ANDRIS NELSONS conducting

“Leipzig Week in Boston”

J.S. BACH  “CHRISTMAS ORATORIO,” BWV 248
Part I: Cantata for the First Day of Christmas
Part II: Cantata for the Second Day of Christmas
Part III: Cantata for the Third Day of Christmas

{INTERMISSION}

Part IV: Cantata for New Year’s Day (Feast of the Circumcision)
Part V: Cantata for the First Sunday in the New Year
Part VI: Cantata for the Feast of the Epiphany

CAROLYN SAMPSON, SOPRANO
CHRISTINE RICE, MEZZO-SOPRANO
SEBASTIAN KOHLHEPP, TENOR
ANDRÈ SCHUEN, BARITONE
TANGLEWOOD FESTIVAL CHORUS AND
BOSTON SYMPHONY CHILDREN’S CHOIR,
JAMES BURTON, CONDUCTOR

BLAISE DÉJARDIN, CONTINUO CELLO
RICHARD SVOBODA, CONTINUO BASSOON
IAN WATSON, ORGAN

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First associate concertmaster Tamara Smirnova performs on a 1754 J.B. Guadagnini violin, the “ex-Zazofsky,” and James Cooke performs on a 1778 Nicolò Gagliano violin, both generously donated to the orchestra by Michael L. Nieland, M.D., in loving memory of Mischa Nieland, a member of the cello section from 1943 to 1988.
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The Program in Brief...

This week’s performances of Bach’s Christmas Oratorio celebrate “Leipzig Week in Boston,” marking the historic partnership established earlier this year between the BSO and the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig. Bach lived in Leipzig from 1723 until his death in 1750, and it was for Leipzig’s St. Thomas and St. Nicholas churches that he wrote the Christmas Oratorio, along with most of his several hundred church cantatas.

The Christmas Oratorio consists of six musically complete cantatas, each recounting a scene from the story of Jesus Christ’s birth as told in the Gospel of Luke. The biblical narrative is given in recitative by a tenor in the role of the Evangelist. Part I tells of Jesus’s birth; Part II, the Annunciation to the Shepherds; III, the Adoration of the Shepherds; IV, Circumcision and Naming of Jesus; V, Journey of the Magi, and VI, Adoration of the Magi. Framing the Evangelist’s narrative are chorales, other movements for chorus, and vocal solo or duo movements providing poetic commentary on and reaction to the story.

In addition to the change in scene, Bach further ensures the musical distinctiveness of each cantata by scoring each for a different complement of instruments in addition to the strings and continuo (organ, bassoon, and cello)—e.g., trumpets and timpani create the festive mood for Christmas Day at the start of the first cantata; dusky oboes da caccia (a precursor to the English horn) denote the world of the shepherd in Part II. Bach also chooses different voice types and instrumental accompaniment to characterize the arias within each part.

Much of the Christmas Oratorio is based on music Bach composed earlier, mined primarily from three secular cantatas and a now-lost church cantata; the composer worked with a librettist to create new words to fit extant melodies and choruses. He wrote the remainder of the music—including all the recitatives—and assembled the whole in time for the Christmas season of 1734. The piece was originally performed over the course of twelve days: Christmas Day, the day after Christmas, and the second day after Christmas; New Year’s Day 1735, the first Sunday after the New Year, and the Feast of the Epiphany on January 6. This week’s BSO performances of J.S. Bach’s Christmas Oratorio mark the orchestra’s first complete performances of the piece, though Charles Munch led the BSO in five of its six parts during the 1950 Christmas season.

Robert Kirzinger

Reflections on Bach’s “Christmas Oratorio”

by John Harbison

Composer John Harbison, whose ties to Boston’s cultural and educational communities are longstanding, celebrates his 80th birthday on December 20, 2018. To mark this birthday, the BSO will perform his Symphony No. 2 on January 10, 11, and 12 at Symphony Hall, and the Boston Symphony Chamber Players perform music of Harbison and J.S. Bach on Sunday afternoon, January 13, at Jordan Hall. The author of a new book entitled “What Do We Make of Bach?—Portraits, Essays, Notes,” Mr. Harbison here offers thoughts on Bach’s “Christmas Oratorio.”

Andris Nelsons’ 2018 performances of Bach’s Christmas Oratorio are the Boston Symphony’s first since 1950, when Charles Munch was the orchestra’s music director. Munch may have been the last BSO conductor for whom Bach’s music remained a natural and substantial part of any season. In the 1950s the influence of Historically Informed Practice (HIP) was beginning to be felt. Large orchestras and their conductors began to draw away from 18th-century repertoire, feeling themselves too large, too unschooled in stylistic issues.

For Charles Munch, Bach was life-blood. I remember hearing his generous, spacious performance of Cantata 4, his monumental reading of the double-chorus, single-movement Cantata 50. Arriving at Tanglewood as a Fellow in 1958, opening night in the Theatre-Concert Hall, there was Munch’s own transcription for string orchestra of Bach’s complete Art of Fugue!

This was a weird and glorious experience, a two-hour journey through Bach’s fugue cycle that seemed a stream of sublime, often very unusual harmony, seldom articulated as to line or sectional contrast. In Charles Munch’s ear it became a kind of late Fauré piece. It was a devotional reading, Bach through a fascinating Gallic prism, an embodiment of Munch’s passion and Bach’s durability.

Are we perhaps returning to a time when Bach, Handel, and Haydn might edge back toward their earlier place in the...
big orchestra world, to be heard again by an audience that seldom crosses over to the specialist early music domain? In Germany, Bach’s Christmas Oratorio is the seasonal equivalent to the English-speaking world’s Messiah. Every locale of even modest size produces it, the audience seems to be virtually humming along. Presented as an evening, all six cantatas, it is a challenging form. In fact it is not really a form: each of the six cantatas has its own piece of the story and its own sound, although I, III, and VI—however nuanced their D major trumpet-drums celebrations—can seem close cousins on first hearing.

Having first experienced them one a week, I feel fortunate to retain distinct, independent impressions of the pastoral, truly angelic Cantata II, the tonally-fresh horn-colored world of IV, the adrenaline shot of V, smallest orchestration and hottest music dealing with the harshest drama in the story.

In addition to the unusual experience of a non-form (a drama in six acts), the listener is privileged to be hearing the only extended example of the late Bach chorale manner. His cantata-choratorio period is behind him, only one other choral enterprise in his final fifteen years absorbed his attention: the completion of the B minor Mass with the addition of the Et incarnatus and parts of the Confiteor.

In the Christmas Oratorio we notice an especially adventurous approach to the chorales, always a site of wordspecific invention, here even more detailed and emotionally charged. There is also a theatrical largeness to the opening choruses, with elaborated “B” sections, and vast ceremonial exchanges between the chorus and orchestra, on a scale rare in cantatas.

A fascinating behind-the-scenes possibility lurks in the genesis of this piece, a premise which a real Bach scholar would not present as baldly here.

Bach and his librettist, Picander (C.F. Henrici), brought forth the St. Matthew Passion very early in their partnership (1727). By the early 1730s they were working often on commissions for secular celebrations—princely birthdays, weddings. It seems plausible, examining the beautifully paired texts, that these pieces could have been conceived in parallel with a much bigger project, the Christmas Oratorio. The secular pieces “subsidized” an important missing piece in Bach’s music for the church calendar. Double-texting of choruses and arias turns out to fit well—for example, birth music for a prince can be reworked as sacred nativity music. In every case the “later” (more likely simultaneous) version is deeper and more telling.

An interesting thing about this hypothesis: it seems to answer one of the most frequently asked questions about Bach. Was he merely vocationally a church composer, or did he aspire to—and cherish—that calling? In the 1730s we find him plotting, planning, preparing, making time and occasion for his last sacred vocal work, long after his obligations to his church job had been fulfilled.

John Harbison (November 2018)

Bach’s “Christmas Oratorio” Then and Now

by Christoph Wolff

Bach scholar Christoph Wolff is Adams University Professor Emeritus at Harvard University and Artistic Advisor to the BSO/GHO Alliance.

Bach’s “Christmas Oratorio” in the Context of Leipzig’s Musical History

This week’s performances of Johann Sebastian Bach’s Christmas Oratorio celebrate the partnership of the Boston Symphony Orchestra and the Gewandhausorchester by commemorating, on the occasion of the Leipzig orchestra’s 275th anniversary, its initial phase. Founded in 1743 under the name “Großes Concert” (“Grand Concerts”) by a group of businessmen, the new concert enterprise started under the musical directorship of Johann Friedrich Doles, a former Bach student and later his second successor as Thomascantor. It essentially filled the void of the weekly secular concert series of Bach’s “Collegium Musicum” that had begun in 1729 and ended in 1741 with the death of its host, the cafétier Zimmermann. Under Bach as music director of the St. Nicholas and St. Thomas churches (the Nikolaikirche and the Thomaskirche), the Collegium series stayed away from religious music. However, the Großes Concert saw no conflict of interest in performing sacred works and, by doing so, following the model of the Concert Spirituel in Paris, added a new facet to an emerging bourgeois music culture in Germany.

