



Bach's St John Passion Les Arts Florissants

Tuesday 19 March 2019 7pm, Hall

JS Bach St John Passion

There will be one interval of 20 minutes between Part 1 and Part 2

Les Arts Florissants

William Christie director

Rachel Redmond soprano

Jess Dandy contralto

Reinoud Van Mechelen tenor (Evangelist)

Anthony Gregor tenor

Renato Dolcini bass-baritone (Pilate)

Alex Rosen bass (Jesus)

Part of Barbican Presents 2018–19

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If anything limits your enjoyment please let us know during your visit. Additional feedback can be given online.



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Welcome

A warm welcome to tonight's performance of Bach's extraordinary *St John Passion*, which is given by Les Arts Florissants – celebrating its 40th birthday year – under its founder and director William Christie. He has long been a champion of talented young singers, whom he nurtures through his Jardin des Voix academy; it's tribute to the success of this scheme that most of the soloists this evening are previous members of Le Jardin, including tenor Reinoud Van Mechelen, who sings the part of the Evangelist.

Bach's *St John Passion* was for a long time seen as the poor relation to the *St*

Matthew, which was famously revived by Mendelssohn, no less, in 1829. What is less well-known is that the *St John* was actually performed prior to this, in 1822, by Mendelssohn's teacher Carl Friedrich Zelter.

While some early listeners found the drama of the *St John Passion* too overtly theatrical for an oratorio, that attitude has long been dispelled. Now we can focus instead on the fervency and beauty of Bach's writing, which continue to make this *Passion* a sublime experience.

Huw Humphreys, Head of Music, Barbican

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

St John Passion (1724, rev 1725, 1732, 1749)

Today, it is hard to imagine either of Bach's two great surviving Passions – the *St Matthew* and the *St John* – ever being mistaken for an opera. For many people, believers and agnostics alike, attending a Passion performance is a vital and meaningful part of Holy Week, an act often invested with something of the sombre reverence of a religious celebration. And sure enough, Bach composed his Passions to be performed in church as part of the liturgy on Good Friday, one of the most important days in the church calendar, when the congregation would have also endured a gruelling sermon between the work's two parts.

Yet, in composing Passions of this particular type, Bach was slotting into a tradition of increasingly dramatised musical settings of the Gospel texts relating the events leading to Christ's crucifixion – a tradition that went back to early Christian times, but had gained particular strength in northern Germany during the previous century. The evolution from the first chanted Passions to elaborate compositions involving solo singers with named roles, choirs and orchestras certainly shows a strong trend towards the theatrical, as the theologian Christian Gerber

recognised when he complained in 1732 that 'if some of those first Christians should rise, visit our assemblies, and hear such a roaring organ together with so many instruments, I do not believe that they would recognise us as Christians and their successors'. Gerber had also written of an unidentified Passion performance at which 'all the people were thrown into the greatest bewilderment ... An elderly widow of the nobility exclaimed: "God save us, my children! It's just as if we were at a comic opera".'

Nevertheless, while the *St John Passion* is a strikingly dramatic work (for instance, in its vivid depiction of Christ's trial in Part 2), and while the presence in it of urgent recitatives interlaced with arias and choruses to words adapted from those the poet Barthold Heinrich Brockes and others had already furnished for even more openly operatic Passions by Keiser, Telemann and Handel is presumably just the sort of thing to which Gerber objected, it seems unlikely that, in composing music for his first Good Friday in Leipzig's St Nicholas Church in April 1724, Bach was actually setting out to be theatrical. After all, at his appointment the previous May to the job of Kantor of St Thomas's School – a post which

carried with it responsibility for organising the music at all Leipzig's four main churches – Bach's new employers, the town council, had specifically stipulated that he should 'so arrange the music that it shall not last too long, and shall be of such a nature as not to make an operatic impression, but rather to incite the listener to devotion'.

