

GCDSA 922205

New release information

December 2007

Johann Sebastian Bach

Motetten


Johann Sebastian Bach
Motetten
Flemish Radio Choir
Bo Holten
Glossa GCDSA 922205
 Hybrid SACD

Programme

 Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)
 Motetten (BWV 225-230 & Anh. 159)

 1-4 Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied
 (BWV 225)

 5-6 Komm, Jesu, komm
 (BWV 229)

 7-9 Der Geist hilft unser Schwachheit auf
 (BWV 226)

 10-11 Ich lasse dich nicht
 (BWV Anh. 159)

 12 Fürchte dich nicht, ich bin bei dir
 (BWV 228)

 13-23 Jesu, meine Freude
 (BWV 227)

 24 Lobet den Herrn, alle Heiden
 (BWV 230)

Production details

Total playing time: 69'43

 Recorded at Jezuietenkerk, Heverlee, Belgium,
 in June 2007

 Engineered and produced by Manuel Mohino
 Executive producer: Carlos Céster

Design by Valentín Iglesias (00:03:00)

 Booklet essay by Mark Wiggins and Bo Holten
 English Français Nederlands Deutsch Español


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NOTES (ENG)

This coming together of two current dynamic musical forces in the Flemish Radio Choir and the Danish conductor Bo Holten in the music of Johann Sebastian Bach signals the latest development in Glossa's association with the Brussels-based professional choral ensemble, which has already seen the artistry, versatility and flexibility of the 24 singers displayed in Zoltán Kodály's *Missa brevis* and Sergei Rachmaninov's *Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*.

The greatness of Bach's music – and here it is his motets – is mirrored by its approachability from a kaleidoscopic range of performance styles. The Flemish Radio Choir (FRC) has the intention, in this repertoire, of presenting an alternative to the authentic early performance style. In an interview within the CD booklet Bo Holten acknowledges his awareness and appreciation of the scholarly developments of recent decades concerning the singing of such music with one voice to a part whilst stressing his own artistic impulses as a choral director, and also as a composer himself.

This Bach recording represents the fruit of many months of preparation by Holten working with the FRC in rehearsal and in concert and it is no real coincidence that the Flemish Radio Choir has just announced the appointment of Bo Holten as its new Principal Conductor.

NOTAS (ESP)

Dos fuerzas musicales de gran dinamismo, el Coro de la Radio Flamenca (Flemish Radio Choir) y el director danés Bo Holten, se encuentran en la música de Johann Sebastian Bach, en lo que es el más reciente resultado de la colaboración de Glossa con el conjunto coral de Bruselas. Estos 24 cantantes profesionales ya demostraron su gran talento y versatilidad en dos discos anteriores, la *Missa brevis* de Zoltán Kodály y la *Liturgia de San Juan Crisóstomo* de Sergei Rachmaninov.

La grandeza de la música de Bach – representada aquí por sus motetes – se refleja en el hecho de que permite una caleidoscópica variedad de planteamientos interpretativos. El Flemish Radio Choir tiene la intención, en este repertorio, de presentar una alternativa al estilo historicista. En una entrevista incluida en el libreto del CD, Bo Holten reconoce su apreciación y aprobación de las teorías que defienden la utilización de una voz por parte, fruto de las investigaciones musicológicas durante las últimas décadas, pero subraya la importancia de sus propios impulsos artísticos como director, y también como compositor.

Esta grabación de Bach representa el fruto de muchos meses de ensayos y conciertos de Bo Holten con el Flemish Radio Choir, y no es una coincidencia que el músico escandinavo acabe de ser nombrado su Director Titular.

NOTES (FRA)

Deux enthousiasmes, celui du Chœur de la Radio Flamande (Flemish Radio Choir) et du chef danois Bo Holten se fondent dans la musique de Jean-Sébastien Bach pour réaliser ce nouveau disque, produit de la collaboration de Glossa et de l'ensemble vocal de Bruxelles. Ces 24 chanteurs professionnels ont déjà fait preuve de leur grand art et de leur versatilité dans deux disques antérieurs : la *Missa brevis* de Zoltán Kodály et la *Liturgie de Saint Jean Chrysostome* de Serge Rachmaninov.

La grandeur de la musique de Bach – représentée ici par ses motets – se reflète dans la variété kaléidoscopique des approches interprétatives possibles. Le Chœur de la Radio Flamande a le propos, dans ce répertoire, de présenter une alternative par rapport à l'historicisme. Au cours de l'interview incluse dans le livret du cédé, Bo Holten exprime son approbation et son estime pour les recherches des érudits durant ces dernières décennies, et leurs théories défendant l'usage d'une voix par partie, mais ne veut pas pour autant renoncer à l'apport important de ses propres pulsions artistiques de chef de chœur, ainsi que de compositeur.

