

## Johann Sebastian Bach *The Contest between Phoebus and Pan*, BWV 201 (1729)

In 1737 Bach suffered a strongly worded attack upon his inability, or perhaps, refusal, to compose in the new, fashionable 'galante' style by the composer and critic Johann Adolph Scheibe in the publication *Der Critische Musikus*:

This great man would be the wonder of entire nations if he were more pleasing and if he did not deprive his pieces of naturalness by a swollen and intricate style and obscure their beauty by all too great art...One admires in [him] the laborious work and exceptional pains, which yet are applied in vain because they conflict with reason...He who manifests musical rules ever so well with respect to purity and art, but does not at the same time think naturally and straightforwardly, will doubtless arouse admiration through his painstaking work, but by no means touch his audience.

Simply stated: Bach's music suffered from an excess of art.

Based upon the Greek myth, translated through the Latin poet Ovid, and ultimately adapted to contemporary purpose with a libretto by Picander, *The Contest between Phoebus and Pan*, BWV 201, was probably first performed in Gottfried Zimmermann's coffee garden in Leipzig in 1729. The essence of Picander's and Bach's creation is the friction between 'high' and 'low' art and who should judge it. This same sort of Ovidian contest of singers can be seen as late as Wagner's *Die Meistersinger*.

*The Contest between Phoebus and Pan* can easily be thought of as Bach's pre-emptive response to Scheibe's criticism. Here, the 'recreational' Bach takes jabs at the simplistic galante style with his own satire written in a fashionable, operatic, faux-galante style. For audiences accustomed to the serious, sacred cantatas of Bach, his comic secular romp can be a tough nut to crack! To achieve Scheibe's goal of 'naturalness' the recitatives will be sung in an English translation. ~Ryan Turner

## James Kallembach *Antigone* (2017)

The inspiration for *Antigone* is the writings of Sophie Scholl and the White Rose. Scholl and her brother Hans were core members of the White Rose, a nonviolent resistance group during WWII that wrote and distributed anti-Nazi pamphlets. Scholl, her brother, and many of the other White Rose members were arrested and sentenced to death in 1943. Scholl's courage and resolve during her trial was well documented and she is one of the most revered figures in the German anti-Nazi resistance movement.

Kallembach uses Sophocles's *Antigone* as a framework for the writings of Sophie Scholl which he draws from her personal letters as well as from White Rose pamphlets. Kallembach writes that as he worked on the libretto, "Scholl's writing seemed to meld directly into the words of Antigone," and he used the anti-Nazi White Rose pamphlets as a form of Greek chorus to deliver the Antigone narrative in short, suggestive vignettes. By combining these two sources, one an ancient Greek drama and the other from relatively recent history, Kallembach brings these two works into dialogue with one another and issues a challenge to the contemporary listener. Both Sophie Scholl and the characters in Sophocles's *Antigone* are wrestling with the same questions: what does it mean to live justly in an unjust society? How should we act when faced with undeniably unjust decrees by those in power?

The musical points of reference range from a Gregorian chant inspired setting of the second White Rose Pamphlet in the movement "The State is never an end," to the almost pop inspired power chords of the

following movement, "Farewell my friends." By using the unique instrumentation of a cello quartet, Kallembach explores formal ideas of registration and texture. Both the choir of female voices and the cello quartet are capable of great blend and homogeneity of texture but are separated by register and timbre. The cello quartet functions at times almost as if it were a Greek chorus commenting on the musical action of Antigone.

*Antigone* manages to both be an exploration of mythology and history as well as a work that is thoroughly grounded in the present. The questions that Sophie Scholl and Antigone wrestled with are still with us. This piece forces us, as listeners, to think about our own role in society and about what it means to live justly. ~ Caleb van der Swaagh