In fact, the *St John Passion* is more complicated than that. Bach's achievement was to devise a work which is more than two hours long, with a detailed and complex yet utterly coherent construction, which tells its well-known story in four parallel and mutually supportive strands. At its core is the narrative, the text of the Gospel itself, sung in recitative by a tenor representing the Evangelist, with Christ's words sung by a bass; in addition, the smaller roles of certain other characters (Peter and Pilate, for instance) are taken by solo voices, while the utterances and exclamations of the crowd are voiced, succinctly but sometimes with almost hysterical intensity, by the chorus.

As a foil to this narrative element, there are the episodes provided by the eight arias, in which the action stops and a relevant emotion or reaction is explored; these are where the most reflective moments in the Passion are to be found, enhanced and coloured by accompanying solo instruments, including two violas d'amore in the bass arioso 'Betrachte, meine Seel' (No 19) and a viola da gamba

(associated in Bach's time with death) in the superb alto aria 'Es ist vollbracht!' (No 30).

The third strand is the meditative and communal element represented by the chorales. These would have been extremely familiar to Bach's contemporaries, and while their role as points-of-entry was probably not literal in the sense of the congregation actually joining in, they would certainly have provided listeners with moments of recognition and identification.

Finally, there are the great choruses that frame the work like massive structural pillars: the first, the very opening movement, is a harrowing depiction of Christ's agony and humiliation, but one which, at the same time, reminds us that within it is contained his ultimate glory; the second, 'Ruht wohl' (No 39), is a moving and consoling farewell to Christ's earthly incarnation.

The *St John Passion* was long seen as a poor relation to the larger, later and better-known *St Matthew*. Recently, however, its popularity has grown, a testament to an increasing realisation among both performers and listeners that this is a work with its own character and ambitions. Maybe it does not reach quite so far into the listener's soul as the more contemplative *St Matthew* but, as a gripping depiction of the emotionally charged events of Holy Week, it ultimately appeals with greater directness to our human sensibilities and sympathies.

Programme note © Lindsay Kemp

About the performers



Pascal Gely

William Christie

William Christie director

Harpichordist, conductor, musicologist and teacher William Christie has spearheaded the reintroduction of French Baroque music to a wide audience. Born in Buffalo, and educated at Harvard and Yale, he has lived in France since 1971. The turning point in his career came in 1979 when he founded Les Arts Florissants.

As director of this vocal and instrumental ensemble, he made his mark in both the concert hall and the opera house. Major public recognition came in 1987 with the production of Lully's *Atys* at the Opéra Comique in Paris, which then went on to tour internationally. He has also led many acclaimed performances of works by composers including Monteverdi, Rossi, Scarlatti, Purcell, Handel, Mozart and Haydn. Notable among his recent operatic work are

Atys at the Opéra Comique and the Brooklyn Academy of Music in 2010; Charpentier's *David et Jonathas* at the Aix-en-Provence Festival in 2012; 'Rameau, maître à danser', which premiered in Caen in 2014 before touring internationally; and Campra's *Les fêtes vénitiennes* in 2015.

As a guest conductor, William Christie often appears at opera festivals including Glyndebourne and at opera houses such as the Metropolitan Opera, Zurich Opera and Opéra de Lyon. Between 2002 and 2007 he regularly appeared as a guest conductor with the Berlin Philharmonic.

His extensive discography includes more than 100 recordings. His most recent recordings include *Si vous vouliez un jour – Airs sérieux et à boire, Vol 2*, *La Harpe Reine*, *Un jardin à l'italienne*, *Bien que l'amour* and Bach's B minor Mass.

Wishing to develop his work as a teacher, William Christie has since 2007 been artist-in-residence at the Juilliard School, where he gives masterclasses twice a year. He also created in 2002 an academy for young singers, the Jardin des Voix. In 2012, he launched the Dans les Jardins de William Christie festival in his own gardens, located in the French village of Thiré in the Vendée, where every summer he welcomes young musicians from the Juilliard School along with the musicians and singers of Les Arts Florissants.



Rachel Redmond

Rachel Redmond soprano

Rachel Redmond began her career with the Jardin des Voix, Les Arts Florissants' academy for young singers, performing under William Christie and Paul Agnew. At William Christie's invitation she made her debut at the Opéra Comique as Iris (Lully's *Atys*), and performed Irène, Léontine and Flore (Campra's *Les fêtes Venitiennes*) at the Opéra Comique, the Théâtre du Capitole de Toulouse and Brooklyn Academy of Music.