As the Leipzig town chronicler reported, on Monday of Holy Week 1748 the Großes Concert presented a Passion oratorio by Johann Adolf Hasse at the Three Swans Inn, its permanent home before moving in 1781 to the Garment House (Gewandhaus). It was attended by an audience of more than 300 and the concert’s success prompted similar oratorio performances at the beginning of Holy Week in subsequent years. The 1748 oratorio performance, however, may not have been the very first, because in 1746 or 1747 George Frideric Handel’s Brockes-Passion was presented in Leipzig under Bach’s direction. The score Bach himself had copied out does not show any signs of a liturgical performance on Good Friday at the vespers service of the Leipzig main churches; therefore, it may well have been presented under the auspices of the Großes Concert. Be that as it may, in the absence of further documentation, the location of the Handel performance remains hypothetical, but there is no question that none other than Bach was
responsible for awakening the appetite for oratorio performances in Leipzig. By the end of his first year as Thomascantor, he had managed to turn the Good Friday vespers of the Leipzig main churches into the musical pinnacle of the year, by offering modern Passion oratorios of unprecedented scale—first with his St. John Passion of 1724, topping that with the double-choir St. Matthew Passion of 1727, and then in 1731 by adding the (lost) St. Mark Passion.

After essentially completing the repertoire of church cantatas, Bach focused in the 1730s primarily on large-scale sacred works. But limited by the 20-30 minutes allotted for cantatas in the liturgy of regular Sunday and feast day worship services, he could not accommodate a large piece except by subdividing it into smaller units. He indeed did so with the Christmas Oratorio of 1734/35 by spreading its six parts over the twelve-day Christmas season. In 1738, he then added two shorter sister oratorios for Easter and Ascension Day by daring to overstretched the liturgical boundaries, thus completing an oratorio trilogy for the three jubilant church festivals. Together with the three Passion oratorios, they commemorate the major stations of the life of the biblical Jesus—birth, suffering and death, resurrection, and ascension to heaven as articulated by the Christian creed. There is no precedent for such a coherent musical scheme covering the four dominant Christological feast days. Bach’s cyclical embedding, as it were, of the three Passions by three complementary oratorios genuinely exposed his personal idea which, by a strange coincidence, anticipated Handel’s Messiah of 1741/42 as a non-liturgical musical representation of the life of Jesus Christ in a single oratorio on a scriptural text.

The “Christmas Oratorio” Viewed as a Whole Among Bach’s large-scale vocal works, the six-part Christmas Oratorio presents a special case that reveals many of the composer’s priorities reflected in his oratorio-style works. First of all, by its structural reliance on a continuous biblical narrative that accords with the contemporaneous definition of oratorio as “sacred opera,” it underscores the conceptual departure from the regular church cantata that functions as an exegetical musical sermon about a scriptural text. Second, the various borrowings from secular works for celebratory occasions hint at Bach’s close collaboration with his librettist and suggest a premeditated re-use of poetic and musical ideas with the goal of finding a permanent home of the music in the sacred repertoire. Hence, textual and musical allusions as they occur, for instance, in the cradle song “Schlafe, mein Liebster” (“Sleep, my beloved”) of both the secular birthday cantata and the Christmas Oratorio, could easily be transferred from the birthday of an electoral prince to that of the Christ Child. Finally, although the performance of the work took place over six feast-days of the Christmas period and alternated between the two main churches in Leipzig, the Christmas Oratorio was deliberately conceived as a self-contained whole. Salient features of the work’s overarching design include the key order of the six parts (D major, G major, D major, F major, A major, D major) and identical tutti scorings with trumpets in the D major home-key parts; different instrumental colors for the dominant and subdominant keys, and a surprise flat-key with F-horns in place of trumpets for New Year’s Day. Moreover, the value Bach attached to the musical architecture and the liturgical embedding of the work is reflected in the linking of the oratorio’s first and last parts, and in rounding off the whole by using one and the same melody for the first and last chorales (nos. 5 and 64, respectively)—a melody that also belongs to a prominent Lenten hymn and thereby foreshadows the Good Friday Passion.

Up to the present, the Christmas Oratorio is still rarely performed complete. Yet only an unabridged presentation of all six parts—like this week’s performances in Symphony Hall—makes it possible fully to realize how ingeniously the composer managed to create a work of such gripping intensity, with a structure so remarkably unified, despite considerable odds: a liturgical calendar and local conventions dictating partition and performance at alternating locations. It almost seems as if Bach had meant to override given conditions and anticipate a non-liturgical concert performance. In this sense, and as he observed the rise of the Großes Concert late in his lifetime, the trend of bringing religious music also to the concert hall would hardly have run against his interests.

Christoph Wolff
Johann Sebastian Bach “Weihnachts-Oratorium” (“Christmas Oratorio”), BWV 248

Johann Sebastian Bach was born in Eisenach, Thuringia, in central Germany, on March 21, 1685, and died in Leipzig on July 28, 1750. He composed and compiled the “Christmas Oratorio” in 1734 for performance in Leipzig during that year’s Christmas season, and its six parts, with Bach himself conducting, were performed over the course of twelve days: Christmas Day 1734 (a Saturday); the day after Christmas, and two days after Christmas; New Year’s Day 1735; the Sunday after New Year’s (January 2); and the Feast of the Epiphany (January 6). Parts I, II, IV, and VI were performed in both the Thomaskirche (in the morning service) and the Nikolaikirche (afternoon); parts III and V were only performed at the Nikolaikirche. This week’s performances are the first by the Boston Symphony Orchestra of the complete work. (A full BSO performance history appears at the end of this note.)
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Concertos, the works for unaccompanied cello and unaccompanied violin, and the first book of the Well-Tempered Clavier. The Leipzig position, Thomaskantor and Music Director of Leipzig, gave him oversight over the musical activities of the city’s four principal churches, the Thomaskirche, Nikolaikirche, Neukirche, and Petrikirche, as well as responsibility for the tutelage of the boys at the Thomasschule, the boarding school of St. Thomas Church.
Bach’s compositional activities in Leipzig focused on music for Sunday services, church feast days and special services, and other special occasions, such as weddings and funerals—“a bold program of church music,” Bach scholar Christoph Wolff notes, that in its “richness of ideas, forms, and sonorities...was unprecedented for Leipzig (or anywhere else, for that matter).” The amount of music that he produced in this position is staggering, especially in the first few years. After his first two years he had assembled two nearly complete church-year cycles of cantatas, each comprising more than sixty large-scale works. He completed two more cycles by 1729, and yet a fifth by the 1740s. The term cantata in Bach’s day broadly referred to a sectional narrative work for voice or voices and ensemble, with or without chorus. The subject matter of the text could be either religious or secular; secular cantatas were typically composed for such occasions as birthdays of the nobility. Bach’s preoccupation and experience with the cantata form is the foundation for the Christmas Oratorio.
That Bach was an encyclopedic composer is apparent over the entire course of his career. Excepting opera, he made a point of exploring the far reaches of possibility in every genre of music he encountered. Smaller-scale examples of this approach can be seen in his comprehensive survey of the concerto grosso style in his Brandenburg Concertos (some of which go well beyond expectations for the genre). In his sonatas and partitas for solo violin and suites for unaccompanied cello, he plumbed the depths of string instrument writing as well as the limits of virtual counterpoint (that is, creating the illusion of multiple contrapuntal voices). Several different projects, including the Clavier-
Übung (which includes the Goldberg Variations and the Italian Concerto) and Well-Tempered Clavier, develop contrapuntal keyboard writing to its highest pinnacle.
Likewise, in his cantatas, Bach developed the form in all dimensions. For his first years in Leipzig, Bach’s deliberate concentration on the church cantata gave him little opportunity for much else, but within the restrictions of the church service (which required a typical duration for each cantata of between twenty and twenty-five minutes) he explored a variety of approaches. For example, in his second year in Leipzig he embarked on a cycle of chorale cantatas, in which the textual and musical content of the piece is based on a single Lutheran hymn, such as Martin Luther’s Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott (“A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”), which is the basis for Cantata No. 80. Among the best-known of Bach’s chorale cantatas is No. 140, Wachet auf, ruf uns die stimme (known in English as “Sleepers, Awake”). All cantatas are vocal works, but Bach’s include those with and without chorus; those for a single solo voice, and those with multiple solo voices. Many begin with a chorale introduction, but others open with an instrumental sinfonia; in some cases this was a concerto-like movement for solo instrument and ensemble. This great variety had the benefit of maintaining the interest of both Bach’s constituency (performers and congregation), and the composer himself.
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THE SCORING OF THE “CHRISTMAS ORATORIO” CALLS FOR soprano, alto, tenor, and bass vocal soloists, four-part mixed chorus (soprano, alto, tenor, bass), and orchestra. The instrumental ensemble is slightly different for each cantata, though the strings and the continuo group—organ, bassoon, and cello—are constants. In addition to the strings and continuo, Part I requires two flutes, two oboes, two oboes d’amore, three trumpets, and timpani; Part II, two flutes, two oboes d’amore, and two oboes da caccia; Part III, two flutes, two oboes, two oboes d’amore, three trumpets, and timpani; Part IV, two oboes and two horns; Part V, two oboes d’amore; Part VI, two oboes d’amore, three trumpets, and timpani.

