

QERDDORION
VOCAL ENSEMBLE

James John

Artistic Director

PRESENTS

*Geniuses of the
Reformation*



Friday, November 17, 2017, 8 pm

St. Paul's Episcopal Church

199 Carroll Street, Brooklyn

Sunday, November 19, 2017, 3 pm

St. Ignatius of Antioch

87th Street & West End Avenue, Manhattan

JAMES JOHN, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

JAMES JOHN is in his eighth season as Artistic Director of the Cerddorion Vocal Ensemble. He is also Professor of Conducting and Director of Choral Activities at the Aaron Copland School of Music, Queens College–CUNY, where he conducts the Queens College Choir, Vocal Ensemble, and Choral Society; and heads the graduate program in choral conducting. Under his leadership the choral program at the School of Music has become recognized as one of the finest collegiate choral programs in the region, with performances by the Queens College Choir at both the New York State School Music Association Winter Conference (2010), and the Eastern Division Conference of the American Choral Directors Association (2012).

Dr. John's guest conducting appearances include Brahms's *Requiem* and Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* with the Tokyo Oratorio Society and Oratorio Sinfonica Japan, Avery Fisher Hall's annual *Messiah* Sing-In, a concert of American choral music with the Virginia Chorale, and honor choirs throughout New York State. He has given presentations at both divisional and national conferences of the American Choral Directors Association, and is in demand as a clinician and adjudicator throughout the United States.

As a teacher and scholar, Dr. John has served as guest lecturer in conducting at the Hochschule für Musik in Freiburg, Germany, and has presented seminars on American choral music in Basel and Stockholm. His dissertation on Brahms won the Julius Herford Prize from the American Choral Directors Association, and will be published in revised form as a book by Edwin Mellen Press. From 2011-2016 he served as Editor of *American Choral Review*, published biannually by Chorus America, and he has also served as a member of ACDA's National Research and Publications Committee.

Dr. John received his Doctor of Musical Arts in Conducting from the Eastman School of Music. His prior appointments include Director of Choral Activities at both Tufts University (Boston, MA) and Nassau Community College (Garden City, NY), as well as Conducting Fellow at Dartmouth College. He received his Master of Arts in Conducting from the Aaron Copland School of Music.



DR. STEPHEN RAPP, ORGAN

Dr. Stephen Rapp is the Director of Music at the Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Bronx, New York City, and is Assistant Organist of St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City. He holds a Bachelor of Music degree and Performer's Certificate from the Eastman School of Music and Master of Music and Doctor of Musical Arts degrees from the Yale University School of Music, with certificates from the Institute of Sacred Music. He has done further study at the Hochschule für Musik in Cologne, Germany, and at the North German Organ Academy.

Dr. Rapp has been on panels for the Fulbright Selection Committee in organ and harpsichord, the Cameron Johnson Organ Competition, and American Guild of Organists' competitions, including the recorded round for the 2012 NYACOP. He is also one of the judges for the chapter's M. Louise Miller–Paul E. Knox Scholarship Competition.

Solo appearances this season include Bach harpsichord concertos and Handel organ concertos, as well as continuo performances with the American Classical Orchestra, Early Music New York, Parthenia Viol Consort, and the New Haven Symphony Orchestra. Dr. Rapp is also a member of baroque period instrument chamber groups Ensemble BREVE and Uhrovská. Among his international appearances, Dr. Rapp has performed as harpsichordist and organ soloist at the Chiquitos Early Music Festival in Bolivia. In recent seasons, he has played with the Connecticut Early Music Festival Orchestra, Orchestra New England, and ARTEK.



GENIUSES OF THE REFORMATION

PROGRAM NOTES

BY
JAMES JOHN, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Inspired by the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, our program assembles a broad range of choral works in the Lutheran tradition. The event that is commonly held as the start of the Reformation was Martin Luther's posting of his *Ninety-five Theses* or *Disputation on the Power of Indulgences* on the door of All Saints' Church in Wittenberg, Germany on October 31, 1517. Luther placed great value on music's role in the liturgy, and this fact perhaps more than any other led to the overwhelming wealth of music that was to grow out of his split from Roman Catholicism, now half a millennium old.

