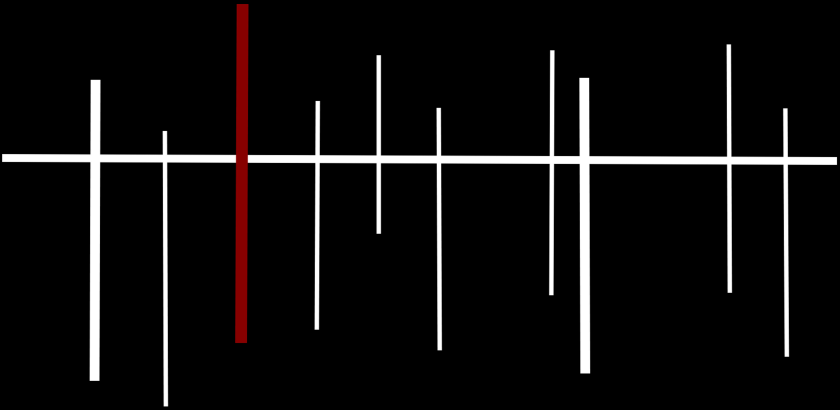


A STAGED PERFORMANCE OF

J.S. BACH

ST JOHN PASSION



16TH APRIL 2023, 14:30 AND 19:00
VICTORIA HALL, GRANGE-OVER-SANDS

Ian Honeyman
Ross Cumming
Jonny Hill
Jack Dolan
Samantha Lewis
Elspeth Piggott

Chorus and Orchestra of the Cumbria Opera Group
Conductor Joe Davies
Director Lucy Britton





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Welcome to the Cumbria Opera Group's staged performance of J.S. Bach's *St John Passion*

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) was arguably the most influential composer of his time. A powerhouse in the development of the Western classical tradition, over one thousand of Bach's compositions are known. But despite his productivity, and the popularity of the medium, Bach never wrote an opera. Bach's works include five settings of the Passion story, of which only two now survive in their entirety: the *St Matthew Passion*, and the *St John Passion*. The *St John Passion*, written before that of *St Matthew*, is shorter and written for smaller forces. Both of Bach's *Passions* combine narrative recitatives with his signature chorales, biting choruses and expansive arias — operas in all but name.

In today's production, we imagine how a Bach opera could look: a Greek chorus and Narrator recounting terrible events whose outcome they know, and a cast of characters drawn together by their interactions with the hero. Like a tragic opera, *St John Passion* pulls on our heartstrings: we have arias recounting love as a guiding light, man searching for meaning, and the fallacies of grief. The principal characters in the *St John Passion* are Christus (played today by Ross Cumming), Pilatus (Jonny Hill, who will also sing the bass arias) and the Evangelist (Ian Honeyman), as well as the Chorus, who alternately play the populace, Soldiers and Christians. The small but crucial role of Petrus is normally sung as a step-out solo for a member of the Chorus; in this production, Petrus will be played by Elspeth Piggott, who will also sing the soprano arias. The alto and tenor arias will be sung by Samantha Lewis and Jack Dolan, playing Mary Magdalene and Judas respectively. These characters are referenced in the Passion text, and although they do not speak in the scripture their stories are too interesting to not include. What went through the mind of the disciple thought to be closest to Jesus, who ultimately betrayed him? How did Jesus' crucifixion feel for those who loved him?

While the story of Jesus' betrayal, trial and crucifixion has been told and retold in countless ways, from traditional passion plays to the film *The Wicker Man*, Bach's music is some of the most effective at placing listeners right into the horror. At the top of each of his manuscripts Bach inscribed 'J.J.' for 'Jesu juva' ('Jesus help me'), and in his *St John Passion* he outlines how Jesus might help, through his explicitly told suffering. The menacing open chorus is a direct plea to God to prove the redemption of mankind through suffering, and Bach's theological point comes to a head in Part II with the sequence of movements centring on the chorale 'Durch dein Gefängnis gottes Sohn' ('From your imprisonment, comes our freedom'). Of course, as glorious as redemption is, suffering is never out of frame in the *St John Passion*. The chorus in Part II take on a brutality unlike much else in the choral repertoire, repeatedly calling for Jesus to be crucified and playing games as Jesus dies.