Cet enregistrement de Bach est le fruit de nombreux mois de répétitions et de concerts donnés par Bo Holten avec le Chœur de la Radio Flamande, et ce n'est pas par hasard que le musicien danois a été nommé chef titulaire de cet ensemble.

NOTIZEN (DEU)

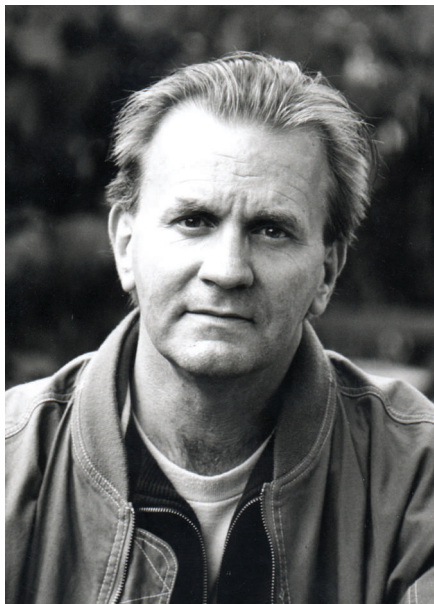
Der Flemish Radio Choir und der dänische Dirigent Bo Holten sind zur Zeit besonders dynamische Protagonisten auf dem Musikmarkt. Diese Aufnahme mit Werken von Johann Sebastian Bach des in Brüssel beheimateten professionellen Vokalensemble stellt das neueste Ergebnis der Zusammenarbeit mit Glossa dar. Die Kunstfertigkeit, Vielseitigkeit und Flexibilität der 24 Sänger war bereits in den Aufnahmen von Zoltán Kodály's *Missa brevis* und Sergei Rachmaninov's *Liturgie des Heiligen Chrysostomus* zu bewundern.

Die Größe der Musik Bachs – in diesem Fall seiner Motetten – spiegelt sich darin, dass man sich ihr mit einem ganzen Kaleidoskop möglicher Aufführungsstile annähern kann. Der Flemish Radio Choir möchte hier eine Alternative zur authentischen Aufführungspraxis alter Musik bieten. In einem Interview im Booklet bekennt Bo Holten, dass er sich der Forschungsergebnisse der letzten Jahrzehnte wohl bewusst ist und diese auch schätzt, welche besagen, diese Musik sei mit einem Sänger pro Stimme aufzuführen. Dies entspricht allerdings nicht seinen eigenen künstlerischen Vorstellungen als Chorleiter und Komponist.

Diese Aufnahme ist die Frucht vieler Monate der Vorbereitung, in denen Holten mit dem Flemish Radio Choir zusammengearbeitet hat. So ist es kein Zufall, dass das Ensemble unlängst die Ernennung Bo Holten zum neuen Chefdirigenten bekanntgegeben hat.

Bo Holten and his Bach motets

by Mark Wiggins



Bo Holten (photograph by Eva Holten)

This coming together of two current dynamic musical forces in the Flemish Radio Choir and the Danish conductor Bo Holten in the music of Johann Sebastian Bach signals the latest development in Glossa's association with the Brussels-based professional choral ensemble, which has already seen the artistry, versatility and flexibility of the 24 singers displayed in Zoltán Kodály's *Missa brevis* and Sergei Rachmaninov's *Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*.

The choir's beginnings reach back to the years 1936/7 when it was brought into being at the behest of the national Belgian Radio, with the task of cooperating in every broadcast of the radio requiring a choir. This remained under the direction of conductors such as Leonce Gras, Jan Van Bouwel and Vic Nees until the Radio Orchestra and the Radio Choir became independent and actually separated from the broadcasting company in 1996. Since that time the choir has been a concert ensemble rather than being based in the studio, touring extensively not just in Belgium but also in France and The Netherlands.

The greatness of Bach's music – and here it is his motets – is mirrored by its approachability from a kaleidoscopic range of performance styles. The Flemish Radio Choir (FRC) has the intention, in this repertoire, of presenting an alternative to the authentic early performance style. In an interview within the CD booklet Bo Holten takes further the ideas expressed below in acknowledging his

awareness and appreciation of the scholarly developments of recent decades concerning the singing of such music with one voice to a part whilst stressing his own artistic impulses as a choral director, and also as a composer himself.

Holten has a remarkable pedigree in both artistic directions. He has worked with other professional choral ensembles such as the BBC Singers and the National Chamber Choir of Ireland as well as leading his own smaller vocal group Musica Ficta since 1996 (and before that Ars Nova, also from Copenhagen). He brings to this recording of Bach motets a fascinating range of musical temperaments: he is as versed in the Notre Dame repertory of the 12th century as he is in Bach or the music of his beloved 16th century. This versatility is further extended by an active involvement in contemporary music-making, interpreting new music, including his own. He has over 100 compositions to his name (many of which have received repeated performances) embracing operas, symphonies, concertos, songs, chamber music and a *cappella* works. Rather than adopting an avant-garde style in his own music there is, by his own admission, a tonal sensibility to it.

