

# BELSIZE BAROQUE

with the *Amici e Voci* choir

## Bach Magnificat Ascension Oratorio

Sunday 29 May 2022, 6.30 pm

St Peter's Church, Belsize Square,  
Belsize Park, London, NW3 4HY

[www.belsizebaroque.org.uk](http://www.belsizebaroque.org.uk)

Supported by the Hampstead Church Music Trust

Tonight's concert presents two works by Bach that relate closely to the church calendar in May: the feasts of The Visitation and Ascension. We are delighted to be performing them so close to their appointed time.

Having spent almost 10 years in Leipzig fulfilling his duties by preparing a new cantata each Sunday, in the 1730s Bach began a new project involving the creation of a collection of works that could be repeated throughout the church year. By this time he had composed several years' worth (cycles) of cantatas that he could select from. These works successfully set to music poetry that commented on a particular week's scriptural text, illuminating its meaning for a contemporary audience. To complete this collection he set about writing music for all the Christian festivals and major events in the calendar, of which the Ascension Oratorio performed tonight is an example.

### **Magnificat in D BWV 243**

The Magnificat, from the Gospel of Luke, is an inspiring hymn of praise sung by Mary, the mother of Jesus. In it Mary celebrates God's mercy in lifting up the humble and the poor, while sending away the rich and powerful over generations. In 1732, Bach turned to this work to provide something festive for the Feast of Visitation (currently observed on 31st May). This event in the church calendar reflects on Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth while pregnant with Jesus. The Gospel of Luke notes that Elizabeth's unborn child, John, leapt for joy at the presence of the pregnant Mary. The Magnificat fits perfectly here to support the message of the story.

Of all JS Bach's choral works, this counts among those that are the most loved by audiences and choirs alike. Bach himself also appears to have cherished the work, as his many revisions attest. Originally composed in 1723, during his first year at Leipzig, it was first performed as part of the 1723 Christmas celebrations. In that version, Bach included four Christmas-related hymns interspersed between the settings of the Magnificat text. In its original form, in E flat major, a single trumpet has a solo role in one movement, with the bulk of the work given to strings and oboes. Bach made significant revisions to the work, removing the Christmas hymns, changing the key, and updating the instrumentation. In this new form, the work could be repeated every year. By transposing the whole work to D major, Bach could incorporate trumpets and timpani into the choruses, giving the whole work a more festive feel. He also took the opportunity to add flutes throughout, rather than in a single aria as in the original, as they were now a common feature of the orchestra.

Overall, the work is on a grand scale, requiring a 5-part chorus along with what was, for the time, a large orchestra. The full ensemble participates only at the start, middle and end, featuring some of the most virtuosic trumpet writing of the era. In between, a reduced ensemble presents the other verses of the text, with soloists taken from the choir and orchestra. Look out for Bach's delightful word painting, such as that by the flutes in No. 9 to illustrate the word *Esurientes* (literally 'delicious'). The same aria shows Bach's sense of humour as he illustrates the rich being sent away unfulfilled by cutting the flutes' final note, leaving an empty incomplete cadence. On a larger scale, we have the depiction of God's 'mighty arm' during the energetic chorus of No. 7 before the music shatters into silence on the word *dispersit* ('scatters'). A subtler example is the melancholic trio of No. 10 where Bach gives the oboes a plainsong presented in long held notes. This haunting theme is known as the *tonus peregrinus*, literally the 'wandering tone', adding depth to the text achingly portrayed by the trio of singers.

One of the most striking features of this work, especially in comparison to Bach's other large-scale choral works, is that each movement is short and compact. In this way Bach makes efficient use of the musical material, never spinning the themes out longer than necessary.

(most movements are no longer than three minutes). This means that the work progresses quickly, leaving the listener wanting more, but there is nevertheless enough depth in the music to connect us with the text in a meaningful way. At the same time, Bach has created highly entertaining and moving music that can stand on its own independently of the text.

## **Ascension Oratorio BWV 11**

Bach composed this work for the Feast of Ascension in 1735. The oratorio narrates Jesus' appearance to his disciples after his resurrection, followed by his ascendance to Heaven in front of them. As alluded to in our introduction, it is very likely that the music from this oratorio was taken from two earlier works: a dedication for the opening of the St. Thomas' School extension and a wedding serenade. The first aria you may think you recognise from the Mass in B minor, and you would be right. The B minor mass also contains a lot of material recycled from other works.

Unlike cantatas, which focus on the interpretation of scripture, oratorios narrate events using prose taken directly from the Bible alongside the interpretation, making them closer to musical dramas such as opera. Bach's Passions are a form of oratorio, albeit highly sophisticated examples. To create these works, he mostly borrowed from his own secular dramas and serenades, written for one-off occasions. Recycling his own works for a new purpose allowed him to make use of music that otherwise would never have been heard again.

