choral and Instrumental Concert

The Chamber Choir of Yale Camerata, conducted by Marguerite L. Brooks, was joined by Sospiro Winds in a concert entitled *Autumn Winds* on Sunday, October 26 at 4 pm at St. Michael's Church in Litchfield (25 South St.). The concert featured works by Gian Carlo Menotti and Carl Nielsen.

The Unicorn, the Gorgon, and the Manticore, or *The Three Sundays of a Poet* by Gian Carlo Menotti (1911-2007) is a "madrigal fable" scored for chamber chorus and instrumental ensemble. The work, an allegory for the different stages of a poet's creative inspiration, tells the story of a man in a castle and his three pets. The unicorn, which represents the poet's youth, is beautiful and innocent, yet foolish; the gorgon—his middle years—is successful, but proud and cocky; and the manticore—his old age—is shy and somewhat prickly.

Founded in 1985, the Camerata and its Chamber Choir are sponsored by the Yale Institute of Sacred Music. The chamber choir is drawn from the Camerata's approximately sixty singers, who are Yale graduate and undergraduate students, faculty, staff, and experienced singers from the New Haven community. The Chamber Choir of the Yale Camerata has performed at the Yale Center for British Art and at Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall. They have traveled to Germany to perform the Berlioz *Requiem* with choruses from all over the world, and, in 2001, spent a week in residence at Saint Paul's Cathedral in London, England.



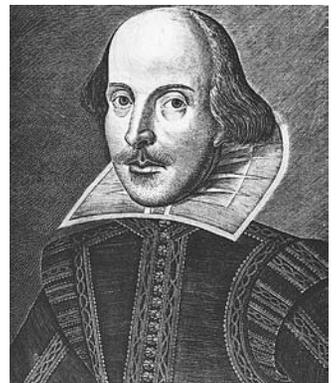
Hailed a "superb ensemble" by New Music Connoisseur, New York-based Sospiro Winds is quickly establishing itself as an exciting new force on the chamber music scene. Originally formed in 2004, Sospiro has received several prizes as it continues its efforts to bring the wind quintet repertoire to many varied audiences throughout the United States. In Litchfield, they performed Carl Nielsen's *Quintet Op. 43*.

Music with Her Silver Sound Songs from Shakespeare's England

The plays of William Shakespeare are full of music, from formal songs to snippets of popular street ballads. Desdemona's eerie premonitions bring back memories of an old, tragic song. The fairy creature Ariel sings haunting tunes to shipwrecked mortals. Falstaff calls on the sky to "rain potatoes" and "thunder to the tune of Green-sleeves." Judith Malafrente leads the Yale Voxtet in a concert of Elizabethan music from stage and street, including some of John Dowland's beautiful and melancholic ayres for lute as well as cheerful, teasing love songs by Thomas Campion. The concert will take place on Sunday, November 9 at 8 pm in Sprague Memorial Hall (470 College St.) in New Haven.

The eight singers of the Voxtet are joined by Grant Herreid and David Walker, lute, Rosamund Morley, viola da gamba, and Priscilla Smith, dulcian and recorder.

*"When griping grief
the heart doth wound,
and doleful dumps
the mind oppresses,
then music, with her
silver sound, with
speedy help doth
lend redress."*



The concert, presented by Yale Institute of Sacred Music, is free and open to the public; no tickets are required. More information is available at www.yale.edu/ism or 203/432-5062.

Oxford University Press/ Institute Workshop

On Saturday, September 27, the Institute and Oxford University Press hosted a workshop to explore OUP's newest sacred and Christmas musical offerings. Marguerite L. Brooks, Thomas Troeger, and R. Walden Moore led the reading and special interest sessions.



Philip Cheah (OUP), Martin Jean, Marguerite L. Brooks, Thomas Troeger, Todd Waldman (OUP), and Douglas Dickson (accompanist).
Missing: R. Walden Moore.

Photos by Albert Agbayani



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