

## Soloists shine in Cleveland Orchestra's Bach Easter Oratorio Magnificat and more (Apr. 17)



The Cleveland Orchestra and Cleveland Orchestra Chorus under the direction of guest conductor Bernard Labadie on Thursday, April 17, 2025, at Severance Music Center. They were joined by solo singers Joëlle Harvey, Adèle Charvet, Andrew Haji and Gordon Bintner in performances of J.S. Bach's *Easter Oratorio*, *Sinfonia* from *Cantata No. 29* and *Magnificat*. (Photo by Roger Mastroianni) Roger Mastroianni

by Kevin McLaughlin | Cleveland Classical

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CLEVELAND, Ohio — On Thursday, April 17, at Severance Music Center, Canadian guest conductor Bernard Labadie led The Cleveland Orchestra, Cleveland Orchestra Chorus, and four splendid soloists in two of J.S. Bach's most exultant sacred works — the dramatic *Easter Oratorio*, and his *Magnificat*. Bach's festive *Sinfonia* from his *Cantata 29* completed the program.

Reworked from a secular cantata for a patron's birthday, Bach's *Easter Oratorio* is a less overtly theatrical work than the composer's Passions. Its uncomplicated story describes the moment that Mary Magdalene (mezzo-soprano Adèle Charvet), Mary of Cleophas (soprano Joëlle Harvey) and the apostles Peter (tenor Andrew Haji) and John (bass-baritone Gordon Bintner) come to the tomb of Jesus and find it empty.

Labadie led a performance that evoked both jubilation and comfort. His communication with the soloists was particularly skilled and empathic, providing elasticity to phrases when breaths were needed.

The opening set a celebratory tone, enhanced by the trumpet playing of Michael Sachs, Jack Sutte, and Michael Miller. The ensuing Adagio featured delicate string playing and a poignant oboe solo from Frank Rosenwein.

The arias for the two Marys were compassionate and assured. Harvey's transformation from doubt to rapture in "Seele, deine Spezereien" was palpable and Jessica Sindell's flute solo added warmth and solace. Charvet sang "Saget, saget mir geschwinde" (Tell me, tell me quickly) with a liquid coloratura.

Making his Cleveland Orchestra debut, Haji used his sunlit voice to impart tranquility in the face of death in his central aria, "Sanfte soll mein Todeskummer" (Gentle will be my sorrow of death). And Bintner distinguished himself in the group recitatives, where his handsome bass voice added gravitas and sheen.

Bach's *Magnificat* is the most concise of his major choral works but contains some of the composer's most profound religious expression, from the intimate to the fervent. Conducting from a seated position (as he did all evening), Labadie deftly paced the music in all its splendor and provided sensitive accompaniment to the vocal quartet. The orchestra played with a buoyant, steady pulse, supplying attractive solos that beamed like shafts of sunlight through a church window.

Labadie consistently supplied a logical sense of direction to the arias and heightened the drama in the choral movements. As in the *Easter Oratorio*, the Chorus dealt masterfully with the many fast notes, as in "Fecit potentiam" (He has shown strength). Diction was well-articulated, and harmonies and rhythms came through clearly.

Harvey's luminous soprano expressed Mary's joy in "Et exultavit," (And my spirit has rejoiced) and Charvet's supple mezzo was a happy medium for the Virgin's contentment in "Quia respexit" (For he has regarded). Haji showed off his dramatic tenor range in his demanding aria, "Deposuit potentes" (He has put down the mighty), and Bintner infused "Quia fecit mihi magna" (For He who is mighty) with a pleasingly warm baritone timbre.

Prepared by Lisa Wong, the Cleveland Orchestra Chorus contributed a polished ensemble tone in both choral works. The sudden return of joy in the final chorus of the *Magnificat* was as exhilarating and surprising as a balmy day in April.

*The program will be repeated on Friday at 7:30 pm and Saturday at 8:00 pm. Tickets are available [at clevelandorchestra.com](http://clevelandorchestra.com).*

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