

PHILADELPHIA CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY

a life more beautiful

PREVIEW
NOTES

Gamut Bach Ensemble
Wednesday, December 18 – 7:30 PM
Church of the Holy Trinity

PROGRAM

Ich armer Mensch, ich Sündenknecht, BWV 55

Johann Sebastian Bach

Born: March 31, 1685, in Eisenach, Germany

Died: July 28, 1750, in Leipzig, Germany

Composed: 1726

Duration: 14 minutes

Composed for the 23rd Sunday after Trinity, which fell on November 27, 1726, Bach's Cantata No. 55 "Ich arme Mensch, ich Sündenknecht" (I poor man, I sin's servant) (BWV 55) sets a text by an unknown poet on the Gospel story from Matthew (Chapter 18, Verses 23 through 35) and closes with a chorale by Johann Rist from 1642. The story of the unfaithful servant has prompted the writer to concoct an excruciating text full of images of pain and suffering.

Herr Jesu Christ, du höchstes Gut, BWV 113

Johann Sebastian Bach

Composed: 1724

Duration: 23 minutes

Composed for the 11th Sunday after Trinity, which fell on August 20, 1724, Bach's Cantata No. 113 "Herr Jesu Christ, du höchstes Gut" (Lord Jesus Christ, you highest good) (BWV 113) sets a penitential text by Bartholomäus Ringwalt in its first, second, fourth, and eighth movements and anonymous texts paraphrasing Ringwalt's text in its third, fifth, and sixth movements. The cantata is scored for alto, bass, tenor, and soprano soloists and chorus, a pair of oboes d'amore, strings, and basso continuo and a transverse flute in its fifth movement.

Süßer Trost, mein Jesus kömmt, BWV 151

Johann Sebastian Bach

Composed: 1726

Duration: 17 minutes

BWV151 ("Sweet comfort, my Jesus comes") is for the third day after Christmas. The text by the Darmstadt court poet Georg Christian Lehms (whose poetry Bach also set in cantatas 110 and 57) does not draw on the gospel for the day, but is instead a consideration of the Christmas Epistle (Hebrews chapter 1) forecasting the birth of Jesus. The cantata was first performed on December 27, 1725. It dispenses with an opening chorus (perhaps, as one authority has suggested, to give the boys a rest after the hectic Christmas period), opening instead with a soprano aria considered by J. G. Whittaker to be "one of the most supremely beautiful in the whole range of cantatas."

Sehet, wir gehn hinauf gen Jerusalem, BWV 159

Johann Sebastian Bach

Composed: 1729

Duration: 13 Minutes

Intended for liturgical use only (the composer could scarcely have imagined otherwise), Bach's sacred cantatas came to serve two roles in the 20th century. Even as they continued to sustain the faithful in numberless church services, these sublime works also began to inhabit the concert hall, heard as much for their musical genius as for their religious message. Bach's Cantata No. 159 is among his finest works in the genre. Composed (most likely) in 1729, it was intended for Quinquagesima Sunday, the Sunday that precedes Ash Wednesday. It invites preparation for the 40 days of Lent, urging the listener to enter upon a journey that culminates in Christ's Passion and Resurrection during Holy Week.