J.S. Bach’s Christmas Oratorio is a cycle of six musically self-contained cantatas, each taking for its subject a scene from the New Testament Gospel of St. Luke’s narrative of the birth of Jesus Christ. The six parts, as laid out by Bach and his unknown librettist (possibly his longtime collaborator Picander), are: The Birth of Jesus; Annunciation to the Shepherds; Adoration of the Shepherds; Circumcision and Naming of Jesus; Journey of the Magi; and Adoration of the Magi. Each cantata employs a similar pattern—a tone-setting introductory movement is followed by the Evangelist’s story-telling recitative, interspersed with poetic commentary from soloists or chorus. Five of the six introductory movements are for chorus and orchestra; the second cantata begins with a Sinfonia for the orchestra alone. This general, flexible template of movements sufficed for most of Bach’s large output of cantatas, the bulk of which he wrote in his first decade in Leipzig.
Bach had arrived in the city in May 1723 following six years of service in Cöthen, and lived in Leipzig until his death in July 1750. In Cöthen, in the service of the music-loving Prince Leopold, he amassed an astonishing catalog of instrumental masterpieces, among them the six Brandenburg Concertos, the works for unaccompanied cello and unaccompanied violin, and the first book of the Well-Tempered Clavier. The Leipzig position, Thomaskantor and Music Director of Leipzig, gave him oversight over the musical activities of the city’s four principal churches, the Thomaskirche, Nikolaikirche, Neukirche, and Petrikirche, as well as responsibility for the tutelage of the boys at the Thomasschule, the boarding school of St. Thomas Church.
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Breaks in performances of cantatas during the church year, during the Lenten season before Easter and during Advent, before Christmas, allowed Bach and his musicians to prepare the special music that was called for during
and around these most important Christian festivals. For Easter 1724, Bach wrote the first of his large-scale “Passion oratorios,” the St. John Passion, and during Easter week in 1727 the even bigger, double-chorus St. Matthew Passion was introduced. A third oratorio Passion, based on the Gospel of Mark, is lost, but the text survives. (A list of works published after Bach’s death notes two further Passion settings, now lost or perhaps listed in error.) The term oratorio designates a large-scale concert work for voices and orchestra with a dramatic narrative, usually based on a religious subject. In its broad musical and narrative outlines, the oratorio corresponded to opera, but lacked staging and sets, and its character roles for the solo singers are usually far less defined. (The biggest exception is the role of the Evangelist, narrator in the Passions as well as the Christmas Oratorio.)

In contrast with his contemporary George Frideric Handel, whose Messiah is the most famous oratorio, Bach wrote very few such works: in addition to the Passions (for which Bach didn’t use the term oratorio), there are only the Christmas Oratorio, the Easter Oratorio, and the Ascension Oratorio. Of these, the Christmas Oratorio is by far the most ambitious.

Much of the music of the Christmas Oratorio originated in earlier Bach cantatas on secular subjects. The two main extant sources were the 1733 cantatas nos. 213, Laßt uns sorgen, laßt uns wachen (“Let us take care, let us watch”), aka Hercules at the Crossroads, and 214, Tönet, ihr Pauken! Erschallet, Trompeten! (“Resound, drums! Ring out, trumpets!”). Both were composed in honor of members of the Saxon royal family, No. 213 for the birthday of Crown Prince Friedrich Christian, and No. 214 for the birthday of his mother, Maria Josepha, Electress of Saxony. (Another major source, the basis for Part VI, is thought to be the lost church cantata BWV248a.) This re-use of earlier works was a common practice for Bach, as it was for many composers of the era, but as John Harbison suggests in his comments on the Christmas Oratorio, the secular cantatas may have been planned from their beginnings as the oratorio’s foundation.

As mentioned above, the oratorio was planned for and first performed during the Christmas season of 1734-35, from Christmas Day through Epiphany, twelve days later. Each cantata is a multi-movement work consisting of several kinds of pieces. The storytelling part of each is delivered in recitative by a tenor in the role of Evangelist, from the Gospel of Luke. This is interspersed with solo vocal and choral commentary, much of the text of which was written for the purpose. Chorale movements from the Lutheran tradition, which would have been well known to Bach’s congregations, are found throughout. For example, the fifth movement of the opening cantata is the 17th-century hymn “Wie soll dich empfangen,” also used in the St. Matthew Passion. For each part, the opening movement establishes the general tenor of the cantata. Five of the six opening movements are chorales, introducing the scene with both text and music. In keeping with its subject matter, the introduction to the second cantata, Annunciation to the Shepherds, is an instrumental Sinfonia known as the “Pastorale,” one of Bach’s most familiar orchestral movements.

Each of the six parts calls for a different complement of instruments, assuring an acoustic distinction among the six parts. In the cantata for Christmas Day, which tells of Mary and Joseph’s arrival in Bethlehem and the birth of Jesus, Bach stocks his ensemble with the celebratory sound of trumpets and timpani, a sound that introduces the cycle as a whole. In the second cantata, a pair of oboes da caccia (a precursor of the English horn) evokes the shepherd’s pastoral world. Horns are only found in the fourth cantata; in the fifth, only a pair of oboes is added to strings and continuo. Bach uses specific instruments to accompany arias throughout the cantata to create nuances of atmosphere and mood.

The text will be your guide through these six scenes from the narrative of Christ’s birth.

Robert Kirzinger

Composer/annotator Robert Kirzinger is the BSO’s Associate Director of Program Publications.

THE FIRST AMERICAN PERFORMANCE OF MUSIC FROM BACH’S “CHRISTMAS ORATORIO”—
Parts I and II of the piece—was given by the Handel & Haydn Society at the Music Hall in Boston on May 17, 1877, Carl Zerrahn conducting, with soloists Emma Thursby, Annie Louise Cary, and William J. and John F. Winch, and organist B.J. Lang.

THESE ARE THE BSO’S FIRST COMPLETE PERFORMANCES OF BACH’S “CHRISTMAS ORARIO,” though Charles Munch led the orchestra, vocal soloists Marguerite Willauer, Janice Moudry, William Hess, and James Pease, and an ad hoc chorus prepared by Arthur Fiedler in performances of cantatas I-IV and VI during the Christmas season of 1950. Wilhelm Gericke led the first and second cantatas with the BSO, soloists Emma Juch, Emily Winant, William J. Winch, and Franz Remmertz, and a “chorus of three hundred” in a concert commemorating the 200th anniversary of Bach’s birth on March 21, 1885. Gericke led the Cantata II alto aria “Schlaf, mein Liebster,” featuring soloist Emily Winant, once; the Sinfonia from that cantata figured many times in the BSO programs of conductors Gericke, Arthur Nikisch, Emil Paur, Max Fiedler, Karl Muck, and Ernst Schmidt between 1884 and 1915, returning to the repertoire under guest conductors Wheeler Beckett in 1944 in Boston and Victor de Sabata in 1950 at Tanglewood. Munch also conducted this single movement during the
J.S. BACH “Christmas Oratorio,” BWV 248

English translation by Pamela Dellal

Part I: Cantata for the First Day of Christmas
“Jauchzet, frohlocket, auf, preiset die Tage”

Chorus
Celebrate, rejoice, rise up and praise these days,
glorify what the Highest has done today!
Abandon despair, banish laments,
sound forth full of delight and happiness!
Serve the Highest with glorious choruses,
let us honor the name of the Supreme Ruler!

Recitative (Evangelist [Tenor])
It came to pass at that time, however, that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be appraised. And everyone went to be appraised, each to his own city. So Joseph also went out of Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into the Jewish territory to the city of David, which was called Bethlehem; since he was of the house and race of David; so that he might be appraised with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was pregnant. And while they were there, the time came for her to deliver.

Recitative (Alto)
Now my dearest Bridegroom,
now the hero from David’s branch,
for the comfort, for the salvation of the earth,
will be born at last.
Now the Star out of Jacob will shine,
its light already breaks forth.
Arise, Zion, and give up your weeping now,
your happiness rises high above you!

Aria (Alto)
Prepare yourself, Zion, with tender efforts,
to behold your lovely one, your beloved,
near you soon!
Your cheeks
must now glow much more radiantly,
hurry to love the Bridegroom with passion!

