

The cacophony of contemporary popular culture makes it difficult to discern the call of truth and wisdom. There is no area in which practicing asceticism is more important. - *Rod Dreher*



*Johann Sebastian Bach*

## Johann Sebastian Bach: *St Matthew Passion*

2pm Sunday March 20  
The Great Hall  
University of Newcastle

It has been nearly twenty years since this sublime masterpiece by Johann Sebastian Bach has been performed in the Hunter. It requires such a great commitment, involving the bringing together of so many musical resources over a long period of time, that it is rarely attempted.

Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* retells the compelling story of the events leading up to the crucifixion of Jesus. Bach divided the music into two parts. Highlights of the first part include the last supper and the betrayal and arrest of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

In the second part, the music turns softer and more sombre — signaling the inevitability of the story as it depicts the trial, crucifixion and burial of Jesus.

Lutheran Passion Music had its origins in the early medieval era. By Bach's time the style of such works was generally accepted. A solo Evangelist, usually a tenor, a number of other soloists for the main characters, and a chorus for the crowd scenes and contemplative comment in chorales.

The Evangelist is an impassive narrator using passages from St Matthew's Gospel, moving the drama along in a half sung, half spoken recitative.

A bass fills the role of Jesus. The chorus takes on different roles, from the crowd calling for Jesus's death, to the puzzled disciples. Some of the most moving arias are sung by altos and sopranos as anonymous but pious believers.

By the time of his death, Bach was no longer fashionable, audiences preferring lighter styles of music, typified by the compositions of two of his sons, Carl Philipp Emanuel and Johann Christian.

In March 1829, 77 years after Bach's death, Mendelssohn conducted *St Matthew Passion* for a large audience, reviving an interest in Bach's compositions. Beethoven was obviously influenced by him, and enjoyed playing his works for harpsichord.

It is particularly notable that this performance will bring together musicians showcasing the talent we enjoy in the Hunter, together with some exciting young Australian singers now making their presence felt on the world stage.

## Paul Bevan – Evangelist



English tenor Ian Bostridge considers the role of the Evangelist a keystone of his career. “I think the *St. Matthew Passion* is one of the greatest pieces of music in the Western repertory,” Bostridge says. “And to start one’s journey toward

understanding that piece is a very important point in anybody’s life.”

Paul Bevan is similarly attracted to the role. He sang the Evangelist in our 2012 production of Bach’s *St John Passion*, and we welcome him back.

As a student, Paul was a member of the choir in 1978, and Peter Brock encouraged him to sing the role of Evangelist in *St John Passion*. In succeeding years he sang as soloist for the choir, including as The Narrator in Schutz’s *St Luke Passion* in 1989.

In 1996 he was Evangelist in the choir’s production of *St Matthew Passion*, which also featured Hunter Singers.

In a recent broadcast Paul, speaking of his admiration for Bach’s music, said “A Bach Fugue to clean your teeth with. Something fresh in the morning. Like toothpaste....” We’re confident that he will bring a similar freshness to our performance.

## Christopher Richardson – Christus



When bass Christopher Richardson appeared as Thoas in Pinchgut Opera’s *Ipigenie in Tauride* in 2014, Clive Padget, writing for Limelight Magazine described his performance:

“Christopher Richardson cuts a chilling figure as Thoas, hands steeped in pitch, garbed in black with white face paint. He makes the bloodthirsty, superstitious, tormented King a truly terrifying figure, singing with firmness and character.”

I mention this to demonstrate that Christopher has considerable dramatic ability to complement his great vocal skills.

Many of you will remember his performance with the choir in our 2012 production of Bach’s *St John Passion*. Now he joins us in the role of Christus in the *St Matthew Passion*.

Music critic Clinton White had this to say about a recent performance: “[He] has a beautiful voice, with a big range, reaching some impossibly low notes with ease. He has plenty of potential to realize in a voice that will surely capture the world’s stages...”

## Penelope Mills – Soprano



When Penelope Mills sang in Pinchgut Opera’s *Idomeneo*, The Sydney Morning Herald praised her performance. “Her heroic arias set her apart musically as her voice bloomed with dazzling colour and expression.”

Penelope has performed some of the great soprano roles with leading Australian symphony orchestras, ensembles, opera companies and choirs. The purity of her voice and her sensitive interpretations of emotionally complex musical works have won her many accolades.

