

# BACH NOTES

The Journal of the London Bach Society Autumn 2016 Edition



## LBS CELEBRATES LANDMARK 70TH

### Editorial:

On the face of it, founding a Society devoted to Germany's greatest composer might not have ticked many boxes in 1946. The effects of a six-year war in Europe were still being felt; buildings lay in rubble. The political situation was still very precarious too. Germany was divided; the capital Berlin was isolated within the eastern, communist half and was soon to be sub-divided into sectors - French, US, British and Soviet. Entry to Eastern Germany in which the precious places of Bachian importance were located was via military checkpoints and here in the UK, the language was still regarded as an enemy tongue. In Britain however, people were starting to pick up the pieces of their lives. In the words of the song it was time to '*pick yourself up, dust yourself off and start all over again*'. Against this background Paul Steinitz founded his (South) London Bach Society on 7 November 1946. Indeed, the green shoots of recovery were sprouting all around. New symphony orchestras were beginning; the BBC Third Programme was launched. Arts Council was formed. Plans were soon laid for a Festival of Britain and the opening of the Royal Festival Hall in 1951, giving clear expression that a new age had truly arrived. LBS quickly became part of that era of renewal simply by being....and through this, also of reconciliation.

### From phone boxes to mobiles... and don't mention the heating!

The LBS's<sup>1</sup> central purpose in 1946 was to '*get back to Bach in its original form*'. Was the time ripe? Paul obviously thought so and his instinct that '*nothing*

*ventured, nothing gained*' was the inner dynamo. The rest is history, but the environment in which the LBS has worked over successive decades is also cause for reflection, not just in musical terms but in practical ones too. Moving the ton weight kneelers in St Bart's to make way for more audience seating, slinging portable lights high-up across the nave, installing makeshift rostra to seat the choir and packing in eager Bach Passion attendees to fill every nook and cranny of this most spiritual setting, would turn the hair of Health & Safety officials white today.

Where now we have mobile phones to help us deal with last minute artist cancellations or other such emergencies, I can well remember either getting on my knees (not literally you understand) to a church secretary for use of the office phone or hoping that the phone box outside was working!! Don't mention the heating! Where once we scouted for spare meters or ensured we were given sufficient parking permits at the South Bank, we live in hopes now that the public and air transport systems are working properly so that the musicians we have engaged return from that one-off concert the night before in Amsterdam or Paris in time to come straight to our rehearsals. Was LBS life easier in earlier days? Not really. No suitable modern concert halls existed until the 1960s<sup>2</sup> and there were less informed audiences too especially for Bach sung in German. Is our life easier practically today? No, just different... in direction, financing, outlook, expectation. But I prefer to think of it as '*building upon our legacy*'. The joy and beauty of Bach's music stays exactly the same.

**Margaret Steinitz (Artistic Director)**



Amici Voices who join LBS to celebrate 70th on 7 November

**For the full Bachfest Programme visit [www.bachlive.co.uk](http://www.bachlive.co.uk)**

<sup>1</sup> "South" was dropped from the title in 1952

<sup>2</sup> Queen Elizabeth Hall opened in 1967

## Bachfest 2016 (4-11 Nov) "Introducing Mr Bach!"

Performances in the congenial surroundings of St John's Smith Square have been a feature in the LBS diary ever since the church's restoration and opening as a concert hall in 1969. Indeed, when the original church was being built (1714-1728) Bach was busy penning some of his most significant works that now grace the programmes of the many groups who appear there. Numerous LBS Bach cantata programmes for BBC Radio 3 have been recorded there and Bachfest concerts are a regular. Once again, this major hall will provide the setting for two concerts in the LBS's 26th annual Bachfest that this year celebrates the Society's anniversary year.

### Musician? Yes! Honourable citizen? Certainly! (4 Nov)

To introduce our opening concert, by 1721 Bach's position at the Cöthen court<sup>3</sup> had become less agreeable, the year when he presented his set of six magnificent concertos to the Margrave of Brandenburg, complete with gushing dedication. Nothing doing at the Margrave's employ, so it was off to Leipzig in 1723, pastures new, and an ideal environment to release the rich vein of musical creativity as church musician and loyal servant without which we would have no cause to exist today!