Chorale
How shall I embrace You,
and how encounter You?
O desire of the whole world,
O adornment of my soul!
O Jesus, Jesus, place
the torch near me Yourself,
so that what gives You pleasure
be known and familiar to me!

Recitative (Evangelist [Tenor])
And she bore her first son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a manger, since there was no other room in the inn.
Chorale (Soprano chorus) and Recitative (Bass)

He came to earth poor,
Who can rightly exalt this love,
that our Savior harbors for us?
So that He might have sympathy for us,
Indeed, who could possibly have predicted
how the sorrow of humanity moved Him?
And make us rich in heaven,
The Son of the Highest came into the world,
since its salvation pleased Him so much,
and like His dear angels.
thus He Himself will be born a human.

Kyrie eleison!

Aria (Bass)

Great Lord, o powerful King,
dearest Savior, o how little
you care about the glories of the earth!
He who sustains the entire world,
who created its magnificence and beauty,
must sleep in a harsh manger.

Chorale

Ah, my heart’s beloved little Jesus,
make Yourself a pure, soft little bed
within my heart’s chamber in which to rest,
so that I never forget You!

Part II: Cantata for the Second Day of Christmas

“Und es waren Hirten in derselben Gegend”

10. Sinfonia

11. Recitative (Evangelist [Tenor])

And there were shepherds in the same region in the fields near the sheepfolds, who guarded their flock at night. And behold, the angel of the Lord approached them, and the brilliance of the Lord shone around them and they were very afraid.

Chorale

Break forth, o lovely light of morning,
and let heaven dawn!
You shepherd-folk, do not fear,
for the angel tells you
that this weak little boy
shall be our comfort and joy,
compelling Satan as well
and bringing peace at last!

Recitative (Evangelist [Tenor], Angel [Soprano])

And the angel said to them:
—Do not be afraid; behold, I proclaim great joy for you, which will occur for all people. For today the Savior is born for you, which is Christ, the Lord, in the city of David.—

Recitative (Bass)

What God promised to Abraham,
now, fulfilled, He has has announced
to the group of shepherds.
A shepherd, then, first of all,
had experience of God.
And now, also, a shepherd is first of all
to know the fulfillment
of what once was promised.

Aria (Tenor)
Happy shepherds, hurry, ah hurry,
before you delay too long,
hurry to see the lovely Child!
Go, this joy is so exquisite,
seek to achieve this loveliness,
go and delight heart and senses!

Recitative (Evangelist [Tenor])
And you will have this as a sign: you will find the Child wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.

Chorale
Look there, there He lies in a dark stall,
whose majesty encompasses everything!
Where once an ox searched for food,
now the Child of the Virgin rests.

Recitative (Bass)
Then go there, you shepherds, go,
so that you see the miracle:
and when you find the Son of the Highest
lying in a harsh manger,
then sing to Him by His cradle
in a sweet tone
and with full chorus
this lullaby!

Aria (Alto)
Sleep, my beloved, enjoy Your rest,
and awaken after it for all the fortunate!
Let your heart delight,
experience the joy
that rejoices our hearts!

Recitative (Evangelist [Tenor])
And immediately, with the angel, there was a throng of the heavenly hosts, who praised God and said:

Chorus (The Angels)
Glory be to God in the highest and peace on earth and a happy occurrence for humanity.

Recitative (Bass)
Thus rightly, you angels, rejoice and sing,
that it works out so beautifully for us today!
Up then! We play along with you;
we can celebrate just as you do.

Chorale
We sing to You in Your host
with all our might praise, glory and honor,
since You, o long-awaited guest,
from now on have become present.

Part III: Cantata for the Third Day of Christmas
“Herrscher des Himmels, erhöre das Lallen”

Chorus
Ruler of Heaven, hear the murmur,
let the dull songs be pleasing to You,
when Your Zion exalts You with psalms!
Hear the delightful praises of our hearts,
when we acknowledge our present awe of You,
since our pilgrimage has been confirmed!

Recitative (Evangelist [Tenor])
And when the angels went away from them towards heaven, the shepherds said to one another:

Chorus
Let us go now towards Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened there, which the Lord has announced to us.

Recitative (Bass)
He has comforted His people,
He has rescued His Israel,
sending help out of Zion
and ending our sorrow.
Look, shepherds, He has done this;
go, this is what awaits you!

Chorale
All this He has done for us,
to indicate His great love;
for this all Christianity rejoices
and thanks Him for it in eternity.
Kyrie eleison!

Aria (Duet: Soprano and Bass)
Lord, your compassion, your mercy
comforts us and makes us free.
Your gracious favor and love,
Your miraculous doings
make Your fatherly devotion
renewed again.

Recitative (Evangelist [Tenor])
And they came hastily and found both Mary and Joseph, along with the child lying in the manger. When they had seen it, however, they spread the word around, that had been spoken about this child. And everyone to whom it came marveled at the sayings that the shepherds had told them. Mary however kept all these words and pondered them in her heart.

Aria (Alto)
Enclose, my heart, these blessed miracles
fast within your faith!
Let these wonders, these divine works,
forever be the reinforcement
of your weak faith!

Recitative (Alto)
Yes, yes, my heart shall cherish this,
what it has experienced
at this glorious time for its blessedness
as a sure revelation.

Chorale
I will cherish You assiduously,
I will
live for You here,
to You will I depart,
with You, at last, I will float
full of joy,
endlessly,
there in the other life.

Recitative (Evangelist [Tenor])
And the shepherds went back again, praising and glorifying God for everything that they had seen and heard, as it had been spoken to them.

Chorus
Meanwhile, be happy,
for your salvation
is born here a God and also a person,
He, who is
the Lord and Christ
in David’s city, chosen out of many.

[Repeat of opening chorus]
Ruler of Heaven, hear the murmur,
let the dull songs be pleasing to You,
when Your Zion exalts You with psalms!
Hear the delightful praises of our hearts,
when we acknowledge our present awe of You,
since our pilgrimage has been confirmed!

INTERMISSION

Part IV: Cantata for New Year’s Day
“Fallt mit Danken, fallt mit Loben”

Chorus
With gratitude, with praise,
fall before the Almighty’s throne of grace!
God’s Son
desires to become
the Savior and Redeemer of the world,
God’s Son
suppresses the rage and fury of the enemy.

Recitative (Evangelist [Tenor])
And when eight days had passed, when the child would be circumcised, He was given the name of Jesus, which was proposed for Him by the angel, while He was still confined in His mother’s body.

Recitative and Arioso (Bass, Soprano chorale)
Emmanuel, o sweet word!
My Jesus is named my treasure,
my Jesus is named my life.
My Jesus has given Himself to me,
my Jesus shall, from now on,
hover before my eyes.
My Jesus is named my joy,
my Jesus refreshes heart and breast.

Jesus, o my dearest life,
bridegroom of my soul,
Come! I will embrace You with joy,
my heart shall never leave You,
You who have given Yourself for me
on the bitter staff of the cross!
Ah! Then take me to You!

Even in death you shall be to me
my most beloved;
in suffering, danger, and hardship
I look to You longingly.
How, then, can death pursue me with fear?
My Jesus! When I die,
I know that I will not perish.
Your name stands written within me,
which has driven out the fear of death.

Aria (Soprano, with echo chorus)
O my Savior, does your name
instill even the very tiniest seed
of that powerful terror?
No, You Yourself say no. (No!)
Shall I shun death now?
No, Your sweet word is there!
Or shall I rejoice?
Yes, o Savior, You Yourself say yes. (Yes!)

Recitative (Bass, Soprano chorale)
Well then, Your name alone
shall be in my heart!
Jesus, my joy and delight,
my hope, treasure and portion,
Thus I shall call you enchanting,
since breast and heart are enflamed with
love for You.
My redemption, adornment, and salvation,
Yet, beloved, tell me:
how shall I praise You, how thank You?
Shepherd and King, light and sun,
ah! How shall I worthily
praise You, my Jesus?

Aria (Tenor)
I will live only for Your honor,
my Savior, give me strength and courage,
so that my heart can do it eagerly!
Strengthen me
to exalt Your mercy worthily
and with gratitude!

Chorale
Jesus orders my beginning,
Jesus remains always with me,
Jesus restrains my thoughts,
let Jesus only be my delight,
let Jesus be with me in my thoughts,
Jesus, do not let me waver!

Part V: Cantata for the First Sunday in the New Year
“Ehre sei dir, Gott, gesungen”

Chorus
Let honor be sung to You, o God,
praise and thanks be prepared for You.
All the world exalts You,
since our well-being was Your pleasure,
since today
all our wishes have come to pass,
since Your blessing so gloriously delights us.