Our program commences chronologically, beginning with Josquin des Prez—whose life essentially pre-dates the Reformation but who was known to be one of Martin Luther's favorite composers—and ending with Heinrich Schütz, master of the early German Baroque. In between we present music by Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck, whose *oeuvre* reflects the Reformation's influence in the Netherlands and France, where Calvinism gradually took hold throughout the sixteenth century.

The second half of our program jumps to the twentieth century with Hugo Distler, and moves backwards in time through Johannes Brahms to J.S. Bach. Distler struggled to revitalize Protestant church music in Nazi Germany; Brahms probed for an answer to how his sacred music fit within an increasingly secular society; Bach stands at the summit of the Lutheran musical tradition, in a world untouched by modern-day existentialism—and it is with his genius that our performance culminates.

Josquin des Prez, *Memor esto verbi tui servo tuo*

Every so often a great artist emerges who is able to assimilate the style and musical language of his predecessors, while at the same time pushing the boundaries of possibility into new areas of self-expression. Beethoven was one such musician; Josquin des Prez (c. 1450-1521) was a similar “giant” of the Renaissance. Born near the border of Belgium and France, he is the most famous in a line of Franco-Flemish composers that includes luminaries such as Guillaume Dufay, Johannes Ockeghem, Jacob Obrecht and Heinrich Isaac. Josquin's gift for tightly knit musical construction is nearly unmatched; he created a new level of motivic and thematic unity within his compositions while also displaying unprecedented sensitivity to the text. Though most of the composer's life precedes the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther (1483-1546) revered him as “Master of the notes,

Unique among Josquin's works, the motet *Memor esto verbi tui servo tuo* is associated with a specific anecdote, passed down by the sixteenth-century music theorist Heinrich Glarean (1488-1563): “Louis XII, the French king, had promised him [Josquin] some benefice, but when the promises remained unfulfilled, as is wont to happen in courts of kings, Josquin was thereupon aroused and composed the Psalm *Memor esto verbi tui servo tuo* [“Be thou mindful of thy word to thy servant”] with such majesty and elegance that, when it was brought to the college of singers and then examined with strict justice, it was admired by everyone. The king, filled with shame, did not dare to defer the promise any longer, and discharged the favor which he had promised.”

Memor esto verbi tui servo tuo,
in quo mihi spem dedisti.
Haec me consolata est in humilitate mea,
quia eloquium tuum vivificavit me.
Superbi inique agebant usquequaque;
a lege autem tua non declinavi.
Memor fui judiciorum tuorum a saeculo,
Domine, et consolatus sum.
Defectio tenuit me, pro peccatoribus
derelinquentibus legem tuam.
Cantabiles mihi erant justificationes tuae
in loco peregrinationis meae.
Memor fui nocte nominis tui, Domine,
et custodivi legem tuam. Haec facta est mihi,
quia justificationes tuas exquisivi.

Portio mea, Domine,
dixi custodire legem tuam.
Deprecatus sum faciem tuam
in toto corde meo; miserere mei
secundum eloquium tuum.
Cogitavi vias meas, et converti
pedes meos in testimonia tua.
Paratus sum, et non sum turbatus,
ut custodiam mandata tua.
Funes peccatorum circumplexi sunt me,
et legem tuam non sum oblitus.
Media nocte surgebam ad confitendum tibi,
super iudicia justificationis tuae.
Particeps ego sum omnium timentium te,
et custodientium mandata tua.
Misericordia tua, Domine, plena est terra;
justificationes tuas doce me.
Gloria patri, et filio, et spiritui sancto.
Memor esto verbi tui servo tuo,
in quo mihi spem dedisti.