Bach's rich powers of creativity in his birthday cantata BWV 206 "*Schleicht, spielende Wellen und murmelt gelinde*" (Glide, O sparkling waves and murmur gently) flowed from his pen as fulsomely as the waters of the four majestic Saxon rivers - Weichsel, Elbe, Donau and Pleisse<sup>4</sup> - that he features in order to convey suitably adulatory sentiments in celebration of the Birthday of King August III, complete with trumpets and drums. Dated 1734, with a rich orchestration and comprising 11 movements to a text probably by Picander, it was performed at Leipzig on 7 October 1736 at Zimmermann's. The congratulatory (secular) cantatas composed to absurd texts in honour of the Royal Saxon House, in homage to civic personages and distinguished academics also provided timely diplomatic vehicles... and didn't do Bach any harm either! This delicious cantata that includes an aria for three flutes, unique in the cantatas,



Mireille Lebel (pictured).

### In the footsteps of Bach (7 Nov)

Presenting the LBS today is the overriding aim of our celebration evening that takes place on the same date as the Society was founded in 1946. The programme is inspired by the Services and Concerts Bach devised and presented in his own time. Latest research has revealed that Bach included a variety of genres, combining cantatas and instrumental music with organ works, as the pitches of the new organs being built in Saxony in the first half of the 18th century were reconciled.



Violinist Jane Gordon, playing unaccompanied Bach and directing on 7 November

Steinitz Bach Players will be joined by a showcase of new talent and supporting William Whitehead's innovative Orgelbüchlein Project with the commissioning of a chorale prelude "*Wo soll ich fliehen hin*" (Whither shall I fly) from leading composer, Diana Burrell.

One of Bach's best-loved solo cantatas is "*Vergnügte Ruh' beliebte Seelenlust*" (Delightful peace, desire beloved of souls) BWV 170<sup>5</sup>. This will be sung by mezzo soprano Anna Harvey who won the 5th Bach Singers Prize in 2015<sup>6</sup>. We are also introducing a new vocal consort, Amici Voices, who will perform the motet that was the first Bach choral work to be sung in Britain in a performance directed by the 19th century champion of Bach's music, Samuel Wesley (pictured), whose 250th anniversary falls this year.



Diana Burrell



The motet "*Jesu, meine Freude*" BWV 227 also featured in the LBS choir's inaugural recitals in June 1947, so there is a double reason to include it for our 70th.

No anniversary evening would be complete without a mémoire or two. Hon. Patron Ian Partridge and oboist Anthony Robson are among those who will contribute these, and the entire company, including the

audience, will be invited to take part in the singing and playing of a much-loved chorale.

Come and join us! We look forward to welcoming guests, past and present members, musicians joining the audience to open a new chapter and a future full of good things.

### Society of Strange and Ancient Instruments (8 Nov)

An early pioneer of period instruments, LBS is delighted to welcome SSAI in an engaging programme (8 Nov) that features some less familiar instruments from their own exotic collection. Viola d'amore, viola da gamba and other less familiar instruments feature in many of



Bach's works and will be included in this concert with delicious musical miniatures by Bach, Vivaldi, Rameau and Couperin, among others, and some enlightening narration to entertain you in this special edition of the LBS Bachfest. SSAI is fast becoming a major attraction for festivals with its engaging programmes and imaginative presentations.

[www.strangeandancientinstruments.com](http://www.strangeandancientinstruments.com)

<sup>3</sup> 1717-1723

<sup>4</sup> Weichsel (Vistula in Poland), Donau (Danube)

<sup>5</sup> For 6th Sunday after Trinity, July 1726. Text by Lehms

<sup>6</sup> The 6th competition is in 2017

## Bach Club @ China Exchange (11 Nov)

CHINA  
EXCHANGE  
中国站

**B**ach and China are not as far away from each other as you might think! The combination inspired our St James' Palace Royal Gala in 2000 organised by LBS President and donor

Sir David Tang (pictured below) and it was the Chinese who invented mean temperament. Well, Sir David's latest brainchild is the new Chinese Cultural Centre, China Exchange, in the heart of London's Chinatown and that's where we shall be for our Bachfest edition of the Bach Club on Friday 11 November.

