

Collegium takes audiences back musically to 1724 for 'St. John Passion'

Bach Collegium San Diego (BCSD), the city's only Early Music performance ensemble, returns to its roots during its eighth season with the first piece it ever performed as a professional ensemble: The Bach "St. John Passion."

This dramatic masterwork will open on Friday, April 15 at St. James By-the-Sea and be repeated April 17 at Point Loma Nazarene University.

BCSD will perform the St. John Passion in a chamber version, with eight soloists singing all the parts. Three of the artists are from San Diego, the others are coming from around the country to participate.

The "St. John Passion" is a sacred oratorio from the Passions — original Latin title: "Passio secundum Johannem." Arguably a little opera, it was composed by J. S. Bach for the Good Friday Vespers service of 1724, during the first winter he was responsible for church music at the St. Thomas and St. Nicholas churches in Leipzig.

Bach's contract as cantor of St. Thomas' School in



Leipzig stipulated: "In order to preserve the good order in the churches, [he would] so arrange the music that it shall not be of such nature as not to make an operatic impression, but rather incite the listeners to devotion."

Although the Calvinists rejected opera, the Lutherans of Bach's day gave it a warmer welcome, and understood how the genre's undeniable rhetorical power could be used.

Bach's "St. John Passion" is often cited as evidence that he was capable of producing

operatic masterpieces, had he chosen to explore this genre. No musician understood rhetoric better than Bach, and his fusion of the liturgical and the dramatic provides a view of Christ's final hours, and the Christian believer's response to this story.

Bach Collegium San Diego was founded in 2003 by its music director Ruben Valenzuela to enrich San Diego's music community with historically informed performances of the Renaissance, Baroque, and particularly, the vocal works of J.S. Bach.

Its members bring longstanding experience from such ensembles as the Academy of Ancient Music (UK), American Bach Soloists, Festival Ensemble Stuttgart, and the Philharmonia Chorale. The ensemble participates in the festival Internacional del Organo Barroco in Mexico City.



If you go

- **What:** Bach Collegium's 'St. John Passion'
- **When:** 7:30 p.m. Friday, April 15, St. James by-the-Sea Episcopal Church, 743 Prospect St., La Jolla; 7 p.m. Sunday, April 17, Point Loma Nazarene University
- **Roundtable:** Discussion with the artists 45 minutes preceding each performance.
- **Tickets:** From \$15
- **Contact:** (619) 341-1726
- **Website:** bachcollegiumsd.org