Other roles with Les Arts Florissants have included Angel (*Jephtha*), Belinda and First Witch (*Dido and Aeneas*), Damon (*Acis and Galatea*), Captive (*David et Jonathas*), Cecilia (*Cecilia, Virgin and Martyr*) and Artébuse (*Actéon*).

Her repertoire also includes Bach's *St Matthew Passion*, *St John Passion* and Cantata, BWV199,

Beethoven's *Mass in C*, Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms*, Brahms's *Ein deutsches Requiem*, Charpentier's *La descente d'Orphée aux enfers*, Graupner's *Diese Zeit ist ein Spiel der Eitelkeit*, Handel's *Esther*, *Israel in Egypt*, *Messiah*, *Saul* and *Nine German Arias*, Vivaldi's *Juditha triumphans*, Sir Karl Jenkins's *Gloria*, Mondonville's *Isbé*, Orff's *Carmina burana*, Purcell's *The Fairy Queen*, Rameau's *Pygmalion* and works by Boismortier, Jommelli, Galuppi, Monteverdi, Pergolesi, Rameau and Vivaldi.

Rachel Redmond is a regular soloist with Jordi Savall and the Centre Internacional de Música Antiga, Capella Mediterranea, Collegio Ghislieri, Dunedin Consort, the Centre de Musique Baroque de Versailles, Ensemble Correspondences, Ensemble Aedes and Le Caravansérail. She has also appeared at the Beaune, Lessay and La Chaise-Dieu festivals.

She has worked with the European Union Baroque Orchestra, Norwegian Chamber Orchestra, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra.

Recent and future highlights include her debut in the role of Susanna (*The Marriage of Figaro*) for English Touring Opera, for which she was nominated for The Times Breakthrough Award at the 2018 South Bank Sky Arts Awards, her return to the Aix-en-Provence Festival as Second Woman (*Dido and Aeneas*) and her debut at the Göttingen International Handel Festival.



Jess Dandy

Jess Dandy contralto

Jess Dandy studied at Trinity College, Cambridge, and the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, at which she held a fellowship and from which she graduated with distinction. She was the winner of the 2017 London Bach Society Singers Prize and an Oxford Lieder Young Artist in 2018, and is a Britten–Pears Young Artist and Heidelberg Fröhling Scholar.

Opera highlights include two Royal Opera House workshops on new works by Soumik Datta/Glyn Maxwell and Philip Venables's *4.48 Psychosis*. She also covered the role of the Messenger and was a member of the ensemble in the Royal Opera House/Roundhouse production of Monteverdi's *Orfeo* under conductor Christopher Moulds, and played the multi-part contralto role in Sir George

Benjamin's *Into the Little Hill* for Shadwell Opera, conducted by Finnegan Downie Dear.

On the concert platform her appearances have included Mozart's *Requiem* at St Martin-in-the-Fields, Berlioz's *Roméo et Juliette* at the Barbican and Salle Pleyel with the London Symphony Orchestra under Valery Gergiev, Andriessen's *De Staat* at the Queen Elizabeth Hall with Simon Wills and participated in the 2017 Multi-Storey Prom under Christopher Stark. She is also an experienced ensemble singer and has worked with the Monteverdi Choir, The King's Consort, Le Concert d'Astrée, Polyphony, the Gabrieli Consort and Philharmonia Voices.

Recent engagements include a recording of Handel's *Samson* with John Butt and the Dunedin Consort, alto solos in their performances of Bach's B minor Mass in Edinburgh and at the Wigmore Hall and the premiere of Alex Mills's *Dear Marie Stopes* at the Tête-a-Tête Opera Festival.

