



Toronto
Mendelssohn
Choir



Artwork: *The Embrace* by Fabrizio Solocco

BACH

ST. MATTHEW PASSION

Jean-Sébastien Vallée
Artistic Director & Principal Conductor

March 24 & 25, 2026 - 7:00 pm

Koerner Hall

TELUS Centre for Performance and Learning

St. Matthew Passion BWV 244

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

Revised Orchestration by Dominique Sourisse

Jean-Sébastien Vallée, Artistic Director & Principal Conductor

Toronto Mendelssohn Choir

Toronto Mendelssohn Baroque Orchestra

The Junior Choir of St. Michael's Choir School

Nicholas Nicolaidis, tenor (Evangelist)

Jonathon Adams, baritone (Jesus & arias)

Sherezade Panthaki, soprano

Allyson McHardy, mezzo-soprano

Isaiah Bell, tenor

Leslie Higgins, soprano (Ancilla 2)

Lindsay McIntyre, soprano (Ancilla 1, Uxor Pilati)

Ryan McDonald, alto (Testi 1)

Nathan Gritter, tenor (Testi 2)

Neil Aronoff, bass-baritone (Pilate)

Kieran Kane, bass-baritone (Peter)

Graham Robinson, bass-baritone (Judas)

Paul Winkelmans, baritone (Kaiphaz, Pontifex 2)

David Yung, baritone (Pontifex 1)

This evening's orchestra performs through the generous support of the Estate of John Philip Penney.

Part One (80 mins) | Interval (20 mins) | Part Two (90 mins)

If you enjoyed this evening's performance please consider making a donation in support of Toronto Mendelssohn Choir.

tmchoir.org/donate-now

Toronto Mendelssohn Choir acknowledges that the land on which we perform is the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. We also acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit.

We are honoured to share our music across these lands.

PROGRAM NOTES

Rena Roussin, Musicologist-in-Residence

I begin with a confession to you all, dear readers: I spent three months wondering where to begin these program notes, because where, after all, does one begin with a work as monumental as *Saint Matthew Passion*? Bach's setting of the events of Chapter 26 and 27 of the Gospel of Matthew holds immeasurable meanings. For Christian members of our TMChoir community, it remains, as it was at its premiere in Leipzig in 1727, a work of deep spiritual significance. Yet it also has profound humanistic insight, with numerous moments that invite us to consider our own human vulnerability, struggles, and fallibility. Then, of course, there is *Saint Matthew Passion's* status as one of the summative works of classical music in the Western tradition. In balancing these spiritual, humanistic, and musical meanings, I have found myself returning, again and again, to one question: what does it mean to perform *Saint Matthew Passion*—in Bach's time, and in ours?

How we hear the work today, after all, bears little resemblance to how Bach and his audience would have conceptualized the work in 1727, when it was performed at St. Thomas Church in a liturgical context, woven into a larger (and quite lengthy) Good Friday Vespers service. Bach's original audience would have been familiar with the customs of Christian Friedrich Henrici's libretto, which interweaves the text of the Gospel (narrated by the Evangelist and soloists who enact the words of Jesus, the apostles, and Pontius Pilate) with many moments that "step out" of the Gospel's narrative to reflect on it, accomplished through the work's many arias and devotional chorales. These musical pieces invited parishioners to see themselves and their own repentance in the human drama of Jesus of Nazareth's Passion. At the same time, both Henrici's libretto and Bach's music are firmly grounded in the Pietist religious revival that was *au courant* in eighteenth-century Lutheran Germany. The Pietists stressed that individuals held deep, personal connections to God that could be achieved through prayer and meditation, and challenged the need for a religious celebrant, placing the congregation rather than a priest at the center of Christian worship (hence, as Victor Lederer notes, the libretto's continual positioning of "I" and "we" in the libretto's chorales and arias). This is joined to another Pietist tradition: a near-obsessive fixation on the bodily, gruesome, and grotesque nature of Christ's suffering: this focus was central to how Pietist writers expressed themselves, primarily as a method of demonstrating the depth of God's and Christ's love for humanity. Bach's audience would have readily interpreted and understood these aspects of the text and its theology.

