



Bach Cantata Series: Masaaki Suzuki Conducts Bach & Vivaldi

Friday, 21 February 2020, 7.30pm
Conservatory Concert Hall

Programme

J.S. BACH

Brandenburg Concerto No. 3,
BWV1048
I. [Allegro]
II. Adagio
III. Allegro

Cantata, "Jesus nahm zu sich
die Zwölfe", BWV22

- Intermission -

VIVALDI

Gloria, RV589

Gloria in excelsis Deo (chorus)
Et in terra pax (chorus)
Laudamus te (2 soprano)
Gratias agimus tibi (chorus)
Propter magnam gloriam
(chorus)
Domine Deus (soprano)
Domine, Fili unigenite (chorus)
Domine Deus, Agnus Dei (alto
and chorus)
Qui tollis peccata mundi
(chorus)
Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris
(alto)
Quoniam tu solus sanctus
(chorus)
Cum Sancto Spiritu (chorus)

Programme Notes

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Timing – 10:00

Brandenburg Concerto No.3 in G, BWV1048

(Allegro)

Adagio

Allegro



The earliest known portrait of Bach, by Samuel Gottlob Kütner, 1774

Now that Bach has been admitted to the infamous “Classical Canon” of composers labelled as “greats” (by 19th century German philosophers and writers, but accepted without question by most subsequent generations of musicians and music lovers), it is easy to forget that for a century or so after his death his music all but fell into oblivion. He was, after all, a jobbing church musician working largely in small towns dotted around the various states which today constitute part of northern Germany, who had no need nor opportunity to spread his name abroad, and it is understandable that, after his death, only his closest associates held on to some memory of him. However, during the second half of the 19th century Bach's genius began to be fully appreciated. Much of the work done to revive Bach's reputation was done by his biographer, Julius August Philipp Spitta, who set about unearthing, rediscovering and cataloguing all Bach's music. Spitta never lived to complete the task, which was eventually finished in 1950 by Wolfgang Schneider whose BWV (Bach-Werke-Verzeichnis) catalogue is now the accepted reference source for all of Bach's music. One of Spitta's most significant discoveries was a set of six concertos for a variety of instrumental combinations which Bach had sent as an unsolicited gift to Christian Ludwig, the

Margrave of Brandenburg. The untouched manuscript had been unearthed in the Brandenburg library in 1849 but not conclusively identified as the work of Bach until Spitta published the first part of in 1880. From that point on, these six works have become known collectively as the "Brandenburg Concertos" and remain amongst Bach's most popular compositions.

The Margrave of Brandenburg



Christian Ludwig, Margrave of Brandenburg (1677-1734)
Painting (ca 1710) by Antoine Pesne (1683-1757)

In our day of prime ministers and presidents (impeached or otherwise), the title of Margrave needs some explanation. It has its parallels in the Italian *Marchese* and the French/English Marquis, where it simply meant the lord of a specific area of territory (or "march). In the Holy Roman Empire, however, it had a more specific implication, as *Encyclopaedia Britannica* explains; "The margraves had their origin in the counts established by Charlemagne and his successors to guard the frontier districts of the empire, and for centuries the title was always associated with this function. The margraves had within their own jurisdiction the authority of dukes, but at the outset they were subordinate to the dukes in the feudal army of the empire. In the 12th century, however, the margraves of Brandenburg and Austria (the north and east marches) asserted their position as tenants-in-chief of the empire. The German margraviates have now all been absorbed into other sovereignties". Brandenburg, which surrounds the city of Berlin, existed as a margraviate from 1157 until 1806 when it was subsumed within the Kingdom of Prussia which, in turn, became part of the newly-created German nation in 1871.