Engagements this season include Stanford's *Mass Via Victrix (1914–1918)* with BBC National Orchestra and Chorus of Wales; recitals at the Oxford Lieder Festival; Mozart's *Requiem* with the Choir of King's College, Cambridge; *Messiah* with the Hallé; Berlioz's *Les nuits d'été* with the BBC Symphony Orchestra; and Bach's *St John Passion* with Stephen Layton and the Adelaide and Tasmanian Symphony orchestras.



Reinoud Van Mechelen

Reinoud Van Mechelen tenor (Evangelist)

Reinoud Van Mechelen graduated in 2012 from the Royal Conservatory of Brussels, where he studied with Dina Grossberger. In 2017 he was awarded the Caecilia Prize for Young Musician of the Year by the Belgian music press.

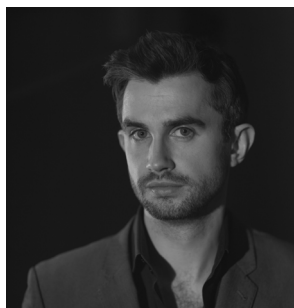
In 2011 he was selected to take part in the fifth Jardin des Voix, the academy for young singers run by Les Arts Florissants. Since then he has regularly performed as a soloist with the group, with concerts at the Aix-en-Provence and Edinburgh festivals, Royal Albert Hall, Château de Versailles, Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow, Barbican Centre, Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels, Paris Philharmonie and Opéra Comique and the Brooklyn Academy of Music in New York.

He has also appeared as a soloist with other leading ensembles, including Collegium Vocale, Le Concert Spirituel, La Petite Bande, Les Talens Lyriques, Pygmalion, Le Poème Harmonique, Il Gardellino, Insula Orchestra, L'Arpeggiata, Ludus Modalis, B'Rock, Ricercar Consort, Capriccio Stravagante, Scherzi Musicali and Hespèrion XXI.

In recent seasons he has performed the title-roles in *Dardanus* (Opéra national

de Bordeaux) and *Zoroastre* (Festival de Montpellier and Radio-France, Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, Festival de Beaune, Théâtre Royal in Versailles, and Theater an der Wien). In 2016–17 he made his Zurich Opera debut as Jason (*Médée*) conducted by William Christie. In concert he also sang Belmonte (*The Abduction from the Seraglio* and *Gérald* (*Lakmé*). Last season he performed with his own ensemble, a nocte temporis; participated in *Un opéra imaginaire* to mark the 30th anniversary of Le Concert Spirituel; sang in Charpentier's *Actéon* and Monteverdi's *Selva morale e spirituale* with Les Arts Florissants, as well as performing the title-role in Rameau's *Pygmalion* at Dijon Opera.

Reinoud Van Mechelen has featured on numerous CDs and DVDs and in 2016 released his first solo CD, of arias by J S Bach. He followed this with a solo disc of Clérambault cantatas, released last year to critical acclaim.



Natalie J Watts

Anthony Gregory

Anthony Gregory tenor

Tenor Anthony Gregory was a Harewood Artist at English National Opera, a Jerwood Young Artist at Glyndebourne, a student of the National Opera Studio and a member of

the Verbier Festival Academy. In the past few seasons, he has sung in Cavalli's *Hipermestra* and Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for Glyndebourne Festival Opera; Handel's *Alcina* for the Teatro Real in Madrid and the Aix-en-Provence Festival; the world premiere of Ryan Wigglesworth's *The Winter's Tale* for English National Opera; *Don Giovanni* and *The Turn of the Screw* for Glyndebourne on Tour; Monteverdi's *Orfeo* for the Royal Opera House; *Così fan tutte* for Opéra de Limoges and English Touring Opera; *Il re pastore* for the Verbier Festival; *Lucio Silla* for the Classical Opera Company; and *Rodelinda* for the London Handel Festival.

More recently, he has sung Odoardo (*Ariodante*) for Les Arts Florissants and the title-role in *Dardanus* for English Touring Opera, and made his debut with Norwegian National Opera as Don Ottavio (*Don Giovanni*).

On the concert platform he performed at the Edinburgh and Luffhansa Baroque festivals and with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Oxford Bach Choir, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, BBC Philharmonic, the Armonico Consort and for the St Luke's Music Society.