Be thou mindful of thy word to thy servant,
in which thou hast given me hope.
This hath comforted me in my humiliation:
because thy word hath enlivened me.
The proud did iniquitously altogether:
but I declined not from thy law.
I remembered thy judgments of old,
O Lord, and I was comforted.
A fainting hath taken hold of me,
because of the wicked that forsake thy law.
Thy justifications were the subject of my song,
in the place of my pilgrimage.
In the night I have remembered thy name,
O Lord: and have kept thy law. This happened to me:
because I sought after thy justifications.

O Lord, my portion,
I have said I would keep the law.
I entreated thy face
with all my heart: have mercy on me
according to thy word.
I have thought on my ways:
and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.
I am ready, and am not troubled:
that I may keep thy commandments.
The cords of the wicked have encompassed me:
but I have not forgotten thy law.
I rose at midnight to give praise to thee;
for the judgments of thy justification.
I am a partaker with all them that fear thee,
and that keep thy commandments.
The earth, O Lord, is full of thy mercy:
teach me thy justifications.
Glory be to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
Be thou mindful of thy word to thy servant,
in which thou hast given me hope.

Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck, *Pseaume 150*

The tumult caused by the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century changed the course of history and was a driving force behind the creation of new styles and genres of sacred music. Congregational singing assumed a great deal of importance, and for that purpose, the French theologian John Calvin oversaw the preparation of the Genevan Psalter, published in 1542—a collection of all 150 psalms translated into the vernacular, with tunes compiled and arranged by the composer/theorist Louis Bourgeois. The Dutch composer Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck (1562-1621), who spent his entire career in Amsterdam, made setting the Psalter to music a lifelong project. Between 1604 and 1621 he published six volumes of psalms that have been called “A monument of Netherlandish music unequalled in the sphere of sacred polyphony.”

Sweelinck’s setting of *Psalm 150*, for double choir, appeared in 1614. It is based closely on the original Psalter melody, which, phrase-by-phrase, is passed back and forth between voices in a quasi-improvisatory style, organized into three large musical sections. The composer’s brilliant organ improvisations (which earned him the nickname “Orpheus of Amsterdam”) clearly left an imprint on the virtuosic vocal writing. Sweelinck also takes advantage of abundant opportunities for word painting, in particular with charming portrayals of the harp, tabor (drum), fife and cymbals.

Or soit loué l'Eternel
de son saint lieu supernel:
Soit di-je, tout hautement,
Loué de ce firmament
Plein de sa magnificence.
Louez-le, tous ses grands faicts
Soit loué de tant d'effects,
Tesmoins de son excellence.

Soit ioint avecques la voix,
Le plaisant son de haut-bois,
Psalterions à leur tour,
Et la harpe et le tabour.
Haut sa louange resonnent
Phifres esclattent leur ton,
Orgues, musettes, & bourdon
un accord son los entonnent.

Praise ye the Lord.
Praise God in his sanctuary:
Praise him, most high,
Praise him in the firmament
full of his magnificence.
Praise him for his mighty acts:
Praise him according to
His excellent greatness.

Praise him with the voice,
With the sound of the oboe,
Praise him with the psaltery
And with the harp and tabor.
His praise resounds on high
With fifes and their bursting tone,
Praise him in one accord with
Organs, bagpipes and drones.

Soit le los de sa bonté
Sur les cimbales chanté
Qui de leur son argentin
Son nom sans cesse & sans fin,
Facent retentir et bruire.
Bref, tout ce qui a pouvoir
De souffler & se mouvoir,
Chante à iamais son empire.

Praise his goodness
On the singing cymbals
Who with their silvery sound
Ceaselessly and without end
Make brilliant sound.
In short, everything that has power
To blow and to move,
Sing at once to his majesty.

Heinrich Schütz, Two motets from *Geistliche Chormusik* (1648)

Ich bin eine rufende Stimme, SWV 383

Selig sind die Toten, SWV 391

Born one hundred years before J.S. Bach, Heinrich Schütz (1585-1672) was one of the most influential figures of the early German Baroque. He traveled to Venice twice during his long career: from 1609 to 1612 to study with Giovanni Gabrieli, and in 1629 to meet Claudio Monteverdi. The fruits of his first sojourn included a book of nineteen Italian madrigals (required of him by his teacher), which became Schütz’s first published works.