Bach neither lived nor worked in Brandenburg but in 1719 travelled to Berlin at the behest of his then employer, Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen, in order to acquire a new harpsichord for the Prince's Hofkapell. Harpsichords by the Berlin instrument-maker Michael Miteke were notable for the strength and richness of tone, and Bach purchased a two-manual instrument for which he was reimbursed the sum of 130

thalers. (To put that in some sort of perspective, Bach's annual salary at the time was 400 thalers, which equates, very roughly to the purchasing power of S\$35,000 today.) While he was there he was invited to perform before the Margrave of Brandenburg at either the Stadschloss (royal palace) or at the Margrave's own estate on the outskirts of Berlin. The Margrave, whose own musical tastes seem to have preferred the music of Italian and French composers, expressed his admiration for Bach's playing. Such royal praise came back to haunt Bach a couple of years later when he realised he needed to seek employment elsewhere; Prince Leopold's great enthusiasm for music having waned in the aftermath of his marriage. He assembled a set of six various concertos written for different occasions and different instrumental combinations and posted them off to the Margrave with a lengthy accompanying letter which begged the Margrave "most humbly not to judge their imperfection by the strict measure of the refined and delicate taste in musical pieces that everyone knows you possess, but rather to consider kindly the deep respect and the most humble obedience which I am thereby attempting to show to you". In respect of the Margraves musical preferences, Bach inscribed his manuscript with the dedication written in French, while the music is drawn from Bach's earlier experiments in writing concertos in the Italian manner after Vivaldi.

The Music



The title page of the Bach manuscript of the "Brandenburg" Concertos

All six of the concertos Bach sent to the Margrave of Brandenburg call for different instrumental combinations. Whilst most of them pit a small group of soloists against a larger orchestra, two of the concertos (numbers three and six) have no solo group, each instrument being of equal importance.

In the invigorating **1st movement** Bach creates an effect of solo group and full orchestra by taking fragments of the opening material and passing them around the orchestra; first to the violins, then to the violas, and finally to the cellos. There is no actual **2nd movement** to the concerto, the manuscript containing just two chords for the entire orchestra marked "Adagio". Different performers approach this in differing ways; some extend the period between the two chords by means of extended improvisations, others improvise a lengthy movement ending with the two chords, while Malcolm Boyd, one of the great authorities on the "Brandenburg" Concertos suggests, "it may be that this movement is not meant to 'work'; perhaps it ought to be performed just the way it appears, as an enigma". Nothing enigmatic about the scintillating chase which puts every single one of the instruments through their paces in the sparkling **3rd movement**, with musical ideas passed from one group of instruments to another with hardly a pause for breath.

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Timing – 17:00

Cantata No.22 : “Jesus nahm zu sich die Zwölf”, BWV22

A Farewell to Cöthen



Schloss Cöthen, where Bach lived and worked from 1717 to 1723

Bach described Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen as “a prince who both knew about music and loved it”. Certainly the Prince held Bach in the highest regard; indeed only one other member of the court staff received a higher salary than Bach. At that time the town of Cöthen, boasting a population of little more than 2000, was caught up in a simmering dispute between the Lutheran and Reformed churches so, diplomatically, Prince Leopold chose to keep a low profile in matters of religion. His court chapel was small and discreet and, as a consequence, musical activity in it was kept to a minimum. So, for the only time in his life, Bach found himself in a post which was not primarily concerned with the composition or practice of religious music and was free to concentrate on writing and performing purely secular music; it is from this period that the majority of Bach’s secular instrumental works date. In this he was aided and abetted by the Prince who was not only an active performer but an adventurous and open-minded music-lover; it was largely the Prince’s enthusiasm for the new-style Italian concertos of Vivaldi and others that prompted Bach to try his hand at the genre. However, on 11th December 1721 the Prince married. This signalled the end of Bach’s halcyon musical life in Cothen for, with marriage, the Prince seemed to lose all interest in music and Bach sensed the impending dissolution of the court’s musical establishment. He set about applying for new posts. We have already read how he solicited the Margrave of Brandenburg through the submission of six concertos. Other

potential employment opportunities, however, were more suited to Bach's background in church music, and in applying for the post of Cantor in the city of Leipzig Bach submitted two cantatas (numbers 22 and 23) which he composed in Cöthen especially to support his application to the Leipzig authorities.

