

WIGMORE HALL

Friday 27 May 2022 7.30pm

Gabrieli Consort & Players

Paul McCreesh director

Mary Bevan soprano

Tim Mead countertenor

Thomas Walker tenor

Malachy Frame baritone

Catherine Martin violin

Persephone Gibbs violin

Oliver Webber violin

Ellen O'Dell violin

Rachel Byrt viola

Christopher Suckling cello

Judith Evans double bass

Eva Caballero flute

Marta Goncalves flute

Christopher Palameta oboe

Joel Raymond oboe

Zoe Shevlin bassoon

Jean-Francois Madeuf trumpet

Katie Hodges trumpet

Russ Gilmour trumpet

Nick Cowling timpani

Jan Waterfield harpsichord

William Whitehead organ

CLASSIC *f*M

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Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Sinfonia from *Wir danken dir, Gott, wir danken dir* BWV29 (1731)

Mass in A BWV234 (?1738)

Interval

Sinfonia in D BWV1045 (c.1743-6)

Lobet Gott in seinen Reichen BWV11 'Ascension Oratorio' (1735)

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I often wonder what went on musically in **JS Bach's** head on any given day. The staggering amount of music he produced over his lifetime bespeaks a seemingly inexhaustible creativity that generated new melodies, textures and forms morning, noon and night. Meanwhile, as these new ideas crowded his imagination, old tunes kept coming back to him – tunes that he was particularly fond of, or even ones that he didn't especially like but that stuck around as earworms nonetheless. As Bach got older, this memory store of musical inventions got ever larger. All the pieces in today's programme were composed in the latter part of Bach's career, from the 1730s to the last years before his death in 1750. And much of this music was in fact derived from earlier compositions. These recycling practices have sometimes been looked upon suspiciously by modern commentators; but they became problematic only in the context of later Romantic notions of original genius and the rise of copyright laws. In Bach's time, such parody procedures were entirely commonplace, and Bach was particularly inclined to continually adapt and reshape earlier ideas. He seems to have wanted to make the utmost of his musical materials, to perfect his earthly efforts to create a sonic foretaste of the divine beauties of paradise.

In today's selection of pieces, we can imagine different motivations for Bach reworking particular inventions of his. In some cases, he was keen to explore the full expressive potential of certain musical gestures or sounds. In his Mass in A (first performed in 1738), four of its movements rework earlier pieces in transformative ways. The 'Gloria', for instance, draws on an aria from his Cantata 67, which alternates two contrasting ideas: a gently flowing pastoral evocation of the God's peace, and a fast and furious celebration of triumph over God's enemies. In the adapted 'Gloria' setting, these two soundworlds effectively bring out two different dimensions of this standard liturgical text: tender, intimate adoration on the one hand, and exuberant collective praise on the other. A similar contrast characterises the opening 'Kyrie' movement: whereas the first *Kyrie* statement invites us into a pastoral world of lilting dotted rhythms in the flutes over a sustained bass, the second *Kyrie* introduces a sprightly fugue subject marked *Vivace*. The 'Qui tollis', meanwhile, presents another instance of musical recycling, this time based on Cantata 179. Here, Bach reworked the texture of the original aria by transposing the bass line up to be played instead by the violins and viola. In combination with the high register of the flutes and soprano, this creates a spine-tinglingly unfamiliar sonic experience, with no bass part interfering in this intricately woven, chromatically saturated meditation on the sins of the world.

Elsewhere, Bach probably recycled older music in order to preserve pieces written for a specific occasion in more durable form. The opening chorus of his *Ascension Oratorio* (first

performed in 1735) reuses music from a cantata written for the re-consecration of the Leipzig Thomasschule in 1732. Incorporated into a work for an annual church feast (Ascension Sunday), this music would have stood a greater chance of being performed again. The mood of effusive exultation in this chorus seamlessly matches the liturgical commemoration of Jesus's ascent to heaven. The oratorio's two arias draw on another occasional work, a wedding cantata of 1725. The tune of the alto aria 'Ach, bleibe doch' was one of those musical inventions that apparently went round Bach's head recurrently, since he reused it again, most famously, in the 'Agnus Dei' of his Mass in B Minor. The second aria, 'Jesu, deine Gnadenblicke', again makes use of that striking bass-less texture, as oboe, flute and soprano generate a translucent polyphonic web over an accompanying violin-viola line. And chorales, of course, presented yet another kind of pre-existing tune that filled Bach's musical memory. In this oratorio, the first chorale is set in a simple four-part homophonic texture, while the closing chorus envelops its hymn tune in a radiant D major celebration that showcases a full festive ensemble of three trumpets and timpani.

