



The Symphony Choir of Cape Town presents

A Baroque Christmas

Conducted by Levi Alexander

Saturday 11 December 2021
at 19h00

Lutheran Church, Strand Street

A Baroque Christmas

In the season of Advent, the church enters a time of expectation, preparation, and hope for the future. Secularly, society comes to the end of a busy work year and looks forward to a time of rest, rejuvenation and a time with family and friends. Mostly, Advent is a time of great expectation and anticipation for a time of joy, love and peace.

The COVID pandemic has resulted in great loss in all spheres of society and the economy. Life as we knew it has completely changed and threatens never to revert to the old 'normal'. Yet, there is still a sincere hope that the future will bring good tidings, health and joyous moments for all.

This concert reflects on the theme of hope for the future and a new dawn through its strong Advent theme. The musical text of our performance of motets, cantatas and canticles by Monteverdi, Bach and Vivaldi refers to current bewilderment and refuge in the hope of the future.

It felt appropriate to start with Monteverdi's *Cantate Domino* ("Sing a new song unto the Lord"), as the SCCT embarks on a period of new directorship, a fresh approach and new and exciting repertoire. In Vivaldi's *Magnificat* we can identify with Mary and rejoice in the prospect of better times. Bach's *Ärg're dich, o Seele, nicht* was performed on the third Sunday of Advent in 1716 and beckons the listener to be patient, for better times are indeed coming. We end with the triumphal sounding of the much-loved Vivaldi *Gloria*, derived from the words of the angels announcing the birth of Christ in the Gospel of Luke.

Join us on this musically and spiritually reviving journey of hope and expectation.

Levi Alexander - Music Director of the Symphony Choir of Cape Town

PROGRAMME

Claudio Giovanni Antonio Monteverdi (1567 – 1643) Cantate Domino ("Sing a new song unto the Lord")

Monteverdi was an Italian composer, string player, choirmaster and priest. *Cantate Domino* canticum novum was published in 1620. At this time the Renaissance musical style was giving way to the early Baroque style of different groups and/or voices sounding together, or *stile concertato*. This wasn't a passing musical fad – the notion of different groups that produce contrasting sounds was the exact opposite of the homogenous choral texture that had been cultivated during the Renaissance. *Stile concertato* eventually evolved into the sacred cantata and secular concerto grosso, the central forms of the Baroque era. And the idea of dividing a choral body into different subsets to generate variety in choral sound is still with us today. The text of this motet is based on verses from Psalms 96 and 98 (with thanks to <http://orianaconsort.org/concerts/programs/201912-notes.pdf>).

Antonio Vivaldi (1678 – 1741) *Magnificat* RV610

Vivaldi composed both his *Magnificat in G minor* RV 610 (c. 1717) and the *Gloria in D*, RV 589 as part of the collection of sacred choral works he produced around the time he was promoted to the position of *maestro de' concerti* of the *Ospedale della Pietà*. The *Ospedale della Pietà* was a prominent orphanage in Venice housing foundlings, among them, the illegitimate daughters of the Venetian noblemen who sponsored them. It also served as a music conservatory, training the most talented of its charges in music. Under the direction of Vivaldi, it held celebrated weekly performances of the very latest compositions by its most advanced students. The concerts that supported the *Ospedale* were attended by large numbers of the local elite and visiting tourists. The instrumentalists, chorus and soloists – all women from the *Ospedale* – performed hidden behind screens, in galleries above the audience. In defiance of traditional gender expectations, even the tenor and bass parts were sung by specially trained women. The *Magnificat* is also known as the *Canticle of Mary*. It is one of the eight most ancient Catholic chants and perhaps the earliest Marian hymn.

(<https://www.coroallegro.org/season/vivaldipart/program-notes>)

Johan Sebastian Bach (1685–1750) *Ärg're dich, o Seele, nicht* BWV186

Johann Sebastian Bach was born in Eisenach, Germany, in March 1685, into a large and distinguished family of professional musicians. His father, Johann Ambrosius Bach, was a 7th generation musician, employed by the city of Eisenach as a violinist and trumpeter. His uncles were church organists, court musicians and composers. His mother and father died before Bach was 10, at which stage he moved in with his eldest brother J.C. Bach, an organist and composer, and under whose tutelage Bach studied organ music as well as the construction and maintenance of the organ.

