

Bach's St John Passion The English Concert

Saturday 19 April 2025, 3pm



Francesco Corti director/harpsichord

Soloists

Rachel Redmond soprano, arias & Ancilla
Jess Dandy alto & arias
Ashley Riches bass, Jesus & Betrachte
Morgan Pearse bass, Pilatus, Petrus, & Eilt
Patrick Grahl Evangelist & arias

Ripienists

Amy Wood soprano
Judy Louie Brown alto
Peter Di-Toro tenor, Servus
Tom Perkins tenor

violin 1 Nadja Zwiener (leader), Kinga Ujszászi

violin 2 Davina Clarke, Elizabeth MacCarthy

viola Jordan Potter

violoncello Joseph Crouch

viola d'gamba Samuel Ng

double bass Alexander Jones

flute Katy Bircher, Rosie Bowker

oboe/oboe d'amore/d'caccia

Clara Espinosa Encinas, Grace Scott Deuchar

Bassoon Catriona McDermid

organ Tom Foster

Simon Neal tuning

Presented by The English Concert in partnership with Turner Sims

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

St John Passion, BWV 245

The first documented performance of the 'St John Passion' was given in St Nicholas Church, Leipzig on Good Friday 1724, nearly a year after Bach had taken up his appointment

as Kantor of St Thomas's School – a post that carried responsibilities for organising the music of the town's four main churches. For his new setting of the Passion, his employer – the town council – had instructed him to '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'. Bach wilfully ignored these stipulations and produced a work of unprecedented length, never previously encountered in Leipzig, and one where he scored for a substantial ensemble including several unusual instruments, such as the viola d'amore and viola da gamba.

The directive to avoid operatic treatment may have been prompted by a complaint reported by the theologian Christian Gerber after an unidentified Passion performance where 'all the people were thrown into the greatest bewilderment ... An elderly widow of the nobility exclaimed: 'May God preserve children. It's just as if we were at a comic opera'. Yet Bach, arguably, was observing a growing trend towards dramatised settings of Gospel texts relating to events leading to Christ's crucifixion – an ancient tradition from early Christian times – but one that had recently gained momentum in northern Germany. Bach's theatrical instincts may also have been encouraged by a positive response to a dramatic setting in 1721, after which Gottfried Ephraim Scheible claimed that performing Passions in an operatic style could attract large congregations, declaring 'The people certainly would not have come to church so promptly in such numbers because of the preacher'. This coming at a time when the congregation would have had to endure a gruelling sermon between each half of the Passion.

Regardless of contemporary attitudes, Bach's St John Passion is an expression of Faith that takes us on a journey to the cross, death and eventual salvation. Its vivid portrayal of Christ's last days allows us the opportunity to consider and meditate on that great mystery at the heart of Christian belief. Like the St Matthew Passion, that of St John has as its central figure an Evangelist who delivers the

Gospel narrative. Arias personalise the points of the drama, while the choir acts variously as priest, disciples and crowds, and serve as a commentary in the great opening and closing choruses. Following tradition, a bass soloist sings the words of Christ, and those of Pilate.

Part One narrates the betrayal of Jesus, his capture by the servants of the Chief Priests in the garden of Gethsemane and Peter's denial of Christ. Solo arias for alto, soprano and tenor reflect on these events, while the chorus punctuate them in brief animated crowd scenes. At the start, a powerful chorus of restless energy and soaring lines provides a harrowing depiction of Christ's agony and humiliation, but one which, simultaneously, reminds us of his majesty and ultimate glory.

Part Two, constituting two-thirds of the work, continues the Gospel narrative and outlines Christ's trial and crucifixion. Pilate is persuaded by the mob to release the prisoner Barabbas and scourge Jesus. A tender bass arioso reflects on the crowning of thorns, but the unruly crowd mock Christ in short energetic choruses and demand his execution. A further bass aria urges condemned souls to hurry to the scene where all shall be redeemed. Following Christ's death an alto lament mourns his loss, and the dramatic rending of the Temple veil leads to further reflection while a consoling farewell (from the chorus) brings the work to a serene close.

Today, it is hard to imagine either of Bach's two surviving Passions ever being mistaken for opera. For some, believers and agnostics alike, attending a Passion performance is a meaningful part of Holy Week, a ritual comparable to a religious observation. As a graphic portrayal of the events of Holy Week, the 'St John Passion' directly appeals to our emotions and sympathies.



