

Bach's Big Bang

DRAMATIC WORKS AND RENOWNED GUEST PERFORMERS MARK THE 79TH ANNUAL BACH FESTIVAL.



PAT REMINGTON

THE BACH FESTIVAL SOCIETY OF WINTER PARK will present its signature festival from February 14 to March 2 this year. The organization's orchestra and choir will be joined by select guest vocalists and musicians in a series of stirring performances.

How did the world begin? As composer Franz Joseph Haydn envisioned it, the event was dramatic, with chaos, storms and thunder, and even what could be considered a big bang. *Creation*, Haydn's monumental and beloved oratorio, is one of the featured orchestral performances in the 79th annual Bach Festival, which runs from February 14 to March 2. A counterpoint to Haydn's intense yet playful work is Bach's monumental and emotional *St. John Passion*, which wraps up the season.

The annual series of performances celebrates the life and music of German Baroque composer Johann Sebastian Bach. The Bach Festival Society of Winter Park is the third-oldest continuously operating Bach Festival in the nation and Central Florida's oldest operating performing arts organization.

Creation is "Haydn at his most elegant," says Dr. John V. Sinclair, conductor and artistic director of the Bach Festival

Society. It tells the story of earth, from chaos to the creation of Adam and Eve, based on Genesis, the Psalms and John Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

Many consider it his masterpiece. Inspired to write a large oratorio during visits to England, Haydn worked on the piece from October 1796 to April 1798—the longest period of time he ever spent on a single composition. It's organized in three parts. The first expresses the time from first light to the creation of plants. Part Two covers sea creatures, birds, animals and the creation of humans and Part Three takes place in the Garden of Eden and introduces Adam and Eve.

Haydn makes frequent use of tone painting, or imitations of natural sounds, in the music. Examples include thunder and lightning, the "foaming billows" of the ocean and the sounds of birds and animals. Haydn also is known for his humorous flourishes, Sinclair says, and the section concerning the creation of



KAREN LESLIE PHOTOGRAPHY

THE BACH FESTIVAL SOCIETY'S Conductor and Artistic Director John V. Sinclair is a mainstay of Central Florida's music scene, conducting close to 150 concerts each year.



KEN COWAN

WORLD-CLASS ORGANIST KEN COWAN is just one of the many featured guest performers scheduled to participate in this year's Bach Festival.

worms is particularly amusing. Overall, the piece is rich, complex and exciting to perform. With so much going on, Sinclair says, "everyone gets a good part in this."

By contrast, *St. John Passion* is more sober, muscular and full of angst. It is, Sinclair says, "perhaps Bach's most visceral, passionate music. Frankly, it's a privilege to do this work." The dramatic story of the Passion as told in the Gospel of John, chapters 18 and 19, the piece is one of Bach's three major religious works, along with *St. Matthew Passion* and *Mass in B Minor*. Bach based the oratorio on Martin Luther's translation of the Bible, with slight modifications. The piece debuted at the Good Friday vesper service at St. Nicholas Church in Leipzig in 1724. "It's exciting," Sinclair says. "It takes quite a cast to pull it off," especially a strong high-tenor soloist in the Evangelist role.

Celebrated tenor Brad Diamond will reprise the role this year. An assistant professor of voice at the University of

South Florida, Diamond has a wide repertoire that includes works by Cavalli, Monteverdi, Bach, Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Rossini, Berlioz, Orff, Bartok, Janacek and Britten. The rest of the all-star cast includes Mary Wilson as soprano, with Amanda Crider as the mezzo, Robert Breault as tenor and Kevin Deas as bass. Guest harpsichordist is Joanne Kong.

The oratorio is written for an intimate ensemble of soloists and a four-part choir. In addition to strings, bass and oboes, original productions included a viola da gamba. It "sounds like a cello with a cold," Sinclair says, and isn't often used anymore.

The piece opens with the chorus in despair at Jesus' crucifixion, but with faith in his triumph over death. The story then backs up to a dramatic portrayal of Jesus' betrayal and capture, with the Evangelist as narrator and the choir as the crowd. The *Passion* concludes with arias for each



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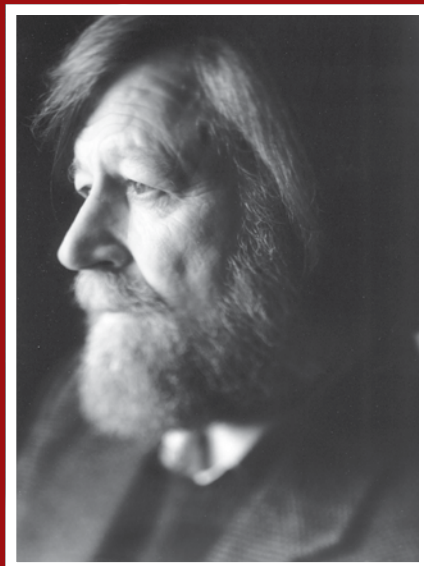
ACCOMPLISHED VIOLINIST Routa Kroumovitch-Gomez is the concertmaster of the Bach Festival Orchestra.



