

Hailsham Choral Society



St John Passion

by

Johann Sebastian
Bach

Saturday 17th March 2018

7.30pm

All Saints' Church, Eastbourne

Hailsham Choral Society is a
Registered Charity
No: 1100408

www.hailshamchoral.org


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Johann Sebastian Bach and the *St John Passion*

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) was born and lived in Germany his whole life. He was a renowned organ virtuoso and one of the greatest composers of all time. From May 1723 until his death, he held the post of *Thomaskantor* in Leipzig. This was a very demanding job which involved, among many other things, composing and directing the music for the city's two principal Lutheran churches, *Thomaskirche* (St Thomas' Church), and *Nikolaikirche* (St Nicholas' Church). Despite the heavy workload, Bach composed much of his greatest music during this period.



The *St John Passion* was written for Vespers (Evening Prayer) on Good Friday 1724, Bach's first Easter in the post. Traditionally, the two main churches took it in turns to host the Good Friday Vespers and in 1724 it was the turn of *Nikolaikirche* (pictured opposite). However, Bach was unhappy with the state of the harpsichord there, plus he needed more room to accommodate performers. As a result, he took it upon himself to move the *St John Passion* to *Thomaskirche* and had announcements printed to that effect. This brought him into direct conflict with the City Council and 'sharp communications' followed. This was the first documented conflict between composer and his employers, and there would be many more! Eventually, the Council agreed to pay for the repairs and alterations necessary to allow the performance to go ahead at *Nikolaikirche*. They also printed and distributed flyers announcing the change of venue.

The congregation at St Nicholas' Church on Good Friday 1724 would have been expecting something special on such an important day in the Christian calendar, but are unlikely to have been prepared for the sheer scale and dramatic intensity of Bach's masterpiece. The enlarged instrumental forces, the virtuoso writing and the remarkable expressiveness of the music was of a completely different order from anything they would have experienced before. Moreover, they were in for a long evening. The service opened with a hymn followed by the *St John Passion* with a full sermon between parts one and two. Then prayers, a motet (a choral work, rather like an anthem) and a closing hymn.

You will notice that Bach divided the *St John Passion* into two unequal parts, with a break less than a third of the way through. This is because a more balanced arrangement would disrupt the drama of the trial scenes.

Bach possessed a profound religious faith which undoubtedly sustained him at times of deep personal suffering. His parents died when he was ten and his subsequent childhood was not always happy. Uprooted from his home town and sent to live with his brother, he had a difficult time at the local school. There was overcrowding, a shortage of books, and hooliganism and bullying were rife. One teacher was so sadistic he had to be dismissed.

Once Bach started work, he often experienced problems in relationships with employers: one even put him in gaol for trying to leave his service! Thanks to a family legacy in 1707, he was able to marry, but his first wife died at the age of 36 and half his children died either at birth or at a young age. If ever there was a composer who was emotionally and musically equipped to write a religious work whose central theme is suffering, it was Bach, and in the *St John Passion*, he wrote one of the great masterpieces of Western Music.

The *St John Passion* is constructed of four strands working together. The first strand is the narrative, with the text taken from chapters 18 and 19 of Martin Luther's translation of John's Gospel. The central figure telling the story is the Evangelist, sung by a tenor, with Christ's words sung by a bass/baritone. Smaller roles, such as Peter and Pilate, are taken by other solo voices. The 'crowd', be they soldiers or priests and their toadies, is voiced by the chorus, whose succinct and hard-hitting music vividly adds to the drama. Nowhere is this better seen than in the depiction of the baying mob at Jesus' trial: *Kreuzige ihn!* (Crucify Him!), and the hatred conveyed as they shout for their victim, *Jesum von Nazareth!*



Two short sections of the text, Peter weeping after his betrayal of Jesus and the ripping of the temple veil during the crucifixion, do not appear in John's Gospel, but were added from the Gospel of Matthew.

In contrast to the narrative, which propels the story forward, the second strand comprises eight arias in which the action stops and one or other of the soloists reflects on what is happening. Bach, or an associate, selected and adapted the words for these from non-Biblical poetic texts by Heinrich Brockes and others. In keeping with the practice of the time, the texts sometimes use elaborate and (it must be said) rather bizarre metaphors: for example, Christ's bloodstained back after scourging is compared to 'the loveliest of rainbows'.

It may seem strange to us now, but in Bach's day the use of arias in church music was a source of great controversy. In the *St John Passion*, the arias use operatic conventions to communicate emotions felt by individuals at particular points in the story. This was undoubtedly well-received by some and even remarked upon as a way of swelling attendance at services; but others disliked the idea of 'theatre' entering the church and preferred older traditions that conveyed a more detached, less emotional tone. Even the use of non-biblical texts caused disquiet and the relatively conservative church authorities at Leipzig seem to have insisted that Bach retain the entire Biblical text of the narrative as a counterweight. (This contrasts with 'progressive' Hamburg, who dispensed entirely with the Biblical text.)