Francesco Corti conductor

Harpichordist and conductor Francesco Corti was born in Arezzo, Italy, in a musical family in 1984. He studied organ in Perugia, then harpsichord in Geneva and in Amsterdam.

He was awarded at the International "Johann Sebastian Bach" Competition in Leipzig (2006) and at the Bruges Harpsichord Competition (2007).

As a soloist and conductor, he has appeared in recitals and concerts all over Europe, in the USA and Canada, in Latin America, in Asia and in New Zealand. He has performed in halls such as Théâtre des Champs Élysées (Paris), Bozar (Bruxelles), Konzerthaus (Vienna), Philharmonie (Berlin and Hamburg), Mozarteum and Haus für Mozart (Salzburg) and Concertgebouw (Amsterdam), Teatro Real (Madrid), Palau de la Música Catalana (Barcelona), Tonhalle (Zürich), Müpa (Budapest).

Since 2018 he is principal guest conductor of il Pomo d'Oro. Among other projects with this ensemble, he has conducted European tours of Händel's 'Orlando', 'Radamisto', 'Tolomeo' and 'Berenice'. His collaboration with Pomo d'Oro include numerous recordings. He is invited to lead Freiburger Barockorchester, Akademie für alte Musik Berlin, Les Musiciens du Louvre, Tafelmusik, Kammerorchester Basel, B'Rock and the Nederlandse Bachvereniging. Starting January 2023, he is Musical Director at the Drottningholm Royal Court Theater.

The past season has included *Messiah* with Kammerorchester Basel and the 'Tölzer Knabenchor', 'Matthäus-Passion' with Freiburger Barockorchester, Monteverdi's 'Orfeo' and Vivaldi's 'Orlando' with Pomo d'Oro and Lully's 'Armide' at Drottningholm. 2024/25 includes Händel's 'Alcina' and 'Jeptha' with Il Pomo d'oro, Terradellas's 'Merope' with Akamus and Cimarosa's II 'Matrimonio Segreto' at Teatro San Carlo in Naples.

His solo recordings have been awarded some of the most prestigious prizes worldwide (Diapason d'or de l'Année, the Preis der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik, Gramophone's Editor's Choice, Choc de Classica...). His latest solo recording (*Arcana*) is dedicated to D. Scarlatti.

His very last release (January 2025, *Arcana*) is a CD published with Il Pomo d'Oro, titled 'The Age of Extremes' with music by Benda and Bach.

He has taught in masterclasses all over the world. Since September 2016, he is professor of harpsichord at the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis.



Ashley Riches bass-baritone

British bass-baritone Ashley Riches read English at the University of Cambridge where

he was a member of the King's College Choir under Stephen Cleobury. He studied at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama.

An extremely versatile artist, his 2024/25 season includes Handel's 'Messiah' at the BBC Proms with John Butt and the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, Rossini's Stabat Mater with Nil Venditti and the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Berlioz 'L'Enfance du Christ' with the NFW Wroclaw Philharmonic and Paul McCreesh, Bach's 'St John Passion' with The English Concert and Harry Bicket, and Puccini's 'La Rondine' with the London Symphony Orchestra and Antonio Pappano.

In 2023/24 he returned to the Royal Opera House as Roucher Andrea Chénier, sang 'Rheinberg' in Wallace's Lurline with the National Symphony Orchestra Dublin and Péter Halász, Beethoven's 'Missa Solemnis' with David Afkham in Madrid, Verdi's 'Requiem' with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and Kazuki Yamada, and Handel's 'Messiah' in concert at Glyndebourne and with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic and Bernard Labadie, and Purcell's 'King Arthur' with Paul McCreesh in Lyon and Lausanne.

A former Jette Parker Young Artist, his roles for the Royal Opera House include Morales Carmen, Mandarin Turandot, Baron Douphol La Traviata and Officer Les Dialogues des Carmelites. For the English National Opera, he has sung 'Count Almaviva Le nozze di Figaro', 'Schaunard La Bohème', 'Escamillo Carmen', and the Pirate King 'The Pirates of Penzance'. Elsewhere, he has appeared as Silvano in 'Cavalli's La Calisto' at the Bayerische Staatsoper, Munich; 'Brander Le damnation de Faust' for the Glyndebourne Festival; 'Claudio Agrippina' at the Grange Festival; 'Don Giovanni', 'Harasta The Cunning Little Vixen', and 'Ibn-Hakia lolanta' for Opera Holland Park; Simon Peter in Schubert's 'Lazarus' in a new Frederic Wake-Walker production at the Potsdamer Winteroper; and Count Almaviva in

Tokyo. This season he returns to the Royal Opera House as Roucher Andrea Chenier.