In 1615, shortly after returning from Italy, Schütz was appointed court composer in Dresden, where he remained for the rest of his life. *Geistliche Chormusik* (“Sacred Choral Music”), completed in 1648, is a volume of twenty-nine motets dedicated to the city council of Leipzig and the choir of St. Thomas Church (where Bach served as Cantor seventy-five years later). In the collection’s preface Schütz explains that he attempted to create a series of works demonstrating the rigors of strict counterpoint, without the need for *basso continuo* (the addition of a bass instrument together with organ or harpsichord to fill in the harmonies), which by that time had become standard practice. The pieces contained in *Geistliche Chormusik* are therefore written in an ‘old style’ (referred to as ‘stile antico’), which Schütz was immersed in as a student of Gabrieli. They reflect the composer’s remarkable assimilation of Italian style into Protestant church music, and as “Ich bin eine rufende Stimme” and “Selig sind die Toten” demonstrate, Schütz’s great gift for word painting and innate contrapuntal skill permeate every line. These elements of his style had a profound influence on the choral writing of both Distler and Brahms, as you will hear on the second half of our program in the motets *Singet dem Herrn* and *Warum ist das Licht gegeben?*

Ich bin eine rufende Stimme

Ich bin eine rufende Stimme
in der Wüsten:
Richtet den Weg des Herren.
Ich taufe mit Wasser,
aber er ist mitten unter euch getreten,
den ihr nicht kennet.
Der ist's der nach mir kommen wird,
welcher vor mir gewesen ist,
des ich nicht wert bin,
daß ich seine Schuriemen auflöse.

I am the voice of one crying
in the wilderness,
Make straight the way of the Lord,
I baptize with water:
but there standeth one among you,
whom ye know not;
He it is, who coming after me
is preferred before me,
whose shoe's latchet I am not
worthy to unloose.

Selig sind die Toten

Selig sind die Toten,
die in dem Herren sterben,
von nun an.
Ja der Geist spricht:
Sie ruhen von ihrer Arbeit
und ihre Werke folgen ihnen nach.

Blessed are the dead,
that die in the Lord
from now on.
Yea, the Spirit speaks:
they rest from their labors
and their works follow them.

Hugo Distler, *Singet dem Herrn* (Op. 12, No. 1)

Hugo Distler (1908-1942) was a church musician, composer, organist and choral conductor who taught at several conservatories and schools of music throughout Germany, most notably at the Staatliche Akademische Hochschule für Musik in Berlin, where he succeeded the well known teacher Kurt Thomas in 1940. Distler sought to return Protestant church music to its roots in the early Baroque, and left behind an *oeuvre* that consists primarily of sacred choral pieces. Influenced in particular by Heinrich Schütz, his own personal style reflects intense devotion to expressive text setting, incorporating the use of 'modern' dissonance (often based on quartal harmonies) within an essentially tonal framework. "Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied" is the first motet from Distler's *Geistliche Chormusik* ("Sacred Choral Music"), Op. 12, inspired by Schütz's collection of works with the same title.

Unfortunately, Distler lived in Germany at one of the most tumultuous times in modern history. When the Nazis assumed power in 1933 he initially hoped that they would support church music reform, and thus joined the NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers' Party). Distler's expectations were soon dashed, however, when in 1938 his music came under threat of being labeled 'degenerate art.' Personal and political pressures continued to increase until, at the peak of the war in Berlin, he committed suicide at the age of thirty-four: "it appears that he saw the futility of attempting to serve both God and Nazis, and came to terms with his own conscience unequivocally."

Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied,
denn er tut Wunder!
Und er sieget mit seiner Rechten.
Jauchzt dem Herrn alle Welt!
Singet, rühmet, und lobet,
Lobet dem Herren
mit Harfen und mit Psalter
und mit Trompeten und Posaunen!
Das Meer erbrause, und was darinnen ist,
der Erdboden,
und die darauf wohnen,
die Wasserströme frohlocken,
und alle Berge seien fröhlich
vor dem Herrn!
Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied!
Singet, rühmet und lobet!

