

# Bach's Christmas Oratorio

# **Bach Collegium Japan**

#### Masaaki Suzuki

Director

Sherezade Panthaki / Soprano Jay Carter / Countertenor Zachary Wilder / Tenor Dominik Wörner / Bass

Friday Evening, December 8, 2017 at 8:00 Hill Auditorium Ann Arbor



#### **PROGRAM**

# Johann Sebastian Bach Christmas Oratorio, BWV 248 (excerpts)

Part I

Jauchzet, frohlocket, auf, preiset die Tage

Part II

Und es waren Hirten in derselben Gegend

# Intermission

Part III

Herrscher des Himmels, erhöre das Lallen

Part VI

Herr, wenn die stolzen Feinde schnauben

# CHRISTMAS ORATORIO, BWV 248 (EXCERPTS) (1734)

Johann Sebastian Bach Born March 31, 1685 in Eisenach, Germany Died July 28, 1750 in Leipzig

UMS premiere: J.S. Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*, nor any of the cantatas which make up the work, has ever been performed as part of a full concert program at UMS. However, arias from the oratorio have shown up on various recital programs over the past century: "Bereite dich, Zion" (Prepare thyself, Zion) on a Marian Anderson recital in Hill Auditorium (1954); "Was will der Hölle Schreken nun" (What will the terrors of Hell now) with the Bach Aria Group featuring soprano Eileen Farrell, tenor Jan Peerce, and cellist Bernard Greenhouse in Hill Auditorium (1960); and "Nur ein Wink von seinen Händen" (Only a wave of His hands) on an Anne Sofie von Otter recital in the Lydia Mendelssohn Theatre (2004).

# Snapshots of History...In 1734:

- · Lutherans expelled by the Roman Catholic Bishop of Salzburg ("Salzburgers") arrive in the British Colony of Georgia
- The Royal Academy of Music closes as a result of difficulties including arguments between Handel and his singers
- · George Sale produces a translation of the Koran into English

Bach's Christmas Oratorio was never meant to be performed on a single day. It was, rather, a "serialization" of the Christmas story — a set of six church cantatas, similar in structure to the approximately 200 cantatas Bach wrote for church services held throughout the liturgical year. In one important respect, however, these cantatas differ from the others; some of the recitatives are sung by the Evangelist reading from the Gospel narrative, rather than by unnamed soloists representing members of the congregation. There are also a few lines for the Angel or King Herod — in other words, the work has a dramatic element somewhat reminiscent of the Passions that we wouldn't find in most cantatas.

Not all the music in the *Christmas Oratorio* was newly composed for

the Christmas season of 1734–35.

Many of the choruses and arias were "recycled" from two secular cantatas (or, as Bach called them, "dramas for music") written shortly before to celebrate the birthdays of two members of the Saxon royal family. Such repurposing was rather common at the time, yet Bach made many changes as he reworked his material to adapt it to its new function as religious music.

The six cantatas were destined, respectively, for Christmas Day, the second and third days of Christmas, New Year, the Sunday after New Year, and the Feast of Epiphany. (At this concert, we will hear Parts I, II, III, and VI.) The text is a fusion of three separate layers. First, the biblical narrative, based on the Gospels of

St. Luke and St. Matthew, is delivered in the Evangelist's recitative and in the turbas, or choruses sung by the crowd. Other recitatives, and all arias, have texts written expressly for Bach, most likely by Christian Friedrich Henrici (also known as Picander), who also penned the aria texts of the St. Matthew Passion. Finally, the oratorio contains numerous chorales, or hymns from the Lutheran church tradition, some of which are by Martin Luther himself, others by his followers.

The cantatas cover Jesus' birth (Part I), the Adoration of the Shepherds (Part II), their visit to Bethlehem (Part III). Jesus' circumcision (Part IV), the appearance of the Magi before King Herod (Part V), and the Adoration of the Magi (Part VI). Even though the performance of the entire work was spread over a period of almost two weeks, the unity of the oratorio is preserved by the fact that the first and the last cantatas share the same key and the same instrumentation (with three trumpets and timpani), providing a pair of magnificent bookends between which the Christmas story unfolds.