Highlights on the concert platform include Berlioz's 'Lélio' with Sir John Eliot Gardiner in Carnegie Hall, Bernstein's 'Wonderful Town' with Sir Simon Rattle/London Symphony Orchestra, a European tour of 'Giulio Cesare' and 'Agrippina' with Christophe Rousset /Les Talens Lyriques, and Creon 'Oedipus Rex' with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. With repertoire ranging from J. S. Bach to Michael Tippett, Ashley has sung with orchestras including the Academy of Ancient Music, Helsinki Baroque, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Gabrieli Consort, London Philharmonic, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Royal Concertgebouw orchestras, Freiburg Baroque Orchestra, and the Basel Chamber Orchestra. Recent appearances include 'Angelotti Tosca' with Edward Gardner/Bergen Philharmonic, Messiaen's 'St Francois d'Assise' with Ryan Wigglesworth/BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, and Schumann's 'Das Paradies und die Peri' with Daniel Harding/Czech Philharmonic. In 2023/2024 he sang Beethoven's 'Missa Solemnis' with David Afkham/Orquesta y Coro Nacionales de España, Schumann's 'Requiem' in California with Richard Egarr/Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, Verdi's 'Requiem' with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and multiple Handel's 'Messiah' with Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, Royal Northern Sinfonia and for the Glyndebourne Festival.

An accomplished recitalist, and former BBC New Generation Artist 2016-2018, Ashley has collaborated with pianists including Graham Johnson, Iain Burnside, Julius Drake, Joseph Middleton, Anna Tilbrook, James Baillieu, Simon Lepper, Gary Matthewman and Sholto Kynoch. This season he returns to the Oxford International Song Festival and Wigmore Hall. He released his debut solo recital disc, 'A

Musical Zoo', in 2021. His discography includes Purcell's *'King Arthur'* with the Gabrieli Consort & Players under Paul McCreesh (BBC Music Magazine 2020 Recording of the Year), *'Wonderful Town'* with the London Symphony Orchestra under Rattle recorded for LSO Live and, most recently, Handel's *'La Resurrezione'* with The English Concert under Harry Bicket.



Jess Dandy contralto & mezzo-soprano

Cumbrian born Jess Dandy is the foremost British contralto of her generation and has been praised for her instrument of velvety plangent timbre, and her artistic remarkable immediacy. Jess studied Modern and Medieval Languages at Trinity College, Cambridge and the Ecole Normale Supérieure de Lyon, and is an alumna and Fellow of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama.

Highlights of the 2024/25 season include her return to the BBC Proms for Holst's *'The Cloud Messenger'* with the BBC Symphony conducted by Sakari Oramo, Beethoven's *'Symphony No 9'* with Boston Symphony conducted by Ludovic Morlot at Tanglewood, Thomas Adès *'Totentanz'* with Leipzig Gewandhausorchester conducted by Thomas Adès, Mozart's *'Requiem'* with Aalborg Symphony conducted by Sofi Jeannin, Handel's *'Messiah'* with Tampere Philharmonic conducted by Matthew Halls, Bach's *'St Matthew Passion'* with Concertgebouworkest conducted by Riccardo Minasi and Berlioz

'Romeo and Juliet' with Bergen Philharmonic and Bryn Terfel, conducted by Sir Mark Elder.

On the recital stage, Jess will return to the Oxford International Song Festival for a programme entitled *'Eternity in an Hour'* with Keval Shah, to the Wigmore Hall for a recital with Dylan Perez and to the University of York for a recital with Ben Goldscheider, Fenella Humphreys and Martin Roscoe, amongst others.