The Leipzig Audition



The Thomaskirche in Leipzig where Cantata 22 was first performed on 7 February 1723

Bach was called to Leipzig in early 1723 to audition for the post and it was on that occasion, on Sunday 7th February 1723, that he directed the first performance of Canasta No.22. It was performed in the customary place, before the sermon, while the second cantata Bach had written, No.23, was given in the same service during the communion. Bach was aware that three weeks earlier another candidate, Christophe Graupner, had also presented a cantata which had proved so successful that he had immediately been offered the post. However, although Bach did not know this at the time, Graupner's employers at Darmstadt would refuse him leave to take up the post, leaving the way open for Bach to be appointed. Nevertheless, knowing that he had to do something very special indeed to convince the Leipzig authorities to give him a fair hearing, Bach worked at Cantata 22 on arrival in Leipzig to mould it more closely to the five-section format of Graupner's work, and with minimal rehearsal time and dealing with musicians of whom he knew virtually nothing, it seems that Bach sang the bass part himself.

In the words of the Bach scholar, Peter Williams, cantatas 22 and 23 "sound as if their composer is trying to impress with complex, refined musical detail such as could flatter a committee but leave the congregation, and perhaps the choir itself, rather at a loss". Against this, however, the French musicologist Gilles Cantagrel suggests that "to both his future employers and his listeners, Bach presents here exactly what was expected of him, and he must guarantee them continuity in the style of Kuhnau, the previous cantor". Following the audition, one contemporary newspaper reported that, "On Sunday last in the morning the Hon. Kapellmeister of Cöthen, Mr. Bach, gave here his

test at the church of St. Thomas's for the hitherto vacant Cantorate, the music of the same having been amply praised on that occasion by all knowledgeable persons". Whether they were puzzled or impressed, on hearing that Graupner could not take up the appointment, the Leipzig committee unanimously selected Bach as their new Cantor, and he took up the post precisely 15 weeks later. It may be of interest to know that Bach was paid 20 thalers to cover travel and accommodation for the audition, and was appointed on a basic annual salary of 100 thaler, but which was supplemented by other fees (mostly from weddings and funerals) amounting to over 700 thaler per year.

Quinquagesima



In the ecclesiastical calendar, 7th February 1723 was Quinquagesima – the fiftieth day before Easter and the Sunday before the beginning of the sombre fasting season of Lent. The theme of the readings on Quinquagesima is the commitment to Jesus to follow him and stand by him during his preparation for the momentous events which culminated in the Passion of Holy Week. It is assumed that Bach himself wrote the libretto for this cantata, although it is based on the Biblical Gospel of St Luke (chapter 18 vv.31-34) which was read that Sunday in the Thomaskirche. This recounts how, before leaving for his final journey to Jerusalem, Jesus called the 12 disciples to his side and told them of his coming passion and resurrection, and that they would be expected to travel with him and witness his fate.

BWV22



Scored for small choir, with the bulk of the solo material given to the lower voices, accompanied by a small string orchestra and an oboe (an instrument Bach often seemed to associate with death), among the more noteworthy features of the Cantata which gave rise to Peter Williams' comment are the fugue in the opening number on the words "they understood none of this", and the abrupt harmonic change in the bass recitative at the mention of the hill on which Christ was crucified (Golgotha).

1. Arioso and Chorus – Jesus nahm zu sich Zwölfe

Tenor:

Jesus nahm zu sich die Zwölfe und sprach:

Tenor:

Jesus took the twelve to himself and told them:

Bass:

Sehet, wir gehn hinauf gen Jerusalem,
und es wird alles vollendet werden,
das geschrieben ist von des Menschen Sohn.

Bass:

See, we are going up to Jerusalem
and all things will be accomplished
that the prophets wrote about the Son of Man.