The Club's ethos is inspired by Bach's Friday evening concerts at Zimmermann's Coffee House where his students' musical society performed the music of the day, gossip was exchanged and no doubt the punters engaged in heated debate on the musical issues arising. It was a different environment for JSB. It is a different environment for our Bach Club this year, a showcase of contemporary talent in the



informal atmosphere of Tang's imaginative creation. So far Chinese-born pianist **Ke Ma** playing a Bach Partita and German-born virtuoso recorder player

**Tabea Debus** are on the bill, with the full programme posted on our website. Exciting!

**LBS Bachfest  
4-11 November 2016  
www.bachlive.co.uk**

### Steinitz Bach Players Period-style playing? Now, there's a novelty!

**W**hen Paul Steinitz founded his orchestra in 1968, it was a logical step and the London Bach Society's profile and purpose was raised as a consequence. It was a statement of considerable intent in the enhancement of modern Bach scholarship in 'live' performances. The ability to hand-pick his players, not only to encourage those equally curious as to how Bach's music might have sounded originally but to encourage more to become so, was a luxury he relished. Period instrument seeds had been planted by him earlier in the decade with the first appearance in modern times of the clarino trumpet in 1962 played by two German trumpeters and our own Philip Jones.<sup>7</sup> Later came the cornett, sackbut and baroque flute. In this we empathised with Leonhardt and Harnoncourt in continental Europe. However, the ability here to field a full team of period instrumentalists in Bach performances was still a decade away.

### Gottfried Reiche, Bach's trumpeter holding a clarino trumpet. Haussmann, Leipzig pre-1734<sup>8</sup>

The original founder members were violinist Alan Loveday, violist Duncan Druce, oboist Tess Miller, cellist Jennifer Ward Clarke, trumpeter Michael Laird and viola da gamba player Adam Skeaping. In the ranks of the fiddles at the SBP's debut in December 1968



was a young violinist called Catherine Mackintosh<sup>9</sup>. They performed on 'modern' instruments at concert pitch<sup>10</sup> as opposed to the period ones used later at low pitch, mostly A=415 Hz. The aim was to promote a style of playing, heightening the dance element that pervades Bach's music by light upbeats and brisk tempi, complementing the singing style of the Society's choir (1947-1989). An early priority was to implement radical change in the performance of *secco* recitatives in Bach's Passions and Cantatas. It was all novel; an introduction to the new sound world that would first confound, then fascinate and finally be accepted. More importantly, it was further evidence that a major development in the performance of Early Music was bubbling nicely. That's how the SBP started and why.



### SBP today

**Leader and Violinist Rodolfo Richter, directing at Bachfest on 4 November**

Those founding principles and practices prevail nearly a half-century later, after years of concerts many of which have been broadcast by BBC Radio 3, series of Bach cantata programmes to bring this treasury into the lives of modern audiences on a bigger scale, tours and festival appearances. The personnel engaged are a Who's Who among players, many having been given their debuts on period instruments - **Anthony Robson** and **Rachel Beckett** among them. The orchestra manager is the experienced **Philippa Brownsword**, whose capacity to cope with multi orchestra set-ups in one evening and ensure everyone is in the right place at the right time with the right music is just one of her many gifts we value. She also books the players for each concert.

Today the orchestra continues to flourish as resident at the annual Bachfest<sup>11</sup>. The absence of a permanent director creates flexibility and has brought, among others, the late, legendary Gustav Leonhardt to our platform. More concerts are self-directed and over 60 cantatas have been performed. The UK 'live' première of a newly discovered Bach Aria was given in 2005 and the UK 'live' première of the early version of Bach's *Matthäus-Passion* (1727) performed in 2013. The SBP joined Leipzig's Thomanerchor on their UK debut tour<sup>12</sup> in 1994, the first time this famous boys' choir, whose Cantor from 1723-1750 was none other than Bach himself, had performed a Bach Passion using period instruments since the 18th century - a truly memorable experience that lives on and the perfect expression of Anglo-German reconciliation. 'Live' performances are the zenith for any artist in every particular and a life-enhancing experience for audiences that we intend to continue.

**MS**

<sup>7</sup> July 1962, City of London Festival, LBS Choir, English Chamber Orchestra/Steinitz  
<sup>8</sup> The replica instrument introduced by Steinitz in 1962 can be viewed at the LBS Exhibit, Royal Academy of Music, Sept'16-Feb'17

<sup>9</sup> Later leader of Academy of Ancient Music among others

<sup>10</sup> A=440 Hz

<sup>11</sup> Founded in 1990

<sup>12</sup> Promoted by London Bach Society

## LBS Choir 1947-1989

### No ordinary choir

A celebration of the Society's 70th anniversary would not be complete without a tribute to the Society's original choir, one that richly served the artistic purpose until its disbanding in the wake of modern Bach scholarship in 1989. Members came and went over the years; what they achieved however is forever enshrined in our history.