Yet when I say that how we hear Bach's *Passion* is different today, I do also mean musically: Bach's performers would have been entirely male, and there would have been at most 24 singers, with soloists made up from the choir. Because of this, the balance of orchestral to vocal forces would have been much more equal, and the tuning, timbre, ornamentation, and musical texture all would have sounded completely different. Furthermore, in contrast to the months of rehearsals most choirs now undertake to perform this work, minimal rehearsal with gifted but not professional church musicians were not uncommon in Bach's time: mistakes would have abounded. What's more, Bach's fusing of the sacred and secular likely sounds normal to current audiences. However, while Bach was certainly not the first composer to draw on opera in church music, the intensity of his interweaving of da capo aria forms into eighteenth-century Lutheran church music drew critiques from his eighteenth-century audiences as being profane (this was in part because Leipzig was notoriously musically conservative, which is likely why Bach—however inconceivably now—was considered a last resort as cantor of St. Thomas Church). Musically, Bach was both of and beyond his time: his decision to interweave multiple musical traditions into his setting of *Saint Matthew Passion* arguably blends musical styles of the human and divine.

After Bach's death, the piece fell out of the musical repertory until 1829, when a young Felix Mendelssohn conducted *Saint Matthew Passion* in a concert setting at the Singakademie in Berlin—an event so influential that posterity would refer to it as the Bach Revival. Since this performance, the *Passion* has never left the standard repertory of classical music. However, Bach himself would likely be surprised at the context the piece is now performed in: Mendelssohn's interpretation of the *Passion* inaugurated the now common practice of performing the work in secular settings, with soloists and large choral forces, in concert halls designed to venerate the music itself. Of course, for Christian members of our community (who are about to enter the holiest week of the year), the theological meaning and spiritual depth of this work surely remain significant, regardless of setting. Yet this changed context also opens the *Passion* and its text and music to the many teachings, traditions, and heritages that we, the audience and performers of this work, bring to it. And so, beyond the changed musical and theological context and setting, I return to my opening question: what does it mean to perform *Saint Matthew Passion* today?

Maestro Vallée has helpful insights here, reminding us that one of the paramount features of Bach's compositional artistry in this work "lies in his construction of a musical and spiritual architecture where multiple temporal dimensions coexist: the linear progression of the Gospel story, the cyclical nature of liturgical time, and the timeless resonance of human emotion. This temporal layering creates a sacred space where the suffering of the past meets our present stories, questions, and reflections. Each performance becomes a living act of memory, empathy, and shared humanity, inviting us to dwell in a sacred time that is both ancient and urgently contemporary." Across contexts, and regardless of what musical forces are used to articulate its meaning, Bach's music ultimately invites us into contemplation of the sacred, of the human, and of our own souls.



Please scan the QR code or visit [TMChoir.org/passion](https://tmchoir.org/passion) to access the full text and translation.

TORONTO MENDELSSOHN CHOIR

Toronto Mendelssohn Choir (TMChoir) is proud to be one of Canada's oldest, largest, and best-known choral organizations. The choir presented its first concert on January 15, 1895, as part of Massey Hall's inaugural season, and has been a leader in choral music in Canada ever since, commissioning works by Canadian composers, and presenting world and Canadian premieres. The choir also regularly performs and records with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. In May 2021, Jean-Sébastien Vallée was named as Artistic Director, only the eighth conductor in TMChoir's 131-year history.

Through its performances, educational programs, and community engagement, TMChoir aspires to introduce its audiences to choral masterworks from the past and present—and make both renowned and lesser-known pieces available, accessible, and inspirational to all.

TMChoir includes a core of professional singers and more than 145 auditioned and experienced volunteer choristers. The smaller professional ensemble, the Toronto Mendelssohn Singers (TMSingers), was created to deliver more intimate repertoire in a variety of nontraditional venues.

Jean-Sébastien Vallée, Artistic Director & Principal Conductor

Jean-Sébastien Vallée is a renowned Canadian-American conductor, scholar, and pedagogue recognized for his expertise in vocal, choral, and orchestral repertoires. With a career spanning over several decades, Vallée has conducted numerous ensembles across North America, Europe, and Asia, and has collaborated with some of the world's most prestigious orchestras including the Boston, Chicago and Toronto Symphony Orchestras, l'Orchestre symphonique de Montréal, and the National Arts Centre Orchestra in Ottawa.