The third strand in the construction of the *St John Passion* is represented by eleven chorales (hymns) which are firmly in the Lutheran musical tradition and would have been well known to Bach's contemporaries. These provided listeners with points of recognition, allowing them to 'time shift' into the present to consider their responses to the historical events depicted so vividly in the narrative. Despite the familiarity, it is unlikely that the congregation joined in singing the chorales, which are pitched rather high for such use and whose simple melodies are sometimes obscured by Bach's sophisticated harmonies.

Finally, come the great choruses that frame the work. The first, *Herr, unser Herrscher* (Lord, our Master), opens the whole piece and reflects upon Christ's ultimate triumph despite the deep humiliation and suffering of the Passion. Bach uses a variety of musical devices to create an unsettled atmosphere and sense of foreboding. (The opening page of Bach's autograph score is shown opposite.)

The other chorus, *Ruht wohl* (Lie in peace), is the penultimate movement of the work and a moving reflection on Christ as he lay in the tomb. This gentle, triple-time dance has a falling figure in its melody, suggesting the laying down of Christ's body. It is also in the key of C minor, which in Bach's day was associated with sleep, in this case the sleep of death.



This last chorus illustrates a major influence in Bach's music - dance. His music in general is heavily influenced by dance forms, and despite the serious and distressing nature of its subject, the *St John Passion* is no exception. Dance forms abound throughout the work and show how Bach

was able to take a musical form from one context and use it brilliantly in another. *Ruht wohl*, for example, is a *sarabande*, a dance of South American/Spanish origin which became popular in the 17th century French court. Bach's genius was to use it as the basis for a masterly and moving chorus depicting the placing of Christ's body in the tomb.

Bach also made use of a musical technique known as 'word-painting', which is writing music to reflect the literal meaning of the words. A good example is the chorus, *Lasset uns den nicht zerteilen*, where the soldiers in charge of the crucifixion cast lots for Jesus' robe. The music initially describes the rattling and throwing of the dice, but then the four participants, represented by the four voices of the choir, verbally 'chase' each other as they squabble and take turns. Near the end, a high note from the sopranos (a cry of victory?) indicates a winner.

It is believed that Bach wrote five settings of the Passion in his lifetime, of which only those according to *St John* and *St Matthew* survive. The *St John* is the earlier of the two and is both shorter (by well over an hour) and more dramatic. Music researchers have identified stylistic differences within the *St John Passion*, leading them to believe it may contain elements of an even earlier work, the *Weimarer Passion*, written when Bach was employed at Weimar (1703 and 1708-1717), but now lost.

Bach presented the *St John Passion* in both *Thomaskirche* and *Nikolaikirche* a total of four times between 1724 and 1749. In 1725, he replaced five of the original movements with new pieces and although he reverted to the original structure for later performances, he continued tinkering with details of the work until the final years of his life.



Leipzig in the time of Bach, showing *Thomaskirche* (St Thomas' Church) and, to its left, *Thomasschule* (St Thomas' School).

John Sebastian Bach

Soloists

Nick Pritchard – Tenor (Evangelist)



Born in West Sussex, Nick Pritchard read music as a choral scholar at New College, Oxford and studied with Russell Smythe at the Royal College of Music International Opera School (RCMIOS) where he was the recipient of the Eric Joseph Shilling Prize. He was awarded the London Bach Society Singer's Prize in 2013 and is a Samling Artist (a programme which nurtures the artistic development of exceptional young singers and accompanists).

Nick has a wide range of operatic experience both in the UK and abroad, singing a large number and variety of roles including Tamino, in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*, Albert Herring, in Britten's opera of the same name, Acis, in Handel's *Acis and Galatea*, etc. He has performed with companies such as the Royal Opera, Opera North, the Aldeburgh Festival, English Touring Opera, the Academy of Ancient Music, L'Orchestra de Chambre de Paris and the Canadian group, Les Violins du Roy.

Among his many recent and future engagements, Nick will be a soloist in the *St John Passion* with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Polyphony and the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, and in New York with the Choir of New College, Oxford. He is a new Rising Star for the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and was recently voted 'Breakthrough Artist in UK Opera' in the WhatsOnStage Opera Poll of 2017.

John Hancorn – Baritone (Jesus)

John is a singer, choral director and workshop leader. As an operatic baritone, he appeared in principal roles at Glyndebourne, English National Opera, Royal Opera and Welsh National Opera. He sang solo roles in numerous works, including Britten's *Midsummer Night's Dream* (Glyndebourne), Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and Beethoven's *Fidelio* (Kent Opera), and Saint-Saens' *Samson and Delilah* with Placido Domingo (Royal Opera).