The work features a tenor Evangelist (just like Bach's Passions and Christmas Oratorio) who narrates the key events using text from the four Gospels. Between sections of this text, newly composed prose serves as a reaction to the events described via recitative (sung text in the style of speaking with accompaniment) and two arias. The whole work is then bookended



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by two grand choruses, the first in the form of a choral aria, and the second an elaborately scored hymn that the congregation at the time would have been familiar with.

The opening chorus is one of Bach's most uplifting, featuring the same scoring as the Magnificat. The music opens with a trumpet melody that is answered by the full orchestra. The instrumental opening is unusually long, passing through a few keys before returning to D major for the first choral entry, giving it the feel of an instrumental sinfonia. There is a lot of instrumental colour on display, showcasing Bach's expertise in the multiple instrument concerti that were popular in Saxony at the time. The first aria was, as noted above, reused in Bach's B minor mass, but here it is a much longer version with an extra middle section. There are also many tweaks and changes to the melodic lines that make it distinct from the more familiar version.

The second aria features woodwinds in a trio with unison violins/violas. With no bass instruments this aria is very light in texture. The final chorus features a hymn tune in a minor key. However, Bach clearly wanted to end this oratorio in D major with the full complement of trumpets and drums. To do this, at the end of each sung phrase he cleverly swerves the music away from the minor back to bright trumpet-like phrases and syncopations, bringing the work to a joyous close.

Programme notes by Richard Austen  
Design/layout by Andrew Welsh

## Belsize Baroque 2021/22 Leadership Scholarship



**Rebecca Bell** is a recent graduate of the Royal Academy of Music, where she received her Masters with Distinction and was awarded a DipRAM Prize for outstanding performance in the final recital. Rebecca enjoys a wide variety of work with both modern and baroque ensembles, which have included the Royal Northern Sinfonia and the LSO. She is regularly invited to guest-lead ensembles at festivals and concerts across the UK, and very much enjoys the opportunities for creative input that this brings. As an in-demand chamber musician, Rebecca performs regularly with her award-winning quartet, The Bell Quartet, as well as being a founding member of The Nuevo Tango Quintet, with whom she has given sell-out concerts across London and featured on BBC Radio 3's In Tune with Sean Rafferty. Outside of her musical endeavours, Rebecca enjoys crochet, vegan doughnuts and life by the sea in Brighton where she lives with her partner Rhys and young daughter Rosalie.

**Save the date!** Belsize Baroque's next scheduled concerts are on Sunday 24 July and Sunday 25 September, at St Peter's, and on Saturday 3 December, at Southwark Cathedral. Details will be available soon at [www.belsizebaroque.org.uk](http://www.belsizebaroque.org.uk).

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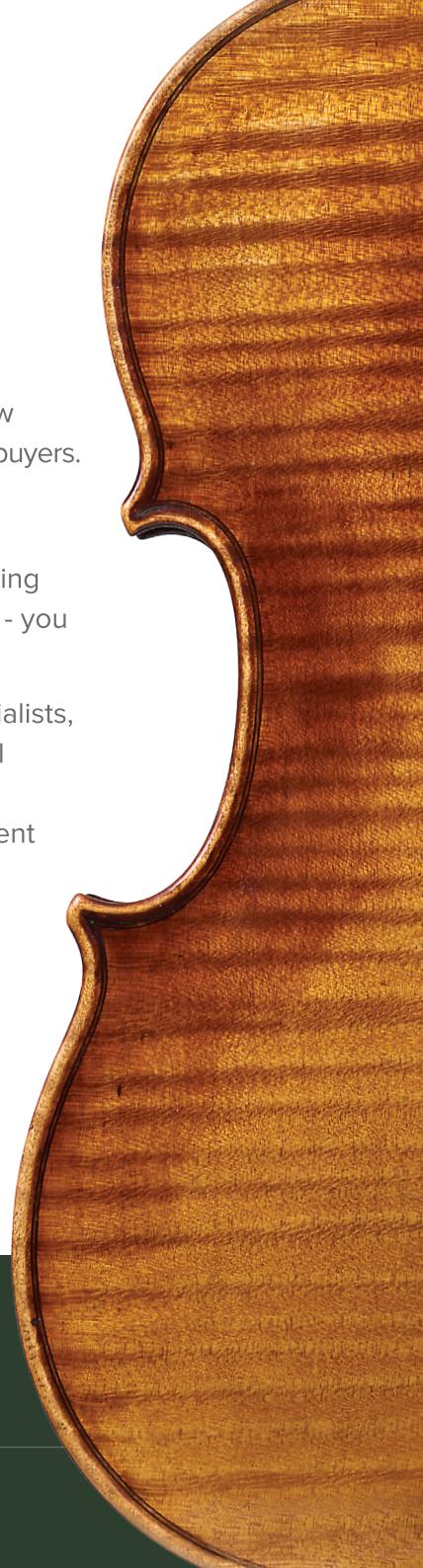
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*Pictured: A very fine and important Italian violin by Giovanni Francesco Pressenda, Turin 1834 recently sold by Brompton's for £354,000.*



