

## THE LONDON BACH SOCIETY

The London Bach Society is the UK's premier Bach society, bringing the music of Johann Sebastian Bach 'live' to both the devoted follower and curious newcomer for over 50 years.

### GENERAL INFORMATION

The origins of the society, which celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1996, go back to the 1930s, when Paul Steinitz became Director of Music at St.Mary's, the parish church of Ashford, Kent. There, with the local choral society, he conducted performances of the Christmas Oratorio, the Matthew Passion and the B minor Mass. From the start, he insisted on the highest possible standards, using professional musicians where necessary. At the same time his curiosity was aroused as to how the music must have sounded in Bach's day.

The first meeting of the South London Bach Society took place on a November evening in 1946, shortly after Dr Steinitz had become organist of St.Peter's Church, Dulwich Common. In March 1952, in the Priory Church of St Bartholomew-the-Great in London, where Dr Steinitz had become organist, the society gave what was probably the first performance in England of the St. Matthew Passion in its entirety and in the original language.

In 1958 Dr Steinitz embarked on a project which would later be seen as his "life's work" - the public performance of Bach's extant cantatas, 208 in all. The 1960s saw the introduction of more period instruments into LBS performances, and in 1964 the society made its first visit to East Germany. This process culminated in 1968, with the foundation of the Steinitz Bach Players, a group of professional musicians who shared Dr Steinitz's wish for a style of playing to complement the sound made by the choir.

The 1970s witnessed its full flowering. In 1976 he used 24 singers from the LBS choir, accompanied by an orchestra of period instruments, including Baroque oboes, to record three cantatas for BBC Radio 3. These were to set the style for the completion of the cycle that Dr Steinitz had begun in 1958.

Domestic engagements were interspersed with foreign tours, to Israel (1969), the United States (1971 and 1973), Italy (1975) and Bulgaria (1980). A second visit to Leipzig, the highlight of which was a performance of the B minor Mass in St Thomas's, took place in 1983.

In 1985, the tercentenary of Bach's birth, Dr Steinitz was awarded an OBE for his services to music. The cantata cycle was completed in the Queen Elizabeth Hall in December 1987.

Five months later Dr Steinitz was dead. Towards the end of his life his thoughts were running along the following lines: the formation of a consort of professional singers, the use of boys' voices where possible, the foundation of an annual Bach festival beginning in the autumn of 1988, and an invitation to the Thomanerchor, Bach's old choir, to visit this country.

The society's amateur choir was wound up in the summer of 1989, after 42 years of existence. The LBS committee had come to the conclusion that in the light of modern scholarship, it was no longer artistically tenable, or financially feasible, to have a 60-strong amateur choir performing with an orchestra of period instruments. Just as the Steinitz Bach Players had switched entirely from modern to Baroque instruments in the early 1980s, so it was now time to reduce the choral forces accordingly.

In 1990 Dr Steinitz's widow, Margaret Steinitz, founded the London Bach Festival. The programmes centre on Bach, his family and his contemporaries. Fifty years after the foundation of the LBS, Dr Steinitz's vision has been realised. The choirs used in the festivals are small and professional; the orchestra plays on period instruments; the participation of young performers reflects Dr Steinitz's long association with students and his widow's determination to persuade a new generation of Bach's greatness.

Outside the annual festival, Steinitz Bach Players carries out commissioned engagements, the society hires out its chamber organs and allows its valuable collection of Bach orchestral material to be used by others. From day to day Mrs Steinitz is kept busy with enquiries relating to the performances of these works as well as continually planning and preparing for future events. In 2006 the society will celebrate its Diamond Jubilee.

### COMMITTEE

#### Founder



### ACTIVITIES

This section holds those activities organized by the association, both addressed to members and the public in general.

### MORE INFO

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