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CHRIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Corning, New York
Rev. W. Scott Harvin, Rector
Barbara Wilson, Organist
Tim Jenks, Choir Director

Grace Episcopal Church
West Church and Davis Streets
Elmira, New York

May 1, 2, 3, 1981

Christ Episcopal Church
39 E. First Street
Corning, New York

May 10, 1981

THE FESTIVAL BACH 1981

CANTATAS FOR THE CHURCH OF J. S. BACH

The Cantata Singers

William O. Payne, Conductor

I. KANTATE BWV 79 17:50

5:35

"Gott, der Herr, ist Sonn' und Schild"

Janice Strain, soprano
Gloria Kirk, contralto
Thomas Strain, bass

II. KANTATE BWV 192 21:50

"Nun danket alle Gott"

Janice Strain, soprano
Thomas Strain, bass

OFFERTORY AND INTERMISSION

III. KANTATE BWV 82 27:50

"Ich habe genug"

James Hudson, bass

IV. KANTATE BWV 137 16:12

loaned to WSKG 2/82

"Lobe den Herren, den maechtigen Koenig der Ehren"

Susan Amisano, soprano
Gloria Kirk, contralto
Edmund Dana, tenor
James Hudson, bass

SOLI DEO GLORIA

THE CANTATA SINGERS

William O. Payne III, Musical Director

SOPRANO

Susan Amisano
Diane Baker
Ruth Bruning
Debbie Courtney
Linda Harrison
Jennifer Jack

Kathy Lovell
Lois McCann
Laura McGrath
Sr. Juliana O'Hara
Marianna Raho

Anna Rice
Betsy Roll
Janice Strain
Marylou Strong
Kay Kennedy Wack
Deborah Wald

ALTO

Nancy Basil
Eunice Bowers
Catharine Brobst
Millicent Chaney
Claire Dana
Gwendolyn Egan

Judith Feitner
Claudia Hamlin
Patricia Hauser
Wendy Hovey
Gloria Kirk
Kathy Lovell

Gretchen Padgett
Phoebe Rice
Lou Sand
Betty Strath
Florence Suffern
Bernice Wickham

TENOR

Robert Badertscher
Claude Cornwall

Edmund Dana
Paul D. Holland

Richard E. Wack
William Wickham

BASS

Richard F. Bauer
David R. Hauser
Marc B. Lovell

Sidney Reed
James Sanderson

Thomas Strain
Michael K. Wald
Norman Wilcox

REHEARSAL ACCOMPANIST

Judith Feitner

THE FESTIVAL CHAMBER PLAYERS

William O. Payne III, Conductor

VIOLIN I

Kenneth Fung,
Concertmaster
Carrie Reuning-Dean
Anne Mark

VIOLIN II

Gary Chollet
Debra Hansen

VIOLA

Bonnie Lawton
Alex Herzfeld

CELLO

Lee Copenhaver
Davis Knobloch

BASS

Peter Dean

FLUTE

Margaret Biery Payne
Salle Matteson

OBOE

Peter Hedrick
Elizabeth Hedrick

HORN

Guy Kinney
Barbara Kinney

TRUMPET

James Ode
J. Jeffry Stempien

TYMPANI

Stephen Shaw

ORGAN

James Sanderson

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PROGRAMME NOTES

I. The text of Cantata No.79, while concerned with the celebration of the festival of the Reformation, addresses itself to the anxieties and the miseries of warfare and with man's total dependence upon God for protection from those miseries for his ultimate salvation. The opening chorus of this work is, in the words of Dr. Albert Schweitzer, "one of the most impressive ever written by Bach. A positively blinding radiance gleams from it; it is as if we were looking at a victorious battle in the rays of morning".

Based upon the chorale "Nun danket alle Gott", this cantata is conceived in five verses with the large choral sections separating the delicate and introspective aria for contralto from the more forthright and anxious duet for soprano and bass. It is perhaps interesting to note that Bach chose to use the chorale "Nun danket alle Gott" in the very center of the work rather than at the end which was more often the common practice. Also it should be mentioned that accompanying the statement of the chorale is the return of the fanfare motive first heard in the opening chorus. This device seems to serve a dual purpose. First, it states the text which gives thanks to God for his everlasting protection; and, second, it serves to maintain the musical and dramatic drive through the center section of the cantata.

The text of the duet which follows the chorale beseeches God not to forsake mankind. The accompaniment to this duet is based upon one of Bach's so-called "rage motives" and, coupled with the setting in the key of b minor, gives the movement a sense of urgency and fear that indicates that only through God may all of man's enemies be vanquished.