Penelope has given several Australian and world premiere performances, including Gordon Kerry’s new completion of Mozart’s *Requiem* with the Sydney Chamber Choir. Other premieres include Ib Norholm’s *Impressions of the Little Mermaid* for the Sydney Festival, works by the Finnish composer Kaaija Saarahe with The Seymour Group and *The Earth That Fire Touches* by Australian composer John Peterson for the Sydney Philharmonia Choir at City Recital Hall, Angel Place.

## Anastasia Bickel – Mezzo Soprano



During holidays from her studies at Queensland Conservatorium, Anastasia hithiked around Australia.

“I love hitch-hiking,” she says. “I know a lot of people say it’s dangerous but I think if you’re careful and trust your intuition you

can meet some amazing people and have some amazing adventures... I really believe as a singer you have to have life experience in order to move people.

“Other than spending my life singing, I also like to do stuff like hitchhike, busk, dumpster dive, yodel, ice skate/ roller skate, learn languages, swim laps... These are all things I love. I aim to live by my motto **QUESTION EVERYTHING** for as long as I live.”

As one of Australia’s outstanding young talents, she has won the Joyce Campbell Lloyd Scholarship for Overseas Study, the Judith Ward Lieder Scholarship at the semi-finals of the Australian Singing Competition in 2015, the Donald Penman Award for Voices in Combination at the Queensland Conservatorium in 2014 and the Prize for Best German Diction in the Finals of the National Liederfest in 2014.

I have come to the conclusion that much can be learned about music by devoting oneself to the mushroom.”

- John Cage, composer and mycologist.

### *Brenton Spiteri – Tenor*



“Brenton Spieri is simply astounding” reported the Australian Book Review of his recent performance in Sydney Chamber Opera’s *Fly Away Peter*. “A vocal virtuosity that takes your breath away with its beauty” said

The Sydney Morning Herald. Other critics noted that his voice was “simply astonishing” for its “charismatic warmth and vocal agility,” “burnished tone and all manner of vocal gymnastics,” and “rich, gorgeous tone.”

Brenton is a graduate of the University of Melbourne, from which he holds a Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Music Performance with Honours. In 2012, he won first prize in Australia’s major singing competition, the Herald Sun Aria, which allowed him to pursue overseas study in singing and languages. As a result, he has worked with singers and coaches from some of Europe’s leading opera houses, and is a current member of the studio at Opéra Lyon, France.

### *Christ Church Camerata*



Christ Church Camerata was founded in 2009 by David Banney, Peta Dries, Helentherese Good and Peter Guy. These founders possessed a vision to present exceptional performances to the people of Newcastle and the Hunter Valley. The Camerata has quickly developed an enviable reputation as Newcastle’s finest orchestral ensemble.

Comprising some of Newcastle’s finest ensemble musicians, the Camerata has also presented numerous chamber music series at the Newcastle Art Gallery.

### *Concertante Ensemble*

Concertante Ensemble started as a trio, expanding in 1994 to become a professional string chamber orchestra with a core of 11 players, bound together by a common vision - to bring exceptional quality chamber music with local, Australian and international performers, to local audiences.

Concertante Ensemble regularly collaborates with the Central Coast Conservatorium, including performers from the teaching staff, former students who are furthering their studies in Sydney, and for specific concerts, specially invited current students.

### *Jeremy Kleeman – Bass*



A graduate of Victorian Opera and Melbourne Conservatorium’s Masters of Opera, Jeremy Kleeman is beginning to establish himself as one of Australia’s leading young baritones.

“I just love the rush of performing, it’s unlike anything else,” Jeremy writes after his first leading role with Victoria Opera. “My first major role with the company I’ve been developing my craft with for the past 7 years... I am very interested in the psychology of performing under such pressure.”

Jeremy recommends the book *Performance Success* by Don Greene, formerly Sports Psychologist for the U.S. Olympic Diving Team. “At one stage he compares driving a race car through a high-speed turn to singing a very high note or difficult phrase. If you get scared and brake, the car spins out and you completely lose control. If you stay calm and accelerate through the turn, the car remains balanced and slingshots out the other side. He suggests that even under extreme pressure you need to learn to ‘go for it no matter what’... I believe an audience can sense when an artist is taking that chance and going for broke. If it comes off, it is just thrilling for all involved! And if it doesn’t, well that’s pretty interesting to watch as well...”