Recent engagements include Mahler's *'Symphony No 8'* with Bergen Philharmonic conducted by Edward Gardner, a studio performance of Mahler's *'Rückert-Lieder'* with BBC Symphony Orchestra and Kristian Sallinen, Elgar's *'Sea Pictures'* with Tokyo Symphony, Mozart's *'Requiem'* with Tampere Philharmonic conducted by Matthew Halls, Brockes *'Passion'* with the English Concert, Handel's *'Esther (Mordecai)'* with the London Handel Orchestra, Handel's *'Messiah'* with the Hallé, Royal Northern Sinfonia, The Glyndebourne Sinfonia and Il Gardellino, and Julia Perry's *'Stabat Mater'* and Bach's *'St John Passion'* with the BBC Philharmonic.

Jess has appeared on the concert platform with the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, BBC Symphony Orchestra, The English Concert, The Academy of Ancient Music, Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Bergen Philharmonic, Tampere Philharmonic, Orchestre révolutionnaire et romantique, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Minnesota Symphony Orchestra, Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony Orchestra, Salzburg Kulturvereinigung, BBC National Orchestra & Chorus of Wales, BBC Welsh National Opera, BBC Symphony Orchestra, The Dunedin Consort, Les Arts Florissant, Opera Settecento, Hallé Orchestra, Britten Sinfonia and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic; collaborating with conductors including Sir John Eliot Gardiner, Harry Bicket, Laurence Cummings, Osmo Vänskä, Trevor Pinnock, Gemma New, John Butt, William

Christie, Kristian Bezuidenhout and Stephen Layton.

Jess finds a natural habitat on the recital platform and enjoys working with a range of pianists, including Martin Roscoe, Dylan Perez, Malcolm Martineau, Chris Glynn, James Baillieu, Julius Drake, Gary Matthewman, Keval Shah, Ian Tindale, Sholto Kynoch, Anthony Hewitt, Gavin Roberts, Iain Burnside, Simon Lepper, Huw Watkins and Wolfram Rieger. She appears regularly at Wigmore Hall and Oxford International Song Festival amongst others.

In 2021, Jess was shortlisted for a Royal Philharmonic Society Award in the category of Young Artist. She is a multi-faceted artist with a keen interest in ecology, body psychology and spirituality. She is the co-founder of SongPath, a mental health initiative creating musical walking trails in nature for better mental health. With composer Alex Mills, she developed the Music & Being Collective, an open laboratory space exploring music and our sense of self through interdisciplinary dialogue.



Morgan Pearse baritone

Morgan Pearse is one of the most exciting baritones of his generation. He studied at the Royal College of Music where he won the Lies Askonas Prize and Gold Medal at the Royal Over Seas League Competition. He was a member of the Houston Grand Opera Studio and subsequently made his UK debut at ENO singing 'Figaro' / 'Barber of Seville'. Recent and

future opera highlights include 'Figaro' / 'Le nozze di Figaro', Papageno / 'Die Zauberflöte' and 'Araspe' / Tolomeo (Staatstheater Karlsruhe), Sid / Albert Herring (Buxton Festival), 'Belcore' / 'L'Elisir d'Amore and Figaro' / Barbieri (New Zealand Opera and the State Opera of South Australia), 'Enrico' / 'Lucia di Lammermoor' (SOSA) and Opera Holland Park, Ned Keene / Peter Grimes (Auckland Philharmonia), 'Figaro' / nozze (Opernhaus Zurich), baritone in 'Idalma' (Innsbruck Festival of Early Music), 'Papageno' (Russian National Orchestra), 'Achilla'/'Giulio Cesare' on tour with The English Concert and 'Scarpia' / 'Tosca' for Opera Holland Park. Concert highlights include a solo recital at Wigmore Hall, concerts with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, The English Concert, Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, Hallé Orchestra, Gabrieli Consort, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Academy of Ancient Music, Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, Britten Sinfonia, King's College Choir Cambridge, Bach with the Adelaide Symphony, 'Messiah' with the Melbourne Symphony, RSNO, London Handel Festival and the Sydney Philharmonic Orchestra.



Patrick Grahl tenor

Born in Leipzig, Patrick Grahl was initially a member of the Thomanerchor under the baton of Georg Christoph Biller. He then received his vocal training at the University of Music in his hometown under Berthold Schmid, where he also completed his studies with a Master's

degree. Courses with Peter Schreier, Gotthold Schwarz, Gerd Türk, Ileana Cotrubas, and Karl-Peter Kammerlander provided him with important impulses for his artistic development.