Recitative (Evangelist [Tenor])
When Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the Jewish lands at the time of King Herod, behold, there came sages from the east towards Jerusalem and said:

Chorus (Wise Men) and Recitative (Alto)
“Where is the new-born King of the Jews?”
Seek Him within my breast,
He lives here, to His and my delight!
“We have seen His star in the east and have come to make our devotions to Him.”
Happy are you, who have seen this light,
it has appeared for your salvation!
My Savior, You, You are the light,
that shall shine also for the heathens,
and they, they do not yet know You,
yet they already wish to honor You.
How bright, how clear must your radiance be,
beloved Jesus!

Chorale
Your radiance destroys all darkness,
the troubled night is transfigured with light.
Lead us on Your paths,
so that Your face
and glorious light
might always be visible to us!

Aria (Bass)
Illumine my dark thoughts as well,
ilumine my heart
through the rays of your clear brilliance!
Your word shall be the brightest candle for me
in all my doings;
this will never let my soul initiate evil.

Recitative (Evangelist [Tenor])
When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and with him all of Jerusalem.

Recitative (Alto)
Why are you afraid?
Can the presence of my Jesus awaken such fear in you?
O! Should you not rather
much more rejoice over this,
since He has promised through this
to renew the happy destiny of humanity.
Recitative (Evangelist [Tenor])
And he had all the high priests and interpreters of Scripture among the people gathered together, and inquired of them where Christ was supposed to be born. And they answered him: In Bethlehem in the Jewish lands: for thus it is written through the Prophets: and you, Bethlehem, in the Jewish lands, are by no means the least among the princes of Judah; for out of you shall come the leader to me, who shall be a Lord over my people Israel.

Aria (Trio: Soprano, Alto, Tenor)
Ah, when will the time appear?
Ah, when will the comfort of the faithful come?
—Hush, He is truly already here!—
Jesus, ah, then come to me!

Recitative (Alto)
My beloved already reigns.
A heart that loves His governance
and gives itself utterly to Him as His own,
is my Jesus’ throne.

Chorale
Indeed such a heart’s closet
may be no ornate princely chamber,
rather a dark pit;
yet, as soon as Your beams of grace
only peep within it,
it seems to be full of sunshine.

Part VI: Cantata for the Feast of the Epiphany
“Herr, wenn die stolzen Feinde schnauben”

Chorus
Lord, when our proud enemies snarl,
then grant that, in firm faith,
we can look for Your help and strength!
We will trust in You alone,
thus we can escape the sharp claws
of the enemy unscathed.

Recitative (Evangelist [Tenor], Herod [Bass])
Then Herod summoned the sages secretly and cleverly discovered from them when the star had appeared. And he directed them towards Bethlehem and said:
—Go there and seek diligently for the infant, and when you find it, report to me, so that I can also come and pay my devotions to it.

Recitative (Soprano)
Liar, you seek only to destroy the Lord;
You employ all false trickery
to supplant the Savior;
yet He, whose power no man can measure,
remains in secure hands.
Your heart, your false heart is already,
with all its deceit, very well known
to the Son of the Highest whom you seek to crush.

Aria (Soprano)
Only a wave of His hands
topples the impotent power of humans.
Here all strength is laughable!
If the Highest speaks only a word,
to terminate the pride of His enemies,
o, then how immediately must
the thoughts of mortals be turned aside!

Recitative (Evangelist [Tenor])
When they had heard the King, they went away. And behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them until it came and stood over where the infant was.
When they saw the star, they were highly delighted, and went into the house, and found the infant with Mary, His mother; and they fell down and worshipped Him and presented their treasures; and they gave Him gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Chorale
I stand here by Your cradle,
o little Jesus, my life;
I come, I bring and give to You,
what You have given to me.
Take it! It is my spirit and mind,
heart, soul, and will, take all of it,
and let it be pleasing to You!

Recitative (Evangelist [Tenor])
And God commanded them in a dream that they should not journey back to Herod, and they travelled by another way back to their own land.

Recitative (Tenor)
Go then! It is enough, my treasure does not leave here,
He remains here with me,
I also will not let Him leave me.
His arm will, out of love,
embrace me with tender emotions
and the greatest gentleness;
He shall remain my bridegroom,
I will dedicate my heart and breast to Him.
I surely know that He loves me,
my heart loves Him inwardly as well
and will always honor Him.
What kind of enemy now, amid such happiness, could harm me!
You, Jesus, are and remain my Friend;
and if I will beseech you anxiously:
Lord, help! then let me see assistance!

Aria (Tenor)
Now, you arrogant enemies, you may tremble;
what kind of fear can you arouse in me?
My treasure, my sanctuary is here with me.
You may seem still so horrible,
threatening to defeat me once and for all,
yet see! My Savior lives here.

Recitative (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass)
How can hell frighten now,
what can the world and sin do to us,
since we are safe in Jesus’ hands?

Chorale
Now you are well avenged
upon the horde of your enemies,
since Christ has pulverized
what was contrary to you.
Death, devil, sin and hell
are weakened once and for all;
the place of the human race
is next to God.

To Read and Hear More...
Johann Sebastian Bach: The Learned Musician by Christoph Wolff, eminent Bach scholar, Harvard professor emeritus, and BSO/GHO Artistic Advisor, remains the best of many fine general biographies of the composer (Oxford University Press paperback). Of particular interest is John Harbison’s new book, What Do We Make of Bach?—Portraits, Essays, Notes, published just this fall (Ars Nova). Other recent general biographies include Peter Williams’s large Bach: A Musical Biography (Cambridge University press, 2016) and his J.S. Bach: A Life in Music, which takes the intriguing path of constructing a life of the composer using, as a jumping-off point, the famous 1754 obituary written by his son, Carl Philip Emanuel Bach, and J.S. Bach’s pupil, J.F. Agricola (Cambridge University paperback, 2007). Johann Sebastian Bach: Life and Work by Martin Geck, a professor at the University of Dortmund, Germany, was translated by John Hargraves and published in the U.S. in 2006 (Harcourt). The conductor John Eliot Gardiner’s Bach: Music in the Castle of Heaven is biography from a scholar/performer’s perspective, with some elements of a personal memoir (Vintage paperback). Christoph Wolff’s Bach: Essays on His Life and Music is an earlier collection of self-contained essays, tending toward greater specificity of subject. Of great general interest, and fun to peruse, is J.S. Bach in the Oxford Composer Companions series, which contains encyclopedia-like entries by dozens of scholars on hundreds of individual Bach-related topics. This was edited by Malcolm Boyd, who also wrote the general-interest biography Bach in the “Master Musicians” series (Oxford University Press). Also of broad appeal is The Cambridge Companion to Bach, edited by John Butt (Cambridge). The Worlds of Johann Sebastian Bach, edited by Raymond Erickson, is a collection of essays on the influence of context and environment on Bach’s music (Amadeus Press). The J.S. Bach essay in the revised New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians (2001) is by Christoph Wolff, somewhat but not radically changed from his essay in the 1980 New Grove. The earlier essay, along with the essays on Bach’s musically significant family members, was reprinted in a separate volume, The New Grove Bach Family (Norton paperback). The New Bach Reader, edited by Arthur Mendel and Hans David and revised by Christoph Wolff, compiles a biographical picture of Bach via citations from letters and other period documents in English translation (Norton). For important older sources, Albert Schweitzer’s and Philip Spitta’s biographies are still available in reprint editions (both Dover paperback). Studies of the Christmas Oratorio include Daniel R. Melamed’s Listening to Bach: The Mass in B minor and the Christmas Oratorio (Oxford University Press, 2018) and Markus Rathey’s Johann Sebastian Bach’s Christmas Oratorio: Music, Theology, Culture (Oxford, 2016). A beautiful facsimile edition, with commentary by Christoph Wolff and Martina Rebmann, of the manuscript of Bach’s Christmas Oratorio, also including a facsimile of the original libretto (Leipzig, 1734), was published just this year (Bärenreiter).

Recordings of Bach’s Christmas Oratorio include John Eliot Gardiner’s with the English Baroque Soloists and Monteverdi Choir (Arkiv), Nikolaus Harnoncourt’s with the Vienna Concentus Musicus and Arnold Schoenberg Choir (Sony), Philippe Herreweghe’s with the Collegium Vocale Gent (Erato), Karl Münchinger’s with the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra and Lübeck Kantorei (Decca), Helmut Killing’s with the Gächinger Kantorei Stuttgart and Stuttgart Bach Collegium (Hänsler Classic), Karl Richter’s with the Munich Bach Orchestra and Choir (Deutsche Grammophon), and Masaaki Suzuki’s with the Bach Collegium Japan (BIS). Carolyn Sampson, the BSO’s soprano soloist this week, can be heard in Riccardo Chailly’s recording of the Christmas Oratorio with the Gewandhaus Orchestra of Leipzig and Dresden Chamber Choir (Decca). Tenor Sebastian Kohlhepp can be heard in Hans-Christoph Rademann’s recording with the Gächinger Cantorey (Carus).