Chor:

Sie aber vernahmen der keines
und wussten nicht, was das gesaget war.

Chorus:

But they understood none of this
Nor the things which were said.

2. Aria (alto) – Mein Jesu, ziehe mich nach dir

Mein Jesu, ziehe mich nach dir,
Ich bin bereit, ich will von hier
Und nach Jerusalem zu deinen Leiden gehn.
Wohl mir, wenn ich die Wichtigkeit
Von dieser Leid- und Sterbenszeit
Zu meinem Troste kann durchgehends wohl
verstehn!

My Jesus, draw me to you,
I am ready, I want to go from here
and up to Jerusalem to your Passion.
Happy will I be if I grasp the significance
Of this time of suffering and death
And can thoroughly understand it for my
consolation.

3. Recitative (Bass) – Mein Jesu, ziehe mich, so werd ich laufen

Mein Jesu, ziehe mich, so werd ich laufen,
Denn Fleisch und Blut verstehet ganz und gar,
Nebst deinen Jüngern nicht, was das gesaget
war.
Es sehnt sich nach der Welt und nach dem
größten Haufen;
Sie wollen beiderseits, wenn du verkläret bist,
Zwar eine feste Burg auf Tabors Berge bauen;
Hingegen Golgotha, so voller Leiden ist,
In deiner Niedrigkeit mit keinem Auge
schauen.
Ach! Kreuzige bei mir in der verderbten Brust
Zuvörderst diese Welt und die verbotne Lust,
So werd ich, was du sagst, vollkommen wohl
verstehen
Und nach Jerusalem mit tausend Freuden
gehen.

My Jesus, draw me hence and I will hasten,
For, like your disciples, flesh and blood
Completely fail to understand what was being
said.
They yearn for the world and the greatest
multitudes;
They want, when you have been transfigured,
To build a strong fortress on Mount Tabor,
But Golgotha, so full of suffering,
And you in your humiliation, they do not want
to behold at all.
Ah! crucify for me in my corrupt breast
Before this world and its forbidden pleasures,
I will truly comprehend what it is you are
saying
And go to Jerusalem with a thousand joys.

4. Aria (Tenor) – Mein alles in allem

Mein alles in allem, mein ewiges Gut,
Verbessere das Herze, verändere den Mut;
Schlag alles darnieder,
Was dieser Entsagung des Fleisches zuwider!
Doch wenn ich nun geistlich ertötet da bin,
So ziehe mich nach dir in Friede dahin!

My all in all, my everlasting good,
Improve my heart, transform my mind;
Strike down everything
Which opposes this denial of the flesh!
But when I am spiritually dead,
Then draw me to you in peace!

1. Chorale (Chorus) - Ertöt uns durch dein Güte

Ertöt uns durch dein Güte,
Erweck uns durch dein Gnad;
Den alten Menschen kränke,
Dass der neu' leben mag
Wohl hie auf dieser Erden,
Den Sinn und all Begehren
Und G'danken hab'n zu dir.

Mortify us through your kindness,
Inspire us through your grace;
Afflict the old man,
So that the new man may live
In contentment here on earth,
And that his mind and all his desires
and thoughts may be directed only to you.

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)

Timing – 30:00

Gloria, Rv589**Bach and Vivaldi: Shared Interests and Fundamental Conflicts**

Writing in the preface to an edition of Vivaldi's *Gloria* published in 1973, William Hermann points out that "it was the Bach revival, starting with Mendelssohn's famous performance of the *St Matthew Passion* in 1829, that brought with it the rediscovery of Vivaldi, since among the Leipzig cantor's manuscripts were found a collection of Vivaldi's concertos". But while Bach may have known and admired Vivaldi's instrumental music, if he had known of the sacred music he would have found it completely outside his range of interest. For while Bach was writing for the Lutheran Church which had been founded in opposition to the excesses of the Roman Catholic church, Vivaldi was not just writing for the Roman Catholic church, but seemed almost to be celebrating those very excesses to which the Lutherans most powerfully objected.