There is significant diversity in the succession of recitatives, arias, big choral movements, and simple chorale settings, due, first of all, to a varied instrumentation. The full orchestra. with trumpets and kettledrums, is present in the first and last cantatas as well as in Part III. The two flutes are used in certain movements only, adding a special color. The most important family of instruments in the work is, without question, the oboe, of which Bach prescribes no fewer than three varieties, almost always in pairs: the regular oboes, the oboi d'amore or "oboes of love," pitched a minor

third lower, and the oboi da caccia or "hunting oboes," pitched a fifth lower than the regular oboes, like modern English horns. Several times in the work Bach requires an oboe quartet consisting of two oboi d'amore and two oboi da caccia.

Five of the six cantatas begin with large choruses in dance rhythms, in keeping with the celebratory mood of Yuletide. Each of the opening choruses is rather complex in its motivic elaboration. Several have middle sections in minor keys for emotional contrast, or include imitative, contrapuntal passages and various types of call-and-response figures. The opening chorus of Part VI combines a veritable trumpet concerto with a choral fugue, maximizing the celebratory mood. Part II is the only section of the oratorio to lack an opening chorus; in its place, this cantata opens with an orchestral sinfonia in pastoral style and a gently rocking rhythm. A good example for a turba chorus is "Lasset uns nun gehen" (Part III), where the shepherds start out on their way to Bethlehem to see the baby Jesus.

Quite another type of choral singing is represented by the numerous chorales woven through the six parts of the oratorio. Many of the chorale melodies are also familiar from other works by Bach such as the *St. Matthew Passion*. We hear them some of the time in straightforward four-part harmony, and some of the time in more complex arrangements, with the melody embedded in a more complex texture. Sometime Bach used the hymn melodies in very unusual ways, as in "Er ist auf Erden kommen arm" (Part I) where the soprano sings the chorale

melody against an elaborate oboe duet, with the chorale interrupted after each line to make room for the bass soloist's recitative which offers a commentary on the chorale.

Bach gave each of his soloists several solo arias in which to demonstrate their abilities. Since female singers were not allowed in church, Bach had to work exclusively with boys and men. He must have had some extremely gifted children at his disposal when he wrote the soprano and alto solos of the *Christmas Oratorio*. Yet he could evidently expect more of the men who sang the tenor and bass parts and those arias are a lot more demanding technically than those for the higher voices.

Typically, an aria in a Bach cantata features an instrumental solo in addition to the solo singer; the combinations of voice types and instrumentations are always carefully

matched to the aria's subject matter. For instance, the tenor aria "Frohe Hirten" (Part II) is scored with a solo flute, representing the traditional shepherd's pipe, and the bass aria "Großer Herr, o starker König" (Part I) includes a very regal trumpet part.

Many of the arias are preceded by recitatives that have Gospel verses or original poetic lines for their texts. Most often accompanied only by the continuo section (organ and string bass), sometimes they are scored with a more elaborate instrumentation to give additional emphasis to the text. Bach often treats the text in such a dramatic way that we begin to feel what a great opera composer he could have been if he had only had the opportunity to work for the musical stage!

Program note by Peter Laki.

#### ARTISTS

Since founding Bach Collegium Japan in 1990, Masaaki Suzuki (director) has established himself as a leading authority on the works of Bach. He has remained their music director ever since, taking them regularly to major venues and festivals in Europe and the US and building up an outstanding reputation for the expressive refinement and truth of his performances.

In addition to working with renowned period ensembles, such as the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and Philharmonia Baroque, he is invited to conduct repertoire as diverse as Britten, Fauré, Mahler, Mendelssohn, and Stravinsky, with orchestras such as the Baltimore Symphony, Danish National Radio Symphony, Deutsches Symphonie Orchester Berlin, New York Philharmonic, and the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra. This season sees Maestro Suzuki make return visits to the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, the Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal, and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra.