This was no ordinary choir. It's example on the musical scene later inspired Roger Norrington's Schutz Choir in 1962 and John Eliot Gardiner's Monteverdi Choir in 1964, with members common to both at one time, and it helped to move the enhancement of scholarship in performance to a new level, which is why the LBS choir was formed in the first place. Entry was strictly by audition and the singers had to negotiate that sight-reading test (a real brute of a piece which we still have somewhere). Rehearsals were obligatory, unless there were extenuating circumstances. However, that was the price they paid for their success and the quality of their annual diary that required them to live up to expectations and deliver. It became a way of life.

The choir enjoyed a privileged existence, working with great artists and appearing on some stellar platforms including Leipzig's Thomaskirche and New York's Carnegie Hall via the South Bank and BBC Studio among others. They worked hard, took part in some major Bach projects, negotiated patches of concentrated engagements and juggled these with their professional and home lives.



**The legendary mezzo soprano Dame Janet Baker appeared with Paul Steinitz and the LBS throughout her career.**

Some singers were also Paul Steinitz's students. Organist Simon Preston has spoken of his enjoyment of singing among the basses in Cantata 50 while studying at the Royal Academy of Music; composer Cornelius Cardew was roped in to write out the continuo part for

some of the Bach motets and many a visiting American choral conductor spent a year in the choir. Extra frisson was created when commissioned composers came to rehearsals, getting the choir to shrug off their inhibitions when singing in Zulu or respond to a particular bit of Tavener musical invention...and there were always the cantatas and passions that inspired invitations to festivals, BBC recordings and tours, including a treasured British Council supported appearance in Bach's Leipzig church with the SBP in 1983, Martin Luther Year.

However, with the completion of the Bach cantata cycle (1958-1987) on the horizon and the march of Bach scholarship during the 1980s, there inevitably came a time when the format of the choir would have to be reassessed. Paul had long been contemplating this. Sadly, he did not live to fulfil his plans<sup>13</sup>. In charting the way forward, the only course open was to stay true to the Society's artistic purpose. Thus, after 42 magnificent years, the amateur choir was disbanded in 1989. **MS**

## BACH GOES WEST

### Peter Smail reports on the American Bach Society Conference in April 2016

The 2016 biennial Conference of the **American Bach Society** took place in the splendid Midwest campus of the University of Notre Dame. With the winds coursing over the Great Lakes, snow fell even in mid-April; but little affecting the warmly ecumenical atmosphere. All was in concurrence with the working title, "*J.S. Bach and the Confessional Landscape of his Time*". The recent creation of a magnificent chapel-like performance space at Notre Dame dedicated to reproducing the North German organ tradition of Arp Schnitger (1648-1719) embodied the bridging of the confessional divide by music in our time: a Protestant artefact in a Roman Catholic institution. But what of the tensions in Bach's generation?

The keynote speech opened with the tension *inside* reformed Christianity. The historian, **Professor Mark Noll**, speculated on the visit of the English protestant, John Wesley (1703-91), to Leipzig in 1738. Drawing on little-known writings from this co-founder of the evangelical movement which arose in the Church of England, a powerful case was made that John Wesley would have admired the Pietist sentiment at work in Bach's Leipzig, but detested the distractions of formal music - had he set foot in the Thomaskirche. This perspective, founded on Wesley's multipoint tract on singing and worship, and his dislike of non-congregational "art music," revealed that both Lutheranism and Anglicanism were experiencing internal division in which the role of music in worship was unstable.

The Bach-Archiv Leipzig continued their tradition of attendance, participation and revelation at international events. Leading on from the 2014 discovery of the Cantata librettist Christoph Birkmann, **Christine Blanken** has followed the trail of his Leipzig circle. She was able to reveal in outline that a supportive Bach fan club within Leipzig University, including Bach's great defender in the aesthetic dispute of 1737-39, Birnbaum, had already formed in the 1720's.