The effect of Bach's music is the same as that of the passion plays which have been staged since medieval times. Where the passion plays made scripture text accessible at first to those who could not read, now perhaps, Bach's *St John Passion* offers a way for us to live through events that otherwise might feel too distant, by forcing us to confront the horror of the story being presented. This is no dry sermon. We watch a mob condemn a man to death because they are unwilling to look outside their own ways of life, and hear officials cite legal precedents to avoid having to make a moral choice. We see people who mirror us, with our capacity for infinite love and unthinkable violence, and we are reminded that we can make a different choice, to be kind, thoughtful, and willing to learn.

Lucy Britton, April 2023

Cast and Crew

Evangelist - Ian Honeyman

Christus - Ross Cumming

Pilatus - Jonny Hill

Petrus - Elspeth Piggott

Mary Magdalene - Samantha Lewis

Judas - Jack Dolan

Soldier/Malchus - Andrew Woodmass-Calvert

Maid/Virgin Mary - Lydia Milburn

Conductor - Joe Davies

Director - Lucy Britton

Répétiteur - Alistair Burton

Chorus Master - Ian Jones

Chorus Manager - Lydia Milburn

Rehearsal Pianists - Ian Pattinson, Ken Forster

Lighting - PJ Summers, 1Five Events and Lighting

Technical Assistant - Ella Pratt

The performance will last approximately two hours, including an interval of 15 minutes.

Ian Honeyman - Evangelist



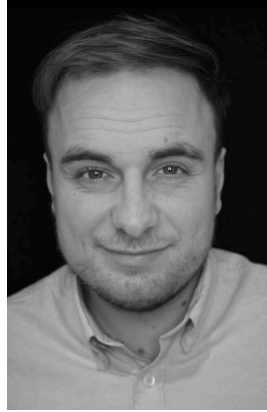
At the tender age of 20 Ian Honeyman sang his very first Johannes-Passion Evangelist with the Ulverston Bach Choir (now the Furness Bach Choir). This was long ago, in 1973, the year of Ian's

first professional solo recordings, and at the start of a long and continuing working life in music. Ian is thus delighted, blessed, moved, proud, and honoured to mark his 50th anniversary in the profession with this Evangelist with the wonderful Cumbria Opera Group, a marvellous initiative.

Throughout his professional career in the UK and Paris, Ian has sung with groups including King's College Cambridge, Canterbury and Westminster Cathedrals, The Monteverdi Choir, The Clerkes of Oxenford, Groupe Vocal de France and Les Arts Florissants. Opera roles include Hippolyte in Rameau's *Hippolyte & Aricie*, Albert in Britten's *Albert Herring*, Peter Quint in Britten's *The Turn of the Screw*, El Minotauro in Dazzi's *La Rosa de Ariadna*, Xerxes in Rzewski's *The Persians*, Arnalta in Monteverdi's *L'Incoronazione di Poppea*, and Acis in Handel's *Acis and Galatea*, with performances at the Opéra de Paris, the Concertgebouw, Teatro La Fenice di Venezia and the Opéra Comique and Palais Garnier, the Vlaamse Opera, and the Grand Théâtre de Genève.

Ian's solo work includes Britten's *Serenade for tenor, horn and strings* and his *Les Illuminations*, Charlie Morrow's *Serenade II* (which was written for Ian to accompany Britten's *Serenade*), and most frequently the Evangelist in Bach's *Passions*, with groups including the Nederlandse Bachvereniging/Netherlands Bach Society, Il Fondamento (Belgium) and Apollo's Fire in the USA and many others. Ian's recital repertoire to date includes Schumann's *Dichterliebe*, Schubert's *Winterreise*, Vaughan Williams' *Songs of Travel*, English and Welsh language song and his own compositions based upon the works of Britten and Purcell.

Ross Cumming - Christus



Ross Cumming is a Baritone originally from the Northeast of Scotland. He has just completed his 2-year MA in Opera Studies at the Alexander Gibson Opera Studio at Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in Glasgow. At the RCS Ross studied under Scott Johnson and performed roles of Siroco in

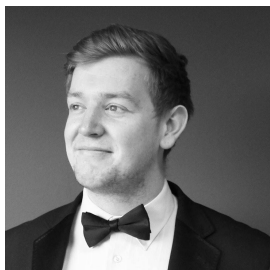
L'étoile, President in *A Feast in a Time of Plague* and Krumpelblatt in *Four Sisters*.

A music graduate of the University of Aberdeen, Ross also studied at the Royal Northern College of Music, in Manchester achieving Distinction in his Vocal Studies Masters. While there he was under the tutelage of Matthew Best. In 2021 he won the Bessie Cronshaw/Frost Brownson Song Cycle Competition.