Highlights of this season include the title-role in Bernstein's *Candide* at Bergen National Opera, a return to Norwegian National Opera as Don Ottavio and the world premiere of Stuart MacRae's *Anthropocene* at Scottish Opera. His concert season includes the current European tour with Les Arts Florissants; Britten's *Serenade for tenor, horn and strings* and Mark-Anthony Turnage's *The Silver Tassie*, both with BBC Symphony Orchestra; *Carmina burana* at the Royal Festival Hall and performances at the London Handel Festival.

Philippe Delval



Renato Dolcini

Renato Dolcini bass-baritone (Pilate)

Renato Dolcini studied with Vincenzo Manno and graduated in musicology from Pavia University. He was a member of the Gstaad Vocal Academy (2009 and 2010) where he worked with Cecilia Bartoli. In 2015 he was chosen to take part in the seventh Jardin des Voix, the academy for young singers run by Les Arts Florissants, touring with the group in Europe, the USA, Russia, Australia, Korea, China and Japan.

Highlights of past seasons include Caldara's *Dafne* at La Fenice, Venice, with Stefano Montanari; the title-role in *The Marriage of Figaro* with René Jacobs at the Royaumont Foundation; *La Cenerentola* with Fabio Biondi and Europa Galante; *Leporello* (*Don Giovanni*), recorded and released by Warner Classics in 2017; Satiro (Rossi's *Orfeo*) with Raphaël Pichon at the Opéra de Versailles; Danao (Cavalli's *Hipermestra*) at Glyndebourne Festival under William Christie; and Ottone (*L'incoronazione di Poppea*) at the Opéra de Nantes.

More recently he has sung Aeneas (*Dido and Aeneas*) with Christie and Les Arts Florissants; Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* in Milan with La Risonanza and Fabio Bonizzoni; Landi's *La morte di Orfeo* at Dutch National Opera with

Christophe Rousset; and Melani's *L'Europa* at the Potsdam Festival. He also made his debut as Seneca in *L'incoronazione di Poppea* at the Salzburg Festival under Christie and in Porpora's *Iole* at the Bremen Festival with Concerto de' Cavalieri.

Current and future engagements include Handel's *La Resurrezione* with La Risonanza and Bonizzoni; the current tour of Bach's *St John Passion*; Guglielmo (*Così fan tutte*) at the New Israeli Opera in Tel Aviv; and *Les Indes galantes* in Geneva under Leonardo García Alarcón.

His discography includes *Stravaganza d'Amore!* with Raphaël Pichon and Ensemble Pygmalion for Harmonia Mundi, which won a *Diapason d'Or* and a *Choc de Classica*.



Alex Rosen

Alex Rosen bass (Jesus)

Alex Rosen is in increasing demand in the concert hall and the opera house both in the USA and internationally.

Last season he sang in *Messiah* with the Portland Baroque Orchestra and Houston Symphony Orchestra, made his debut with the New York Philharmonic in Beethoven's Choral Fantasy, and undertook a European tour of Haydn's *Die Schöpfung* with Les Arts Florissants. Last summer he appeared as Seneca (*L'incoronazione di Poppea*) with Cincinnati Opera, reprised *Die Schöpfung* and performed in a concert version

of Handel's *Acis and Galatea* with Les Arts Florissants.

This season Alex Rosen appears with Les Arts Florissants in *Die Schöpfung* and the current tour of Bach's *St John Passion*, and sings in Handel's *Radamisto* with Opera Lafayette. He also gives concerts with pianist Michał Biel as one of four duos in the inaugural season of the Royaumont Foundation's Song and Lied Academy, in Paris.

Les Arts Florissants

The renowned vocal and instrumental ensemble Les Arts Florissants, which this year celebrates its 40th birthday, was founded in 1979 by the Franco-American harpsichordist and conductor William Christie, and takes its name from an opera by Marc-Antoine Charpentier. It has played a pioneering role in the revival of a Baroque repertoire that had long been neglected but which is now widely performed and admired. The Ensemble is directed by William Christie who, since 2007, has regularly passed the conductor's baton over to British tenor Paul Agnew.