Robert Kirzinger/Marc Mandel

Andris Nelsons
The 2018-19 season is Andris Nelsons’ fifth as the Boston Symphony Orchestra’s Ray and Maria Stata Music Director. Named Musical America’s 2018 Artist of the Year, Mr. Nelsons will lead fourteen of the BSO’s twenty-six subscription programs in 2018-19, ranging from orchestral works by Haydn, Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Stravinsky, and Copland to concerto collaborations with acclaimed soloists, as well as world and American premieres of pieces newly commissioned by the BSO from Thomas Adès, Sebastian Currier, Andris Dzenitis, and Mark-Anthony Turnage; the continuation of his complete Shostakovich symphony cycle with the orchestra, and concert performances of Puccini’s one-act opera Suor Angelica. In summer 2015, following his first season as music
director, Andris Nelsons’ contract with the BSO was extended through the 2021-22 season. In November 2017, he and the orchestra toured Japan together for the first time. In February 2018, he became Gewandhauskapellmeister of the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, in which capacity he brings both orchestras together for a unique multidimensional alliance. Immediately following the 2018 Tanglewood season, Maestro Nelsons and the BSO made their third European tour together, playing concerts in London, Hamburg, Berlin, Leipzig, Vienna, Lucerne, Paris, and Amsterdam. Their first European tour, following the 2015 Tanglewood season, took them to major European capitals and the Lucerne, Salzburg, and Grafenegg festivals; the second, in May 2016, took them to eight cities in Germany, Austria, and Luxembourg.

The fifteenth music director in the history of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Andris Nelsons made his BSO debut at Carnegie Hall in March 2011, his Tanglewood debut in July 2012, and his BSO subscription series debut in January 2013. His recordings with the BSO, all made live in concert at Symphony Hall, include the complete Brahms symphonies on BSO Classics; Grammy-winning recordings on Deutsche Grammophon of Shostakovich’s symphonies 5, 8, 9, and 10, the initial releases in a complete Shostakovich symphony cycle for that label; and a new two-disc set pairing Shostakovich’s symphonies 4 and 11, The Year 1905. Under an exclusive contract with Deutsche Grammophon, Andris Nelsons is also recording the complete Bruckner symphonies with the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig and the complete Beethoven symphonies with the Vienna Philharmonic.

The 2018-19 season is Maestro Nelsons’ final season as artist-in-residence at the Konzerthaus Dortmund and marks his first season as artist-in-residence at Hamburg’s Elbphilharmonie. In addition, he continues his regular collaborations with the Vienna Philharmonic and Berlin Philharmonic. Throughout his career, he has also established regular collaborations with Amsterdam’s Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, and the Philharmonia Orchestra, and has been a regular guest at the Bayreuth Festival and the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.

Born in Riga in 1978 into a family of musicians, Andris Nelsons began his career as a trumpeter in the Latvian National Opera Orchestra before studying conducting. He was music director of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra from 2008 to 2015, principal conductor of the Nordwestdeutsche Philharmonie in Herford, Germany, from 2006 to 2009, and music director of Latvian National Opera from 2003 to 2007.

Guest Artists
Carolyn Sampson
Carolyn Sampson has enjoyed notable successes on concert and opera stages in the UK as well as throughout Europe and the United States. Her operatic roles have included the title role in Semele and Pamina in The Magic Flute for English National Opera, various roles in Purcell’s The Fairy Queen for Glyndebourne Festival Opera (released on DVD), and, for Scottish Opera, in Sir David McVicar productions, Anne Trulove in The Rake’s Progress and Mélisande in Pelléas et Mélisande. Internationally she has appeared at Opéra de Paris, Opéra de Lille, Opéra de Montpellier, and Opéra National du Rhin. Her performance of the title role in Lully’s Psyche for the Boston Early Music Festival was released on CD and Grammy-nominated in 2008. Ms. Sampson’s numerous UK concert engagements have included regular appearances at the BBC Proms and with orchestras including the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, The English Concert, Britten Sinfonia, The Sixteen, the Hallé, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, and City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. Her many European appearances have included concerts with the Bergen Philharmonic, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Freiburg Baroque Orchestra, the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, WDR Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra dell’Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, Gürzenich Orchestra, Rotterdam Philharmonic, Leipzig’s Gewandhaus Orchestra, the Vienna Symphony Orchestra, and the Salzburg Mozarteum Orchestra. In the United States she has performed with the San Francisco, Boston, Detroit, and Cincinnati symphony orchestras, the Philadelphia Orchestra, and St. Paul Chamber Orchestra; she is a regular guest at the Mostly Mozart Festival. She made her Carnegie Hall recital debut in October 2013 to a sold-out audience in Weill Recital Hall, and most recently gave recitals at New York’s Lincoln Center and San Francisco Performances. Ms. Sampson works with such conductors as Sir Mark Elder, Riccardo Chailly, Ivor Bolton, Markus Stenz, Philippe Herreweghe, Harry Bicket, Trevor Pinnock, Louis Langrée, Harry Christophers, Andris Nelsons, Yannick Nezet-Seguin, and William Christie, most recently performing and recording Mahler’s Symphony No. 4 with Osmo Vänskä and the Minnesota Orchestra. As a recitalist she appears regularly at London’s Wigmore Hall, where she was a “featured artist” in the 2014-15 season. Having recently made her debut recital tour of Japan, she has given recitals at the Oxford and Leeds Lieder, Saintes, and Aldeburgh festivals, and in Amsterdam, Frankfurt, Vienna, Barcelona, and Freiburg. Her partnership with the pianist Joseph Middleton has included her debut song recital disc, “Fleurs”; released in 2015, it features songs by composers from Purcell to Britten and was nominated for a Gramophone Award. Since then they have released “A Verlaine Songbook,” exploring settings of the poetry of Paul Verlaine; “Lost Is My Quiet,” a duet disc with the
countertenor Iestyn Davies, and, most recently, “A Soprano’s Schubertiade,” all for the BIS label. Ms. Sampson’s only previous BSO appearances were as soloist in Mendelssohn’s *Lobgesang*, in January 2012 with Bramwell Tovey conducting.

Christine Rice
Christine Rice was born and educated in Manchester and read physics at Balliol College, Oxford, before entering the Royal Northern College of Music to study with Robert Alderson. Besides this week’s BSO performances of Bach’s *Christmas Oratorio*, engagements this season and beyond include Berlioz’s *Les Nuits d’été* with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Bersi in *Andrea Chénier* at the Royal Opera House–Covent Garden, Verdi’s *Requiem* with the Philharmonia Orchestra and Edward Gardner, and return engagements with English National Opera, Garsington Opera, and the Royal Opera. Her many roles at Covent Garden have included Carmen, Giulietta in *Les Contes d’Hoffmann*, Concepción in *L’Heure espagnole*, Emilia in *Otello*, Lucretia in Britten’s *The Rape of Lucretia*, Sonyetka in *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, Blanca in *The Exterminating Angel*, Judith in Duke Bluebeard’s Castle, Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni*, Hansel in *Hansel and Gretel*, Maddalena in *Rigoletto*, and Jenny Smith in *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, as well as two world premieres: Ariadne in Birtwistle’s *The Minotaur* and Miranda in Adès’s *The Tempest*. She recently made her Metropolitan Opera debut, appearing there as Hansel and Giulietta. Among her many other roles are Nero in *Agrippina*, Arsace in *Partenope*, Rosina in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, Zenobia in *Radamisto*, and Marguerite in *The Damnation of Faust*. She has sung at Munich’s Bayerische Staatsoper, the Teatro Real Madrid, Dutch National Opera, English National Opera, Teatro di San Carlo, Seattle Opera, Frankfurt Opera, the Opéra Comique in Luxembourg, Deutsche Oper Berlin, Glyndebourne Festival Opera, and in Geneva. In concert she has appeared with the BBC, Bournemouth, and City of Birmingham symphony orchestras, the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Boston Symphony Orchestra, and with the Philharmonia and London Philharmonic orchestras in repertoire including *The Dream of Gerontius*, *La Mort de Cléopâtre*, Britten’s *Spring Symphony*, Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion*, Ravel’s *Shéhérazade*, Mozart’s *Requiem*, and Verdi’s *Requiem*. She has appeared at the Aldeburgh, St. Denis, and Edinburgh festivals and the BBC Proms. Conductors with whom she has worked include Sir Simon Rattle, Edward Gardner, John Nelson, Sir Charles Mackerras, Donald Runnicles, Andris Nelsons, Ryan Wigglesworth, Laurence Cummings, and Harry Bicket. At New York’s Carnegie Hall, Christine Rice performed Verdi’s *Requiem* with the Philadelphia Orchestra under Yannick Nézet-Séguin and the world premiere of John Harbison’s *Closer to My Own Life* with the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra. For the BBC she has recorded Falla’s *El amor brujo*, Elgar’s *Sea Pictures*, Berlioz’s *Les Nuits d’été*, and, with Iain Burnside, an English song recital and Wolf’s *Spanisches Liederbuch*. For EMI she has recorded a debut recital disc with Roger Vignoles and Respighi’s *Il tramonto* with Sir Antonio Pappano. Her only previous Boston Symphony appearances were as the mezzo-soprano soloist in Bach’s B minor Mass in February 2017, with Andris Nelsons conducting.

