



**MEDIA RELEASE
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Bach's powerful drama comes to life in a Melbourne Easter tradition.

21 January, 2012 – On Good Friday in 1724, the congregation at Leipzig's Nicholaikirche were witness to a work that changed music forever. On that cold spring day, their new Kantor (church music director), **Johann Sebastian Bach** premiered his *St John Passion*, a setting of the story of Christ's arrest, trial and execution. With its blend of searing operatic drama and radiant meditative inwardness, Bach's *St John Passion* was unlike any other liturgical music of the time: a work of religious theatre. This is music which transcends time and place, and still moves listeners almost 300 years after its premiere.

Bach made the performance of a Passion an annual Easter tradition in Leipzig and so has Melbourne Recital Centre. On **Sunday 25 March 2012**, Bach's musical retelling of the Gospel of St John will be performed by the Trinity College Choir, the Consort of Melbourne and period instrument orchestra Ludovico's Band, led by renowned conductor and choir director Stephen Layton. In 2011, Melbourne Recital Centre mounted Bach's *St Matthew Passion* for a capacity audience and to critical acclaim. *St John Passion* is the earlier setting of the story, and the more urgent and powerful of the two, its intimate scale contributing to its emotional force. It's a work that **Stephen Layton** (see editors' notes) has directed many times. His 2010 London performance of the Passion, in the words of *The Guardian*, "**are becoming ever more dramatic and daring, have a raw intensity**". Layton's annual Passion performances have become a highlight of the musical calendar. *The Observer* said, "**It is hard to imagine it done better.**"

Layton has hand-picked some of the best Australian and International exponents of early music singing and playing to bring this masterpiece to life using instruments and techniques that musicians of Bach's day would have used. This is not a merely academic exercise: the colours and textures of Bach's music are most vividly realised on authentic instruments in the ideal acoustic of Melbourne Recital Centre's Elisabeth Murdoch Hall.

Of course, any performance of the Bach passions is defined by the tenor singing the crucial role of the Evangelist. Layton has selected "**luminous**" Swedish tenor **Martin Vanberg**. His lyrical, flexible and expressive voice is perfectly suited to the demanding part of the Passion's narrator and the tenor arias. Vanberg has brought his charismatic stage presence to operatic roles from Handel to Britten and in Swedish performances of *St John Passion* with Layton. Australian bass-baritone **Joshua Bloom** will perform the role of Pilate. Already a seasoned performer, Bloom has performed all over the world to top critical acclaim. A who's-who of Australian voices rounds out the soloists: **Siobhan Stagg** (soprano), **Sally-Anne Russell** (alto) and **Michael Leighton Jones** (bass).



Melbourne Recital Centre initiated the Bach Passion tradition in 2011 and has presented historically-informed performances of early music masterpieces such as Claudio Monteverdi's Vespers of 1600, creating opportunities for inspiring collaborations of local and international artists. As Melbourne's home to music, the Centre is committed to bringing the best musicians together for performances of works which shaped musical history and which continue to touch audiences. Elisabeth Murdoch Hall's perfect acoustic has become a drawcard for the best musicians in the world and the best place to hear music from baroque to jazz.

BACH'S ST JOHN PASSION
Johannes-passion BWV 245

Stephen Layton, conductor
Martin Vanberg, Evangelist/tenor
Joshua Bloom, bass
Siobhan Stagg, soprano
Sally-Anne Russell, alto
Michael Leighton Jones, bass
The Choir of Trinity College, Melbourne
The Consort of Melbourne
Ludovico's Band

EVENT DETAILS

Sunday 25 March 2012, 3pm
Elisabeth Murdoch Hall, Melbourne Recital Centre
Book at melbournerecital.com.au or call the Box Office on 03 9699 3333.

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