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American Bach Soloists present "Handel's Messiah in Grace Cathedral"

"A Baroque New Year's Eve at the Opera" returns to San Francisco's Herbst Theatre

American Bach Soloists (ABS) present "Handel's Messiah in Grace Cathedral"

This holiday season, the American Bach Soloists' December concerts begin with three performances of Handel's treasured masterwork, *Messiah*, in San Francisco's resounding Grace Cathedral. Jeffrey Thomas will conduct the ABS period-instrument orchestra, the acclaimed American Bach Choir, and an outstanding quartet of soloists, totaling 72 musicians.

"What stood out above all, in this annual rite that drew a huge crowd, was the sense of being addressed directly, personally, confidingly. Conductor Jeffrey Thomas brought it all together, melding his ABS forces with precision and intuitive responsiveness to Handel's capacious 1742 masterwork."
Steven Winn, *San Francisco Classical Voice*.



Now beginning their fourth decade of celebrated Bay Area performances, and well into the third decade of annual presentations of Handel's *Messiah* in Grace Cathedral, American Bach Soloists have established a singular holiday tradition with these concerts. Noted especially for their adept mastery of complex and technically difficult choruses that call upon each singer to demonstrate control over Baroque coloratura, the American Bach Choir under Thomas's direction have established themselves as experts particularly in the music of Handel and Bach.

"The truly splendid ABS choir, with its round and transparent tone, tied both the evening and Handel's message together."
Niels Swinkels, *San Francisco Classical Voice*

Having released both a critically acclaimed audio recording of Handel's autograph score version (as he composed the work before making performance-related modifications) and a Blu-ray/DVD High-Definition Audio film of "Handel's *Messiah* in Grace Cathedral", the ensemble focused on presenting nearly all known versions of *Messiah* as it was performed under Handel's direction in the 1740s-1750s over the course of their performances of the work in San Francisco. Now, having completed the cycle, the versions heard in recent seasons reflect Handel's last performances, when it was presented as an event to raise funds for the benefit of orphaned and abandoned children at one of 18th-century London's most important charitable institutions. ABS offers a 21-minute YouTube documentary about this topic: <https://tinyurl.com/messiahdocumentary>

Each season's performances present a carefully chosen and balanced quartet of vocal soloists, all noted for their gifts at bringing such Baroque works to life. The 2019 quartet features Canadian soprano H el ene Brunet, the ABS debut of mezzo-soprano Rebecca Powers, tenor Steven Brennfleck, and baritone Hadleigh Adams (a favorite of San Francisco Opera patrons).

Continued...

Listing Information:

Handel's Messiah in Grace Cathedral

December 11–13, 2019

American Bach Soloists • American Bach Choir

Jeffrey Thomas, conductor

Hélène Brunet, soprano • Rebecca Powers, mezzo-soprano

Steven Brennfleck, tenor • Hadleigh Adams, baritone

Wednesday December 11 2019 7:30 p.m. • Grace Cathedral, 1100 California Street, San Francisco

Thursday December 12 2019 7:30 p.m. • Grace Cathedral, 1100 California Street, San Francisco

Friday December 13 2019 7:30 p.m. • Grace Cathedral, 1100 California Street, San Francisco

TICKETS: americanbach.org/tickets or call 800-595-4849

INFORMATION: americanbach.org/messiah

"A Baroque New Year's Eve at the Opera" returns to San Francisco's Herbst Theatre

At the end of last season's enormously popular New Year's Eve concert, ABS music director Jeffrey Thomas announced that American Bach Soloists would be back at the end of 2019 for a reprise of the event. The delightful program of arias and instrumental music from opera and concert turned out to be one of the hottest tickets in town. This late afternoon performance in San Francisco's beautiful Herbst Theatre — a cornerstone and jewel among the city's most prestigious venues — will joyfully ring in the New Year in elegant style and offers an opportunity for audience members to bring friends and family to celebrate a New Year full of wonderful music!

The exciting voices of two young artists who have already established themselves as exceptionally talented singers will be presented in arias from Handel's *Agrippina*, *Ariodante*, *Giulio Cesare*, *Orlando*, and *Riccardo I, ré d'Inghilterra*; Rameau's *Castor et Pollux* and *Hippolyte et Aricie*; and Vivaldi's *Il Bajazet*. Additionally, the period-instrument specialists of American Bach Soloists will perform sinfonias, ballet music, and dances from operas by Vivaldi, Handel, and Marais. Well suited to the Baroque opera repertory, ABS Music Director has been praised by *Opera News*: "Jeffrey Thomas draws crisp, vital playing from the ace baroque instrumentalists of American Bach Soloists, who provide galvanizing vigor but also caress the gut strings of their period instruments with unusual beauty."

