

## Fifth family member follows great-great-grandmother's footsteps to join The Bach Choir for concerts of Bach's epic *B Minor Mass* and *St Matthew Passion*



**Tuesday 11 February, 7:30pm**  
Royal Festival Hall

**Bach *B Minor Mass***

**Sunday 5 April, 11:00am**  
Royal Festival Hall

**Bach *St. Matthew Passion***

On Tuesday 11 February, 23-year-old **James Picton-Turbervill** becomes the fifth member of the same family to join The Bach Choir for a performance of Bach's celebrated *B Minor Mass*, 144 years after his great-great-grandmother joined the Choir for the first UK performance of the work.

Founded in 1876, **The Bach Choir** was set up to promote the first complete performances of Bach's master works. Over 120 years after his death, Johann Sebastian Bach was little-known in the UK, and some of his larger works had never been performed in the UK at all. The Choir was created by Otto Goldschmidt, whose wife was the "Swedish nightingale" Jenny Lind, greatest soprano of her day, who coached the choir and performed in this first performance.



The Bach Choir's inaugural concert of the *B Minor Mass* was held in 1876 in London's former St James' Hall and **Henrietta Blagden** (1858-1939), 18 at the time and a scholar at the Royal College of Music, was invited to join. Amongst the choir's ranks was the composer Hubert Parry, a bass in the Choir, to whom Henrietta would subsequently write for advice on a choice of singing teacher. Blagden later became a suffragist fighting with the slogan "no vote, no tax".

Now three subsequent generations have followed in Henrietta Blagden's footsteps – her grandson **Wilfrid Picton-Turbervill** (1919-2002) and his wife **Shirley** (1929-), their son **David** (1964-),

and now grandson James (1996-). 23-year-old James, a former Exeter Cathedral Choral Scholar and currently an English teacher at Harris Academy in Bermondsey, joins his father David who has been in the Choir since 1981. Shirley, now aged 91, retired from the choir at the age of 69 after 38 years of continuous membership, at the same time as long-time conductor David Willcocks retired in 1998. Shirley, who joined The Bach Choir in 1954, met her future husband there. After a temporary move to Cornwall, the pair returned to London and auditioned afresh to re-join the Choir. David Willcocks accepted Shirley but turned down her husband. For 16 years, Shirley sang in the choir alongside her son David, who also met his future wife through a choir tour.

Despite her age, Shirley's memories of her time in The Bach Choir remain crystal clear: singing at the Royal Wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana in 1981, giving the London premiere of Britten's *War Requiem* under the composer's baton in 1962, a commemoration of World War II with Dame Vera Lynn – the first concert by a British choir in Dresden's restored Frauenkirche – and working with prisoners in Wormwood Scrubs for some 25 years.

The Choir's unique funding model is based on a paid membership following a rigorous audition. The 250 members fund their concerts and tours across the globe. Though they are not professional singers, many were choral scholars or fully-trained musicians who could have followed a career in the industry, but opted for other careers. As committed amateurs, they have made many outstanding recordings and frequently commission new work to complement their annual performances of the *St. Matthew Passion*, which they return to with a sense of devotion to the unbroken tradition. There is an ethos of loyalty, commitment and camaraderie which is quite unique in the professional music arena.

**David Picton-Turbervill** commented:

*“Four generations of the family have kept the Monday evening choir rehearsal in their diaries since 1876 and I'm thrilled that my son is now joining to sing in this musical family. We have grown up, married and had children alongside The Bach Choir and it has given us the most extraordinary opportunities to travel the world and make friends through music. It has been an enormous privilege for all of us, as well as a support and a passion. Our family owes it so much.”*

## Listings

**Tuesday 11 February, 7:30pm**

Royal Festival Hall

**Bach B Minor Mass**

**The Bach Choir**  
**Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment**  
**David Hill** conductor

**Gemma Summerfield** soprano  
**Robin Blaze** countertenor  
**James Oxley** tenor  
**Peter Harvey** bass

**Sunday 5 April, 11:00am**

Royal Festival Hall

**Bach St. Matthew Passion**

**The Bach Choir**  
**Florilegium**  
**David Hill** conductor

**Ed Lyon** Evangelist  
**Mark Stone** Christ  
**Elizabeth Watts** soprano  
**Christopher Ainslie** countertenor  
**Nicky Spence** tenor  
**Neal Davies** baritone

## The Bach Choir

Founded in 1876, The Bach Choir is recognised as one of the world's leading choruses, building upon a tradition that combines musical excellence with creativity and innovation.

From the first performance in Britain of Bach's *Mass in B minor* 144 years ago to the soundtrack for Ridley Scott's epic *Prometheus*, the Choir's musical heritage is as rich as it is diverse. Directed by David Hill, one of the country's most eminent conductors and choir trainers, the Choir regularly performs and records across London and the UK in prestigious venues, from the Royal Albert Hall to Abbey Road Studios.

Described by the London Evening Standard as 'probably the finest independent choir in the world', The Bach Choir values the freedom that its independence brings, allowing it to work with the very best orchestras and soloists, and to choose the music it performs. To date the Choir has sung over 400 works in more than 120 venues, and continues to share its work with audiences around the world. Following an invitation from the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, the Choir gave two performances of Bach's *St Matthew Passion* in Hong Kong's Cultural Centre just before Easter 2014, and it gave further concerts in Shanghai and Hangzhou. In October 2017, the Choir gave six concerts in the Netherlands of *a cappella* music and works for choir and organ, one of which was broadcast on Dutch radio. The Choir will tour the US in March 2020, giving concerts in New York, Washington, Boston, Philadelphia and New Haven, with David Hill and the Yale Philharmonia.

With a strong commitment to new music, The Bach Choir has commissioned works from some of the world's leading composers including Sir John Tavener, Bob Chilcott, Jonathan Dove, Will Todd and Carl Rütti. In June 2017 the Choir gave the world premiere performance of James MacMillan's *Blow the trumpet in the new moon*, and recently commissioned Roxanna Panufnik to complete her *Four Choral Seasons*, which was premiered by the Choir in October 2019.

The Bach Choir has always been characterised by the commitment of its members. With over 250 talented singers coming from all walks of life, an international touring schedule, and a pioneering outreach programme, *Vocalise!*, that takes its passion for music into inner-city schools and dementia care homes, the Choir takes pride in performing, recording and sharing music for all to enjoy.

[thebachchoir.org.uk](http://thebachchoir.org.uk)

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