As a composer and musician of the late Baroque period, he mastered counterpoint and harmonic organisation and adapted rhythms, forms and textures from places such as Italy and France. His contributions greatly enriched the established German styles of music. His compositions include hundreds of cantatas, both sacred and secular, and he composed Latin church music, oratorios and motets. He often adopted Lutheran hymns and wrote extensively for organ and other keyboard instruments. This prolific composer died of complications after eye surgery in 1750 at the age of 65.

Did you know?

The definitive biography of J.S.Bach was written by the Nobel Prize Laureate, author, explorer and doctor Albert Schweitzer

*** **There will be a short 'leg-stretch' break before the Gloria** ***

What's the difference between a motet and a madrigal?

A **madrigal** is a secular work for a small group of singers, usually one to a part, while a **motet** is a religious work for (potentially) larger groups. The madrigal as a form died out with the beginning of the Baroque period. The biggest difference is the language in which it is sung. Motets are always sung in Latin, and madrigals are always sung in the vernacular.

Antonio Vivaldi (1678 – 1741) **Gloria in D** RV589

Antonio Lucio Vivaldi, a priest, music teacher and virtuoso violinist, composed this Gloria in Venice, in 1715, for the choir of the *Ospedale della Pietà* (see note above). The Gloria is probably his most famous choral piece, and it presents the traditional Gloria from the Latin Mass in 12 cantata-like sections. We do not know the exact occasion that Vivaldi's most famous *Gloria* celebrated. It may have been part of the ritual of a Christmas mass. Perhaps given the martial character of the opening movement and the yearning for peace expressed in the second movement, "Et in terra pax," Vivaldi may have written the work with the Ottoman-Venetian War (1714–18) very much on his mind.

Today Vivaldi is one of the most popular of all composers. During his lifetime he enjoyed considerable success and fortune, which he squandered through extravagance, and when he died in Vienna he was buried in a pauper's grave. For two centuries after his death, the Gloria lay undiscovered, until the late 1920s, when it was found buried among a pile of forgotten Vivaldi manuscripts. It was not until 1957 that the now familiar original version was published and given its first performance at the First Festival of Baroque Choral Music at Brooklyn College, NY. (With thanks to **Peter Carey, Royal Free Singers**

[http://www.choirs.org.uk/prognotes/Vivaldi%20Gloria%20\(Royal%20Free\).htm](http://www.choirs.org.uk/prognotes/Vivaldi%20Gloria%20(Royal%20Free).htm)

<https://www.coroallegro.org/season/vivaldi-part/program-notes>)

Levi Alexander



Levi Alexander graduated *cum laude* with a Masters in Music from Stellenbosch University, specialising in Choral Conducting. His Masters thesis addressed the “Plight of Anglican Music in the Western Cape”, aiming to ascertain whether traditional music is under threat of falling into disuse in the church and if so, what possible measures could be implemented to preserve the heritage for future generations of Anglican

worshippers.

He started his formal musical tuition in saxophone at the Hugo Lambrechts Music Centre in 2007 while attending The Settlers High School, and progressed to study a Bachelor’s Degree of Music in baritone saxophone performance and conducting at the South African College of Music (UCT) (2010). He toured Europe with various chamber music ensembles throughout his high school and university studies.

Levi has extensive teaching and conducting experience and is currently the Departmental Head of Music at the SACS High School where he started working in January 2015. He is an *ad hoc* saxophone teacher at the South African College of Music (UCT) and has been a woodwind performer in several Cape orchestras. Levi was appointed the Director of the Symphony Choir of Cape Town in 2021.

Elsabe Richter (Soprano)



Elsabe Richter is a South African Soprano bearing an M.Mus. degree in Vocal Performance from the North-West University. She has gained extensive experience in a wide range of music, art songs and opera as well as oratorio and other sacred works. Earlier this year, Elsabe performed as soloist with Cape Town Opera and the Cape Town Baroque Orchestra in a filmed production of Monteverdi’s ‘Vespro della Beata Vergine’ that was later broadcast on KykNET and DStv.

She is a voice lecturer at Stellenbosch University and also teaches at La Rochelle Girl’s High School. She regularly performs as soloist and with various ensembles including The Cape Town Baroque Orchestra, Lutesong Duo, the Cape Consort, the Cape Soloists Choir, the Cape Town *Camerata* and Baroque 2000.

Vasti Zeeman-Knoesen (Alto)



Vasti Zeeman-Knoesen was born in Bellville, Cape Town, and graduated with a Bachelor of Music degree, specialising in Opera, at the University of Cape Town. She went on to complete her Post Graduate Diploma in Performance. Vasti has performed in a number of operatic roles as well as in a range of cantatas and masses and has appeared at the National Arts Festival as well as with Glasgow Opera (*Anamchara*). Vasti has been a voice teacher for the last 7 years at both Bishops College and Rondebosch Boys' High School. Currently she is preparing to perform as the Mezzo-soprano soloist in another new work by

composer Jonathan Blair.