Sarah Coit (mezzo-soprano) was a Vocal Fellow with Ravinia's Stearns Music Institute in 2018, and made several important role and house debuts there. *Opera News* praised her performance as Cherubino in *Le nozze di Figaro* with Michigan Opera Theatre: "Sarah Coit's burnished mezzo-soprano gave her Cherubino a seductive tinge. Her pure, lovely "Voi che sapete" confirmed her bright future, made all the more likely by her undeniable aptitude for physical comedy." She was also heard as Addison Moore in a workshop performance of John de los Santos and Clint Borzoni's *The Copper Queen* with Arizona Opera at Opera America. In the 2018-2019 season, she performed the role of Adonis in the world premiere of Dan Visconti and Cerise Jacobs' "interactive video game opera" *PermaDeath* with White Snake Projects in Boston.



She made her Seattle Opera debut as Mercédès in Bizet's *Carmen*, performed at the Ravinia Festival as a soloist in Bernstein's *Songfest*, joined West Edge Opera as Jenny Diver in John Gay's *The Threepenny Opera*, sang her first Olga in Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* with Livermore Valley Opera, and performed as a soloist in Bach's Magnificat and Vivaldi's Gloria with the Master Chorale of South Florida. Ms. Coit will be heard in 2020 again as Mercédès in *Carmen* with Opera Tampa and Rosina in Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* with Utah Opera. In the summer of 2015, she was a Gerdine Young Artist with Opera Theatre of St. Louis where she covered Richard in the American premiere of Handel's *Riccardo primo, re d'Inghilterra*. She spent two years as a Resident Artist with Utah Opera, where she sang the Shepherd, White Cat, and Squirrel in *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* with the Utah Symphony and performed the roles of Mercédès in *Carmen* and Zerlina in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* on the mainstage. As an apprentice artist at the Santa Fe Opera, she covered the roles of Erika in Barber's *Vanessa*, and Laurene Powell Jobs in the world premiere of Mason Bates' *The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs*. As Alisa in

Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Classical Review* remarked "...mezzo-soprano Sarah Coit distinguished herself as Alisa, especially in the gorgeous sextet." Sarah Coit was a 2017 National semi-finalist in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and has received prizes from the George London Foundation and the Handel Aria Competition. A native of Spring Hill, Florida, Ms. Coit holds degrees in Music Studies and Theatre Performance from the University of South Florida and a Master's degree from the University of Michigan.

Hadleigh Adams (baritone) has been hailed a "comic tour de force" by Alex Ross of *The New Yorker* following last year's performances with the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Performing repertoire that spans from Rameau and Vivaldi to Ades and Francesconi, he is an artist equally at home on the opera stage and in the concert hall. This season's highlights include the West coast premiere of Luca Francesconi's *Quartett* (Valmont), three mainstage productions with the San Francisco Opera, including their new production of Puccini's *Tosca* (Angelotti), his European debut with the Nederlandse Reisopera in Sondheim's *A Little Night Music* (Carl Magnus), a debut with the Ravinia Festival, and a return to the Cincinnati Opera for Gounod's *Romeo et Juliette* (Mercutio). On the concert platform he performs Orff's *Carmina Burana* with the San Francisco Symphony, and Handel's *Messiah* with Houston Symphony Orchestra, Nashville Symphony Orchestra, American Bach Soloists, and the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra.



Mr. Adams made his professional debut in Jonathan Miller's 2012 staging of Bach's *St Matthew Passion* at the Royal National Theatre, London. His performance of Christus was described by *The Guardian* as "tremendous...utterly beguiling." Since then he's taken the same role with the Colorado Symphony, sung Bach cantatas with ensembles like the Atlanta Symphony, and performed Beethoven's Mass in C with Philharmonia Baroque. He sang the role of Pollux in Rameau's *Castor et Pollux* and the title role in Vivaldi's *Bajazet*, both for Pinchgut Opera, Sydney. He also made a resounding New York debut as Zoroastro in R. B. Schlather's staging of Handel's *Orlando* at the Whitebox Art Centre, New York: a performance singled out by *The New York Times* for its "glowering presence" and by *Opera Today* as a "show-stopper...the audience tingled with excitement every time he stepped onto the stage." "Adams manages to use his gorgeous instrument with ease and beauty," that review continued, "under the strain of outlandish costumes or unusual staging. His movement is deft and cat-like, and his sound precision never suffers as he maneuvers the stage with the agility of a seasoned dancer." Next year, Mr. Adams makes returns to the San Francisco Opera in Handel's *Partenope* (Ormonte). Among his many concert engagements, he will perform Beethoven's ninth symphony with the Colorado Symphony, and *Messiah* with the Melbourne and Adelaide Symphony Orchestras. Previous highlights included Lou Harrison's *Young Caesar* (Nicomedes), Bernstein's "Mass" with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* with the London Philharmonia Orchestra. Mr. Adams studied at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, and is a former Merola artist and Adler Fellow of the San Francisco Opera.

Listing Information:

A Baroque New Year's Eve at the Opera

December 31, 2019 at 4:00 p.m.

American Bach Soloists

Jeffrey Thomas, conductor

Sarah Coit, mezzo-soprano • Hadleigh Adams, baritone

Tuesday December 31 2019 4:00 p.m. • Herbst Theatre, 401 Van Ness Avenue, San Francisco

TICKETS: cityboxoffice.com or americanbach.org/nye or call 415-392-4400

INFORMATION: americanbach.org

About American Bach Soloists

AMERICAN BACH SOLOISTS ("ABS") was 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 three 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 Washington Post* 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 "there is nothing routine or settled about their work. Jeffrey Thomas is still pushing the musical Baroque envelope." And the *San Francisco Chronicle* has extolled the ensemble's "divinely inspired singing."