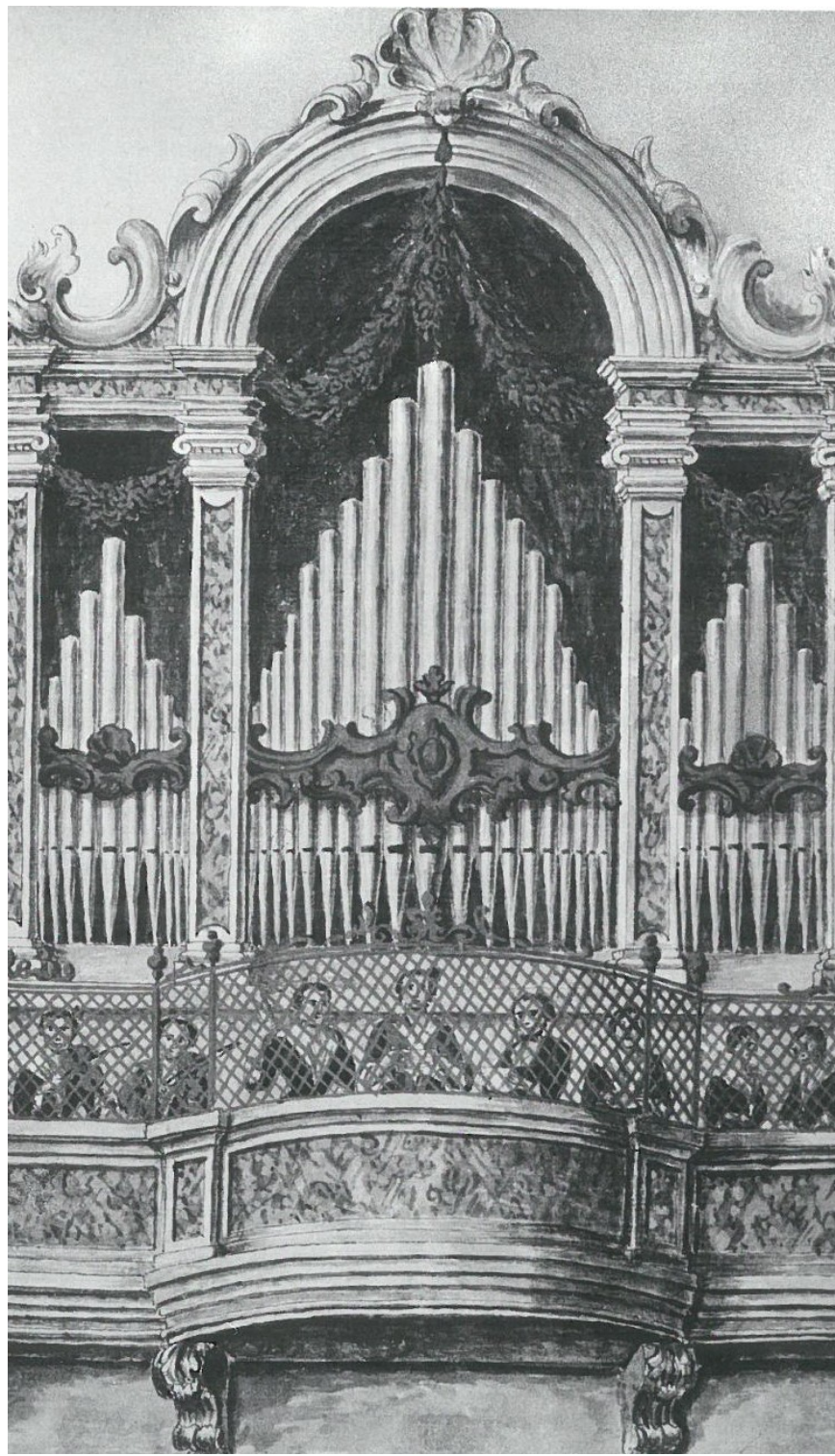
Red-haired, Violent Young Men

Caricature of Vivaldi "The Red Priest" by Pier Leone Ghezzi, 1723

The Vivaldi family was not one of the most respectable in musical history; and those who associate red hair with a fiery disposition (red hair seems to have been a Vivaldi family feature) find plenty of evidence to support their prejudice here. H C Robbins Landon described the family as "a rowdy collection" and drew attention to the fact that two of the composer's brothers were at various times expelled from Venice for drunken brawling and violence. It may seem odd, therefore, that Antonio Vivaldi was destined almost from birth for the priesthood. But it was standard practice for the eldest sons of relatively poor families to be given to the church, and on 18th September 1693 at

the age of 15, he was taken in as a novice, being ordained a full priest 10 years later. His priestly duties were certainly neither onerous nor in any way obstructive to his career as a musician, and he was even spared the obligation to say a daily Mass; as he later recalled, after ordination “I said Mass for a year or a little more. Then I discontinued saying it, having on three occasions had to leave the altar without completing it”. Vivaldi had long suffered from debilitating asthma attacks, and it was this which allowed him the freedom to devote himself wholly to music.

Angelic, Ugly Young Women



A girls' choir singing behind a grille in a Venetian church

On his ordination in 1703 Vivaldi was appointed to one of the *Ospedali* in Venice - residential schools for girls who, while described as “orphans”, were mostly the illegitimate daughters of bishops, cardinals and the Venetian nobility – and he threw himself eagerly into his duties as violin teacher. There were four such *Ospedali* in Venice and they attracted large numbers of young men eager for a glimpse (and more) of the inmates who were reputed to be of exceptional and unblemished beauty. With the *Ospedale della Pietà*, those gawping young men (and more shameless older ones) had a legitimate excuse; Vivaldi had raised the level of music making there to such an