Maestro Suzuki's impressive discography on the BIS label, featuring all Bach's major choral works as well as complete works for harpsichord, has brought him many critical plaudits — the Times has written: "it would take an iron bar not to be moved by his crispness, sobriety, and spiritual vigor." 2014 marked the triumphant conclusion of Bach Collegium Japan's epic recording of the complete Church Cantatas initiated in 1995 and comprising 55 volumes. The ensemble has now embarked upon extending their repertoire with recent discs of Mozart's Requiem and Mass in c minor and a future release of Beethoven's Missa Solemnis.

This season, Bach Collegium Japan makes their debut appearance in Switzerland at the Fribourg International Festival of Sacred Music. Other highlights include return visits to the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, the Bachfest Leipzig, and Théâtre de Champs Elysées in Paris, and a tour of the US performing at venues including Alice Tully Hall in New York and San Francisco's Davies Symphony Hall.

Maestro Suzuki combines his conducting career with his work as organist and harpsichordist. Born in Kobe. he graduated from the Tokyo University of Fine Arts and Music with a degree in composition and organ performance and went on to study harpsichord and organ at the Sweelinck Conservatory in Amsterdam under Ton Koopman and Piet Kee, Founder and Professor Emeritus of the early music department at the Tokyo University of the Arts, he was on the choral conducting faculty at the Yale School of Music and Yale Institute of Sacred Music from 2009-2013. where he remains affiliated as the principal guest conductor of Yale Schola Cantorum. In 2012 he was awarded with the Leipzig Bach Medal and in 2013 the Royal Academy of Music Bach Prize. In April 2001, he was decorated with Das Verdienstkreuz am Bande des Verdienstordens der Bundesrepublik from Germany.

Bach Collegium Japan was founded in 1990 by Masaaki Suzuki, its inspirational music director, with the aim of introducing Japanese audiences to period instrument performances of great works from the Baroque period. Comprised of both Baroque orchestra and chorus, their activities include an annual concert series of Bach's cantatas and a number of instrumental programs. The award-winning ensemble has recently begun to explore classical repertoire, and released a recording of Mozart's Requiem in November 2014.





They have acquired a formidable international reputation through their acclaimed recordings of the major choral works of Johann Sebastian Bach for the BIS label: 2014 saw the triumphant conclusion of their recorded cycle of the complete Church Cantatas, a huge undertaking comprising over 50 CDs initiated in 1995. This major achievement was recognized with a 2014 ECHO Klassick "Editorial Achievement of the Year" award. Their recent recording of Bach Motets was honored with a German Record Critics' Award (Preis der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik), Diapason d'Or de l'Année 2010, and in 2011 with a BBC Music Magazine Award, BBC Music Magazine again recognized Masaaki Suzuki and Bach Collegium Japan, selecting their recording of Mozart's Great Mass in c minor as "Recording of the Month" in January 2017. The disc follows their first recording of Mozart — the Requiem — released in 2015, and builds on Maestro Suzuki's continuing wish to explore the tradition and line of Christian music.

Bach Collegium Japan and Masaaki
Suzuki have shared their interpretations
across the international music scene
with performances in venues as far afield
as Amsterdam, Berlin, Paris, Hong Kong,
London, Los Angeles, Melbourne, New York,
and Seoul, and at major festivals such as
the BBC Proms, the Edinburgh International
Festival, the Hong Kong Arts Festival,
New Zealand International Arts Festival,
Ghent's Festival of Flanders, and Festival
Cervantino in Mexico.

In 2010 the ensemble celebrated its 20th anniversary with a series of special concerts in Tokyo, and in 2013 they were invited to appear at New York's Lincoln Center where Masaaki Suzuki and the choir collaborated with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra to open its Bach

Variations Festival. The 2013–14 season saw the ensemble debut in the Czech Republic at the Prague Spring Festival and in Mexico. A sold-out tour in fall 2015 marked their fifth visit to North America. This season's highlights include a return to North America performing at Yale University, Lincoln Center, UMS, San Francisco Symphony, and the Philharmonic Society of Orange County as well as performances in Europe at the Thüringer Bachwochen and Leipzig Bachfest; a tour to Gronigen, Amsterdam, and Paris; and their debut in Switzerland at the Fribourg International Music Festival.

For more information, please visit www.bachcollegiumjapan.org, or follow Bach Collegium Japan on Facebook @bachcollegiumjapan and Twitter @bach\_collegium and @bach\_collegiumE.

