

Prairie U-U Society, December 10, 2000
J. S. Bach (1685-1750)

Hymn #303

Welcome, Erin Bosch

Chalice lighting: WOH: Listen! DC plays...

Doleta just played the notes we call in English B flat, A, C, and B natural. In German the notes are B A C H. One of Johann Sebastian Bach's last works was a fugue based on those four notes. Listen again, and meditate, if you wish, about the wonders of human creativity he exemplifies.

DC plays BACH again.....and after one minute, BACH again.

1. Before the excerpt from the cantata *Was Gott thut...*, Doleta's remarks

Story for All Ages — Barbara Rames

2. About the Goldberg Variations:

Johann Sebastian Bach spent most of his career in Leipzig, in Germany. The city of Dresden isn't very far away, and one of Johann's students, Johann Goldberg, got a job there with a noble named Count von Keyserlingk. The Count often couldn't go to sleep, and then he would ask Goldberg to play music in the room next door. The Count asked Bach to write some music for him, and Bach wrote some variations on a theme by Goldberg; [Bach knew the popular songs of the day and included some in his variations.] Then, when the Count couldn't go to sleep, he would say to Goldberg, "Play for me some of my variations." Bach created the variations, but since the Count paid Bach for them, he called them his own. [Wolff p. 36]

Judy and Carl will now play something from these variations.

Children leave.

3. The *Magnificat* is a text from the New Testament often set to music by composers. After Michael Briggs, who had a good Christian education, tells us something about the text, we will hear two beautiful excerpts.

4. Bach worked for the church in Leipzig, and one of his jobs was to compose music for the Sunday church services. For almost every Sunday of the year, for five years, he wrote a cantata for the services. A cantata is a choir piece, sometimes with instrumental accompaniment. It came just before the sermon, which signifies its importance. The whole service might go on for five hours. But imagine yourself as a citizen of Leipzig in 1730: every Sunday I could look forward to hearing a cantata by Bach, and I might even be able to tolerate the sermon. (Johann Sebastian seems to have been impatient. In one of his early jobs as an organist he was chastised by his employers for going down to the wine cellar during the sermon. He apologized and said he wouldn't do it again.)

Bach's employers insisted that he not be operatic: that would be too Roman Catholic.

This made Bach out of fashion in most of Europe, where composers like Handel and Vivaldi got rich out of operas. But Bach also wrote secular cantatas, that might be played at weddings and the big houses of the nobles and the bourgeoisie. One of my favorites is the Peasant cantata, and we will next hear a piece from it sung by Barbara [Park] and Ian:

from the *Peasant Cantata*

5. Dean Schroeder: about his arrangement of the *Bourree*.

6. In 1772 and 1775 Bach presented two notebooks of keyboard music to his new wife, the Anna Magdalena notebooks, *Klavier Buchlein*. They weren't published for about a century or more, by which some sections were illegible with age. I wanted to sing one melody that was the basis for a popular song, one that hit the charts two or three decades ago, but I forgot the title and the lyrics. I hummed the melody to Doleta, and she knew it at once. She had not only one but four piano versions. They all knew the song came from the Anna Magdalena notebooks, but the oldest said: by J. S. Bach. The middle ones were sort of skeptical, like "attributed to J. S. Bach" or then "attributed to Christian Petzold." And the most recent one, based on the best recent scholarship, says, "by Christian Petzold." [Petzold was a student of Bach who went on to become the chief organist in Dresden, about 60 miles away from Leipzig.]

Doleta has written some lyrics for me to sing to this melody. I haven't found earlier lyrics, but perhaps some of you might be able to refresh my memory.

A Tribute to Christian Petzold

7. *Pleni sunt coeli et terra*, Choir

Joys & Sorrows. Introduction of guests and visitors. Offering. Prairie Announcements.

8. We will close with the only hymn in the U-U hymnal by J. S. Bach. There are several other hymns there with harmonizations by Bach, such as the one we sang at the beginning. [Anyway, our hymnal has more references to Bach than the one at Luther Memorial Church. We know more about that Lutheran musical heritage than they do, perhaps.]