astonishingly high standard that its reputation had spread throughout Europe. To this end, when the girls performed, they did so screened behind grilles in a high balcony where they were visible only as distant silhouettes. As the Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau commented following his year as secretary to the French ambassador to Venice, “What grieved me was those accursed grilles, which allowed only tones to go through and concealed the angels of loveliness of whom they were worthy”. (Sad to relate, the detestable Rousseau wormed his way into the *Ospedale* to see the girls for himself, and reported back: “Scarcely one was without some considerable blemish. I was desolate. Yet ugliness does not exclude charms, and I found some in them. Finally, my way of looking at them changed so much that I left nearly in love with all these ugly girls”.)

A Sacred “Four Seasons”



Rousseau described the sacred music he heard at the *ospedali* as “very superior to that of the operas, and that has not its equal throughout Italy of perhaps the world. I can conceive of nothing as voluptuous, as moving as this music”. Certainly the style of church music in Venice was very different to that elsewhere. Reports tell of how certain sections of the Mass were applauded for their musical settings, and while elsewhere Mass settings tended to be fairly unified and relatively concise, it was fashionable in the Venice of Vivaldi’s time, for the longer sections of the Mass – notably the *Credo* and the *Gloria* – to be almost self-contained works broken into several distinct movements. Much of Vivaldi’s music has been lost, but we do know of two extended settings of the *Credo* (Rv591 and Rv592) as well as three of the *Gloria* (Rv588, 589 and 590), the third of which has been lost. It is the second of those settings of the *Gloria* we hear today; a work which Robbins Landon describes as “the most accessible and immediately comprehensible of all Vivaldi’s sacred music – the *Four Seasons* of its genre”.

