8/30/**16 FINAL COPY** submitted to Inna Lobanova-Heasley and Matthew Glandorf

**1734 – 1735: A Season in the Life of J.S. Bach**

(b. March 21, 1685; d. July 28, 1750)

Johann Sebastian Bach: Rock Star of Western Classical Music? Counterpoint Colossus? The Greatest Musician Who Ever Lived? Yes, Yes, and Yes!

This year Choral Arts Philadelphia pays tribute to this genius in a unique, exciting way with ***1734 – 1735: A Season in the Life of J.S. Bach.*** We approach the music of the Immortal with awe, admiration, and, above all, joy.

We delve into what are believed to be the 18 surviving cantatas from that season, pairing them two by two and illuminating them with insightful commentary by scholars who love Bach as much as we do.

In his works Bach grasped and expressed what it meant to be human. And as we anticipate the beauty and infinite variety of the music that lie in store, we must not forget that he also faced the challenges of daily life, as do we all. He was orphaned at age nine—losing both parents within one year—and was saddened by the death of his first wife. He fathered 20 children, many of whom died as tiny tots and several who were likewise composers. He was a godfather and a grandfather. And Bach was a devout Lutheran, who inscribed his manuscripts with “J.J.”— *Jesu, Juva* (Jesus, help!) and ended them with “S.D.G.”— *Soli Deo Gloria*(To God alone the glory).

Bach got into the occasional fight, butted heads with bosses, had high expectations of his students, was liked by young people, enjoyed his Rhine wine, dealt with unappreciative employers who called him incorrigible, job-hopped to advance his career, was passed over for promotions, was thrown in jail for a month for “impertinence,” was the subject of unflattering reviews, and was third choice for the prestigious music director job in Leipzig’s St. Thomas Church and School (“Since we cannot get the best, we will have to settle for average,” said his future employers on the town council). Blind at the end of his life he was survived by nine children and his second wife, Anna Magdalena, who died in poverty. He was a human being we can identify with.

Bach’s grueling workload might have felled a less determined man—a cantata every Sunday and Christian feast day—a cycle of about 60 a year. During his tenure in Leipzig he produced five such cycles, of which only the first three have come down more or less intact.

Try to imagine his weekly To Do List. After selecting the appropriate Bible verse, hymn text, or devotional poem he had to seek musical inspiration, compose the cantata, copy the parts with help from his most qualified students, rehearse the piece, and perform it on Sunday. On Monday, it started all over again. And that was just Bach’s church work! There were also cantatas for civic occasions, such as celebrations to honor elected officials, birthdays, weddings, funerals, and academic festivities. Plus teaching choral and instrumental music.

Our selected cantatas are marvelously diverse…some are repurposed older works (yes, Bach was a “recycler”), others were new creations for that liturgical year. Some are well-known, like “Ein feste Burg” and “Ich habe genug,” while others are there for you to delight in discovering.

Accompanied by our critically acclaimed period instrument ensemble, the Philadelphia Bach Collegium, we’ll perform the works from his Leipzig tenure in the approximate order Bach wrote them—tied to the seasons and the Lutheran liturgical calendar.

The miracle that was Bach is that these works reflect his inexhaustible imagination, discipline, inspiration, and unflagging devotion to music, whose “aim and final end should be none other than the glory of God and the refreshment of the soul.”

We invite you to refresh *your* soul on this journey; it promises astonishing adventures, unexpected pleasures, and joyful experiences.

—Hannelore N. Rogers