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**Nick Hardisty** is a London-based musician who leads a complicated career in all sorts of musical pursuits. Having written his postgraduate thesis on the music of Max Bruch, worked in musical outreach and given pre-concert talks with renowned international artists, he now divides his time between running music festivals in the Lake District and as much playing and conducting as possible. Regardless of style, period or instrument, Nick is happiest on the concert platform armed with either modern violin, baroque violin, or conductor's baton. He is the founder and conductor of the Greenwich-based Meridian Collective, conducted the Chiltern Camerata and *Amici e Voci* in a programme of Handel and Monteverdi, and recently appeared on baroque violin at Shakespeare's Globe in *The Secret Theatre*. Inspired by his affection for chamber music and the naturally collaborative nature of smaller ensembles, he loves to apply this conversational approach to music-making to much larger forces.

**Mark Johnstone** founded *Amici e Voci* 20 years ago, inviting friends from a wide range of choirs to sing in a series of concerts to raise money for charity. Since then the choir has gone from strength to strength, performing concerts in London and Buckinghamshire to excellent reviews. The quality of singers it can draw on is demonstrated by the fact that all soloists are drawn from within the choir. The *Amici e Voci* repertoire spans the entire canon of choral music from the Renaissance to contemporary, a capella and works with orchestra.

#### **Singers** (\* denotes soloists)

Sopranos: Cath Caunt\*, Julie Evans, Jane Metcalfe, Marie Power, Geraldine Rowe\*

Altos: Denise Fabb, Debbie Johnstone\*, Annika Lindskog, Olivia Maffett

Tenors: Mark Johnstone, Neil Malcolm, Richard Milnes\*

Basses: Kevin Bailey, Robert Brignall\*, Jonathan Lane, Andy Mackinder\*

# THE OLD MASTERS IN NEW HANDS

Sheku Kanneh-Mason MBE plays on a cello by  
Matteo Goffriller, Venice c1700, the 'Ex-Goritzki',  
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and an exceptionally fine bow by Nicolas Maire  
c1855, lent by a private sponsor.



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# Belsize Baroque's 20th anniversary year

This year the orchestra turns 20 years old, and we are planning a celebratory year! Our special concert and anniversary celebration is on Sunday 24 July at St Peter's, and we look forward to seeing many of the people who have contributed to the life of the orchestra over the past 20 years.

In addition to this, Catherine Martin will direct us on Sunday 25 September at St Peter's, and we also have another large choral concert: we will perform Bach's Mass in B Minor at Southwark Cathedral on 3 December.

Belsize Baroque Orchestral Society Ltd is a registered charity (number 1108596) and company (number 5267265).

The orchestra can be hired for orchestral or choral concerts and other events, and is delighted to assist other charities.

[www.belsizebaroque.org.uk](http://www.belsizebaroque.org.uk); Twitter: @Belsize\_Baroque

**Belsize Baroque** would like to thank Hampstead Church Music Trust, whose generous grant has made the concert possible.

We would also like to thank St Peter's for the loan of their chamber organ, donated to them by Mrs Ruth Moffat and renovated with the assistance of the Hampstead Church Music Trust, Mr William Tuck for his loan of the timpani, and Mr David Blackadder, professor of baroque trumpet at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, and his students.

## First violins

Rebecca Bell  
Christine-Marié Louw

Wendy Talbot  
Val Hudson

## Second violins

Miranda Ford  
Sally Heath  
Jenny Frost

## Violas

Elizabeth Hart  
Andrew Spencer

## Cellos

David Winfield  
Yuji Kubo

Hartmut Kuhlmann

## Bass

Evangelos Saklaras

## Mandora

Quentin Miller

## Organ

Michael Strange

## Bassoon

Hilary Ougham

## Flutes

Richard Austen

Naomi Andersen

## Oboes

Susan Cooksley  
Grace Scott Deuchar

## Trumpets

Rebecca Toal  
Lucas Houldcroft  
Darcie Jago

## Timpani

Andrew Cumine



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