Dr. Vallée is Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the renowned 170-voice Toronto Mendelssohn Choir and the professional chamber ensemble, the Toronto Mendelssohn Singers. In addition, Jean-Sébastien is Full Professor of Music, Director of Choral Studies, and Coordinator of the Conducting & Ensembles Area at the Schulich School of Music of McGill University. He has previously served as the Director of Choral Studies at California State University, Los Angeles, and was on the choral faculty of the University of Redlands.

Vallée's recordings have been broadcast internationally and include *Remember* (ATMA, 2024), *Distance* (ATMA, 2021), *Requiem* (ATMA, 2018 – requiems by Fauré and Duruflé), and *Lux* (ATMA, 2017).

Most recently, he was honoured with the 2025 Université Laval Distinguished Alumnus Award as well as the Order of Choral Merit, the highest distinction awarded by the Alliance chorale du Québec, recognizing his exceptional career, his deep commitment to musical and community leadership, and his significant role in shaping the future of classical music.

In the upcoming season, Maestro Vallée will return to the Orchestre symphonique de Québec and make his debut with the Seattle Symphony and the Pacific Symphony.



Jonathon Adams, baritone

Jonathon Adams is a Cree-Métis, Two-Spirit baritone from amiskwaciwâskahikan (Edmonton, AB). They have appeared as a soloist with the New York Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, National Symphony, Calgary Philharmonic, Tafelmusik, Vox Luminis, B'Rock, and Collegium Vocale Gent, among others. Together with Métis pianist/composer Jesse Plessis, Jonathon forms one half of Duo Nistwayr. Notable recent projects include Tyson Houseman's experimental opera *Askiwan*, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui's *Mea Culpa* with Ballet Vlaanderen, and *Against the Grain's Messiah/Complex*. The inaugural artist-in-residence at Early Music Vancouver, Jonathon has led workshops at the Juilliard School, Bard College, McGill, the Universities of Toronto, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Festival Montréal Baroque. Jonathon attended the Royal Academy of Music, the Conservatorium van Amsterdam, and studied singing with Nancy Argenta and Emma Kirkby.



Neil Aronoff, bass-baritone

Montreal-born bass Neil Aronoff is a graduate of McGill University and an active choral performer in Toronto. He sings with the Toronto Mendelssohn Singers and Soundstreams Choir 21, performing major choral masterpieces alongside innovative contemporary works.



Isaiah Bell, tenor

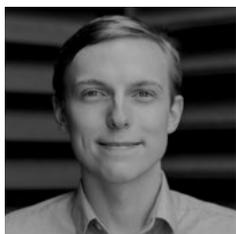
Tenor Isaiah Bell first distinguished himself as an interpreter of Handel, Britten, and Bach's Evangelists (Lincoln Center, Edinburgh Festival, Aldeburgh Festival, Toronto Symphony), and has further found an artistic home in new work and re-interpretations of classics. He has created lead roles in the world premieres of *Hadrian* (Canadian Opera Company), *La Reine-garçon* (Opéra de Montréal, Canadian Opera Company), and *La beauté du monde* (Opéra de Montréal).



This season includes concert engagements with the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra, the Indianapolis Symphony, Toronto Mendelssohn Choir, and Ottawa Choral Society. He also recently sang his first Peter Quint in Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* with Pacific Opera Victoria, and joined Opéra de Montréal as Števa in *Jenůfa*.

Nathan Gritter, tenor

Nathan Gritter (he/him) is a singer and conductor based in Toronto. He holds a Master of Music degree from the University of Toronto. He is a frequent featured soloist in Bach's cantatas presented by the *Trinity Bach Project* in Toronto. Nathan is a founding member of the nine-voice chamber choral ensemble *Silver Thread*.



Leslie Higgins, soprano

Leslie Higgins is an Uxbridge-born soprano currently based in Toronto. She is an active member of Toronto's vibrant choral scene, having performed professionally with many choirs including Chorus Niagara, the Orpheus Choir, and The Elora Singers. She recently performed the Bach Christmas Oratorio at St. Pauls in Uxbridge, and is looking forward to singing Mahler 4 with the Rosedale Symphony Orchestra in June.