In 2016, the tenor won the first prize at the XX. International Johann Sebastian Bach Competition in Leipzig. Since then, he has become a highly sought-after oratorio and concert singer, performing with ensembles such as the Gewandhaus Orchestra in Leipzig, the Dresden Philharmonic, the NDR Radiophilharmonie, the Gürzenich Orchestra Cologne, the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, the Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale della RAI di Torino, and the London Symphony Orchestra, under the baton of conductors like Sir John Eliot Gardiner, Sir Simon Rattle, Vladimir Jurowski, Daniele Gatti, Zubin Mehta, Manfred Honeck, Hans-Christoph Rademann, Ton Koopman, Philippe Herreweghe, Christoph Poppen, Andrew Manze, Omer Meir Wellber, and Stefano Montanari. In January 2025, he made his debut in Prague with the Czech Philharmonic under the baton of Semyon Bychkov (J.S. Bach's Mass in B minor).

In addition to his numerous engagements on the concert and opera stage, Patrick Grahl places great importance on chamber music projects and song recitals. In these contexts, he collaborates with pianists such as Daniel Heide and Klara Hornig and increasingly performs abroad.



Rachel Redmond soprano

British soprano Rachel Redmond is establishing herself as a most sought-after interpreter of baroque repertoire. Appearing at major venues and festivals throughout Europe, her recent Handel roles have attracted particular praise.

Having started her earlier career with 'Le Jardin du Voix', the young artist's programme of 'Les Arts Florissants', Rachel has performed extensively with the group in programmes of the French baroque masters as well as Purcell, Handel and Bach directed by both William Christie and Paul Agnew.

Rachel Redmond made her stage début at the Opéra Comique in Lully Atys. Her other opera appearances include the Aix-en-Provence Festival (Second Woman 'Dido & Aeneas'), Théâtre du Châtelet (Loena 'La Belle Hélène'), the Göttingen International Handel Festival (Dalinda 'Ariodante'), Opéra du Rhin (Fortuna 'L'Incoronazione di Poppea'), the Edinburgh International Festival (Papagena 'Die Zauberflöte'), English Touring Opera (Susanna 'The Marriage of Figaro') and Irish National Opera and the Royal Opera House Linbury Theatre (Aminta in 'Vivaldi L'Olimpiade'). In concert she has also sung the roles of Dorinda 'Orlando' with the Academy of Ancient Music / Laurence Cummings, Doña Isabel 'The Indian Queen' at the Salzburg Festival with the Utopia Orchestra / Teodor Currentzis.

Concert engagement include Bach 'B Minor Mass' with Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment / John Butt at the BBC Proms; 'Purcell and Handel' with the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra / Kristian Bezuidenhout; 'Handel Esther' and 'London Handel Festival' / Laurence Cummings and Bach and Handel with The English Concert / Harry Bicket. Aside from period ensembles Rachel has worked with the Northern Sinfonia, BBC Scottish Symphony, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic and Royal Concertgebouw Orchestras. She counts

amongst her musical collaborators conductors Christophe Rousset, Trevor Pinnock, Leonardo Garcia Alarcón and Jordi Savall.

Recently released on the Linn label is Rachel Baptist: 'Ireland's Black Syren' a disc of repertoire sung by the 18th Century Irish soprano of African descent recorded with the Irish Baroque Orchestra and Peter Whelan.

Rachel Redmond studied at the Music School of Douglas Academy, the Royal Scottish Conservatoire, and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. Born in Glasgow she lives in Paris and holds an Irish passport.

The English Concert is an outstanding orchestra: exceptional, in the world-renowned quality, ambition and variety of its live and recorded output; unique, in the zeal of its players for working and performing together; unwavering, in its desire to connect with its audience throughout the world. Founded by Trevor Pinnock in 1972 and under the present artistic direction of Harry Bicket and principal guest Kristian Bezuidenhout, The English Concert has earned a reputation for combining urgency, passion and fire with precision, delicacy and beauty. Highlights of the orchestra's calendar include an international *Handel opera tour*, a regular London series at venues including the Wigmore Hall, St Martin-in-the-Fields and the Barbican Centre, and an

annual residency at Garsington Opera. In 2023, The English Concert launched its ambitious 'Handel for All' project, which aims to film and make freely available all of Handel's works online. For more information, visit englishconcert.co.uk

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