



San Francisco Bach Choir at Calvary Presbyterian Church in 1950 with founding director Waldemar Jacobsen.

San Francisco Bach Choir Celebrates 75 Years

75 YEARS AGO a letter was circulated to patrons of music in San Francisco, requesting subscriptions for “an annual festival of the works of Johann Sebastian Bach.” The inaugural concert, to be presented that June in the Veterans Auditorium would consist of selections from Bach’s great *Mass in B Minor*. The conductor would be Waldemar Jacobsen, who had assembled a chorus to be joined by vocal soloists and members of the San Francisco Symphony. That single-concert event launched not only a festival but an institution. It was the premiere performance by the San Francisco Bach Choir. This year the Bach Choir celebrates its 75th anniversary marking the longest unbroken history of any community choral group in the greater Bay Area.

Waldemar Jacobsen pioneered numerous concerts of the

music of J.S Bach and other classical choral masterworks for Bay Area audiences in a time when few such offerings existed. At the time of his death some 42 years later, the SFBC had established a strong choral presence in San Francisco, and the works of J.S. Bach had become well-known to the concert-going public. Today the group is comprised of trained amateur musicians selected by audition. Joined by world-class professional soloists and instrumentalists, it offers four principal programs each year.

Following Jacobsen’s death, organist and choral conductor **David Babbitt** took over as the choir’s second Artistic Director in 1981. He brought an “early music” focus to the group with programs that began to emphasize the historical and cultural contexts of the music. He also began to use orchestras and soloists drawn from the nascent community of early music specialists who were beginning to make

the Bay Area a center of early music practice. In 1989 the San Francisco Bach Choir presented one of the very first baroque style performances of the St. Matthew Passion to be heard by Bay Area audiences.

Mr. Babbitt continued to grow and challenge the choir in new directions. He led the choir deeper into the musical history of North German repertoire leading up to the great musical genius of J. S. Bach. He researched and arranged many contemporary performing editions of late Renaissance and early baroque polychoral compositions that had lain dormant in library archives for centuries. The SFBC has presented numerous modern premieres of this rare antiphonal music from Germany’s rich post-Reformation period. In the early nineties, Mr. Babbitt also introduced the choir’s annual candle-light Christmas concerts that have become a choir institution and a San Francisco holiday staple.

Current Artistic Director **Corey Jamason** took over the post in 2007 after Mr. Babbitt's untimely death in 2006. Harpsichordist and director of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music's Historical Performance Program, Mr. Jamason has already ably directed the Bach Choir for four seasons, bringing polish to the choir's 16th and 17th choral repertoire and new musical energy and ideas to the organization.

In 2008, Mr. Jamason moved the choir to its new home base at historic Calvary Presbyterian Church in Pacific Heights where founder Waldemar Jacobsen had long conducted both the church choir and the SF Bach Choir.

In 2009, Mr. Jamason launched the choir's educational outreach program, taking groups of SFBC singers to local elementary schools to help educate and to inspire a love of classical music. His relaxed style and easy charm is particularly effective when talking to children. Further educational outreach is planned for December of 2011 with an interactive family concert designed for young audiences.

In May of 2010, Mr. Jamason briefly detoured from the choir's early music path to premiere a work for chorus and dance by composer, Eric Davis, and choreographer, Rachael Lopez. The concert also included works from the Civil War era and was dedi-



Artistic Director Corey Jamason

cated to all who serve the community.

For the **75th anniversary season** the Bach Choir's spring schedule has included a three-concert celebration of the work of its namesake. In January Mr. Jamason stepped from the podium and presented an all-Bach harpsichord concert in the more intimate setting of Calvary's reception hall. Those in attendance heard the director play and talk about the music as well as getting a closer look at a beautiful historically inspired instrument lent for the occasion by builder, Kevin Fryer.

In March Mr. Jamason continued the theme of celebration with a selection of favorite Bach choruses from the choir's past and balanced the program's main focus by also inviting the brilliant young pianist Hilda Huang to appear as both guest performer and conductor. At the age of 14, Miss Huang represents the future of the music and talent that has always been central to the choir.

On May 21st and 22nd, 2011, the SFBC revisits its most beloved repertoire work, J.S. Bach's *Mass in B Minor* for the grand finale concert of its 75th season. With this performance at Calvary Presbyterian Church, the choir comes full circle with its own past, as once again this great choral monument rings forth in the very hall where the choir first sang a complete version in 1950. A reception after the Sunday performance will bring former and current members together with the audience for a memorable mingling of past and present, all centered on the joy of J.S. Bach and a community choir that has flourished on his musical legacy.



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