



Bach for a Hundred Years: A Social History of the Bach Choir of Bethlehem

Paul S. Larson

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This is an account of the actions taken by the residents of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania to create a local amateur society singing the music of J. S. Bach and to develop it into a choir of international importance. Singers, instrumentalists, industrialists, academicians, bankers, and churches acted in community to found and perpetuate a group devoted to sharing the music of Bach locally, nationally, and internationally. While The Bach Choir of Bethlehem performs frequently elsewhere, the annual Bethlehem Bach Festival became and remains a magnet for those who love Bach and want to experience his music excellently performed in historic and sacred surroundings.

In order to reach and maintain its premier status, the choir, its conductor, its board, and staff had to be experts in music performance and shifts in audience tastes. They had to be responsive to research in performance practice, and skilled in strategic planning, promotion and fundraising. In recent years they had to become competent in sound recording technology and use of the internet. These attributes are described and analyzed with frequent use of documents and personal anecdotes.

Successfully balancing the human actions and desires involved in such a complex enterprise has earned The Bach Choir of Bethlehem the title "A National Treasure" in music and the recognition that it is at the same time a national model for excellence as a cultural non-profit organization.

This is a story of how and why—for over a century—inspiring performances of Bach's music came about and were brought to many thousands of listeners.



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