Sebastian Kohlhepp
Making his Boston Symphony Orchestra and United States debuts in this week’s performances of Bach’s *Christmas Oratorio*, German tenor Sebastian Kohlhepp made his acclaimed debut as Belmonte in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* at the 2018 Mozart Week in Salzburg under the baton of René Jacobs. At Stuttgart Opera he earned praise as Jason in Peter Konwitschny’s new production of Cherubini’s *Medea*. In late 2017, also under René Jacobs, he covered the role of Tamino in *Die Zauberflöte* at Vienna’s Theater an der Wien. Born in Limburg an der Lahn, Sebastian Kohlhepp received his first musical training in the local boys’ choir. Following studies with Hedwig Fassbender in Frankfurt, he became a member of Karlsruhe Opera. For the 2013-14 season he moved to the Vienna State Opera, where he sang such roles as Jaquino (*Fidelio*) and Froh (*Das Rheingold*) under such renowned conductors as Adám Fischer, Franz Welser-Möst, Peter Schneider, Jeffrey Tate, Dan Ettinger, and Patrick Lange. From 2015 to 2017, as a member of the Stuttgart State Opera, he achieved particular success as Lucio Vero in Niccolò Jommelli’s late Baroque opera *Il vologeso* (Berenice, Queen of Armenia), a production named by Opernwelt magazine as 2015’s “Opera Rediscovery of the Year.” Further roles covered in Stuttgart were Alfred (*Die Fledermaus*), Ferrando (*Cosi fan tutte*), Oronte (*Alcina*), Don Ottavio (*Don Giovanni*), and Lucianio (*Ariodante*). Guest engagements have taken Mr. Kohlhepp to the Opera of Monte-Carlo (First Jew in *Salome*), Theater an der Wien (*Eurimaco in Il ritorno d’Ulisse in patria*), Vienna Volksoper (the title role in *Albert HERRING*), Theater Basel (*TAMINO*), and Cologne Opera (*Don Ottavio*). As a concert soloist, he appears regularly with the Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin, RIAS Chamber Choir, Freiburg Baroque Orchestra, Collegium Vocale Gent, Gaechinger Cantorey, the NDR Choir, the Stuttgart Chamber Choir, B’Rock, and Collegium 1704, as well as with such renowned conductors as René Jacobs, Philippe Herreweghe, Pablo Heras-Casado, Helmuth Rilling, and Andreas Spering. He has performed at Amsterdam’s Concertgebouw, Berlin’s Philharmonie, the Philharmonie in Paris, the Philharmonie in Cologne, Vienna Konzerthaus, Zurich’s Tonhalle, Shanghai Concert Hall, Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires, the
Though first established for performances at the BSO’s summer home, the Tanglewood Festival Chorus was soon appointed to the newly created position of BSO Choral Director. Mr. Burton occupies the Alan J. and Suzanne W. Dworsky Chair on the Boston Symphony Orchestra roster.

Andrè Schuen

Baritone Andrè Schuen makes his BSO debut in these performances of Bach’s *Christmas Oratorio*; he made his American debut at Tanglewood singing Schubert Lieder in July 2017 with pianist Thomas Adès in that summer’s “Schubert’s Summer Journey” concert series in Ozawa Hall, followed by a Schubert recital with Andreas Haefliger at the Aspen Music Festival. From the Ladin area of South Tyrol in Italy, Mr. Schuen grew up speaking Ladin, Italian, and German, a versatility reflected in his vocal repertoire. Although the cello was originally his chosen instrument, he decided to attend the Mozarteum University in Salzburg, studying singing under Horiana Branișteanu and song and oratorio under Wolfgang Holzmair. He also attended master classes held by Kurt Widmer, Thomas Allen, Brigitte Fassbaender, Romualdo Savastano, and Olaf Bär. Mr. Schuen begins and ends his 2018-19 season with Schubert Lied recitals, singing *Die schöne Müllerin* and *Schwanengesang* at the Schubertiade in Austria, where he has already earned high acclaim. Further recitals take him to the Schubertiade Vilabertran, Munich, the Philharmonie de Paris, and Madrid. On the opera stage he sings Papageno in *Die Zauberflöte* at Tokyo’s New National Theatre Opera; makes his debut as Olivier in a new production by Christof Loy of Strauss’s *Capriccio* at Madrid’s Teatro Real, and tours Asia with the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra, singing a signature role, Don Giovanni, in concerts in Shanghai and Seoul. Besides these BSO performances of the *Christmas Oratorio*, he can also be heard this season in the same work with the Vienna Symphony Orchestra and Philippe Jordan. A tour with the Orchestre des Champs-Élysées and Philippe Herreweghe takes him to Brussels, Poitiers, and Essen, among other cities. André Schuen has performed in Salzburg since 2010, first as a member of the Young Singers Project and subsequently in various Salzburg Festival productions conducted by Simon Rattle and Riccardo Muti. From 2010 to 2014 he was an ensemble member at the Graz opera house, and appeared as Figaro, Don Giovanni, and Guglielmo in Nikolaus Harnoncourt’s *Da Ponte Cycle* at Vienna’s Theater an der Wien, winning the Austrian Music and Theater Prize. Mr. Schuen has continued his close association with the Theater an der Wien, winning acclaim for his interpretation of the title role in Paisiello’s *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and the title role in the world premiere of Anno Schreier’s *Hamlet*. Subsequent role debuts included Marcello in *La bohème* in Geneva and Count Almaviva in *Le nozze di Figaro* in Angers and Nantes. Last season he was Guglielmo for Opéra National de Lorraine in Nancy and the Grand Théâtre de Luxembourg. Recital appearances with pianist Daniel Heide include London’s Wigmore Hall, Oxford, the Heidelberger Frühling, and Vienna’s Konzerthaus. With Gerold Huber, he made his debut at the Schubertiade in Hohenems. His latest CD, entitled “Wanderer,” is devoted to Robert Schumann and follows his first recital disc of songs by Schumann, Wolf, and Martin.

Tanglewood Festival Chorus

James Burton, BSO Choral Director and Conductor of the Tanglewood Festival Chorus

John Oliver (1939-2018), Founder

The Tanglewood Festival Chorus joins the BSO this season for performances of Mahler’s Symphony No. 2 (October 25-30), Bach’s *Christmas Oratorio* (November 29-December 1), Puccini’s *Suor Angelica* (February 21 and 22), and Dvořák’s *Stabat Mater* (February 28-March 2) all under Andris Nelsons, and Estévez’s *Cantata Criolla* (April 11-13) with guest conductor Gustavo Dudamel. Also in October, the TFC performed Maija Einfelde’s *Lux aeterna* with James Burton, BSO Choral Director and Conductor of the Tanglewood Festival Chorus, making his subscription-series conducting debut. Originally formed under the joint sponsorship of Boston University and the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the all-volunteer Tanglewood Festival Chorus was established in 1970 by its founding conductor, the late John Oliver, who stepped down from his leadership position with the TFC at the end of the 2015 Tanglewood season. In February 2017, following appearances as guest chorus conductor at Symphony Hall and Tanglewood, and having prepared the chorus for that month’s BSO performances of Bach’s B minor Mass led by Andris Nelsons, James Burton was named the new Conductor of the Tanglewood Festival Chorus, also being appointed to the newly created position of BSO Choral Director. Mr. Burton occupies the Alan J. and Suzanne W. Dworsky Chair on the Boston Symphony Orchestra roster.

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playing a major role in the BSO’s subscription season as well as BSO concerts at Carnegie Hall; the ensemble now performs year-round with the Boston Symphony and Boston Pops. It has performed with the BSO on tour in Hong Kong and Japan, and on two European tours, also giving a cappella concerts of its own on those two occasions. The TFC made its debut in April 1970 at Symphony Hall, in a BSO performance of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony with Leonard Bernstein conducting. Its first recording with the orchestra, Berlioz’s La Damnation de Faust with Seiji Ozawa, received a Grammy nomination for Best Choral Performance of 1975. The TFC has since made dozens of recordings with the BSO and Boston Pops, with Seiji Ozawa, Bernard Haitink, James Levine, Leonard Bernstein, Sir Colin Davis, Keith Lockhart, and John Williams. In August 2011, with John Oliver conducting and soloist Stephanie Blythe, the TFC gave the world premiere of Alan Smith’s An Unknown Sphere for mezzo-soprano and chorus, commissioned by the BSO for the ensemble’s 40th anniversary. Its most recent recordings on BSO Classics, all drawn from live performances, include a disc of a cappella music marking the TFC’s 40th anniversary; Ravel’s complete Daphnis et Chloé (a 2009 Grammy-winner for Best Orchestral Performance), Brahms’s German Requiem, and William Bolcom’s Eighth Symphony for chorus and orchestra (a BSO 125th Anniversary Commission). On July 4, 2018, the Tanglewood Festival Chorus joined Keith Lockhart for the “Boston Pops Fireworks Spectacular” on the Charles River Esplanade.

