

New

FILLMORE

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Calvary Choir Offers Bach's 'Passion' as He Intended

By JOE BEYER

CALVARY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH'S Chancel Choir will offer a rare musical experience this month when it presents J. S. Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* in successive parts, each lasting 30 to 35 minutes, over the six Sundays of Lent.

Integrated into the liturgy of the 11 a.m. Sunday morning service, the program will feature a full orchestra, six soloists and the 60-person choir. The public is invited and can participate by joining in singing the chorales, as Bach originally intended.

Before each service, at 10:45 a.m., congregants will rehearse the chorales to prepare for their role in the drama, commenting and reacting like a Greek chorus on the events leading to the crucifixion.

To further enrich the experience, Calvary Music Director Alden Gilchrist has assembled a group of Bay Area scholars to present a series of lectures on Sundays at 10 a.m. to offer perspectives on the music, Bach's use of the scriptural narrative and how to approach the piece as a listener.



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"I believe Bach's monumental crucifixion drama is the greatest piece of music ever written," says Gilchrist, "and that participating in this music drama is among the most compelling, immersive worship experiences available. I'm fulfilling a cherished dream to present the *St. Matthew Passion* as Bach originally intended — in a church, as worship."

First performed in 1727, the *Passion's* musical textures range from complex coun-

terpoint to simple hymns. Added richness and depth stem from the emotional outpourings of solo singers, lending immediacy to the music.

The Calvary Choir has been preparing the work for more than a year. Soloists include Jeff Fields as Jesus and Brian Thorsett as the evangelist. Major roles also will be sung by Pamela Sebastian and Janet Campbell.

Alden Gilchrist has been director of

music at Calvary Presbyterian Church since 1965. In recent years he has led Calvary's Chancel Choir on two concert tours of France, including performances at the Nice, Rouen and Chartres cathedrals and at Notre Dame in Paris.

Calvary Presbyterian Church is located at 2515 Fillmore Street, at the corner of Fillmore and Jackson. For more information about the performance, call 346-3832 or visit www.calvarypresbyterian.org.