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- The past twenty years have seen the beginning of a major revival of the music of Christoph Graupner, who was a very prolific and successful composer in his day. He is chiefly remembered as the composer who, in 1723, was offered the position of Kantor at the St. Thomas Church in Leipzig, but was not allowed by his employer Ernst Ludwig, Landgraf of Hesse-Darmstadt, to leave his position at Darmstadt. This, then, cleared the way for Johann Sebastian Bach to be hired for that position at the St. Thomas Church.

The son of a tailor, Graupner's gift for music was recognized early, and he was sent to be trained at the St. Thomas School in Leipzig. As a young man, he became a friend of Handel and Telemann while playing harpsichord and composing operas for the famed Goose Market Opera in Hamburg. In 1709, he was hired to work at first as Vice Kapellmeister and later, upon the death of his predecessor in 1712, as Kapellmeister at the court of Ernst Ludwig, Landgraf of Hesse-Darmstadt, at first as Vice Kapellmeister and later, upon the death of his predecessor in 1712, as Kapellmeister. Graupner served in this prestigious position until 1754 for 42 years, when until failing eyesight forced his retirement. Initially at Darmstadt, Graupner's time was dedicated to was occupied composing and producing Italian operas for the court, but after 1719, when financial considerations reduced the large musical forces, he turned his full attention to composing music for the court and chapel.; This included more than 1400 church cantatas and a large significant amount of instrumental music. His efforts additionally produced resulted in 113 symphonies, 50 concertos, 36 sonatas for various instrumental combinations, and a large body of keyboard music.

Although Graupner indicated that all of his manuscripts were to be destroyed upon his death, fortunately for posterity, there was a legal battle over who actually owned them -- the Landgraf or Graupner's family. It took some 60 years for the question to be resolved in the courts, at which point all of the interested parties were dead and the prevailing musical styles had changed. So Graupner and his music passed into obscurity. Thanks to this series of events, fortunately all of Graupner's manuscripts survived and have been maintained in the State Library in Darmstadt. Their current availability on the Internet allows scholars and performers unprecedented access to his

works., This has resulted in an intense investigation of his works, including the compilation of a catalog of his music, and the beginnings of the systematic study of this repertory.

The four cantatas chosen for today's concert have been newly edited by the Collegium Vocale's Artistic Director from digital images of Graupner's manuscripts and of the original parts now available on the internet. They are being performed presented today for the first time since they were first performed under Graupner's direction. These pieces have been drawn from his work of the period between 1724 and 1740. They illustrate Graupner's approach to composition and allow us to appreciate his skill in handling musical resources in service of his chosen texts. These texts are by the Lutheran pastor and architect, Johann Conrad Lichtenberg (1689-1751), who is the author of the majority of Graupner's cantata texts. The works themselves are typical of the period in their form, combining choral pieces, arias and chorale settings, separated by recitative sections. Most often, the arias are composed in the da capo (ABA) form, which is comprised of an initial section that is repeated after a contrasting middle section.

The first cantata, "*Barmherzig und gnädig ist der Herr.*" was composed for the 22nd Sunday after Trinity and was first performed on November 6, 1735. The text focuses on the miracle of God's forgiveness for sins and the dangers of ingratitude. The opening chorus makes an emphatic statement of a passage from using Psalm 103 as its text, which sets forth the theme of the cantata. The soprano recitative and aria amplify this joyous message. An exhortation for us to apply this forgiveness to one another in our daily life is set forth in the Bass recitative, and is followed by an emotional affirmation to do so in the remarkable aria for Bass and solo viola, accompanied by muted strings. In all his more than 1400 church cantatas, Graupner only calls for a solo viola in one other case, (in 1740). This is a good example of Graupner's inventiveness, in using traditional resources in new and interesting ways that reward the attentive listener.

"*Befleissige dich Gott zu eizeigen,*" our second cantata, was written for Septuagesima Sunday and was first performed on February 14, 1740. Septuagesima is the name given the ninth Sunday before Easter and traditionally begins a period of time leading up to Ash Wednesday that is often used as a preparation for Lent. The cantata opens with the tenor proclaiming a passage from the Paul's Letter to Timothy, setting forth the

theme of the honest and content workman in the service of the Lord. The remainder of the cantata presents elaborations of various aspects of this theme. The soprano aria features the first of several remarkable bassoon obbligato solo parts that will be heard on today's concert.

Also composed in 1740, "*Hebet eure Augen auf den Himmel*," was first performed on the Second Sunday of Advent, December 4, 1740. It begins with a stunning depiction of Isaiah's exhortation to lift one's eyes to heaven and to reflect upon the transitory nature of earth and all therein. The writing for the violins and viola creates a nebulous impression of clouds and smoke, seemingly detached rhythmically from the lower instruments and the voices. Typical Baroque devices are used in the text-setting, such as putting the word "Himmel" (Heaven) on a descending octave and the word "veralten" (to age) on a long melisma, (several notes on the same syllable,) to illustrate the process of wearing out. The Bass is accompanied by the bassoon in his aria. The final chorale celebrates the wonder of God's new creation, using the famous chorale melody, "How brightly shines the morning star."

Our final cantata, "*Gott führt die Seinen wunderbar*," written for the Fourth Sunday after Epiphany, was first performed on January 30, 1724. It draws its thematic inspiration from the image of a storm-tossed ship and Jesus's calm and careful attention to his frightened flock. The bulk of the cantata is meant to reassure Christ's followers of their safety when in His care, despite whatever fearsome things might threaten them. The musical tone of the opening Dictum (Biblical text,) depicts the ship on the water, with the violins illustrating the storm with appropriately agitated figures. In the next movement, the chorus calls for Jesus to awaken and not allow them to perish; their agitation underscored by the bassoon figuration. The tenor aria with flute, (originally played on the oboe,) states that, while Jesus appears to sleep, His watchfulness never wavers. This image is further developed in the Bass recitative, with and the ensuing aria with a bold statement of trusting in Jesus's care in the face of all threats.

Graupner and the Bassoon

The bassoon has been thought to have developed from the Renaissance dulcian in the middle of the seventeenth century. However, more modern thinking is that it was a new invention of Martin Hotteterre who died in

1712, who also is believed to have invented versions of the oboe and flute known and used throughout the 17th and 18th centuries. All three of these instruments have since evolved into their modern forms. In any event, These French woodwinds were well known in Germany by 1700. The bassoon was an essential bass instrument, combining a wide range with the ability to support strings, voices, and other wind instruments equally well. Eventually, composers adopted it as a solo instrument. Reinhold Keiser and Johann Mattheson used bassoons as solo instruments in groups of 2, 3, and 5 to accompany arias in their operas produced in Hamburg. Telemann, also working in Hamburg, published the first solo sonata for bassoon in 1728. Between 1720 and 1740, Antonio Vivaldi in Venice composed nearly 40 concertos featuring the bassoon as soloist. While Graupner was familiar with Vivaldi's concertos, he was less likely to have known of Vivaldi's use of the bassoon as soloist. Graupner composed 4 concertos for bassoon and strings, probably in the 1730's.