The Blanken study follows from a project to explore Bach's pupils; sleuth **Michael Maul** has in addition started to look at the musicians and performers. In Bach's Weimar period, it transpires that the highest-paid Court tenor, Tezelinus Aiblinger, was in fact one of a duo of escaped monks. By reason of an epidemic around the Heiligenkreuz monastery near Vienna, they had gone to visit Rome and subsequently absconded, horrified "at the decadent excesses of the Eternal City". At any rate, that was the propaganda put about by Bach's pious master, Duke Wilhelm Ernst of Saxe-Weimar. Paid over double Bach's salary, the timings suggest that Aiblinger, the Catholic convert, would have sung the tenor part in the *Reformation Cantata* BWV80!

Historically-informed performance, as exemplified by a delightful concert at Notre Dame of sacred music by Bach' predecessor Sebastian Knüpfer, has become the norm for Baroque realisations. But can we ever achieve a historically-informed audience? **Michael Marissen** touched on the subtle underplay of hermeneutic meaning in the orchestrations, keys and rhythm of Bach's sacred output, allusions known to the eighteenth century mind but obscured to ours. **Ruth Tatlow**, fresh from the success of

/Continued overleaf

<sup>13</sup> Paul Steinitz 25 August 1909 - 21 April 1988

## Peter Smail

her book, "Bach's Numbers," revealed that the same proportionate techniques for structuring precise bar allocations within compositional sections had been later deployed in C P E Bach's *Magnificat* Wq 215, in line with Baroque conceptions of heavenly symmetry and divine order. Meanwhile, the often-neglected Cantata texts were shown by **Derek Stauff** to be susceptible to revised meanings (compared to translations in our day) by looking at dictionaries contemporary to Bach, and where the senses of words have subsequently changed.

These, and an array of other fresh insights, reveal to participants in Bach gatherings a continuing buoyancy of discovery and interpretation. Certainly Johann Sebastian Bach writes (as he sets out in the superscription of the *Orgel-Büchlein* BWV 599-644) for the Glory of God, but also the edification of his neighbour. The continuing search for a greater understanding of Bach's world enables us to be better latter-day neighbours. This event continued the process, by delving further and deeper into the bygone world in which Bach's perennially valued masterpieces were formed.

## Bachfest Leipzig 2016, a review from the pews Yo Tomita

**B**achfest Leipzig ran from 10 to 19 June 2016 with the motto '*Secret of Harmony*', a reference taken from the obituary of 1754. The quest for its meanings and implications began with the Passacaglia BWV 582 performed by Ullrich Böhme at the opening concert. Through his delicate and imaginative execution on the 'Bach organ' in Thomaskirche, the persuasive power and logic were revealed.

The event at which the quest was most methodically explored was the chamber concert by Anne Freitag (traverso and recorder), Susanne Scholz (violin) and Jean-Christophe Dijoux (organ and harpsichord) in the Grassi Museum for Music Instruments on 16 June. Described as an 'academic concert', they traced how the canonic compositions evolved from Renaissance to the time of Bach. Using the instruments of each time period and with a brief introduction on the pieces, it effectively was a music history lecture at its best.

The highlight was a pair of performances of the St Matthew Passion BWV 244, one directed by Trevor Pinnock on the first day in the Gewandhaus, and the other by John Eliot Gardiner in Thomaskirche 6 days later. Pinnock with MDR Rundfunkchor and Gewandhausorchester, on the one hand, used the version as edited and presented in 1841 by Mendelssohn, presenting a remarkably natural rendition of the drama convincingly capturing what Mendelssohn must have intended with the added performance-related instructions. Gardiner with the Monteverdi Choir and English Baroque Soloists, on the other, immediately reminded me of the reaction of an old widow of the nobility as reported in Christian Gerber's *Historie der Kirchen-Ceremonien in Sachsen* (1732; repr. *New Bach Reader*, pp. 326-7): "God save us, my children! It's just as if one were at an Opera Comedy!" The Evangelist's story-telling (sung by James Gilchrist) was painfully vivid, especially when it concerned our sins.

**Bach Network**  
UK's next Dialogue Meeting,  
Cambridge, July 2017.  
Details coming soon.  
[www.bachnetwork.co.uk](http://www.bachnetwork.co.uk)

The St Mark Passion BWV 247 was also featured twice, one a version for the hearing-impaired entitled '*Bach & Mime*' on 14 June in Gewandhaus, and the other a new composition by Steffen Schleiermacher (1960-) called '*Nach Markus: Passion*'. Michael Schönheit with Collegium Vocale Leipzig and Merseburger Hofmusik performed it on 13 June in Nikolaikirche with a profound spiritual effect.

