

Program Notes from November 2000

PROGRAM NOTES

Berkshire Bach devotes its November program to three spectacular cantatas:

1. the pastoral, (104), *Du Hirte Israel, höre* (Shepherd of Israel, Hear Us, BWV 104),
2. the moving exhortation to charity, *Brich dem Hungrigen dein Brot* (Break Your Bread For the Hungry, BWV 39)
3. the ode to honesty and courage *Herz und Mund und Tat und Leben* (Heart, Voice, Deed and Life, BWV 147) which includes the celebrated chorale-prelude *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring*.

Although these works have soulful and dramatic agendas of their own, their texts offer Bach a stimulating variety of musical opportunities for warm and zesty choruses, heartfelt chorales, daring recitatives and ecstatic and colorful arias. The choruses display Bach's rhetorical and orchestral genius most magnificently, but it is in the arias that one can observe Bach's word expression, instrumental-vocal intertwining and contrapuntal wizardry most closely. The choice of instruments (duets and solos for oboe and violin, recorder, cello, bassoon and oboe d'amore) is as ingenious as the choice of textual imagery. The texts focus on rustic, natural images and "everyday" issues. The pastoral 104, scored with a bagpipe-like double-reed quartet, speaks of shepherds, green pastures, wilderness, pathways, herds and flocks, food and fresh water. An especially luscious tenor aria gives us a rare duet of two oboes d'amore (alto oboes with a deep, creamy sound). Cantata 39, composed in sympathy for Protestants banished in one of Catholic Vienna's periodical purges, asks you powerfully to feed the hungry and clothe the naked, against the moving tapestry of the sprinkling of bread crumbs by strings, oboes and recorders. Both arias here are in Ländler (waltz-like) style as a friendly compliment to the needy Viennese visitors; the second aria boasts a ravishing recorder solo.

The strong presence of the recorder in this cantata makes it a particularly appropriate memorial to our friend, the late Bernard Krainis, a former president of the Berkshire Bach Society.

Cantata 147 explores the need for courage and confidence rather than shame, silence or callousness. The famous chorale, *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring*, occurs twice in this cantata, allowing us two modes of presentation: first by the Children's Chorus, then, in closing, by the entire chorus and orchestra - with your collaboration: come warmed up and ready to sing.

Kenneth Cooper