This Bach recording represents the fruit of many months of preparation by Holten working with the FRC in rehearsal and in concert and it is no real coincidence that the Flemish Radio Choir has just announced the appointment of Bo Holten as its new Principal Conductor.

How do you describe your approach to performing the Bach Motets?

Over the last hundred years (and especially over the past two decades) we have seen how much performance practices concerning Bach's music have changed and we have now reached a point where tempi are usually quite fast; a situation, I believe, which provides a very convincing approach for this music.

Even if most vocal polyphony in Bach's day was performed with instruments (and with doublings), my understanding of the motet is that it was performed with continuo only and so this is why we are singing on this recording with only a violone and a small organ as continuo accompaniment. This, I believe, is the only right way, generally speaking, to achieve clarity in the polyphony and in the articulation of the words where doubling with a lot of instruments would only serve to cloud the wording.

Actually, I am in favour of the "one voice to a part" theory developed by Joshua Rifkin and Andrew Parrott, finding it very interesting and capable of yielding very probable results, musically speaking. However, with the works that we have recorded here, the motet tradition indicates that they were designed for choral use. With the Flemish Radio Choir we usually perform these double choir pieces (four voices in each choir) with a total of 24 singers. With less than three singers to a part some of the clarity is lost, especially in the many long and strenuous stretches of music composed by Bach.

With the Motets do you see that there is a marked difference between the earlier and later motets or between the individual motets?

As always with really great composers, each of Bach's Motets seems to have its own definite character. There are similarities between them, of course, but nonetheless they are all different souls, different persons that you can meet and talk to. The motets themselves span several decades of

Bach's compositional career with the earliest, *Ich lasse dich nicht* (BWV Anh. 159) dating from 1707, when he was around 22 years old whilst the later pieces come from the 1730s. I think that *Ich lasse dich nicht* is a very convincing composition, very much in the style of my compatriot Buxtehude. But the others are much more in the genuine mature Bach style. The one motet whose authenticity I question slightly is *Lobet den Herrn* (BWV 230). The sources are a little indistinct with this work; we do not know anything, for sure, about Bach being the author of this piece. It has been in the Bach canon, of course, for centuries but it is not nearly as well-composed as the other motets. It is a piece full of interesting details, but with some weak points, moments when you suddenly think, "Ah, Bach wouldn't have done this". It is also not so easy to sing as the other motets. Bach had this way of writing for voices that tells you that a vocal line does not need to be as difficult to sing as it first appears because it is so logical; there is so much sense in the way that he writes. With *Lobet den Herrn*, however, it just keeps on being difficult. This tells me that perhaps the authorship is doubtful here. Of course, it is still worth being performed and recorded and I am not in a position to state categorically that it is not by Bach. It is worth mentioning that there are various other movements in Bach's works which are motet-like, or in motet style. In the Passions as well as in many cantatas or other works you can find pieces that are in motet style although they are not strictly motets. So, the whole concept of the motet is much more widespread in the oeuvre of Bach than the Motets themselves. For Bach it was an entire style concept.

At what point in your life did the music of Bach start becoming important for you?

Curiously, I was originally brought up in a jazz environment so I had very little contact with Bach's music before I reached the age of 17 or 18. Since my very first early musical experiences with the European musical tradition Bach has always stood

for me as an iconic figure. I have loved practically everything of his music that I have come across. I am a real Bach fan: I play Bach on the piano practically every day and in rehearsal I frequently make use of fugues from Volume 2 of *Das wohltemperierte Clavier*. I consider him simply as the greatest composer ever.

You are a composer yourself. Does that inform how you perform the music of Bach?

To me the act of composing will always influence any performance and it is very healthy for all performers to also be composers. In my case, half my life is spent composing, with the other half given over to conducting, a state of affairs which I think would have been very characteristic of all composers prior to the 20th century. Indeed, the idea of a performer not being a composer is actually a new thing. In my case I am currently at work on my sixth opera, which is due to be premiered in Det Kongelige Teater (the Royal Danish Opera) in Copenhagen in 2009. I am in the fortunate position for a composer today that my previous operas have all gone on to receive new performances and new productions and I am extremely proud that my third such work, *Operation: Orfeo*, recently was given its 90th performance.

What other musical activities are you involved in at the moment?

In addition to my activities with the Flemish Radio Choir I maintain a connection as a guest conductor with the National Chamber Choir in Ireland (whose performance bases are in the National Gallery of Ireland in Dublin and Queen's University, Belfast). Additionally, I have my own group, Musica Ficta, which consists of 8-10 professional singers in Copenhagen. In my own country I also do a lot of orchestral conducting and recordings. I have a special weak spot for the music of Frederick Delius and I have been making a series of Delius recordings with Danish orchestras and choirs – there will be three more of these to come in the future.