As a concert soloist, John sang the role of Jesus in the Bach *Passions* alongside Peter Pears as Evangelist. Other performing highlights include Mozart's *Requiem* with the BBC Singers under



Jane Glover, Handel's *Israel in Egypt* and Bach's *St John Passion* with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields under Laszlo Heltay, and Brahms' *Requiem* at the Hong Kong Festival. John was also one of the Priests in *Jesus Christ Superstar* for the Concert Spectacular Scandinavian Tour.

John is well-known locally as the music director of both Eastbourne Choral Society and East Sussex Bach Choir, but he also directs the BREMF Singers, the Baroque Collective Singers and is co-director of The Baroque Collective. Recent performances for Brighton Early Music Festival include Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*, Monteverdi *Vespers* and Purcell's *King Arthur*.

John leads workshops and masterclasses specialising in baroque repertoire throughout the UK. He examines at Trinity College of Music and teaches at the University of Chichester, East Sussex Academy and Lancing College.

Bethany Partridge - Soprano

Bethany began singing as a chorister at Exeter Cathedral before moving on to study music at Trinity College, Cambridge, where she was a choral scholar under Stephen Layton and a Senior Academic Scholar. She took part in the inaugural fellowship programme of the National Youth Choirs of Great Britain from 2015-2016 and is currently an Associate Artist of professional ensemble, Tenebrae.



Bethany is in demand as a consort performer and sings with a number of professional choirs, including The Tallis Scholars, Polyphony and The Gabrieli Consort. She is a founding member of the Baroque ensemble, Amici Voices, which specialises in one-per-part performances of Bach. She has made a number of CD recordings and appeared live on BBC Radio 3 concert broadcasts.

As a concert soloist, Bethany's recent performances include: Haydn's *Nelson Mass*, Bach's *Magnificat*, Mozart's *Exsultate Jubilate* and *Mass in C Minor*, Handel's *Dixit Dominus*, Monteverdi's *1610 Vespers*, Brahms' *Deutsches Requiem* and Mendelssohn's *Elijah*.

Bethany has a keen interest in music education and enjoys working as a peripatetic teacher in Putney, and running vocal workshops with Tenebrae and London Youth Choir.

Rebecca Leggett – Mezzo Soprano

Originally from Sussex, mezzo-soprano Rebecca is in her fourth year at Trinity Laban Conservatoire studying with Alison Wells. In 2015, she appeared in the role of Flora in Britten's *Turn of the Screw* for Opera di Firenze in Italy, having understudied the role on the Glyndebourne Tour of 2014.

Rebecca was winner of the Elisabeth Schumann Lieder Competition in 2016, and a finalist at both the Junior Kathleen Ferrier award 2015 and the English Song Competition 2017, all with pianist Ashley Beauchamp. Over the past three years, she has been a choral scholar with the Old Royal Naval College Chapel Choir and was a member of Genesis Sixteen 2016, led by Harry Christophers and Eamonn Dougan.



Rebecca has gained wide experience in opera, with repertoire as varied as Stephen Neff's *Banished* (soloist in the World Premiere), Britten's *Noye's Fludde*, Strauss' *Die Fledermaus*, Bizet's *Carmen*, Rossini's *Barber of Seville*, Mozart's *Magic Flute* and *Marriage of Figaro*, Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, etc.

As a concert soloist, recent performances include Bach's *St Matthew* and *St John Passions*, *The Christmas Oratorio*, Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, Britten's *Rejoice in the Lamb*, Handel's *Messiah*, Vivaldi's *Gloria* and Copland's *In the Beginning*.

Paul Austin Kelly - Tenor



Paul Austin Kelly has performed many leading operatic tenor roles in venues as diverse as the New York Metropolitan Opera, the Royal Opera, Glyndebourne Festival and Milan's La Scala. Originally a specialist in the Rossini repertoire, he sang on numerous occasions at the Pesaro Festival and recorded many CDs and several operas with the Opera Rara label.

On the concert platform, Paul has performed throughout the world at venues which include the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris, Amsterdam, and the Kennedy and Lincoln Centres in the USA.

As a recitalist, Paul has performed with pianist Martin Isepp; and with his wife, pianist Carol Kelly, gave a recital in 2016 as part of the Nicholas Yonge Society Chamber Music Series.

In 2003, Paul founded the award-winning children's music label, *Walking Oliver*, writing and recording a catalogue of twelve CDs for children. His collection of songs supporting UNICEF'S Rights Respecting Charter is used in Primary Schools throughout the UK.

Paul has been a resident of Lewes for the last nineteen years and maintains a busy teaching studio, for both voice and trumpet. He and his wife enjoy their proximity to the South Coast, to the Weald and to the Downs for walking their dog.