Finally, on some occasions Bach seems to have reworked older music out of sheer enjoyment of creative play and experimentation. The *Sinfonia* from BWV29 (first performed in 1731) experiments with transposing musical virtuosity from one instrument to another. It is based on one of Bach's partitas for solo violin (BWV1006), whose elaborate figurations are here transferred to the organ, with new accompanying parts added. Bach initially wrote this revised version for a wedding cantata in 1729, and he clearly liked it so much that he decided to reuse it again in this cantata for the annual inauguration of the Leipzig town council. The switch from violin to organ as the star instrument produces novel performative challenges: while some of the violin's gestures become more easily playable on the organ, other features (such as fast repeated notes) are more difficult to execute on a keyboard. The musical material remains relentlessly energetic in the revised version, too, not stopping for breath until the very final cadence, which the organist even overruns with a surplus flourish. The *Sinfonia* in D, meanwhile, offers a blast of that original violinistic virtuosity that lurks beneath the organ playing of BWV29. Apparently written as an introduction to a lost cantata, the piece sounds more like the first movement of an Italianate violin concerto, as the soloist unleashes a dazzling display of virtuosic figuration. It is possible that this work, too, existed in a previous version before being incorporated into this cantata. Ultimately, we will only ever know a fraction of all the tunes and their different versions that perpetually criss-crossed Bach's musical mind.

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Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Sinfonia from *Wir danken dir, Gott, wir danken dir* BWV29 (1731)

Mass in A BWV234 (?1738)

Kyrie eleison

Kyrie eleison.
Christe eleison.
Kyrie eleison.

Lord, have mercy

Lord, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

Gloria in excelsis

Gloria in excelsis Deo.
Et in terra pax hominibus bonae
voluntatis.
Laudamus te. Benedicimus te.
Adoramus te. Glorificamus te.
Gratias agimus tibi propter
magnam gloriam tuam.

Glory be to God on high

Glory be to God on high,
and on earth peace, good will
towards men.
We praise thee, we bless thee,
we worship thee, we glorify thee,
we give thanks to thee for thy
great glory,

Domine Deus

Domine Deus, Rex caelestis,
Deus Pater omnipotens.
Domine Fili unigenite, Iesu
Christe.
Domine Deus, Agnus Dei, Filius
Patris.

O Lord God

O Lord God, heavenly King, God
the Father Almighty.
O Lord, the only-begotten Son,
Jesus Christ;
O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son
of the Father.

Qui tollis

Qui tollis peccata mundi,
miserere nobis.
Qui tollis peccata mundi,
suscipe deprecationem
nostram.
Qui sedes ad dexteram
Patris, miserere
nobis.

Thou that takest

Thou that takest away the sins of
the world, have mercy upon us.
Thou that takest away the sins
of the world, receive our
prayer.
Thou that sittest at the right
hand of God the Father, have
mercy upon us.

Quoniam

Quoniam tu solus Sanctus. Tu
solus Dominus.
Tu solus Altissimus, Iesu
Christe.

For thou only

For thou only art holy; thou only
art the Lord;
thou only art most high, O
Christ.

Cum sancto Spiritu

Cum Sancto Spiritu, in gloria
Dei Patris.
Amen.

With the Holy Ghost

With the Holy Ghost, in the glory
of God the Father.
Amen.

Interval

Sinfonia in D BWV1045 (c.1743-6)

Lobet Gott in seinen Reichen BWV11

'Ascension Oratorio' (1735)

Liturgical text

Coro

Lobet Gott in seinen Reichen,
Preiset ihn in seinen Ehren,
Rühmet ihn in seiner Pracht;
Sucht sein Lob recht zu
vergleichen,
Wenn ihr mit gesamten Chören
Ihm ein Lied zu Ehren macht!

Recitativo

Evangelist:

Der Herr Jesus hub seine
Hände auf und segnete seine
Jünger, und es geschah, da er
sie segnete, schied er von
ihnen.

Recitativo

Ach, Jesu, ist dein Abschied
schon so nah?
Ach, ist denn schon die Stunde da,
Da wir dich von uns lassen
sollen?
Ach, siehe, wie die heißen Tränen
Von unsern blassen Wangen
rollen,
Wie wir uns nach dir sehnen,
Wie uns fast aller Trost gebricht.
Ach, weiche doch noch nicht!

Aria

Ach, bleibe doch, mein liebstes
Leben,
Ach, fliehe nicht so bald von mir!
Dein Abschied und dein frühes
Scheiden

Praise God in His kingdoms

Chorus

Praise God in His kingdoms,
praise Him in His honour,
laud Him in His splendour;
seek to tell His praise
correctly,
when with assembled choirs
you sing to His honour!