In 2013, to commemorate ABS Music Director Jeffrey Thomas's 25-year tenure of inspired leadership, the American Bach Soloists created the Jeffrey Thomas Award to honor, recognize, and encourage exceptionally gifted emerging professionals in the field of Early Music.

Bringing to fruition the ensemble's commitment to introduce audiences to newly discovered works from the Baroque era, ABS presented the West Coast premiere of Antonio Lotti's *Mass for Three Choirs* in 2011 and the first North American performance of Heinrich Biber's 53-part *Missa Salisburgensis* — perhaps the largest-scaled surviving work from the Baroque — utilizing the composer's full instrumentation at the 2013 ABS Festival & Academy. In 2015, the Festival offered the first performances outside of Europe of Marin Marais' 1709 opera, *Sémélé*. Handel's complete serenata, *Parnasso in festa*, was given its North and South American premiere at the 2016 Festival & Academy.

American Bach Soloists are frequent winners of *San Francisco Classical Voice* "Best of the Bay" awards, placing first in "Best Early Music / Baroque Ensemble," "Best Choral Performers," "Best Early Music / Baroque Performance," "Best Vocal Recital," and four times as "Best Festival".

The American Bach Soloists' renowned discography — available on CD and streaming services — includes their recent audio recordings of the American Bach Choir in a disc of Bach's Motets for Double Chorus, the ABS orchestra in Bach's Orchestral Suites, and the most recent release of "Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen Sings Gluck, Handel, & Vivaldi." ABS's beautiful feature film "Handel's *Messiah* in Grace Cathedral," recorded in 5.1 DTS-HD™ Surround Sound and 2.0 DTS-HD™ Stereo, is available on High Definition Blu-ray™ and DVD, as well as streaming video services.

More information at: americanbach.org/about

About Music Director Jeffrey Thomas

Jeffrey Thomas (conductor) has brought thoughtful, meaningful, and informed perspectives to his performances as Artistic and Music Director of American Bach Soloists for more than 25 years. 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. He has directed and conducted recordings of more than 20 Bach cantatas, the Mass in B Minor, *Brandenburg Concertos*, *Saint Matthew Passion*, Orchestral Suites, various concertos, motets for double chorus, and works by Beethoven, Handel, Haydn, Pergolesi, Schütz, and Vivaldi. *Fanfare Magazine* has praised his series of Bach recordings, stating that "Thomas' direction seems just right, capturing the humanity of the music ... there is no higher praise for Bach performance."

Educated at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, Manhattan School of Music, and the Juilliard School of Music, with further studies in English literature at Cambridge University, he has taught at the Amherst Early Music Workshop, Oberlin College Conservatory Baroque Performance Institute, San Francisco Early Music Society, and Southern Utah Early Music Workshops; presented master classes at the Eastman School of Music, the New England Conservatory of Music, San Francisco Conservatory of Music, SUNY at Buffalo, Swarthmore College, and Washington University; and served on the faculties of Lehigh University in Pennsylvania and the University of California,

where he was artist-in-residence and is now professor emeritus of music (Barbara K. Jackson Chair in Choral Conducting) in the Department of Music at UC Davis, having been named a UC Davis Chancellor's Fellow from 2001 to 2006. The Rockefeller Foundation awarded him a prestigious Residency at the Bellagio Study and Conference Center at Villa Serbelloni. In 2019, he was a guest conductor at the Historical Performance Institute of Indiana University in Bloomington. Additionally, Mr. Thomas hosts two public radio programs on Classical KDFC.

Before devoting all of his time to conducting, he was one of the first recipients of the San Francisco Opera Company's prestigious Adler Fellowships. Cited by *The Wall Street Journal* as "a superstar among oratorio tenors," Mr. Thomas' extensive discography of vocal music includes dozens of recordings of major works for Decca, EMI, Erato, Koch International Classics, Denon, Harmonia Mundi, Smithsonian, Newport Classics, and Arabesque. Mr. Thomas has appeared with the Baltimore, Berkeley, Boston, Detroit, Houston, National, Rochester, Minnesota, and San Francisco symphony orchestras; with the Vienna Symphony and the New Japan Philharmonic; with many American Baroque orchestras; and in Austria, England, Germany, Italy, Japan, and Mexico. He has performed at the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, Spoleto USA Festival, Ravinia Festival, Saratoga Performing Arts Center, Berkeley Festival and Exhibition, Boston Early Music Festival, Bethlehem Bach Festival, Göttingen Festival, Tage Alte Musik Festival in Regensburg, E. Nakamichi Baroque Festival in Los Angeles, the Smithsonian Institution, and at the Brooklyn Academy of Music's "Next Wave Festival," and he has collaborated on several occasions as conductor with the Mark Morris Dance Group.

More information at: americanbach.org/JeffreyThomas.html

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americanbach.org/press