Sing to the Lord a new song,
For He works wonders!
And He conquers with His right hand.
Let the whole world rejoice in the Lord!
Sing, glorify, and praise,
Praise the Lord
with harps and psaltery
And with trumpets and trombones!
May the sea roar, and whatever is in it,
The foundation of the earth,
and those that live upon it,
May the floods celebrate
And all the hills be joyful
before the Lord!
Sing to the Lord a new song!
Sing, glorify, and praise!

Johannes Brahms, *Warum ist das Licht gegeben?* (Op. 74, No. 1)

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) published the unaccompanied motet *Warum ist das Licht gegeben?* (Op. 74, No. 1) in 1878, not long after the premiere of his Second Symphony, Op. 73. Often viewed as Brahms's most cheerful symphonic work, it is puzzling that the composer described it to his publisher as "so melancholy that you will not be able to bear it. I have never written anything so sad, and the score must come out in mourning." Brahms had a habit of making cryptic statements, though this one is indicative of a darkening in mood that gradually begins to suffuse the music of his later period. No piece hails this shift more clearly than the motet we are performing this evening.

As with *Ein deutsches Requiem*, Brahms assembled his own texts from the Bible, relying heavily on the Book of Job for the first movement. Though it has been suggested that the piece was inspired by the tragic loss of Brahms's colleague Hermann Goetz (who died of tuberculosis in 1876), no specific occasion can be cited as the catalyst for its composition. Brahms fashioned a substantial portion of the musical material from an earlier, unpublished Canon Mass (WoO 18; 1856), perhaps because its jagged, chromatic fugue subject seems uncannily suited to the bleak, almost desperate first line of text, "Why is Light given to those in misery?" At the opening, Brahms sets this question in stark relief as an anguished refrain—"Why?"—that returns as a structural pillar throughout the first movement. For the second and third movements (also based on material from the earlier Mass), the composer turns to texts from the New Testament that refer back to Job, providing a measure of solace in the image of a compassionate and merciful God. The final movement is a four-part harmonization of Martin Luther's famous chorale, "Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin" ("In peace and joy I now depart"), written in the style of J.S. Bach. This is perhaps the most interesting and controversial aspect of the work.

Brahms dedicated *Warum?* to his friend Phillip Spitta, one of the 19th century's most famous Bach scholars, suggesting an homage to this cultural icon of German music. The composer later tried to withdraw the dedication, however, fearing that it might be perceived as "pretentious," or that unfavorable comparisons might be drawn. He wrote to his friend and publisher Fritz Simrock, "I would very much like to leave the dedication out, it really looks arrogant with motets," and later, "Were I to dedicate motets to the music scholar and Bach biographer, it looks as though I think that I can create something special and exemplary in the genre." Despite Brahms's protestations, Simrock let the inscription stand.

One commonly held view is that through this motet Brahms was attempting to find his place within the German Protestant tradition, albeit in a much more secularized world (there is no mention of Christ in the work, which would have been unthinkable in Bach's day). Brahms's motivation may have run deeper, however. The Brahms scholar Daniel Beller-McKenna has perceptively written that *Warum?* is an intensely personal statement by a composer partially consumed with self-doubt. By juxtaposing the figures of Job and Bach at either end of the motet, Brahms is ardently questioning a musical-religious tradition that had in large part lost the core of its meaning in 19th century liberal, intellectual circles.

Warum ist das Licht gegeben?, Op. 74, no. 1

Why is Light Given?

