

AMERICAN BACH SOLOISTS



JEFFREY THOMAS
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

The AMERICAN BACH SOLOISTS ("ABS") engage and inspire audiences through historically informed performances, recordings, and educational programs that emphasize the music of the Baroque, Classical, and Early Romantic eras.

Founded in 1989 with the mission of introducing contemporary audiences to the cantatas of Johann Sebastian Bach through historically informed performances, under the leadership of co-founder and Music Director Jeffrey Thomas the ensemble has achieved its vision of assembling the world's finest vocalists and period-instrument performers to bring this brilliant music to life.

For more than two decades, Jeffrey Thomas has brought thoughtful, meaningful, and informed perspectives to his performances as Artistic and Music Director of the American Bach Soloists. Recognized worldwide as one of the foremost interpreters of the music of Bach and the Baroque, he continues to inspire audiences and performers alike through his keen insights into the passions behind musical expression. *Fanfare Magazine* proclaimed that "Thomas' direction seems just right, capturing the humanity of the music...there is no higher praise for Bach performance."

Critical acclaim has been extensive: *The Wall Street Journal* named ABS "the best American specialists in early music...a flawless ensemble...a level of musical finesse one rarely encounters." *San Francisco Classical Voice* declared that "there is nothing routine or settled about their work. Jeffrey Thomas is still pushing the musical Baroque envelope." And the *San Francisco Chronicle* recently extolled the ensemble's "divinely inspired singing."

PERFORMANCES

The American Bach Soloists present an annual Subscription Series with performances in Belvedere, Berkeley, Davis, and San Francisco. Their annual holiday performances of Handel's *Messiah*—presented each December before capacity audiences since 1992—have become a Bay Area tradition. Each season culminates with the American Bach Soloists Festival, held each summer in July in the spectacular facilities of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. Components of the annual summer Bach Festival include the Masterworks Series, Chamber Music Series, Distinguished Artist Series, "Academy-in-Action" Series, free Lecture and Master Class Series, and public Colloquia on a variety of topics. In addition to their regular subscription season, the American Bach Soloists have been presented at some of the world's leading early music and chamber music festivals, and have appeared worldwide from Santa Fe to Hong Kong and Singapore.

ABS has been a leader throughout the Bay Area in its commitment to artistic collaborations. Some recent examples include a collaboration with two San Francisco dance organizations, Xeno and Ultra Gypsy, at The Crucible in Oakland in 2004 and collaborations with the well-known Mark Morris Dance Group in 2004 and 1999. To celebrate the 20th Anniversary Season, ABS joined forces with San Francisco's Grace Cathedral and Lighting

Systems Design Inc. (based in Orlando FL) in a spectacular laser show rendering of Handel's *Music for the Royal Fireworks*.

HISTORY

The first public concerts were given in February 1990 at St. Stephen's Church in Belvedere, where the ensemble serves as Artists-in-Residence. 1993 brought the debut of ABS's first annual summer festival in Tiburon/Belvedere. By the fifth season, regular performances had been inaugurated in San Francisco and Berkeley, and as a result of highly successful collaborations with the Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts, ABS'S full concert seasons expanded to the Davis/Sacramento region in 2005. As the audience increased, so the artistic direction of the ensemble expanded to include Bach's purely instrumental and larger choral masterpieces, as well as music of his contemporaries and that of the early Classical era.

In 1998, in conjunction with the Fifth Biennial Berkeley Festival & Exhibition, ABS established the American Bach Soloists & Henry I. Goldberg International Young Artists Competition as a way to foster emerging musicians who wish to pursue a career in early music.

The Chorus of the American Bach Soloists has shone in repertoire from the Baroque and early Classical eras. With the inception of the Choral Series in 2004, these fine singers have been featured on programs exploring over five centuries of choral music. To acknowledge this splendid work, the American Bach Soloists announced in 2006 a new name for their choral ensemble: American Bach Choir. Critics have acclaimed their "sounds of remarkable transparency and body."

In July 2010, the American Bach Soloists inaugurated North America's newest annual professional training program in Historically Informed Performance Practice. Drawing on their distinguished roster of performers, the **AMERICAN BACH SOLOISTS ACADEMY** offers advanced conservatory-level students and emerging professionals unique opportunities to study and perform Baroque music in a multi-disciplinary learning environment. The ACADEMY is held in the San Francisco Conservatory of Music's exquisite new facilities in the heart of the city's arts district.

RECORDINGS

The American Bach Soloists have a discography of eighteen CDs on the Koch International Classics, Delos International, and American Bach Soloists labels, including six volumes of Bach cantatas, many performed one on a part. The ensemble's critically acclaimed disc of Bach's Mass in B Minor has been called a benchmark recording and a "joyous new performance" (*The Washington Post*). One of their most popular offerings is an historically significant version of *Handel's Messiah*, recorded live during performances in 2004 at the Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts at UC Davis, and released in November 2005 on the Delos International label. In 2007, ABS'S entire catalogue of critically acclaimed recordings of Bach's Mass in B Minor, cantatas, and transcriptions of Italian music, Haydn Masses, choral and vocal works by Schütz, and other works was re-released on iTunes, Magnatune.com, Amazon, CDBaby, and ABS'S own excellent and resourceful web site, which features free streaming audio of most titles. The same year brought two new and much-anticipated releases: *Beethoven's Ninth Symphony* and Bach's *Brandenburg Concertos*. The most recent release, *1685 & The Art of Ian Howell*, features the remarkable young countertenor (and recent winner of the ABS Young Artist Competition) in works by Bach, Handel, and Domenico Scarlatti. Coming soon this season will be Bach's Violin Concertos featuring the brilliant virtuoso, Elizabeth Blumenstock.

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