Besides their work with the BSO, TFC members have also performed with Zubin Mehta and the Israel Philharmonic and in a Saito Kinen Festival production of Britten’s Peter Grimes under Seiji Ozawa in Japan. The ensemble had the honor of singing at Sen. Edward Kennedy’s funeral; has performed with the Boston Pops for the Boston Red Sox and Boston Celtics; and can be heard on the soundtracks of Clint Eastwood’s Mystic River, John Sayles’s Silver City, and Steven Spielberg’s Saving Private Ryan. TFC members regularly commute from the greater Boston area and beyond to sing with the chorus in Boston and at Tanglewood. For more information about the Tanglewood Festival Chorus and upcoming auditions, please visit www.bso.org/tfc.

Boston Symphony Children’s Choir
James Burton, Conductor
The Boston Symphony Children’s Choir gave its first official performance in summer 2018, joining the BSO, the Tanglewood Festival Chorus, and Andris Nelsons for a July 2018 concert performance of Puccini’s La bohème at Tanglewood. The choir performed Mahler’s Symphony No. 3 at Tanglewood that August, and also gave its own solo performance as part of Tanglewood’s “Summer Sundays” presentations. The Boston Symphony Children’s Choir will make its Boston Pops debut this winter in Holiday Pops concerts at Symphony Hall. The choir’s schedule this season has included a performance in the BSO’s start-of-season Symphony Gala, and will continue after Holiday Pops with BSO concert performances in February of Puccini’s Suor Angelica and Britten’s Friday Afternoons for children’s chorus and orchestra. After holding auditions for nearly 200 children in the fall of 2017, sixty-five singers from grades 5-9 were selected by BSO Choral Director James Burton to participate in the BSO’s January 2018 performances under Andris Nelsons of Mahler’s Symphony No. 3. Following the success of that project, the Boston Symphony Children’s Choir (BSCC) was officially announced as a permanent ensemble of the BSO. Many of the BSCC’s members had previously sung in school and church choirs. Some who sang in Mahler’s Third Symphony enjoyed their first choral experience on that occasion, and some enjoyed their first operatic experience in last summer’s performance of La bohème. If you know a young person who would be interested in joining the choir, please visit bso.org/bssc for information about auditions.

James Burton
James Burton was appointed Conductor of the Tanglewood Festival Chorus, and to the newly created position of BSO Choral Director, in February 2017. He made his BSO subscription-series conducting debut in October 2018, leading the Tanglewood Festival Chorus in Maija Einfelde’s Lux aeterna. Born in London, Mr. Burton holds a master’s degree in orchestral conducting from the Peabody Conservatory, where he studied with Frederik Prausnitz and Gustav Meier. He began his training at the Choir of Westminster Abbey, where he became head chorister, and was a choral scholar at St. John’s College, Cambridge. He has conducted concerts with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, the Hallé, the Orchestra of Scottish Opera, Royal Northern Sinfonia, BBC Concert Orchestra, and Manchester Camerata. He made his debut with the Boston Pops in December 2017 and returns to the Pops podium this coming December. He is a regular guest of the Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional of Mexico and returns this season to lead performances of Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9 in the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City. Opera credits include performances at English National Opera, English Touring Opera, Garsington Opera, and the Prague Summer Nights Festival, and he has served on the music staff of the Metropolitan Opera and Opéra de Paris. Mr. Burton’s extensive choral conducting has included guest invitations with professional choirs including the Gabrieli Consort, the Choir of the Enlightenment, Wroclaw Philharmonic, and
the BBC Singers, with whom he performed in the inaugural season of Dubai’s Opera House in 2017. From 2002 to 2009 he served as choral director at the Hallé Orchestra, where he was music director of the Hallé Choir and founding conductor of the Hallé Youth Choir, winning the Gramophone Choral Award in 2009. He was music director of Schola Cantorum of Oxford from 2002 to 2017. Mr. Burton is well known for his inspirational work with young musicians. In 2017 he was director of the National Youth Choir of Japan; he has recently conducted the Princeton University Glee Club, Yale Schola Cantorum, and University of Kentucky Symphony. In 2018 he founded the Boston Symphony Children’s Choir. Mr. Burton has given conducting master classes at the Royal Academy of Music in London and at the Tanglewood Music Center, and founded a scholarship for young conductors at Oxford. His growing composition portfolio includes works for commissioners including the National Portrait Gallery in London, the 2010 World Equestrian Games, the Choir of St. John’s College, Cambridge, and the Exon Festival, where he was composer-in-residence in 2015. In July 2019, Mr. Burton will conduct the Boston Symphony Children’s Choir and Boston Symphony Orchestra in the world premiere of his The Lost Words, as part of next summer’s gala Tanglewood on Parade concert. He is currently working on a major new piece commissioned by the Hallé Orchestra. His works are published by Edition Peters. As BSO Choral Director and Conductor of the Tanglewood Festival Chorus, James Burton occupies the Alan J. and Suzanne W. Dworsky chair, endowed in perpetuity.

Tanglewood Festival Chorus
James Burton, BSO Choral Director and Conductor of the Tanglewood Festival Chorus

John Oliver (1939-2018), Founder
(Bach Christmas Oratorio, November 29-30 and December 1, 2018)

In the following list, § denotes membership of 40 years or more, * denotes membership of 35-39 years, and # denotes membership of 25-34 years.

SOPRANOS

Aimée Birnbaum • Catherine C. Cave# • Tori Lynn Cook • Emilia DiCola • Mary A.V. Feldman* • Jodie-Marie Fernandes • Katherine Barrett Foley • Bonnie Gleason • Cynde Hartman • Alyssa Hensel • Ann K. Kilmartin • Donna Kim# • Nancy Kurtz# • Laurie Stewart Otten • Johanna Schlegel • Sarah Telford# • Nora Anne Watson • Alison L. Weaver • Lauren Woo • Lisa Wooldridge • Susan Glazer Yospin • Meghan Renee Zuver

MEZZO-SOPRANOS

Virginia Bailey • Lauren A. Boice • Danielle Coombe • Abbe Dalton Clark • Amy Spound Friedman • Irene Gilbride* • Mara Goldberg • Lianne Goodwin • Susan L. Kendall • Nora Kory • Gale Tolman Livingston* • Anne Forsyth Martín • Louise Morrish • Celia Russo • Ada Park Snider§ • Lelia Tenreyro-Viana • Martha F. Vedrine • Christina Wallace Cooper# • Karen Thomas Wilcox • Janet Wolfe

TENORS

Brad W. Amidon# • Keith Erskine • Quincy Cason • Stephen Chrzan • John Cunningham • Tom Dinger • Len Giambrone • Kwan H. Lee • Daniel Mahoney • Guy F. Pugh • Peter Pulsifer • Miguel A. Rodriguez • David Roth • Arend Sluis • Martin S. Thomson • Stratton Vitikos • Joseph Y. Wang • Andrew Wang • Hyun Yong Woo

BASSES

Stephen J. Buck • Matthew Buono • Eric Chan • James W. Courtemanche • Tevan Goldberg • Jim Gordon • Jeramie D. Hammond • Bruce Kozuma# • Timothy Lanagan# • Dan Ludden • Martin F. Mahoney II • Greg Mancusi-Ungaro • Eryk P. Nielsen • Donald R. Peck# • Steven Rogers • Peter Rothstein§ • Kenneth D. Silber • Scott Street • Alexander Teplansky • Stephen Tinkham • Samuel Truesdell • Alex Weir • Lawson L.S. Wong

Boston Symphony Children’s Choir
James Burton, Conductor

(Bach Christmas Oratorio [No. 39, echo chorus], November 29-30 and December 1, 2018)
Daniel Awgchew • Chloe Baril • Gita Drummond • Emily Genis • Maddie Genis • Sophie Li • Navaa Malihi • Taban Malihi • Victoria Miele • Lucy Zhang

Ian Watson, Rehearsal Pianist and Assistant Chorus Conductor
Justin Blackwell, Rehearsal Pianist
Pamela Dellal, German Diction Coach
Jennifer Dilzell, Chorus Manager
Micah Brightwell, Assistant Chorus Manager