# Sherezade Panthaki's (soprano)

international success has been fueled by superbly honed musicianship; "shimmering sensitivity" (Cleveland Plain Dealer); a "radiant" voice (The Washington Post); and vividly passionate interpretations, "mining deep emotion from the subtle shaping of the lines" (The New York Times). An acknowledged star in the early music field, Ms. Panthaki has ongoing collaborations with leading early music interpreters including Nicholas McGegan, Simon Carrington, the late John Scott, Matthew Halls, and Masaaki Suzuki, with whom she made her New York Philharmonic debut.

Ms. Panthaki's recent performance with Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra and conductor Nicholas McGegan was named one of the "Top 10 Classical Music Events of 2015" and described as "a breathtaking combination of expressive ardor, tonal clarity, technical mastery, and dramatic vividness" by *The San Francisco Chronicle*.

Ms. Panthaki's current season features performances of Vivaldi's *Gloria* with the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl and the St. Louis Symphony (Nicholas McGegan conducting), the Milwaukee Symphony, Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, Music of the Baroque, her return to Ars Lyrica, Pasadena Symphony Orchestra, Orlando Philharmonic, and a US *Christmas Oratorio* tour with Bach Collegium Japan.

Highlights of her past seasons include Messiah with Bach Collegium Japan, the National Symphony Orchestra, Calgary Philharmonic, and the Nashville and San Antonio symphonies; Bach cantatas and oratorios and works by Handel and Purcell with Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra: Saul with the Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra; Belinda in Dido and Aeneas and Galatea in Acis and Galatea with the Mark Morris Dance Group: Solomon with the Radio Kamer Filharmonie; Handel at Carnegie Hall with William Christie; Oregon Bach Festival; Berkeley Early Music Festival; Christmas Oratorio with the Orchestra of St. Luke's; Mozart's Exsultate jubilate and Requiem with the Washington Bach Consort; and St. John Passion, St. Matthew Passion, and Brahms Requiem with St. Thomas Fifth Avenue.

Ms. Panthaki's repertoire extends well beyond the music of the Renaissance and Baroque to Orff's Carmina Burana with the Houston Symphony, John Tavener's The Last Discourse with Orchestra of St. Luke's, Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 with American Classical Orchestra, Rachmaninoff's Vocalise and Strauss lieder at the Bari International Music Festival, Britten's War Requiem with Louisville Choral Arts Society, as well as solos in Stravinsky's Les Noces and Poulenc's Stabat Mater and Gloria. Ms. Panthaki holds an Artist Diploma from the Yale School of Music and a master's degree from the University of Illinois.

Jay Carter (countertenor) has gained recognition as one of the nation's finest countertenors. A frequent collaborator with both period and modern ensembles, Mr. Carter is recognized as a leading interpreter of late Baroque repertoire and has been lauded for his luminous tone, stylish interpretations, and clarion delivery.

Recent appearances include Bach's St. Matthew Passion with the American Bach Soloists and the Choir of St. Thomas Church, Handel's Messigh with the National Symphony and Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, Handel's Saul with Musica Vocale and the Kansas City Baroque Consortium, Handel's Jeptha with Ars Lyrica, and the North American premiere of John Tayener's Lament for Jerusalem with the Choral Arts Society of Washington. Though recognized as a specialist in the Baroque, Mr. Carter also performs works from the modern countertenor repertoire and has premiered works by John Tavener, Augusta Read Thomas, Chester Alwes, and Anthony Maglione.

In recent seasons he has routinely appeared with acclaimed conductors Nicholas McGegan, Ton Koopman, John Butt, John Scott, and Matthew Halls. Highlights of the current season include appearances throughout North America with Maasaki Suzuki and the Bach Collegium Japan, the Portland Baroque Festival, and the St. Louis Symphony and Nicholas McGegan in Vivaldi's Gloria and opera arias.

As a researcher and clinician, Mr. Carter frequently presents master classes and lecture recitals for colleges, universities, and presenting organizations throughout the US. Topics have included countertenor technique and repertory, the role of high male voices in Elizabethan and Jacobean vocal music, and concepts of masculinity in Henry Purcell's glees and catches.

