

Concert presented by the South African Early Music Trust (SAEMT)

Sunday, 28 August: 11h, St. Norberts Priory, Rubbi Road, Kommetjie

Johann Ludwig, Christoph & Sebastian Bach

Motets by three members of the Bach family

Johann Christoph Bach (1642-1703)	Mit Weinen hebt sichs an <i>Chorale for SATB & bc</i>
Johann Christoph Bach	Fürchte dich nicht <i>motet for SATTB & bc</i>
Johann Christoph Bach	Lieber Herre Gott, wecke uns auf <i>motet for double choir & bc</i>
Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)	Liebster Jesu wir sind hier <i>Chorale Prelude for organ, BWV 731</i>
Johann Sebastian Bach	Komm Jesu, komm <i>motet for double choir, BWV 229</i>
Johann Sebastian Bach	Sarabande <i>from Cello Suite in c minor, BWV 1011</i>
Johann Ludwig Bach (1677-1731)	Unsere Trübsal <i>motet for six voices & bc</i>
Johann Sebastian Bach	'Dorian' Toccata & Fugue in d minor, BWV 538
Johann Sebastian Bach	Singet dem Hern ein neues Lied, <i>motet for double choir, BWV 225</i>



Antoinette Blyth, Elsabé Richter – soprano
Lente Louw, Monika Voysey – alto
Willem Bester, Warren Vernon-Driscoll – tenor
Reinhardt Liebenberg, Patrick Cordery – bass
Diederick Basson, Bill Robson – organ
Hans Huysen – Baroque cello, musical direction

Programme Notes

In an obituary on his father JS Bach, CPE Bach notes that, without exception, every member in six generations descending from progenitor Veit Bach were musical ('surrendered to music') and – with very few exceptions – even took up musical professions. He describes the family as a lineage 'onto all of whose members nature has seemingly bestowed a love and deftness for music as a general gift.' Reflecting on this remarkable musical pedigree himself, Sebastian, in his 50th year, compiled a genealogy titled *Ursprung der musicalisch-Bachischen Familie*. Indeed it seems apt to equate being musical with being a Bach as this document turns out to chronicle the biographical dates of no fewer than 53 musicians. A recent musicological survey has added another 30 musicians to the list, corroborating the fact that the Bach clan must be considered a singularly outstanding musical family.

Though born in close proximity – on a map of Thuringia, their respective hometowns of Eisenach, Arnstadt and Meiningen form the corners of an equilateral triangle ca. 45 km apart from each other – the three composers in this program represent three different 'lines' of the Bach family. Sebastian belongs to the Franconian line, Christoph to the Arnstadt line and Ludwig to the Meiningen line. As with most of the Bachs, extant biographical data is scant and may in each case aptly be summarized by CPE Bach's phrase: 'surrendered to music'.

Johann Ludwig Bach was an oboe player and director of the court orchestra in Meiningen for 20 years (1711-31).¹ Although he must have composed a large amount of music in his capacity as orchestral director, all but two instrumental works – an Overture and a Concerto for 2 violins – have been lost. That a number of his cantatas, masses and motets have survived we owe to JS Bach, who copied and edited several of these works in preparation for performing them in Leipzig.

Johann Christoph Bach (Sebastian's cousin once removed) was organist at the court chapels in Arnstadt and Eisenach, as well as harpsichordist of the court orchestra in Erfurt. Though these positions straddled the realms of sacred and secular music, only a handful of sacred compositions have survived and, once again, arguably only because of JS Bach's collector's zeal. All of them are contained in what has become known as the *Altbachisches Archiv*, a collection of some 200 manuscript pages with about 20 works that Sebastian held in special esteem, studied and performed, even though the taste of the time (in which only contemporary music counted) would probably have considered them outdated.

Perhaps this deliberate cognisance of his predecessors' works offers a clue to explaining Johann Sebastian Bach's singular position within this gifted family. Prior to the relatively well-documented 27 years as Thomaskantor in Leipzig, his biography is just as shrouded as that of all his relatives. In effect, here was just another Bach musician working in a local Thuringian musical tradition. However, from his on-going practical engagement with the older family member's compositions, it is clear that he was not collecting them as souvenirs, but studied them to gauge his own historical and artistic position. Johann Sebastian must have had a very clear understanding of his native musical tradition to then exceed its boundaries in a way that is immediately apparent from the very outset of his compositional activity. Strongly rooted in local traditions, his music never questions venerated genres such as suites, chorale preludes, cantatas, motets etc. but on the contrary, expands their scope and thinks of them as universal forms. What comes over as most charming, but perhaps somewhat narrow and dutifully pious interpretations of Lutheran, German and Baroque concepts in the works of his predecessors has quite a different air in JS Bach's output. The same content is conveyed, but now in a far more vigorous, enlightened and cosmopolitan manner. Striving for the perfect harmony and formal balance within existing genres, he time and again achieves – one hesitates to use this clichéd phrase, but for once it is justified – musical perfection.

Hans Huyssen

¹ Incidentally this orchestra has been in uninterrupted existence for 326 years and even trades under its original name of Meiningener Hofkapelle again. Venerated as one of Europe's oldest orchestras, it boasts a glamorous history for having premiered works by Liszt, Wagner, Grieg, Brahms and Richard Strauss under the baton of the composers themselves. One is hardly surprised to learn that it is currently directed by a young Swiss conductor with the name of Philippe Bach.