Outside RCS he has been a Young Artist at Buxton International Opera Festival, and other roles have included Amonasro in *Aida* (Opera Festival Scotland), Guglielmo in *Così fan tutte* (Cumbria Opera Group), Don Giovanni in *Don Giovanni* (ALLO Opera), The Forester in *The Cunning Little Vixen*, (RNCM), Kilan in *Der Freischütz*, (Random Opera). He has also sung with The Sixteen, The Dunedin Consort and Voces8.

He is now looking forward to embarking on a professional singing career, starting with performances with Grange Park Opera and British Youth Opera this summer.

Jonny Hill - Pilatus



Jonny Hill is currently studying his Masters degree in opera at the Royal Northern College of Music on the Maurice and Jean Buckley Award. His musical career started at the age of seven

as a chorister at Carlisle Cathedral, serving in due course as Head Chorister. Jonathan's love of choral singing has led him to join a number of prestigious choirs, including the Sage Gateshead Choir, the BBC Proms Choir, the National Youth Choir, as well as The University of Leeds, Leeds College of Music, the Royal Northern College of music and Manchester university chamber choirs.

Jonathan has also been involved in a number of Operas over the past few years in Leeds, Cumbria and Manchester. Over the summer he worked with British youth opera as a member of the chorus for their production of *Sir John in Love*. He has starred in Cumbria Opera Groups production of *Così fan tutte* and performed the role of Leporello in Leeds University's production of *Don Giovanni*. Jonathan has also performed as the character Goffredo in the stage premier of Judith Weir's *Armida* and *The Armchair* and *The Black cat* in Ravel's *L'enfant et les sortilèges* with the University of Manchester. As well as these Jonathan has had the privilege of performing in the chorus for Opera North's production of *Silent night* by Kevin Putts and Bergen National Opera's production of Britten's *Peter Grimes*. Currently Jonathan is working on RNCM's production of *Mansfield Park* as Sir Thomas Bertram and regularly sings at Manchester Cathedral as a Lay Clerk.

Jack Dolan - Judas



Born and raised in Manchester, Jack Dolan is currently based in London. He is a graduate of the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, having studied

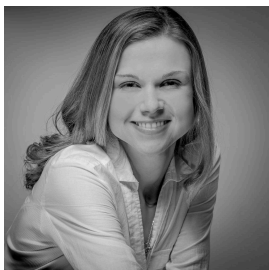
with Maureen Brathwaite, Sarah Pring and Adrian Thompson.

Jack's musical roots lie in rock and blues, and he studied guitar for six years whilst developing a love for Classical music. His eclectic musical tastes, from rock to musical theatre, sparked a fascination with vocal music and motivated his research into all different types of singing. As a freelance singer, Jack's vibrant performance schedule is supplemented by a rich career as an educator. Alongside his private studio of singers, Jack is a voice tutor for Guildhall Young Artists, delivering top quality music education to the next generation of professional musicians, works with choral societies to deliver 'Vocal MOTs' to their members, and regularly engages in outreach programmes for all ages.

Recent engagements: *Father Grenville/Howard/Motorcycle Cop Heggie* ***Dead Man Walking*** (Guildhall School of Music and Drama, Feb/March 2023). Rossini ***Petite Messe Solenne*** (Woodburn Singers cond. Jonathon Swinard).

Upcoming engagements: Garsington Alvarez Young Artist Programme 2023 - Covering Jenik ***The Bartered Bride*** and Marzio ***Mitridate, re di Ponto***, Chorus ***Il barbiere di Siviglia***. Don Ottavio ***Don Giovanni*** (Cumbria Opera Group, August 2023).

Samantha Lewis - Mary Magdalene



Samantha is a recent graduate of The Royal Birmingham Conservatoire (RBC) and has been there since 2018 on their Masters and Advanced Postgraduate Diploma courses.

Previously, she trained in Veterinary Science at Harper Adams University. Upon graduating from RBC with distinction, she was awarded the Postgraduate Course Prize and the St Clare Barfield Rosebowl for Operatic Distinction 2021. Opera credits include Dorabella in Mozart's *Così fan tutte* (North Wales Opera Studio and Cumbria Opera Group), Cherubino (Scenes) in Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*, La Zelatrice (Scenes) in Puccini's *Suor Angelica*, Cendrillon (scenes) in Massenet's *Cendrillon*, Mother/Other Mother in Mark-Anthony Turnage's *Coraline*, and Fanny Price in Dove's *Mansfield Park*.