He received his MM from the Yale School of Music and Institute of Sacred Music where he was a pupil of Simon Carrington, Judith Malafronte, and James Taylor. He received his undergraduate degree from William Jewell College where he studied voice with Arnold Epley. He currently lives in Liberty, Missouri with his family, and serves as artist-in-residence at William Jewell College where he mentors undergraduate music students and leads the Schola Cantorum.

Zachary Wilder (tenor) is recognized for his work in repertoire from the 17th and 18th centuries and is sought after on both the concert and operatic stages on both sides of the Atlantic. Having studied at the Eastman School of Music and at the Moores School of Music at the University of Houston, Mr. Wilder subsequently moved to Boston after the beginning of his collaboration with Boston Early Music Festival and a summer of studies as a Tanglewood Music Fellow.

Mr. Wilder relocated to France after he was chosen by William Christie in 2013 to take part in Les Arts Florissants' prestigious academy for young singers, Le Jardin des Voix. He now works with leading ensembles including Les Arts Florissants, Bach Collegium Japan, Boston Early Music Festival, Cappella Mediterranea, Le Concert Spirituel, Collegium Vocale Gent, English Baroque Soloists, Ensemble Pygmalion, Handel & Haydn Society, Orchestre de Chambre de Paris, Le Poème Harmonique, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, and Les Talens Lyriques.

Highlights for the current season include the continuation of the Monteverdi450 tour with the English Baroque Soloists in Berlin, Wroclaw, Paris, Chicago, and New York; Handel's Almira as Osman with the Boston Early Music Festival; Handel's Messiah and Bach's Johannespassion with the American Bach Soloists; Handel's Dixit Dominus and Hayes' Fall of Jericho with Netherlands Baroque; Draghi's El Prometeo as Mercurio at Opera Dijon; and three tours with Bach Collegium Japan in the US, Japan, and Europe of Bach's Christmas Oratorio, Bach's St. John's Passion, and Mozart's Mass in c minor.

Mr. Wilder's discography comprises several recordings with the Boston Early Music Festival, including their Grammy Award-winning La Descente d'Orphée aux Enfers as Tantalus. This season will also see the release of a DVD of Monteverdi's Orfeo (as Pastore) with Les Arts Florissants, a CD of Monteverdi's Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria (as Eurimaco) with the English Baroque Soloists, and his solo album of 17th-century Venetian chamber music with lutenist Josep María Martí Duran.

Dominik Wörner (bass), one of the most sought-after bass-baritones of his generation, has been hailed for his "warm and exceptionally colourful voice" and for the "tender glow and sparkling expressiveness" of his style. He studied church music, musicology, harpsichord, organ, and singing at the conservatories in Stuttgart, Fribourg, and Berne, notably with Jakob Stämpfli. In 2002, Mr. Wörner won first prize in the vocal section of the International Bach Competition and a special prize from the Leipzig Baroque Orchestra. Mr. Wörner completed his studies with a master class in lied interpretation given by Irwin Gage in Zürich, where he graduated with honors.

Mr. Wörner has made guest appearances around the world, performing the major oratorio roles with conductors such as Carl Saint Clair, Christophe Coin, Thomas Hengelbrock, Philippe Herreweghe,

Manfred Honeck, Tōnu Kaljuste, Sigiswald Kuijken, Philippe Pierlot, Helmuth Rilling, and Masaaki Suzuki. His recordings have won accolades such as the Diapason d'Or de l'Année, Echo Klassik, and the German Record Critics Award.

The German *lied* forms an important part of Mr. Wörner's repertoire. His recordings of *Winterreise* and *Schwanengesang* with fortepiano accompaniment on the ARS label were enthusiastically received by the press. He is also the artistic director of the German-Japanese Lied Society in Tokyo, founded with Masato Suzuki and Goro Tamura, supporting the interpretation and performance of art song in Japan. The Society gave its debut multimedia performance with Brahms' *Die Schöne Magelone* at Toppan Hall in Tokyo.