As for the remaining concerts, the most memorable were the following: Solomon's Knot baroque collective performing *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis* BWV 21, Johann Schelle's *Machet die Tore weit*, and Bach's *Magnificat* in E-flat BWV 243a on 11 June in Nikolaikirche; Sir Roger Norrington with RIAS Kammerchor performing the 1724 version of *Sanctus* BWV 232<sup>III</sup>, Handel's *Ode for St Cecilia's Day* HWV 76 and Haydn's *Harmoniemesse* Hob. XXII:14 on 15 June at Nikolaikirche; Berliner Barock Solisten with Dorothee Oberlinger (recorder) and Jacques Zoon (traverso) as concertists on 19 June in Michaeliskirche with a programme consisting of the Overture in B minor BWV 1067, Locatelli's Concerto Grosso in F minor op.1, no.8, Vivaldi's Concerto in C major RV 443, Sinfonia in B minor BWV 209/1, Telemann's Sonata in B minor TWV 40:105, Vivaldi's Concerto in G minor RV 156, and Telemann's Concerto in E minor TWV 52: e1. The final concert, Bach's B-minor Mass, was performed this year by William Christie with Les Arts Florissants: employing quick tempi with no sign of artificial application of articulation and phrasing, it was one of the most serene and majestic renditions in my memory.

**Bachfest 2017 will run from 9 to 18 June with the theme**  
**'"a beautiful new song": music and reformation'.**

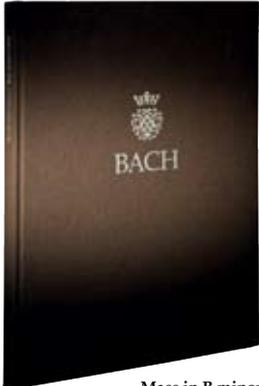
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## LBS Exhibit at Royal Academy of Music

19 September 2016 – 28 February 2017

An Exhibit of items from the LBS Archive and some significant borrowings is being mounted in the Tertis Display case at the Royal Academy of Music. Opening on 19 September, the Exhibit sets Paul Steinitz's work with the London Bach Society in context with that of two key players in the 19th century British Bach revival, both of whom have anniversaries this year - Samuel Wesley (1766-1837) and William Sterndale Bennett (1816-1875). The Exhibit forms part of the London Bach Society's 70th Anniversary celebrations and has been curated with the generous help of Mr Barry Sterndale Bennett, Ms Joanna Tap (Museum Curator, RAM) and Mr Gabriele Rossi Rognoni (Museum Curator, Royal College of Music).

### A new Cantor is appointed



Members of Thomanerchor in the Sanctuary of the Thomaskirche

The appointment of a new Cantor at Leipzig on the retirement of Professor Georg Christoph Biller last year followed a long held tradition and is a necessarily long process. The Cantor's chief responsibility is the direction of the world-famous Thomanerchor, both at home for the weekly Services and for national and international concerts and tours. The schedule is punishing; the expectation high. The 9-18 year-old boys are together for a large part of the year, living in the Alumnat, rehearsing, performing and touring, so they must all get on well together. The Cantor is at the very heart, a sort of father-figure to the boys as well as musical mentor. It is a demanding post, but the richness of the musical heritage combined with the often prestigious engagements - the choir toured Israel with German Federal President Joachim Gauck last December - plus the challenge to contribute to that heritage make it an attractive proposition. It has taken just over a year for the special commission set up for the purpose to reach a decision and ahead of the annual Leipzig Bachfest, it was announced that Professor **Gotthold Schwarz** had been selected. Our congratulations and good wishes to Professor Schwarz

[www.thomanerchor.de](http://www.thomanerchor.de)

A profile of the new Cantor will be published in March 2017 edition.

Join LBS Bach Friends today and support our musical enterprise  
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Extract from the chorale prelude  
"Der Tag, der ist so freudenreich" BWV 605  
(Translated: "The day is so full of joy") from Bach's Orgelbüchlein.

BACH NOTES is published by the London Bach Society and edited by Margaret Steinitz.  
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