



Winner of Chorus America/ASCAP Alice Parker Award
Christine Gevert, Founding Artistic Director

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For immediate release.

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Crescendo presents:

Bach-Circle: Christmas Oratorios and Contemporary Female Voices
Bringing Heaven to Earth

Crescendo, the award-winning music organization based in Lakeville, CT, presents two concerts with festive Baroque holiday music for chorus, soloists, and orchestra to conclude the year on December 28 and 29. Crescendo Chorus of thirty singers is joined by soprano Paulina Francisco (Canada), winner of the 11th edition of Les Jardin des Voix with Les Arts Florissants; countertenor Nicholas Tamagna (Germany), "his meteoric rise in recent years has made him one of the world's most fascinating alto voices" (*Operabase*); tenor Gene Stenger (Connecticut), hailed as an "impressive tenor" (*The New York Times*) who sings with "sweet vibrancy" (*The Cleveland Plain Dealer*) and creates "the most lasting moments" (*Virginia Gazette*) of the performance; bass-baritone Douglas Williams (Massachusetts), who has appeared as a soloist with some of the great orchestras, including the Berlin Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, Munich Philharmonic, Boston Symphony, Houston Symphony, Detroit Symphony, and St. Louis Symphony; and Crescendo Period Instrument Orchestra with musicians from New York City and Boston. The performances are led by Crescendo's founding artistic director, Christine Gevert.

Christmas cantatas are intended to bring comfort, joy, and a sense of wonder to listeners. They celebrate the true essence of Christmas—unity, love, and hope—through the power of music. Performed at religious and secular occasions, cantatas originated in Italy in the 17th century as intimate works for solo voices and minimal instrumental accompaniment. They

quickly spread to other European countries and developed into large dramatic works with multiple soloists, chorus, and orchestra. A culmination of this genre is undoubtedly Johann Sebastian Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*, part of which stands at the center of this program. Cantatas by his predecessors and contemporaries showcase the festive themes of Advent, Christmas, and the New Year in different ways.

Some elements of the Christmas story featured in these cantatas touch upon the greatest quests of our humanity. The central one is the birth of God's own son, a paradox of divine laws and earthly reality becoming one. Others are the voice of the angels as the messengers of God, and with them the overlapping of the natural and supernatural worlds; the character of Mary, embodying the purity of the human spirit, a female who trusts in God; the shepherds who "get" the divine message, and through their response to it elevate themselves beyond the limitations of their social status; and the wise men, strangers who come from afar to witness and express their reverence to the newborn savior, acknowledging the manifestation of God to the world. These characters and elements are all expressed through the music in this program, being equally at the center of the baroque and contemporary works.

Crescendo's founding artistic director talks about Johann Sebastian Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*: "It is a set of six cantatas that tell the story of Christ's birth, the annunciation to and adoration by the shepherds, the circumcision and naming of Jesus, the journey, and the visit of the wise men. The texts are based on different Gospel readings. It may seem shocking that most of Bach's music was originally 'secular'—cantatas written by him in praise of royalty or notable local figures, performed outside the church. In modern words this means recycling music. It was common practice in Baroque times, and Bach was an expert at this 'parody technique.' A sensual love duet becomes a symbol for the love between the human soul and God, the yearning of a lover for his beloved is transformed into the longing for Christ."

This program includes Johann Sebastian Bach's "Ehre sei dir, Gott, gesungen" (Let honor be sung to you, O God), the fifth cantata of his *Christmas Oratorio*. This cantata is about the journey of the wise men and the symbolism of light winning over darkness. An important composer in Bach's circle was his mentor Dietrich Buxtehude, the renowned North German organist and cantor. His New Year's, and Johann Schelle's Advent cantatas, Johann Rosenmüller's *Magnificat*, and Philipp Erlebach's Christmas cantata are followed by a work of the later Jeremias du Grain, a student of Bach's close friend Georg Philipp Telemann. Several of these cantatas are scored for orchestra with trumpets, which symbolized royalty and Christ's status as the "King of Kings." In contrast to this stand intimate unaccompanied choral works by the award-winning contemporary female North American composers Emily Drum, MaryAnne Muglia, and Christine Donkin.

The concerts will take place on Saturday, December 28, 2024 at 4:00 pm at Trinity Church, 484 Lime Rock Rd., Lakeville, CT, and on Sunday, December 29, 2024 at 4:00 pm at Saint James Place, 352 Main Street, Great Barrington, MA. Tickets are available online at www.crescendomusic.org, or on a first come, first served basis at the door, 45 minutes prior to the concert.

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