

BachBeat

The Newsletter of the Bach Cantata Choir



December 2009

Vol.3, No.1

Artistic Director

Ralph Nelson

Accompanist

John Vergin

Board of Directors

President

Ralph Nelson

Secretary

Maureen Diamond

Treasurer

Julie Beck

Members at Large

Jim Hook

Barbara Lance

Susan Nelson

Woody Richen

Lorin Wilkerson

The Bach Cantata Choir is a legally organized non-profit corporation under Oregon law, and is a registered 501(c)(3) corporation with the IRS. Donations to the choir are tax-deductible to the extent provided by law and regulation.

Newsletter

Editors

Lorin Wilkerson

lorinwilk@yahoo.com

Wayne Carlon

Layout

Kristin Sterling

The *BachBeat* newsletter is published cyclically by the Bach Cantata Choir.

www.bachcantatachoir.org

The Italian Style in Europe

By Lorin Wilkerson – Bass

In the years surrounding 1580 in Florence, Italy, a group of leading musicians, writers, and intellectuals gathered on a regular basis at the opulent home of Count Giovanni de'Bardi to discuss trends in the music of the day.

Known as the Florentine Camerata, they decided that the way forward from the dense, often text-obscuring polyphony of the high Renaissance was to recapture the simplicity and straight-forwardness of ancient Greek drama, which the scholarship of the day erroneously concluded was almost always sung rather than spoken. Out of their early experiments developed the *stile recitativo*, a song with an emphasis on a melody sung with instrumental accompaniment. This seemingly simple innovation led to what would shortly be known as opera, and by further permutations down the road this would lead to some of the great instrumental forms of the baroque: the concerto and the sonata.

Germans (and other Europeans) had been studying in the great Italian musical centers (Venice, Florence and Rome among them) since the early days of the baroque revolution, when the great Claudio Monteverdi and Giovanni

Gabrieli taught a brilliant young German named Heinrich Schütz some Italian innovations, including the polychoral style, which uses more than one choir, and the *stile concertato*, which places equal weight on voices and instruments. (See *BachBeat* Vol.2, No.1) A bit later, Johann Jakob Froberger studied with the Roman organ master Girolamo Frescobaldi, learning the toccata and *ricercare* (an earlier form of baroque counterpoint.) The *fast-slow-fast* pattern for concerto movements

was established by another Italian, Arcangelo Corelli.

So by the time J.S. Bach transcribed for the keyboard over twenty concertos by Italian composers, such as Vivaldi and Torelli, and by those composing in the Italian style, such as Telemann, and Johann Ernst of Weimar, the suffusion of the Italian aesthetic into the musical consciousness

of Europe had been going on for a long time. Handel's wanderings throughout Italy are well-known; the brilliant young composer became known to the music public as 'il caro sassone', 'our dear Saxon.'

Antonio Vivaldi

One of the most famous composers of the late baroque was Bach's contemporary Antonio Vivaldi. Born in 1678, Vivaldi led an interesting life. He was an ordained Catholic priest, and was known by the nick-name *il prete rosso*, or 'the red priest,' apparently in reference to his hair. But soon after his ordination he



Member Spotlight



Susan McDowell, Soprano

I have been involved with music since about age 4 1/2 when I started taking piano lessons because I wanted to play this 'Indian' sounding piece that the little boy across the street was playing. A few years later I added the violin, and have been in various choirs and orchestras since high school. I studied music in college and probably should have become a choral conductor but I had never heard of a professional woman conductor, so I ended up becoming a physician instead. I have played the recorder (the wooden kind!), ever since my parents gave me one for my 12th birthday, and when I retired about 10 years ago I decided that I was all grown up and could do what I always wanted, which was to learn cello. I also have a fascination with rhythm and have many folk drums and sound-makers.

Currently I play in the Jewish Community Orchestra, Beaverton Chamber Symphony, and the Oregon Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra. However, my biggest love is choral music, and my favorite composer is Bach - so guess what choir fits me the best???? I also direct a small *a cappella* choir called Portland Camerata, which I formed 25-plus years ago in order to sing Russian Orthodox Church music at an icon and vestment show. Baroque and Renaissance music are my special favorites. I don't know why, but it always makes me feel good when I hear it. Perhaps in a past life I was a Baroque or Renaissance musician!

stopped saying mass, was censured for conduct unbecoming a priest, and throughout his life was under suspicion of having one or more mistresses. As *maestro di violin* at the Ospedale della Pietá in Venice, he was responsible for teaching the orphaned girls there the violin; concerts by these girls ranked high on the Venetian social calendar, so the young ladies were quite skilled musicians. Numerous times throughout his life Vivaldi was fired and re-hired by the Pietá.

Vivaldi was in high demand all over the continent; indeed, music-loving nobles could not seem to get enough of the exuberance and freshness of his concerti (which may be one reason there are over 500 surviving concerti attributed to him.) He also had success composing operas and sacred music. He traveled throughout Europe on self-promotional tours; Vivaldi was known to be quite arrogant and opinionated, and all-too-conscious of his skills and popularity as a composer.

In addition to his prolific compositional capacity, Vivaldi was known as one of the supreme violin virtuosi of the day. Following in the footsteps of Corelli, who has been called the father of modern violin technique, Vivaldi wrote work of such difficulty for his primary instrument that other musicians of the day considered it almost unplayable by anyone but him; think of the famous set of concerti *The Four Seasons* as an example of his expert skills. Though he made a small fortune throughout his life, his prodigality led him to a pauper's grave on a trip to Vienna in 1741. ♪

References:

1. The New Grove Italian Baroque Masters, Various authors. © 1984, W.W. Norton & Co.
2. History of Baroque Music, Kurt List. © 1967, Orpheus.



BACH CANTATA CHOIR
3570 NE MATHISON PLACE
PORTLAND OR 97212



Join us for our annual
Christmas Oratorio
concert also featuring
Vivaldi's Gloria!

Friday, December 18 at 7:30 pm
Tickets: www.pdxtix.net/bachcantatachoir