Samantha is on The Royal Opera House's Jette Parker Artist Programme mentorship scheme, and has since been paired with Australian operatic soprano, Lauren Fagen. Samantha also has a vehement passion for art song, winning The Edward Brooke's English Song Prize in 2019 and being a semi-finalist in The London Song Festival 2022. She is looking forward to exploring this repertoire more, touring a programme consisting of composers and poets born or resident, along the famous journey from John O'Groats to Lands End. Having made her debut in the Isle of Wight, she is looking forward to more *Messiah* performances throughout the year, performing the alto solos. She is currently enjoying studying the role of Mercédès in Bizet's opera, *Carmen*, which she will perform with NWOS later in the year.

Elsbeth Piggott - Petrus



Since her very first taste of the profession, understudying I Fagiolini's immersive theatre production *Betrayal* in 2015, Elsbeth has been captured by the dual art forms of music and drama,

and has since pursued this pairing in her work ardently, in both traditional opera as well as newly devised works. She has played Sophie in the staged Bach *St Matthew/ Sophie Scholl Passion*, from theatre maker and director Ross McGregor, with the Deutscher Chor London, Southwark Cathedral 2022; Sirena in Francesca Caccini's opera *La Liberazione di Ruggiero*, Brighton Early Music Festival (BREM) 2021; Cupid in Marco da Gagliano's *Daphne*, BREMF 2020; and understudying Charlie in Anna Appleby's *Drought* with the BBC Philharmonic 2022.

Elsbeth is also a sought-after soloist of the baroque repertoire, having performed at some of the country's top festivals and venues; Bach *Lutheran Mass in F*, Rachel Podger & Brecon Baroque 2022; Bach *Cantata BWV51*, The Hampstead Collective 2020; Handel *The Messiah*, Snape Maltings 2017; MacMillan *Seven Last Words from the Cross*, The Britten Sinfonia, The Barbican 2016.

Living out her passion for one-to-a-part ensemble singing, Elsbeth is a member of I Fagiolini, The Marian Consort and Musica Secreta. She also sings with The Sixteen, Arcangelo, The Britten Sinfonia Voices, Eric Ericsons Kammarkör in Sweden, Mogens Dahl Kammerkor in Denmark and The Netherlands Radio Choir. This coming year she is touring I Fagiolini's *Angel's & Demons*, and appearing as Second Woman next to Mary Bevan's Dido in Purcell's famous opera with Bjarte Eike and Barokksolistene.

Joe Davies - Conductor

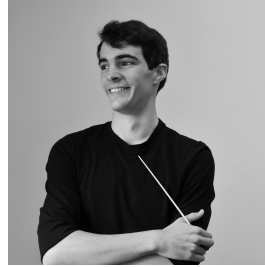


Praised by Howard Skempton as an 'inspiring' conductor with a 'substantial future ahead of him', Cumbrian-born Joe Davies is Musical Director of the Worcester Philharmonic Orchestra,

Leamington Sinfonia, Midland Concert Orchestra, Coventry & Warwickshire Youth Orchestra, UK AC Proms Orchestra and Ripieno Players; Artistic Director of Cumbria Opera Group and CoMA East Midlands; and a Musical Director for Barricade Arts and SLAM Theatre.

Highlights include collaborations with Laura van der Heijden, Jess Gillam, and Xhosa Cole; MD credits include *Candide* at the Oxford Playhouse, *How to Use a Washing Machine* at the Edinburgh Fringe, and *Così fan tutte*, *Trouble in Tahiti*, *A Hand of Bridge*, *Acis and Galatea*, *Venus and Adonis* and *Dido and Aeneas* with the Cumbria Opera Group. Joe graduated with a first-class degree in music from St Peter's College, Oxford, before graduating with Distinction from the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, where he studied Orchestral Conducting under Michael Seal.