Daniel Jordan – Baritone



Daniel was educated at Wells Cathedral School and as a choral scholar at St John's College, Cambridge. He then won a choral scholarship to the Royal Academy of Music where he was supported by both the Academy and a Star Award from the Countess of Munster Trust.

Graduating with distinction from the opera course, he worked with conductors such as Sir John Eliot Gardiner, Trevor Pinnock, Edward Gardiner, Daniel Harding and Kurt Masur, singing as a soloist with the English Concert, Monteverdi Choir and Florilegium.

Daniel was a member of the choir of St Bride's, Fleet Street, from 1999 until 2014 and has performed as a member of Pro Cantione Antiqua, The Clerk's Group and The King's Consort. On the operatic stage, he has worked with English National Opera, Scottish Opera, Grange Park, English Touring Opera, the Opera Group, Opera North and the Festival D'Aix-en-Provence.

Daniel has been Director of Music at Eastbourne College since September 2015.

Soloists from the Choir:

Rachel Chilton – Soprano (Maid)

Marcus Haddow – Tenor (Servant)

Robert Wicks – Tenor (Servant)

Graham Keeley – Bass (Peter)

Jozik Kotz **Conductor and Musical Director**

Jozik was born in Oxford of Polish-Australian parents. After reading music at the University of York and singing as a lay-clerk at York Minster, he won a postgraduate scholarship to the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, where he was a finalist in the Kathleen Ferrier, Royal Overseas League and Richard Tauber competitions. In 1993, he was winner of the South East Arts competition, which led to his debut at the Wigmore Hall.



Jozik subsequently performed operatic roles with English National Opera, Royal Opera, Glyndebourne, Opera Factory, Garsington and Grange Park; and in Paris, Vienna, Zurich, Madrid, Aix-en-Provence and Lisbon. He has appeared as a soloist at the Proms and with the BBC Symphony, London Philharmonic, Philharmonia and English Chamber orchestras. His CD recordings include baroque cantatas for Hyperion, Turnage's *The Silver Tassie* and Gavin Bryar's *Dr Ox's Experiment* for Deutsche Grammophon, and Paray's *Mass* with the Scottish National Orchestra, which was nominated for a Grammy award.

We are delighted that Jozik has been musical director of Hailsham Choral Society since 2006.

Colin Hughes **Rehearsal & Concert Accompanist**

Colin trained at Trinity College of Music, London, where he studied Violin and Piano. He has played in venues such as The Royal Albert Hall, The Festival Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall and Glyndebourne. Whilst living in North London he held positions as Choirmaster and Organist at a number of churches, as well as playing in orchestras and chamber groups, giving solo recitals and drumming for a rock band.



Colin subsequently moved to Eastbourne where he has become well known and respected as a teacher, accompanist and performer. We are delighted that since 2012 he has been Hailsham Choral Society's regular accompanist. He is playing the chamber organ as part of the orchestra in this evening's performance.

Hailsham Choral Society

Sopranos

Jane Allen
Trish Brown
Rachel Chilton
Jenny Clay
Pat Collingwood
Janet Cox
Carol Deschamps
Barbara Edwards
Liz Furlong
Nancy Gillio-Terry
Hilary Hartley
Christina Lynn
Val McIntosh
Jennie Mansfield
Lin Petit
Marion Ponting
Sue Simpson
Lis Turner
Sally White
Nicola Williams

Altos

Jane Aldred
Milly Clark
Fiona Dundas
Barbara Fry
Liz Hews
Wendy Pengelly
Pam Russell
Liza Stewart
Rosalind Taylor-Byrne

Tenors

Nigel Baelz
Mick Bridges
Paul Carter
Nick Gosman
Marcus Haddow
Geoff Rowe
Robert Wicks

Basses

Shaun Clay
Ian Fry
Stan Gater
Peter Gilbert
Robin Hooper
Graham Keeley
Simon Marsden
David Nunn
Chris Taylor

Assistant Musical Director

Barbara Edwards

Orchestra Leader

Julia Bishop

Staging

David Semmens and team

*We also wish to thank All Saints' Church Administrator,
Andy Anderson, for his help with arrangements for this concert.*

Hailsham Choral Society online: www.hailshamchoral.org



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Hailsham Choral Society

If you are interested in singing with the choir, or even 'just looking', please contact our Membership Secretary, Jan Boyes: tel. 01323 870515, or email:

info@hailshamchoral.org

We rehearse on Thursday evenings from 7.30 – 9.30pm in the
Community Hall, Hailsham.

SUMMER CONCERT

Popular British Folk Songs

Saturday 30th June 2018 - 7.30pm

Civic Community Hall, Hailsham

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All Saints' Church, Eastbourne

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