Since its production of *Atys* by Lully at the Opéra Comique in Paris in 1987, which was triumphantly revived in May 2011, it is in the field of opera that Les Arts Florissants has found most success. It enjoys an equally high profile in the concert hall, as illustrated by its many acclaimed concert or semi-staged performances of operas and oratorios.

Each season Les Arts Florissants gives around 100 concerts and opera performances in France – at the Philharmonie de Paris, where it holds a residency, the Théâtre de Caen, the Opéra Comique, the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées and the Château de Versailles, as well as at numerous festivals – and is an active ambassador for French culture abroad, being regularly invited to New York, London, Brussels, Vienna, Madrid, Barcelona, Moscow and elsewhere.

Les Arts Florissants has an award-winning discography of over 100 recordings under the

Vincent Pontet



baton of William Christie and Paul Agnew. In recent years, it has launched several education programmes for young musicians, notably the Academy of the Jardin des Voix: created in 2002, it is held every two years and has already brought a substantial number of new singers into the limelight. The Arts Flo Juniors programme, launched in 2007, enables conservatory students to join the orchestra and chorus for a production. There is also a fruitful partnership between William Christie, Les Arts Florissants and New York's Juilliard School, which since 2007 has allowed an artistic exchange between the USA and France.

Les Arts Florissants also organises numerous events aimed at building new audiences at the Philharmonie de Paris, in the Vendée and elsewhere in France and all around the world. These are designed for both amateur musicians and non-musicians, and for both adults and children.

In 2012, William Christie and Les Arts Florissants created the festival Dans les Jardins de William Christie, in partnership with the Conseil départemental de la Vendée. An annual event, it brings together artists from Les Arts Florissants, pupils from the Juilliard School and finalists from

Le Jardin des Voix for concerts and *promenades musicales* in the gardens created by William Christie at Thiré, in the Vendée. In addition to the festival, Les Arts Florissants is working to establish a permanent cultural venue in Thiré. This aim was furthered in 2017 through some noteworthy events: the settlement of Le Jardin des Voix in Thiré, the creation of a Spring Festival directed by Paul Agnew, a new annual event at the Fontevraud Abbey and the accolade of 'Centre culturel de Rencontre' for Les Arts Florissants and Les Jardins de William Christie – an award which distinguishes projects associating creation, heritage and dissemination. Last year saw the creation of the Les Arts Florissants–William Christie Foundation. Christie has gifted his entire Thiré estate to the Foundation.

Les Arts Florissants receives financial support from the French Ministry of Culture, the Département de la Vendée and the Région Pays de la Loire. The Ensemble has been in residence at the Philharmonie de Paris since 2015 and has been named 'Centre Culturel de Rencontre'. The Selz Foundation, American Friends of Les Arts Florissants and Crédit Agricole Corporate & Investment Bank are its Principal Sponsors.

Les Arts Florissants

Musical Director/**Founder**

William Christie

Associate Musical**Director**

Paul Agnew

Violin 1

Hiro Kurosaki *leader*
Emmanuel Resche
Sophie de
Bardonnèche
Tami Troman
Catherine Girard
Patrick Oliva

Viola

Galina Zinchenko
Simon Heyerick

Cello

Alix Verzier
Elena Andreyev

Flute

Serge Saitta
Charles Zebley

Oboe

Pier Luigi Fabretti
Yanina Yacubsohn

Bassoon

Claude Wassmer
Robin Billet

Basso continuo**Cello**

Cyril Poulet

Viola da gamba

Myriam Rignol

Double Bass

Joseph Carver

Lute

Thomas Dunford

Harpsichord/Organ

Marie Van Rhijn

Choir**Soprano**

Maud Gnidzaz
Virginie Thomas
Eugénie De Padirac
Juliette Perret

Countertenor

Théophile Alexandre
Brian Cummings
Christophe Baska

Tenor

Thibaut Lenaerts
Jonathan Spicher
Sean Clayton

Bass

Anicet Castel
Laurent Collobert

Tonight's performance
uses the Bärenreiter
Edition of Bach's
St John Passion