### *Echology*



Echology, the Newcastle University’s multi-award winning choir, is an exciting and vital part of the Australian choral landscape. Their approach to music making has a uniquely Australian energy and the choir has performed around the world at such venues as London’s St Paul’s Cathedral, Westminster Abbey, Canterbury, Winchester and Liverpool Cathedrals, and Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris.

Conductor Dr Philip Mathias says “We promote music from Australia that people overseas can relate to but that is a little bit different – we try to bring something unique to the stage and show our high standards of performance.”

Human speech is like a cracked kettle on which we tap crude rhythms for bears to dance to, while we long to make music that will melt the stars.

- Gustave Flaubert

## Hunter Singers



We've shared the stage with the Hunter Singers before, notably in our 2009 concert *Songs of Remembrance*. Their renditions of Paul Jarman's *Shackleton* and *Known Unto God* are simply unforgettable.

Hunter Singers was established in 1989 by Music Director Kim Sutherland as the Hunter Region Department of Education Choir. The choir has enjoyed many highlights, including international tours, commissioned works and wonderful concerts.

## Newcastle University Choir



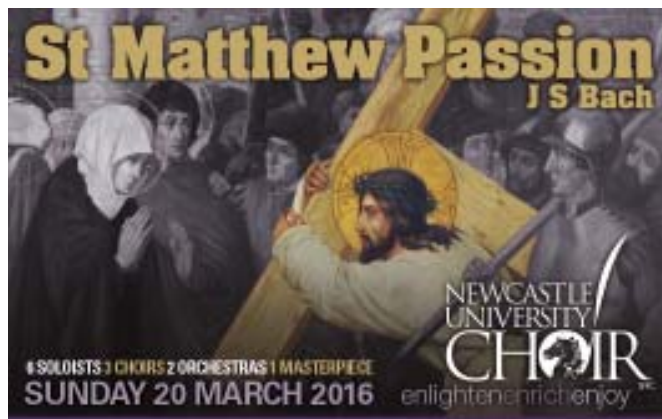
It's fitting that in its 40th year the Newcastle University Choir should present such a monumental work as Bach's *St Matthew Passion*.

The choir first began rehearsals in 1976, and the first concert took place in May 1977 – Verdi's *Requiem*, to an audience of 200 people. The choir grew rapidly to become the premier adult choir in the Hunter region, with the assistance of some excellent conductors.

The choir has performed works from to 16th century to the 21st, and has performed with many other choral groups and other musicians.

Our Musical Director is Dr Christopher Allan, whose monumental task is to bring together the six soloists, three choirs and two orchestras presenting this concert. It's worth noting that he sang the role of Christus in the choir's 1996 performance of *St Matthew Passion*.

Did you hear that NASA was planning to send music into space with the Voyager spacecraft just in case it came into contact with extraterrestrial life forms?  
One scientist suggested the music of J S Bach, to which another replied "Wouldn't that be showing off?"



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## Join our concert card scheme and win!

We greatly appreciate the support of our regular patrons and we have introduced a **Concert Card** scheme as a 'thank you' initiative for these special supporters.

If you attend all three of our 2016 concerts you will be in the draw to win a very worthwhile prize.

Step 1: Pick up a **Concert Card** at the *St Matthew Passion* performance.

Step 2: Have it stamped at *ANZAC - A Generation Lost in Legend* concert in August.

Step 3: Hand it in at the December *Christmas at the Movies* concert.

One lucky loyal patron's card will be drawn to win the prize.

Don't forget to pick up your **Concert Card** and bring it to each concert.

I am an excitable person who only understands life lyrically, musically, in whom feelings are much stronger than reason. I am so thirsty for the marvelous that only the marvelous has power over me. Anything I can not transform into something marvelous, I let go. Reality doesn't impress me. I only believe in intoxication, in ecstasy, and when ordinary life shackles me, I escape, one way or another. No more walls.

-Anais Nin

*Cacophony* is edited by Peter McCloy on behalf of the Newcastle University Choir, who do not necessarily share the views of the editor. To contribute or to communicate, email us at [newsletter@newcastleuniversitychoir.com](mailto:newsletter@newcastleuniversitychoir.com)

For more about Newcastle University Choir, go to [www.newcastleuniversitychoir.com](http://www.newcastleuniversitychoir.com)