Kieran Kane, bass-baritone

Kieran has worked with choirs across Canada including The Elora Singers, The Canadian Chamber Choir, and The Vancouver Chamber Choir. Recent solo highlights include: *Missa Omnium Sanctorum* (Zelenka) with Choir of St Michael's College, U of T; *Requiem* (Fauré) with University of Guelph Choirs, and numerous Bach cantata performances with Toronto's Trinity Bach Project.



Ryan McDonald, alto

A multi-award winner from the Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition, Ryan has recently appeared as a soloist with Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Newfoundland Symphony Orchestra, Theatre of Early Music, Nota Bene Players, Thunder Bay Symphony, Les Arts Florissants, Opera on the Avalon, Opera Parallèl, Canadian Music Centre, New Music Concerts, Santa Fe Opera.



Allyson McHardy, mezzo-soprano

Hailed by the San Francisco Chronicle as "a singer of enormous imagination and versatility", Allyson McHardy has been celebrated for her rich, expressive voice and compelling artistry. She has performed with many of the world's leading opera companies, symphony orchestras, and early music ensembles, including recent engagements with Sweden's Drottningholms Slottsteater, Chicago's Music of the Baroque, and l'Orchestre symphonique de Montréal. In the upcoming season, Allyson joins the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony, the Grand Philharmonic Choir, the Orchestre Symphonique de Québec, and the Toronto Mendelssohn Choir, for repertoire including works by Handel, Dvorak, Mahler, and Bach.



Lindsay McIntyre, soprano

Lindsay McIntyre is a Toronto-based soprano specializing in contemporary chamber music and adventurous vocal repertoire. She co-founded the duo vox & bow and recently performed Feldman's *Three Voices* to critical acclaim. Lindsay has held artist residencies at Bang on a Can, LAMP, the Banff Centre for Arts & Creativity, and Yellow Barn.



Nicholas Nicolaidis, tenor

Nicholas Nicolaidis is an accomplished and versatile, soloist, chorister, conductor and vocal pedagogue. Born in Johannesburg, South Africa, he began his vocal studies at the world famous Drakensberg Boys' Choir School. Nicholas studied music at Wits University, furthered his singing studies in London, UK, and conducting in Stellenbosch. He specialises in oratorio, lieder and jazz standards. Nicholas is the musical director of the Trinity Bach Project and is a proud member of the TMChoir.



Sherezade Panthaki, soprano

Sherezade Panthaki, soprano, enjoys ongoing international collaborations with conductors Nicholas McGegan, Masaaki Suzuki, Stephen Stubbs, and more. Recent engagements include early music and oratorio performances with the New York Philharmonic, Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, Bach Collegium Japan, Wiener Akademie (Austria), NDR Hannover Radiophilharmonie (Germany), the LA Philharmonic, the Boston Early Music Festival, and the Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra (Canada). Born and raised in India, Ms. Panthaki holds graduate degrees from the Yale School of Music and the University of Illinois. She is a founding member of the Kaleidoscope Vocal Ensemble, presenting vocal excellence alongside arts education and social justice. Ms. Panthaki is a renowned clinician, has taught voice at Yale University, and currently heads the Vocal program at Mount Holyoke College.



Graham Robinson, bass-baritone

Bass/Baritone Graham Robinson is a sought-after interpreter of classical voice, from the early Baroque to Contemporary, with a deep love for the music of J.S. Bach.

Graham holds a BMus from the University of Victoria and a Master's degree in Performance and Vocal Pedagogy from the University of Toronto. When not performing he maintains an exclusive voice studio in Toronto's downtown core.



Paul Winkelmanns, baritone

Baritone Paul Winkelmanns is in his fifth season singing with the Toronto Mendelssohn Choir. Originally from Victoria, BC, he completed his music studies at the University of Manitoba and McGill University before moving to Toronto. He is excited to sing his first St Matthew Passion with such a fantastic group!



David Yung, baritone

David Yung is a Toronto-based Baritone active in the choral community. He sings as a professional lead with the Toronto Mendelssohn Choir, and appears with the Trinity Bach Project and Nathaniel Dett Chorale. He serves as a lead with the St. Paul's Bloor Street Anglican Church Choir, the Holy Blossom Temple Choir, and as a Daily TV Mass Cantor with the National Catholic Broadcasting Council.