Highlights of Mr. Wörner's recent career include Mendelssohn's *St. Paul* with Gächinger Kantorei and Bach-Collegium Stuttgart; a European tour with Collegium Vocale Gent and the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra; a performance of Beethoven's *Symphony No.* 9 with the Latvian State Choir in Tallinn, and Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, Handel's *Messiah*, and a performance of Bach's secular cantatas with the Bach Collegium Japan in Tokyo.

Among his upcoming performances are Bach's St. John Passion in Spain, Rossini's Petite Messe Solennelle in Estonia, Brahms's Requiem in Tonhalle Zürich, and Mendelssohn's St. Paul in Japan. Mr. Wörner is co-founder of the Sette Voci ensemble and founder and artistic director of Kirchheimer Konzertwinter, a concert series in his home region of Pfalz.

#### **BACH COLLEGIUM JAPAN**

Masaaki Suzuki / Director

#### CHORUS

#### Soprano

Sherezade Panthaki Minae Fujisaki Yoshie Hida Maria Mochizuki

#### Alto

Jay Carter Hiroya Aoki Chiharu Takahashi Michael Wisdom

#### Tenor

Zachary Wilder Yusuke Fujii Takayuki Kagami Satoshi Mizukoshi

#### Bass

Dominik Wörner Daisuke Fujii Chiyuki Urano Yusuke Watanabe

# ORCHESTRA

# Trumpet

Dave Hendry Nicolas Isabelle Hidenori Saito

#### Timpani

Maarten van der Valk

#### Flauto traverso

Kiyomi Suga Yoko Tsuruta

#### Oboe/Oboe d'amore

Masamitsu San'nomiya Go Arai

#### Oboe da caccia

Yukari Maehashi Kaori Katayama

## Bassoon

Yukiko Murakami

#### Violin I

Natsumi Wakamatsu, *Leader* Akira Harada Yuko Takeshima Yukie Yamaguchi

#### Violin II

Azumi Takada Mika Akiha Evan Few

#### Viola

Hiroshi Narita Sonoko Asabuki Emilio Moreno

#### CONTINUO

#### Cello

Emmanuel Balssa Toru Yamamoto

#### Violone

Frank Coppieters

#### Harpsichord

Francesco Corti

#### Organ

Masato Suzuki

#### Stage Manager

Hisato Iwasaki

#### Staff

Moegi Takahashi Ai Takizawa

Bach Collegium Japan's US tour is supported by The Agency for Cultural Affairs, Government of Japan.

#### UMS ARCHIVES

This evening's performance marks **Bach Collegium Japan** and **Masaaki Suzuki**'s third performances under UMS auspices, following their UMS debuts in April 2003 in a performance of Bach's *St. John Passion* at St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church. They most recently appeared at UMS in March 2011 in a performance of Bach's *Mass in b minor* at Hill Auditorium. Bass **Domink Wörner** makes his second UMS appearance this evening following his UMS debut in February 2002 with Collegium Vocale Gent at St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church. Tenor **Zachary Wilder** makes his third appearance under UMS auspices tonight following his UMS debut in September 2008 in two performances with the Mark Morris Dance Group at the Power Center. UMS welcomes soprano **Sherezade Panthaki** and countertenor **Jay Carter** as they make their UMS debuts this evening.

### MAY WE ALSO RECOMMEND...

1/6	What's in a Song with Martin Katz
2/17	The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess
3/13	Tenebrae

Tickets available at www.ums.org.

# ON THE EDUCATION HORIZON...

1/4	Voice Master Classes: What's In a Song?
	(Moore Building, 1100 Baits Drive)
	Please see ums.org for detailed times and locations.

- 1/12 Post-Performance Q&A: Urban Bush Women (Power Center, 121 Fletcher Street)

  Must have a ticket to the performance to attend.
- 1/13 You Can Dance: Urban Bush Women
  (Ann Arbor Y, 400 W. Washington Street, 1:30 pm)
- 1/14 Pre-Performance Talk with Professor Steven Whiting: St. Lawrence String Quartet (Earl Lewis Room, Third Floor, Rackham Graduate School, 915 E. Washington Street, 2:00 pm)

Educational events are free and open to the public unless otherwise noted.