

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra
April 14 programme complementary content

Join the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir on the eve of Easter weekend to experience one of classical music's most profound spiritual and religious works – Bach's *St John Passion*.

The concert is conducted by baroque expert Jeannette Sorrell, and features seven superb soloists.

You can learn more about what to expect in our programme notes, which this year are being presented in a new and accessible way.

In addition, this companion page draws together a range of complementary content that we hope will help shine further light on the pieces, the people who composed them and the performers bringing them to life here in Hope Street.

Jeannette Sorrell

San Francisco-born conductor **Jeannette Sorrell** grew up studying piano, violin, ballet and drama, and at 16 started to learn composition and conducting.

She later studied with Roger Spano at Oberlin Conservatory and under Leonard Bernstein and Sir Roger Norrington at Tanglewood. In 1991, Sorrell moved to Amsterdam to study harpsichord with Gustav Leonhardt, going on to win first prize and audience choice awards at the Spivey International Harpsichord Competition.

At 26, she founded **Apollo's Fire**, a period instrument orchestra which has appeared at Carnegie Hall, Madrid's Teatro Real and at the BBC Proms. The orchestra has also enjoyed eight best-selling classical albums.

This Grammy award-winning baroque conductor is in demand from orchestras around the world, and **Bach's *St John Passion*** marks her Liverpool debut. Watch Jeannette Sorrell talking about *St John Passion*.

Carine Tinney

Soprano **Carine Tinney** started her career learning piano and violin at the Douglas Academy Music School in Scotland.

She went on to study at Edinburgh Napier University under Andrew Doig and Paul Keohone, where she won the Harold Gray Prize for solo singing, and then at the University of Music in Detmold, Germany where she graduated with masters degrees in lied singing and opera.

Tinney has performed in concerts around the world, from Japan and Italy, to Canada, Germany and the United States. Concerts this season include Bach's *Magnificat* in Erfurt, Haydn's *Die Schöpfung* in Berlin and Handel's *Messiah* in Celle, Germany. She will also be artist in residence at the Trigonale Festival.

She is a member of **Sollazzo Ensemble**, and since 2016, she has enjoyed a musical partnership with Polish organist, Martin Gregorius. The pair recently released an album, **Dusk to Dawn**.

Robin Blaze

Manchester-born **Robin Blaze** studied at Leeds Grammar and Uppingham School, where he was taught by countertenor John Whitworth. Following that, Blaze became a chorister and academic clerk at Magdalen College, Oxford.

He went on to win a scholarship to the Royal College of Music, later becoming a professor of vocal studies there.

One of the foremost interpreters of Purcell, Bach and Handel, Blaze has worked with many leading conductors in the early music field, including Harry Christophers and Sir John Eliot Gardiner.

His opera engagements have included Oberon in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Arsamenes in *Xerxes* and Didymus in Handel's *Theodora* at the Glyndebourne Festival Opera.

Listen to Robin Blaze performing *Von den Stricken meiner Sünden* from *St John Passion*.

Ed Lyon

Tenor **Ed Lyon** studied at St John's College, Cambridge, where he was a choral scholar, before training at the Royal Academy of Music and the **National Opera Studio**.

He enjoys an international career performing a wide repertoire, ranging from baroque to contemporary music. Lyon has appeared at many of the world's leading venues, including the Royal Opera House Covent Garden, Glyndebourne Festival Opera, the Bayerische Staatsoper Munich, Teatro Real in Madrid, and the Aix, Edinburgh, Holland and Aldeburgh Festivals.

His roles at the Royal Opera House have included Lysander in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Hylas in Berlioz's *Les Troyens*.

Lyon's concert repertoire includes Handel's *Messiah*, Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* and Bach's *Mass in B minor*.

Roderick Williams

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra's artist in residence, **Roderick Williams**, is one of the world's foremost and most sought-after baritones.

He was a choral scholar at Magdalen College, Oxford and later became a music teacher, before changing career and studying at the Guildhall School of Music.

Williams' operatic repertoire includes Billy Budd, Don Giovanni, Figaro in *The Barber of Seville*, Onegin in *Eugene Onegin* and Albert in Massenet's *Werther*. He is also an accomplished and popular recitalist.

In 2016, he won the Royal Philharmonic Society's Singer of the Year award. Williams, who was made an OBE in 2017 for services to music, is also a composer, president of the Three Choirs Festival Society and patron of Birmingham Bach Choir.

He has sung the role of Christus in the *St John Passion* on a number of occasions, including **Peter Sellars' staging at the Royal Festival Hall** which he has described as "the most extraordinary artistic experience of my career."

Speaking about tonight's concert, he said: "I want to say how excited I am to take part in Jeannette's vision of how this is going to be."

Joshua Bloom

Australian-American bass **Joshua Bloom** studied cello, double bass and singing as a child, and was a member of Opera Australia's Young Artist Programme.

Throughout his career, Bloom has won praise for his work across a wide repertoire, ranging from Mozart to Wagner.