Recitativo

Evangelist:

The Lord Jesus lifted up His
hands and blessed His
disciples, and it came to pass,
while He blessed them, He
was parted from them.

Recitativo

Ah, Jesus, is Thy parting now
so near?
Ah, is the hour already come,
when we must let Thee leave
us?
Ah, see how the burning tears
are rolling down our pale
cheeks,
how we are yearning for Thee,
how we lack almost all comfort.
Ah, do not yet go from us!

Aria

Ah stay, my dearest
life,
ah, do not flee so soon from me!
Thy parting and Thy early
leaving

Bringt mir das allergrösste Leiden
Ach ja, so bleibe doch noch hier;
Sonst werd ich ganz von
Schmerz umgeben.

Recitativo

Evangelist:

Und ward aufgehoben
zusehends und fuhr auf gen
Himmel, eine Wolke nahm ihn
weg vor ihren Augen, und er
sitzet zur rechten Hand
Gottes.

Choral

Nun lieget alles unter dir,
Dich selbst nur ausgenommen;
Die Engel müssen für und für
Dir aufzuwarten kommen.
Die Fürsten stehn auch auf der
Bahn
Und sind dir willig untertan;
Luft, Wasser, Feuer, Erden
Muss dir zu Dienste werden.

Recitativo

Evangelist:

Und da sie ihm nachsahen gen
Himmel fahren, siehe, da
stunden bei ihnen zwei
Männer in weissen Kleidern,
welche auch sagten:

beide:

Ihr Männer von Galiläa, was
stehet ihr und sehet gen
Himmel? Dieser Jesus,
welcher von euch ist
aufgenommen gen Himmel,
wird kommen, wie ihr ihn
gesehen habt gen Himmel
fahren.

Recitativo

Ach ja! so komme bald zurück:
Tilg einst mein trauriges
Gebärden,
Sonst wird mir jeder
Augenblick
Verhasst und Jahren ähnlich
werden.

Recitativo

Sie aber beteten ihn an, wandten
um gen Jerusalem von dem
Berge, der da heisset der Ölberg,
welcher ist nahe bei Jerusalem
und liegt einen Sabbater-Weg
davon, und sie kehrten wieder

cause me untold suffering,
ah yes, so stay yet here awhile;
else pain will quite encompass
me.

Recitative

Evangelist:

And while they beheld, He
was taken up; and a
cloud received Him out
of their sight, and He sits
on the right hand of
God.

Chorale

All now dwell beneath Thee,
Thyself the sole exception;
the angels must for evermore
come to wait upon Thee.
Princes too stand by the
path
and are Thy willing servants;
air, water, fire and earth
must now do Thy bidding.

Recitative

Evangelist:

And while they looked
steadfastly toward heaven as
He went up, behold, two men
stood by them in white
apparel, which also said:

both:

Ye men of Galilee, why stand
ye gazing up into heaven?
This same Jesus, which
is taken up from you into
heaven, shall so come in
like manner as ye have
seen Him go into
heaven.

Recitative

Ah yes! so come back soon again:
efface at last my sad
demeanour,
otherwise each moment will be
for me
despised and seem to last for
years.

Recitative

And they worshipped Him
and returned unto Jerusalem
from the mount called
Olivet, which is from
Jerusalem a sabbath day's
journey, and they returned

gen Jerusalem mit grosser
Freude.

Aria

Jesu, deine Gnadenblicke
Kann ich doch beständig sehn.
Deine Liebe bleibt zurücke,
Dass ich mich hier in der Zeit
An der künftgen Herrlichkeit
Schon voraus im Geist erquickte,
Wenn wir einst dort vor dir
stehn.

Coro

Wenn soll es doch geschehen,
Wenn kömmt die liebe Zeit,
Dass ich ihn werde sehen,
In seiner Herrlichkeit?
Du Tag, wenn wirst du sein,
Dass wir den Heiland grüssen,
Dass wir den Heiland küssen?
Komm, stelle dich doch ein!

to Jerusalem with great
joy.

Aria

Jesus, I can continually see
Thy looks of mercy.
Thy love remains behind,
so that I here on earth
might already refresh my soul
with the glory that is to come,
when we one day shall stand
before Thee.

Chorus

But when shall it come to pass,
when shall the dear day dawn
that I behold Him
in all His glory?
O day, when will you dawn,
that we may greet the Saviour,
that we may kiss the Saviour?
Come, then, and appear!

*Translation of 'Lobet Gott in seinen Reichen BWV11' by Richard Stokes from J S Bach:
The Complete Cantatas, published by Long Barn Books (Ebrington, Gloucestershire,
1999)*