Despite that, the *Gloria* took much longer to earn a place in the public consciousness than the *Four Seasons* for the simple reason that the Vivaldi revival, described by Herrmann, concentrated almost exclusively on the instrumental music. It was not until well into the 20th century that Vivaldi's genius in the realm of sacred music began to be recognised. The trigger appears to have been the preparations to mark the bicentenary of Vivaldi's death. Alfredo Casella unearthed the score of the *Gloria*, revised and edited it for a concert held in Siena in September 1939 which was broadcast on Italian radio. This seems to have been the first public performance of any of Vivaldi's sacred music for over two centuries and it created huge international interest, albeit quickly stifled by the outbreak of war, after which the *Gloria* was recorded for the first time. It is now the most frequently recorded and performed of all Vivaldi's sacred works.

Sexing the Gloria

Gloria
RV 589
I. Gloria in excelsis Deo
Antonio Vivaldi

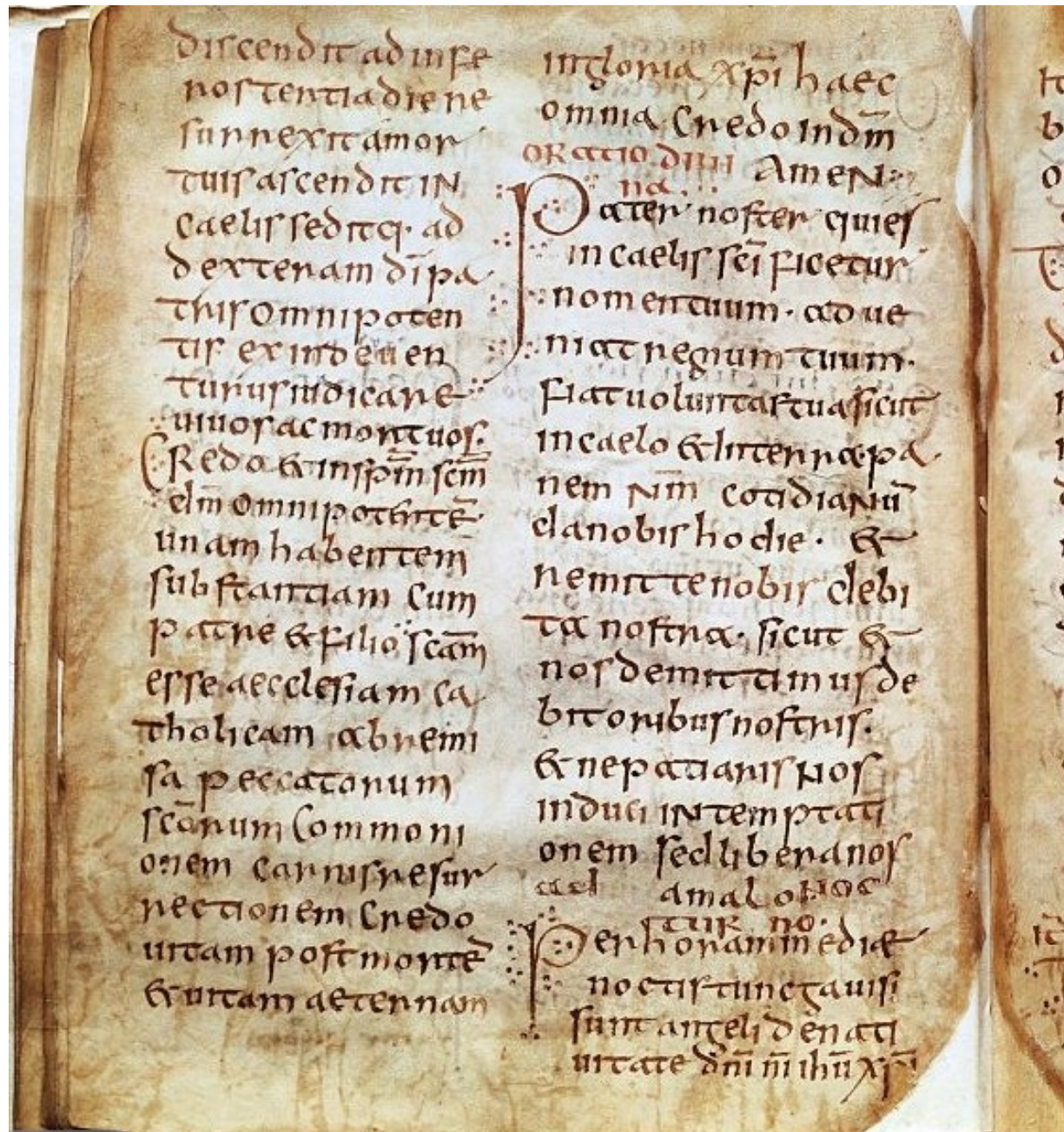
Allegro

The musical score is arranged in two systems. The first system includes the Tromba, Oboe, Violino I, Violino II, and Viola parts. The second system includes the Soprano, Alto, Tenore, and Basso vocal parts, along with a Basso part in the bass clef. The tempo is marked 'Allegro'.

While it is believed that the first of the two extant settings of the *Gloria* dates from 1715, no date can be given for the second, although since it was originally written for female voices, it is safe to assume it was written for and first performed at, the *Ospedale della Pietà* sometime between 1713 and 1717 during which time Vivaldi served as *Maestro di coro* alongside his principal role as *Maestro di violin*. On publication, the *Gloria* was written for four-part mixed choir, yet Vivaldi had specified that the two lower parts should be sung by female voices. It seems unlikely that female voices in early 18th

century Venice had lower tessituras than those in 21st century Singapore, so many scholars believe that these two lower parts were simply sung an octave higher than written. Today, however, we hear the work with the lower parts taken by male singers, while all of the singers can be seen without the imposition of grilles.