The final chorale is, in a word, superb. For after all the excitement of what has gone on before, Bach sees this closing as a choral benediction in which he uses the simply stated text and music to ask for God's eternal help through Jesus Christ.

II. The Cantata No.192 is, like Cantata No.79, based upon the chorale "Nun danket alle Gott". Although considered by most musicologists to be incomplete, this work seems, to this writer at least, to be perfectly balanced both musically and textually. Its symmetry suggests that of what perhaps could be called a sacred choral symphony.

If we proceed with the symphonic concept a bit further and look at the formal structure as a whole, we may find some striking examples of structural technique. The first movement opens with an orchestral introduction in which is stated all the harmonic and rhythmic ideas to be used in the choral sections. Once the chorus has entered, the chorale melody is stated in the classic Bach manner; i.e., the melody is sung by the sopranos and is accompanied by the lower three voices and orchestra in counterpoint. The union of melody and counter-melodies is developed throughout the movement, each time further elaborating the material first heard in the introduction. This movement then closes with another statement of the introductory material followed by a brief choral codetta.

The duet which serves as the middle movement of this cantata is set in the key of D Major which the dominant key to that of the first movement. After a brief orchestral introduction, the soprano and bass enter in counterpoint and are accompanied by the simplest of instrumental doubling of the voices. We find no extended development of the material in this movement; but rather it serves as a link, as it were, between the two lush and contrapuntally complex outer movements.

The cantata ends with the statement of the final stanza (again in the sopranos) accompanied by the lower three voices and orchestra. The 12/8 meter with its flowing triplet eighth-note patterns suggests a dance-like quality not completely unlike that of a gigue. For the overall impression is one of pure joy as the chorus and orchestra "dance" their way to the conclusion.

III. In the years since Bach's death, much has been said about his use of motives to express various emotions and ideas. In the Cantata No.82 we are afforded a wealth of just such motives; for it has often been said that Bach was at his most sublime when his compositions were concerned with dying, death, and the assurance of everlasting life through God and Christ. Cantata No.82 is just such a sublime creation, demonstrating Bach's greatness as well as conveying his own personal beliefs about the acceptance of death.

In the very first few measures of the instrumental introduction, we find the combining of two very prominent motives. First, the strings are given a gentle duplet figure which suggests the rocking motion of a lullaby. This rocking motion serves as an accompaniment to the motive given to the solo oboe which has come to be regarded as a symbolism for the longing for death. The effect is such that when the solo bass enters and sings of having had enough of this life to the melody first heard in the oboe obbligato, there can be no question as to how the protagonist feels: he is ready for sleep as expressed in his longing for death.

The recitative that follows the opening aria conveys the urgency and intensity of the moment. The protagonist has "had enough" of this life and, in putting his trust in God, is ready to move on to the sleep which has been promised and which is his reward. The "sleep motive" is stated by the first violins in the first measure of the following aria and becomes the basis for the entire movement.

Following another recitative in which he bids the world "gute Nacht", the soloist sings his final aria in which he rejoices in his death. Bach achieves a masterful combination of and perfect balance between the somber thoughts of leaving this world and the joy of achieving everlasting life. He does this by setting the movement in the key of c minor together with a rather quick 3/8 dance-like meter. The primary thematic material is first stated by the oboe and upper strings in unison and when this motive is repeated by the lower strings in counterpoint to the upper strings, the entire effect signifies the ascension after death.

IV. The Cantata No.137 is the third of the so-called Reformation cantatas. Its conception is in the traditional form which Bach had developed to its highest musical and religious prominence. The first movement is conceived as a declaration of exaltation and praise. Scored for four-part chorus and soloists and an orchestra of flutes, oboes, trumpets, tympani, strings and organ, this movement cannot fail to impress the listener with the sheer joy which Bach took in creating it. If ever there were a work intended to convey a dignified happiness, this opening movement must be it!

In each of the following three movements which are scored for solo voices and orchestra, Bach makes brilliantly innovative use of the chorale melody. In the aria for contralto, Bach sets the unaltered melody in the solo voice in 3/4 meter while the solo violin obbligato and its accompaniment are in 12/8 meter. The result is not unlike some of the later organ chorale preludes. With the setting of the third verse for soprano and bass duet, Bach employs the chorale melody in the minor key of e minor in a canon at the fifth. The fourth verse is a setting for tenor solo, solo trumpet and continuo. The innovation here is that although the movement is in the key of a minor, every time the solo trumpet enters to state the chorale melody, it does so in the key of C Major. The resulting combined contrasts are stunningly brilliant.

The cantata comes to an exuberant finale with a statement of the fifth verse of the chorale sung by the full chorus and accompanied by what has come to be known as Bach's "Festal Orchestra".