Arthur Swan (Tenor)



Arthur Swan studied opera at the South African College of Music and was a member of Cape Town Opera's Young Artists' Programme. His professional career took him from Cape Town to Windhoek and London to Hong Kong, until his return to Cape Town in 2018 to settle here permanently. Arthur's lyric tenor is in demand on both the concert and opera stage, in repertoire ranging from the baroque to late romantic, thanks to what critics have described as a "nobility" and "warmth" of tone, as well as his natural

vocal flexibility and versatility.

Keaton Manwaring (Bass)



Born in Cape Town, Keaton Manwaring started his musical journey with piano and theory lessons at the age of 8. He sang in school choirs until the age of 13, when he joined the Cape Town Youth Choir (CTYC). This afforded him the opportunity to travel overseas to participate in choral competitions and gain confidence for the stage. In 2013, he commenced his studies in music at Stellenbosch University with piano and voice

as his two instruments.

In 2017, he completed his honours in singing performance under the direction of Lauren Dasappa and Dr Barry Ross. Since graduating, Keaton has enjoyed various performance opportunities with Cape Town Opera, The Cape Consort and Cape Soloists Choir. Currently he is the bass soloist at St Michael and All Angels Parish Church.

What's the difference between a canticle and a cantata?

A **canticle** is Latin in origin and simply means “little song”. Canticles are songs derived from biblical texts other than the book of Psalms. They are non-rhythmic and are either spoken, chanted or sung.

A **cantata** is a vocal composition with instrumental accompaniment, typical of 17th and 18th century Italian music. It contains more than one movement and can be based either on a secular or sacred subject.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church, Strand Street

The church complex originated in the 1760s and has functioned as a church from the 1780s. There is very little in this church that is not original, and all the detail is in the remarkable carvings by 18th century sculptor, Anton Anreith.

Notice the tall Gothic-arched windows, the stinkwood and yellowwood panelled galleries and of course, the pulpit, which is the church's masterpiece (see the note below on the swan).

If you're wondering why there are limited or no sight-lines in the gallery, thank our ancestors. Slaves in the Cape Colony had to sit upstairs, and were only allowed to see the “predikant op die preekstoel”

More information may be obtained from www.outsiderswithin.co.za and Duncan, P. and A. Proust, 2013 “Hidden Cape Town”. Struik

The Lutheran Swan

Have you noticed the swan above the pulpit?

Jan Hus (1370-1415), whose name literally means ‘goose’ in the Bohemian language, had a strong influence on Martin Luther and the Reformation. He was excommunicated for his beliefs and burned at the stake in July 1415. Just prior to being burned, he was ordered to recant his teachings. He responded: “You are now going to burn a goose, but in 100 years you will have a swan which you can neither roast nor boil”.

Almost exactly 100 years later, in October 1517, Martin Luther posted his Theses on the door of the church in Wittenberg, and the Reformation was born. Lutheran art frequently portrays Luther with a swan, and it has become the symbol of the Lutheran Church.

Symphony Choir of Cape Town is a non-profit organisation of classical music enthusiasts, which rehearses at the Rondebosch United Church.

Under the new direction of Levi Alexander, with Warren Patientia as accompanist, the choir aims to provide quality music to the public in conjunction with community organisations and emerging young soloists and conductors.

Don't miss our next concert!

Why not stay in touch with all our news by joining our mailing list?

Check out our website for more information:

www.scct.co.za

Find us on Twitter: @SymphonyChoirCT

Email: symphonychoircapetown@gmail.com

Non Profit Organisation No. 053-049-NPO

We are always looking for new members, so if you are interested in joining us please apply online via our website above.

Our ability to continue as a choir and to be able to perform choral music for music lovers of Cape Town is entirely dependent on the generosity of our sponsors

The Rupert Foundation



DE RUPERT-MUSIEKSTIGTING

A Sobering Thought

“A symphony orchestra costs less than one footballer today.

What legacy do we expect to leave to our children?

Culture does not exist to make profit but to educate.

If this does not change, superficial and very dangerous people will prevail in future generations.”

Riccardo Muti

Should you wish to become a sponsor, please contact us

Special thanks go to Gretchen van der Byl
(email: gretchencvdb@gmail.com)
for our fabulous poster and cover artwork