ABOUT ST. MICHAEL'S CHOIR SCHOOL

Since 1937, St. Michael's Choir School has nurtured creativity, academic achievement, and musical excellence in a unique faith-based environment.

Located in downtown Toronto, the Choir School is a full-curriculum school of 250 boys from grades 3-12 that provides sacred music for St. Michael's Cathedral Basilica. The Choir School is devoted to helping boys realize their full academic, musical, and spiritual potential. Our academic and music programme results in the formation of well-rounded young men of character and faith.

The commitment to sacred music that characterizes St. Michael's Choir School provides students with a deep sense of the beauty and joy of the Catholic spiritual tradition and helps them mature in their faith while fulfilling the school's mission of the formation of Catholic men through the service of sacred music and the pursuit of knowledge.

To learn more about St. Michael's Choir School please visit us at smcs.on.ca.



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Michelle Odorico
Louella Alatiit
Joe Lanza
Chris Verrette
Marija Ivcevic

Violin II

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principal
Elizabeth Loewen Andrews
Emily Eng
Maya Budzinski
Rezan Onen-Lapointe
Allene Chomyn

Viola

Matt Antal,
principal
Sam Rothermel
Charlene Yeh
Anthony Rapoport

Cello

Felix Deák,
continuo & viola da gamba
Kerri McGonigle
Margaret Gay

Bass

Joe Phillips

Flute/Recorder

Alison Melville
Jin Cho

Oboe

Daniel Ramírez Escudero
Marco Cera

Bassoon

Ondrej Golias

Organ

Jonathan Oldengarm

Harpsichord

Chris Bagan

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 Jocelyn Belfer
 Nicole Bernabei
 Jenna Bly
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 Louise Boyden
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 Ada Chan
 Amy Chen
 Lauren Choi
 Rayna Crandlemire *
 Maria Farrier
 Kim Finkelstein
 Leslie Finlay
 Marina Galeano
 Rebecca Genge *
 Alison Haines
 Alexandra Harvey
 Leslie Higgins *
 Vivien Illion *
 Carmen Skyla
 Jackson
 Hanna Kim
 Alysha Ladha
 Alice Liu
 Jocelyne Lussier
 Marlene Lynds
 Maeve MacKinnon
 Lindsay McIntyre *
 Clara McNamee
 Cathy Minnaar
 Kaitlin Montgomery
 Michelle Murphy
 Camila Mussa
 Emily Parker *
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 Michelle Prunier
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 Noemi
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 Alex Chan
 David Chan
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 Scott Crocker
 Jason Faris
 Michael Harrison
 Kieran Kane *
 Angus Laurie
 John Lemke
 Cliff Liu
 Doug Long
 Matt Lozinski
 Joseph McGowan IV
 Magnus Mee
 Frederick Mei
 Ping Yim Miu
 Lazar Nikolovski
 David Peer
 David B. Powell
 Milovan Prelević
 Douglas Proctor
 Graham Robinson *
 Daniel Savin
 Seymour Stern
 Gavriel Rhys Swayze
 David Tillmann
 Karl Tomczak
 Sean van Wyk
 Jonah Wall
 Paul Winkelmanns *
 Albert Wong
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 David Yung *
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This list reflects donations from September 1, 2024 to March 5, 2026. We make every effort to ensure the accuracy of this list, however, if you notice an error or omission, please accept our apologies and contact Yasaman Nouri at yasaman.nouri@tmchoir.org

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J. S. BACH
ST. JOHN PASSION

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FESTIVAL CHOIR & ORCHESTRA**
Nicholas Nicolaidis | Evangelist
Jonathan Oldengarm | Direction

**FRIDAY, APRIL 3, 2026
7:30 P.M. | 6:30 TALK**



\$40 Adults | \$15 Students
In-person | 56 Queen St East, Toronto
Livestream | metunited.ca/live



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About the Artwork | *The Embrace* by Fabrizio Sclocco
www.fabriziosclocco.com | Instagram: @f.scolocco

Fabrizio Sclocco is Toronto-based self-taught figurative artist and trained architect. His work interrogates the fluidity of identity and the complexities of selfhood. His paintings depict figures that resist conventional categorization, occupying a space between vulnerability and strength.





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