KAREN LESLIE PHOTOGRAPHY

KNOWLES MEMORIAL CHAPEL on the Rollins College campus in Winter Park will house all of the performances in this year's Bach Festival.

Songs of Serenity



When modern composer Morten Lauridsen was a young man, he spent 10 weeks as a fire lookout for the Forest Service. Alone in an isolated fire tower near Mount St. Helens, Washington, he was surrounded by vast wilderness. Only his trumpet and a pile of books kept him company. In the silence, he learned to appreciate the rhythms and harmonies of the natural world.

"It was a great time of personal reflection," he says, and when he came down, he knew he wanted to pursue music as a career. So he left a small liberal arts college in Washington for the University of Southern California (USC).

Growing up in Portland, Oregon, he listened to classical and Broadway music and learned piano and trumpet, but thought he might study English or history. Though he had never written a note of music in his life, he managed to talk his way into the composition program at USC with some of the greatest teachers of that time, including Halsey Stevens, Ingolf Dahl, Robert Linn and Harold Owen.

Some four decades later, Lauridsen is a respected educator at his alma mater and one of the world's most popular choral composers. Some of his beloved works will be performed at a January 26 concert as part of the Bach Festival Society's Visiting Artist series. Organizers are thrilled: Sinclair mentions Lauridsen in the same breath as Mozart and Beethoven and even Bach himself. "We're going to know about his music in 100 years," Sinclair says. "Every generation has some composers who last through time. His music will last."

Lauridsen is equally pleased. "They knew my music," he says of Sinclair and the Bach Festival. "We were very simpatico. This is a conductor and an organization that would do an excellent performance of my music."

Lauridsen's works include eight vocal cycles and two collections, as well as a series of sacred a cappella motets and numerous instrumentals. They have been recorded on more than 200 CDs, five of which earned Grammy nominations. Lauridsen also was the 2007 recipient of the National Medal of the Arts and the subject of an award-winning documentary, *Shining Night: A Portrait of Composer Morten Lauridsen*.

Considered a composer of serene, almost mystical, even spiritual, works, he draws on such diverse influences as Gregorian chants, Latin texts and the Bible, as well as nature. And poetry. A lover of Rilke, Agée and Gioia, he reads poetry every day and quotes it to his students to help them find inspiration. "I want to teach them the realm of possibilities," he says, "and guide them to spot their individual talents and abilities and to nurture their own creativity."

Lauridsen's own inner song still needs isolation to take wing and fly. He spends part of the year on Waldron Island, a remote rock in the San Juan Archipelago off the coast of Washington. His accommodations are rustic, much like the fire tower: no water, no electricity and a piano rather than a trumpet. But it's more than enough. "I need to go into the silence and pristine beauty of this place," he says. "The serenity comes through."



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RENOWNED VIOLINIST Lara St. John will be performing with the Bach Festival Orchestra during Concertos by Candlelight.

soloist, followed by the chorale "Ach Herr, lass dein lieb' Engelein" ("Ah, Lord, send your dear angels").

Other performances on the festival's program include a recital on February 14 by world-class organist Ken Cowan, whom Sinclair calls one of the great virtuosos in his field. Known for his technical mastery, as well as his imagination and sensitive interpretations of the music, Cowan is associate professor and head of the organ program at Rice University's Shepherd School of Music in Houston.

This season's Concertos by Candlelight features two performances of Vivaldi's *Bassoon Concerto* and *Credo for Choir*, as well as violinist Lara St. John playing Bach's *Violin Concerto No. 1 in A Minor* and *Violin Concerto No 2 in E Major* with the Bach Festival Orchestra. Vivaldi liked the warm, reedy timbre of the bassoon, Sinclair says, and wrote more concerti for the instrument than any other composer. Guest soloist St. John is considered a musical phenomenon. She began playing violin at age two and soloed with an orchestra at age five.

All performances are held in Knowles Memorial Chapel at Rollins College. For tickets and information, call 407.646.2182 or visit bachfestivalflorida.org. **oam**

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- February 17: School Break Camp – Zoo Explorers* 9:00 a.m. – 4 p.m.
- February 25: Homeschool Presentation: Fear to Fascination* 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
- March 1: Summer Camp and Cub Club Registration Begins*
- March 11: Snake Awareness Presentation* 7:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
- March 17-21: Spring Break Camp – Wild About Animals!* 9:00 a.m. – 4 p.m.
- March 25: Alligator Awareness Presentation* 7:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
- Every Wednesday in April: Storytime, 10:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.
- April 5: Brews Around the Zoo*, 6:00 p.m. – 10:00 p.m.
- April 5: Responsible Animal Ownership Workshop* 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
- April 19 & 20: FAIRWINDS Credit Union Hippity Hop Adventure 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.
- April 22: Homeschool Presentation: Florida Outback Adventures* 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

*Additional cost applies

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