1. (Job 3: 20-23)

Warum ist Licht gegeben dem Mühseligen, und das Leben den betrübten Herzen (die des Todes warten und kommt nicht, und grüben ihn wohl aus dem Verborgenen, die sich fast freuen und sind fröhlich, daß sie das Grab bekommen), Und dem Manne, des Weg verborgen ist, und Gott vor ihm denselben bedeckt?	Why is light given to those in misery, and life to afflicted souls (to those who wait for death, and it comes not; who dig for it secretly, who nearly rejoice and are glad that they have found the grave), and to the one whose way is hidden and from whom God has hidden himself?
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2. (Lamentations 3: 41)

Lasset uns unser Herz samt den Händen aufheben zu Gott im Himmel.	Let us lift up our hearts and our hands to God in heaven.
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3. (James 5: 11)

Siehe, wir preisen selig, die erduldet haben. Die Geduld Hiob habt ihr gehört, und das Ende des Herrn habt ihr gesehen; denn der Herr ist barmherzig und ein Erbarmer!	Behold, we call them blessed, those who have endured. You have heard of the patience of Job and you have seen the purpose of the Lord; for the Lord is compassionate, and a merciful God.
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4. (Martin Luther)

Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin In Gottes Willen, Getrost ist mir mein Herz und Sinn, Sanft und stille. Wie Gott mir verheißten hat: Der Tod ist mein Schlaf geworden.	In peace and joy I depart, according to God's will; my heart and mind are comforted, calm, and still. As God has promised me, death has become my sleep.
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J.S. Bach, *Der Geist hilft unser Schwachheit auf*, BWV 226

Only five motets by J.S. Bach (1685-1750) are of undisputed authenticity, and none are linked to the rigorous weekly schedule of the church year for which Bach wrote more than two hundred cantatas as Cantor of the Thomasschule in Leipzig—his final and most noteworthy appointment, held from 1723 onward. Bach's motets were composed for special occasions (primarily funerals or memorial services), and aside from being far fewer in number than the cantatas, they are also purely choral, containing no solo arias, recitatives, or obbligato instruments, and requiring no orchestral forces.

Der Geist hilft unser Schwachheit auf is unique in that it is the only motet for which the specific occasion of composition is known: the funeral in October 1729 of Johann Heinrich Ernesti, Rector of the Thomasschule, who was Bach's direct supervisor. Despite the solemnity of this event, the music is resoundingly joyful and life affirming. There are three short, continuous movements, the first a spirited double chorus that begins in triple meter, the second an exuberant four-part fugue, and the third a heartening chorale by Martin Luther.

1. Double Chorus (Romans 8: 26)

Der Geist hilft unser Schwachheit auf,
denn wir wissen nicht,
was wir beten sollen,
wie sich's gebühret;
sondern der Geist selbst
vertritt uns aufs beste
mit unaussprechlichem Seufzen.

The Spirit helps our weakness,
for we know not
hat we should pray,
nor how we ought to pray;
but the Spirit
pleads for us in the best possible way
With inexpressible sighing.

2. Chorus (Romans 8: 27)

Der aber die Herzen forschet,
der weiß, was des Geistes Sinn sei,
denn er vertritt die Heiligen
nach dem, das Gott gefället.

But he who searches our hearts
knows the mind and thinking of the Spirit;
for the Sprit intercedes for the saints,
according to God's pleasure.

3. Chorale (Martin Luther)

Du heilige Brunst, süßer Trost,
Nun hilft uns fröhlich und getrost
In dein'm Dienst beständig bleiben,
Die Trübsal uns nicht abtreiben!
O Herr, durch dein Kraft uns bereit
Und stärk des Fleisches Blödigkeit,
Daß wir hier ritterlich ringen,
Durch Tod und Leben zu dir dringen.
Hallelujah, hallelujah!

You holy fire, sweet consolation,
Now help us, joyful and consoled,
To remain steadfast in your service;
Let affliction not drive us away.
O Lord, prepare us by your power
And strengthen our feeble flesh,
So that we here may gallantly struggle
Through death and life to reach you.
Hallelujah, Hallelujah!

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The members of Cerddorion are grateful to James Kennerley and the Church of Saint Ignatius of Antioch for providing rehearsal and performance space for this season. Thanks also to Vince Peterson and St. Paul's Episcopal Church for providing a performance space for this season.

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