The Text



A Page from the Bangor Antiphonary of 690

The *Gloria* dates back to a 2nd century Greek text which subsequently appeared in the AD380 Apostolic Constitution as a “morning prayer”. Three centuries later it appeared for the first time as a Latin text in the *Bangor Antiphonary* compiled by the monks of Bangor Abbey in Ireland in AD690, but it was not until the 11th century that it became a fully integral part of the Latin Mass and its text modified to the form which was set by Vivaldi

1. Gloria in excelsis Deo (Chorus) Gloria in excelsis Deo	Glory to God in the highest
2. Et in terra pax (Chorus) Et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis.	And on earth peace and goodwill to all men.
3. Laudamus te (Soprano I & II) Laudamus te, benedicimus te, Adoramus te, glorificamus te.	We praise you, we bless you, We adore you, we worship you.
4. Gratias agimus tibi (Chorus) Gratias agimus tibi.	We give you thanks
5. Propter magnam gloriam (Chorus) Propter magnum gloriam tuam.	Because of your great glory.
6. Domine Deus (Soprano) Domine Deus, Rex coelestis. Deus pater omnipotens.	Lord God, heavenly king. God the Father Almighty.
7. Domine Fili unigenite (Chorus) Domine Fili unigenite, Jesu Christe.	Lord, the only-begotten son, Jesus Christ.
8. Domine Deus, Agnus Dei (Contralto, Chorus) Domine Deus, Agnus Dei, Filius Patris, Qui tollis peccata mundi Miserere Nobis.	Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father. Who takes away the sins of the world Have mercy on us.
9. Qui tollis peccata mundi (Chorus) Qui tollis peccata mundi, Suscipe deprecationem nostrum.	Who takes away the sins of the world Receive our prayer.
10. Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris (Contralto) Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris, Miserere Nobis.	Who sits at the right hand of the Father, Have mercy on us.
11. Quoniam tu solus sanctus (Chorus) Quoniam tu solus sanctus, Tu solus Dominus Tu solus latissimus, Jesu Christe.	For you only are Holy, You only are the Lord, You only are the highest, Jesus Christ.
12. Cum Sancto Spiritu (Chorus) Cum Sancto Spiritu in Gloria Dei Patris. Amen	With the Holy Spirit In the glory of God the Father Amen.