

“BACH TO SCHOOL”

High School Presentation

THESIS: The man, the music and the choir: the synthesis of cultural, social and artistic elements relevant to the time, the individual and the community.

I. **The Bach Choir of Bethlehem** – Show Video Excerpt

A. History

1. Bach died in 1750; rediscovered in early 1800s in Europe
2. Bach’s “rediscovery” transported to U.S. at end of 19th c.
3. Bach Choir established 1898, gave **first** U.S. performances of the *B Minor Mass*, *St. John Passion*, and many cantatas.

B. WHY in Bethlehem?

1. The Moravians (cite parallels w/ Bach & his community)
 - a) commitment to church, German background
 - b) commitment to community
 - c) commitment to music, music education
 - d) love of singing & family
 - e) panculturalism – education of & respect for native Indians
2. Pennsylvania Germans, Lutherans

C. Evolution of the Bach Choir

1. Commitment to Bach’s music alone – only American choir that does this
2. commitment to high musical standards – soloists, orchestra, conductor
3. commitment to community choir status, unpaid amateur singers who practice and perform out of devotion to Bach’s music
4. this & the May festival reflect ongoing love of singing and family
 - a) family picnics on the grounds of Packer Church
 - b) people return year after year as a family tradition from many states and countries
 - c) generations of Bach Choir singers
5. fostering love for great music regardless of religion, cultural background, age, social or economic condition, etc., reemphasizing universal appeal of Bach’s music.
6. This is the community of MUSIKFEST!

D. The Bach Choir Today

1. size
2. new annual concert traditions in addition to May Festival
 - a) Christmas concerts
 - b) Passion concerts
 - c) Family Concert
 - d) Bach at Noon

3. Recordings
 - a) Community outreach on a global scale
 - b) Ever higher professional standards
4. European Tours
 - a) To return to Bach's community that which he and his music have given ours

II. **Johann Sebastian Bach – 1685 to 1750 – The Man**

A. Introduction

MUSICAL EXAMPLE #1: A few bars of first movement of *Brandenburg #2*. (GOALS: to show the importance and inherent appeal of driving rhythm, motion; also tune may be familiar to some.) Discuss importance of rhythm, one of the basic elements of Bach's music that makes it so universally popular. The core appeal of the next example is similar.

MUSICAL EXAMPLE #2: A few bars of L.L. Cool J's late 80's rap hit, *357 – Break it on Down*. (GOALS: to draw a parallel between the relentless driving rhythm of this modern-day piece [which represents an immensely popular type of music] with the Bach excerpt just played.)

B. Bach – Personality and Family Background

1. What kind of Man was Bach?
 - a) stubborn, irascible genius
 - b) anecdotes of his first organ job, rocky relationship with "employers"
 - c) walked 200+ miles to hear a concert
 - d) organ virtuoso; improvisatory skills; compositional output (# of new cantatas required by his job; keyboard inventions, preludes and fugues, etc.; demands of his music upon performers)
 - e) literal, very personal faith in God – Lutheran, SDGI, pietistic texts
2. Bach's Family
 - a) inherent musical talent
 - b) integration of music and family life – composing for education of children, family entertainment
3. Marriages & Children (personal interest stories)
 - a) #1 - Maria Barbara (his cousin!); #2 – Anna Magdalena (16 years younger than Bach)
 - b) 20 children (!!!), including C.P.E., Wilhelm Friedemann, Johann Christian – composers and musicians themselves
4. Importance of Church in Bach's Time
 - a) Church's relationship to public education, politics & community life
 - b) Family involvement

- c) Bach himself a brilliant and insightful biblical scholar & also a pietist (a highly personal type of faith – return to the idea of Bach’s intensely religious worldview for segue to the next section.)

MUSICAL EXAMPLE #3: Introduction and first few choral measures from *St. John Passion*. (GOALS: to reinforce importance of rhythm, introduce idea of text and drama, lead into description of what “Passions” are.)

III. The Passions

- A. Brief description (dramatic retelling of biblical story of Jesus’ suffering and death; synthesis of drama and form, musician and congregation; great moments of Western civilization, etc.)
- B. Three Dramatic Layers
 - 1. The Gospel Story – told in recitatives and some choruses

MUSICAL EXAMPLE #4: “*Herr, bin ichs?*” from the *St. Matthew Passion*. (GOALS: To show Bach’s use of drama; his highly personal conception of scripture; numerology – 11 repetitions of question “Lord is it I?”

- 2. personal reflections upon the story by single persons – arias

MUSICAL EXAMPLE #5: A few bars of “*Erbarme Dich*” from *St. Matthew Passion*. (GOALS: To contrast dramatic mood to that of last example; [also to dispel possible notion that ALL of Bach’s music is quick and drivingly rhythmic!])

- 3. Response of Lutheran believers, congregations – chorals – represent general Christian response to horror of Jesus’ suffering & request for forgiveness

MUSICAL EXAMPLES #6 & #7: “*O Sacred Head*” and “*Amazing Grace*” (GOALS: to illustrate last dramatic layer; to return to first section by broaching idea of universal recognition of tunes [hymns], their relevance to the average person; to link the German and American [specifically early Moravian] musical/religious sensibility.)

IV. Conclusion/Questions