He has sung principal roles with companies worldwide, including New York's Metropolitan Opera, Wiener Staatsoper, Opera Australia and the English National Opera and WNO here in the UK. He also gave the world premiere of Richard Ayres' one-man opera, *The Garden*.

In concert, he has sung with some of the world's foremost orchestras including the Berlin Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, London Symphony Orchestra and Britten Sinfonia.

David Woods

Tenor **David Woods** is currently studying for a Master of Music in vocal performance at the Royal Northern College of Music.

Woods is also a Fellow of the **National Youth Choirs of Great Britain** and a choral scholar with the **Oxford Bach Soloists** as well as being in demand as a soloist with opera companies and choral societies.

His repertoire includes Mozart's *Great Mass in C minor*, Handel's *Messiah* and Bach's *St John Passion*.

Among forthcoming engagements is Bach's *Cantata No 43, Gott fähret auf mit Jauchzen*, with the Liverpool Bach Collective in Ince Blundell.

William Kyle

Lyrical baritone **William Kyle** is currently studying for a masters degree at the Royal Northern College of Music, and is the recipient of a D'Oyly Carte Opera Scholarship.

His roles while studying have included Dandini in Rossini's *La Cenerentola*, Harasta in *The Cunning Little Vixen* and Ein Musiklehrer in *Ariadne auf Naxos*. He will also make his debut with Outreach Opera this summer, playing Benoît/Alcindoro in a production of *La bohème*.

An experienced oratorio singer, his repertoire includes Handel's *Judas Maccabeus* with the Border Marches Early Music Forum, Haydn's *The Creation* and Fauré's *Requiem*.

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Choir

When the Liverpool Philharmonic Society was founded in 1840, it saw the birth not only of an orchestra, but of a chorus too.

In recent years, **the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Choir** performed Bach's *St Matthew Passion* and *Mass in B minor*, Orff's *Carmina Burana*, Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius*, Mahler's *Symphony No.2*, Rachmaninov's *Vespers*, Verdi's *Requiem*, Karl Jenkins' *Stabat Mater*, James MacMillan's *St John Passion*, *Duruflé Requiem*, Britten's *War Requiem* and Handel's *Messiah*.

The Choir has also appeared in many of the UK's major concert venues, including the Royal Albert Hall, and has sung on a number of foreign tours.

Johann Sebastian Bach

Johann Sebastian Bach was born in Eisenach in March 1685, and was the youngest son of the town musician.

Bach's musical talent was evident from an early age, and although his role as an organist and composer would define his career and legacy, it was his vocal abilities which helped him through school, and his first paid job was actually as a violinist.

Both talented and very ambitious, by 1708 Bach had secured a position as court organist and chamber musician in Weimar, where part of his role was to compose a new cantata each month.

In 1717, he had **a spell behind bars** after demanding to leave his post as Konzertmeister. When his employer, Duke Wilhelm Ernst, finally relented, Bach left for Köthen where he was made Kapellmeister by **Prince Leopold**. It was in Köthen that he created the majority of what would become known as the Brandenburg Concertos.

In 1723, Bach moved to Leipzig and the **St John Passion** was composed during his first year as director of church music there. It received its first performance during Good Friday Vespers at St Nicholas' Church in April 1724.

Bach would revise it several times over the next quarter of a century, adding several new sections.

Did you know? While the young Bach was organist at Arnstadt, he was accused of unlawfully allowing a young woman into the organ loft. That young woman was his second cousin, Maria Barbara Bach, and a year later she would become his first wife.

About The Music

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750): St John Passion

Composed: Leipzig (modern Germany), 1723-4

First Performed: April 7, 1724 (Good Friday), St Nicholas Church, Leipzig, dir. JS Bach

Johann Sebastian Bach was lucky to have been born a Lutheran. Unlike some of the other great Protestant reformers, Martin Luther not only loved music, but saw it as vital to Christian worship. It was a crucial element in his attempt to open up the Christian story to ordinary people: the Bible would be sung in German, not Latin, and in place of austere, otherworldly ritual, would be a new, more immediate kind of service, where the congregation would be so much more than passive, largely uncomprehending listeners.

Bach's *St John Passion* – the first of his two surviving settings of the Gospel story about Christ's final suffering and crucifixion – fills this brief superbly. There's something almost operatic about the way it reflects this very human drama – right from the anguished choral shouts of 'Herr' ('Lord') in the first chorus, through the tenor's shocked reaction to Peter's betrayal, and the superb 'courtroom drama' depiction of Christ's trial, right up to the ending, poised between hope and devastating loss. The alto's response to Christ's last words, 'It is finished', swings wildly between grief and exultation, and (in contrast to the *St Matthew Passion*) the chorus' beautiful lullaby-like laying of Jesus to rest is followed by a chorale which looks forward to the possibility of resurrection for everyone.

It's in the chorales that we sense how involving this musical drama would have been for Bach's congregation. Everyone would have known these hymn tunes, and they would have been able to take part in them as they meditated on the personal significance of the words, so tellingly enhanced by Bach's wonderful harmonies. Even today, nearly three hundred years after it was written, *St John Passion* can remind us that there is more to the story of Christ's suffering and death than abstract theology.