Alistair Burton - Répétiteur



Alistair is a pianist and répétiteur studying on the Opera Course at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, where he is coached by répétiteurs Elizabeth Rowe and Susanna Stranders, and

studies piano with Bretton Brown. In 2022 he graduated from Clare College, Cambridge, where he studied Music and was involved with a number of student opera productions, including *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Acis and Galatea* and the second UK performance of Philip Venables' multimedia opera *Denis & Katya*. In 2021 he was also Assistant Musical Director for Cumbria Opera Group's production of *Così fan tutte*. Since then has worked on a number of productions at Guildhall, including the London stage premiere of Jake Heggie's *Dead Man Walking*, and next term will act as répétiteur for Judith Weir's *Blond Eckbert*. Alistair is also a keen song accompanist, having been coached by Joseph Middleton as part of the Pembroke College Lieder Scheme alongside baritone Oscar Simms, and a conductor, having performed Schubert's Symphony No. 8 ('Unfinished') and Sibelius' Symphony No. 7 with the orchestra of the Clare College Music Society.

Lucy Britton - Director



Lucy is a civil servant based between Oxford and London, and the Managing Director of the Cumbria Opera Group. Lucy joined her first choir aged 10, and held choral scholarships at Oxford University, where she also sang with the university chamber choir, Schola Cantorum, and in the Holywell Consort. Since graduating Lucy has sung with Exultate Chamber Choir in Bristol and Hesperos Choir in London, and performs as a vocal soloist with the Midland Concert Orchestra. Bach's *St John Passion* has been one of Lucy's favourite pieces since, aged 15, she joined a choral society just to hear Dame Emma Kirkby sing the soprano solos, and she is thrilled to make her directorial debut with this work.

The Cumbria Opera Group Chorus

Soprano

Mandy Bartlett
Faye Bowness
Lucy Britton
Sula Cotterell
Jenifer Gray
Clio Hedley
Meg Hill
Helen Johnson
Lydia Milburn
Josie Pepper
Mary Robinson
Janet Rougvie
Valerie Walsje

Alto

Dorothy Bayliss
Gesa Blackmore
Emma Britton
Allyson Fiddler
Annie Garden
Sabine Janowitz
Rosemary Jones
Gwenda Major
Maggie Mees
Elizabeth Shapland
Rosie Smith
Vickie Thompson

Tenor

Geoff Bowles
Peter Deaville
Ian Jones
John Murray
Charles Ritchie
David Wanless
Andrew Woodmass-Calvert

Bass

Timothy Bartlett
Philip Bell
Edmund Dixon
Charlie Lewis
Andrew Lockley
Tony Reeves
Christopher Scott
Richard Slater
Matt Warwick
Oliver Wates
David Wheeler

The Cumbria Opera Group Orchestra

Violin I

Pam Redman*
Carol Klemperer
Alice Hurley

Violin II

Sue Armstrong*
Sarah Wilson
Richard Best

Viola

Fiona Brodie*
Maddie Mcardle

Cello

Mary Dainton*
Jo Gascoigne

Bass

Richard English*

Flute

Andrew Forsyth*
Laura Tattersall

Oboe

Nigel Atkinson*
Sarah Davies

Bassoon

Bridget Starling*

Organ

Alistair Burton*

Harpsichord

Maria Martin*

* Denotes section principal

Many thanks to our partner organisations:

Westmorland Orchestra, whose next concert on 10th June 2023 at Kendal Parish Church will include Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2.

Levens Choir, whose next concert 'Britten and Byrd, Two Elizabethans' will take place on 8th July 2023.

The **Choir of the Earth** and Mark Strachan.

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1FIVE EVENTS & FILM

The Cumbria Opera Festival 2023

The Cumbria Opera Group are delighted to present the Cumbria Opera Group 2023, an eight-day celebration of opera, song and theatre across our beautiful county.

Cumbria Opera Festival 2023 events are as follows:

26th August - Poulenc's *La Voix Humaine* at Penrith Playhouse

**27th August - Opera Highlights at St Mary's, Dalton-in-Furness;
Poulenc's *La Voix Humaine* at Penrith Playhouse**

28th August - Opera Highlights at Appleby Public Hall

29th August - Opera Highlights at Tithe Barn, Carlisle

30th August - Mozart's *Don Giovanni* at Victoria Hall, Grange-Over-Sands

31st August - Mozart's *Don Giovanni* at Victoria Hall, Grange-over-Sands

1st September - Joan Rodgers CBE Masterclass at St Bees Priory

**2nd September - Cumbrian Opera and Song at Kendal Town Hall;
Mozart's *Don Giovanni* at Victoria Hall, Grange-over-Sands**

Further information on all events are available on our website at www.cumbriaoperagroup.com/2023festival

If you'd like to support the Cumbria Opera Group in continuing to bring professional opera to Cumbria, there's no better way than by becoming a Festival Friend.

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