PRESS RELEASE
For immediate release

LANDMARK PERIOD-PERFORMANCES OF BACH'S *ST MATTHEW PASSION* COME TO CAPE TOWN AND STELLENBOSCH

Three of South Africa's leading musical ensembles, **Schola Cantorum** of Stellenbosch University, the **Cape Town Baroque Orchestra (CTBO)**, and **VOX Cape Town**, will join forces in March 2027 for two landmark performances of **Johann Sebastian Bach**'s monumental oratorio ***St Matthew Passion***, marking the 300th anniversary of the work's first performance in Leipzig, Germany, in 1727. Led artistically and organisationally by Schola Cantorum's conductor, **Martin Berger**, the project brings together leading South African and international musicians for two performances of the three-hour work: on **Saturday 13 March 2027** at **St George's Cathedral, Cape Town, and on Sunday 14 March 2027** at the **Endler Hall, Stellenbosch**.

As one of the most important works in the Western sacred repertoire, Bach's *St Matthew Passion* combines vivid, dramatic storytelling with richly expressive choral and orchestral writing. **John Woodland**, Founder and Artistic Director of VOX Cape Town, notes that "through narration, intimate arias and chorales, and powerful ensemble scenes, the work explores enduring themes of suffering, sacrifice, compassion and redemption." For Woodland, the 2027 performances also carry significance in the context of Cape Town's own musical history. "There is a well-established tradition of performing the *St Matthew Passion* in the city, notably the performances associated with Barry Smith at Bishops Diocesan College on Good Friday, many of which I—along with other members of VOX—was fortunate to be part of. The last time the *St Matthew Passion* was heard in Cape Town was Barry's final performance of the work in 2015."

Indeed, these upcoming performances continue that tradition while breaking entirely new ground: the project will present the **first South African performances of the work using period instruments**, thus bringing audiences closer to the sound world Bach and the musicians who originally performed this work would have known. The Cape Town Baroque Orchestra (CTBO), comprising both local and international baroque specialists, will provide the period-instrument ensemble for the performances. According to **Erik Dippenaar**, Artistic Director of CTBO, period performances of this work in Cape Town and, in fact, in South Africa, are an extremely special occasion.

Dippenaar explains, “Over the past eleven years, the Cape Town Baroque Orchestra has worked very hard to build up a substantial body of locally based period instrumentalists. We are proud and excited to be able to provide the orchestra for large-scale performances such as Bach’s *St Matthew Passion.* For the *St Matthew Passio*n performances, you will experience CTBO in its largest orchestral format to date: 38 period instrumentalists on one stage—26 of whom are local specialists, augmented by twelve players from abroad, including South African-born baroque oboist and regular CTBO collaborator, **Carin van Heerden**, who is a co-founder of the acclaimed Austrian baroque ensemble, *L’Orfeo Barockorchester*.” Schola Cantorum, appearing alongside CTBO and VOX Cape Town, is another force to be reckoned with in terms of historically informed performance practice in South Africa. Since 2013, the ensemble has presented historically informed performances of works such as Heinrich Schütz’s *Musicalische Exequien*, Claudio Monteverdi’s *Vespro della Beata Vergine* and Johann Sebastian Bach’s *St John Passion*.

Apart from a full baroque orchestra and two adult choirs, the project also draws together a children’s choir and various local and internationally acclaimed soloists. Adult choirs Schola Cantorum and VOX will perform alongside a children’s choir, the **St Cyprian’s School Choir**, directed by **Riaan Oosthuizen**. They will be joined on stage by soloists **Christian Rathgeber** (tenor), **Felix Rathgeber** (bass), **Stefanie True** (soprano), **Christopher Ainslie** (countertenor), **and Conroy Scott** (bass), amongst others. For conductor Martin Berger, these performances also carry personal significance, as “2027 will mark my thirtieth anniversary with the St Matthew Passion—as a singer, continuo player and conductor.”

Beyond the concert hall, the project is conceived as a significant cultural and educational undertaking, comprising several educational and outreach initiatives that will allow scholars, students, and wider audiences to engage more deeply with Bach’s music and historically informed performance practice. Jens Eggers, who chairs the project’s organisational team, says that the team expects more than 1 200 people to attend the two live performances, with some online content reaching additional audiences. Berger concludes, “Three centuries after its first performance, the *St Matthew Passion* continues to speak with remarkable immediacy to questions of Christian faith, hope, empathy and shared humanity. Its 2027 anniversary offers Cape Town and Stellenbosch audiences a rare opportunity to experience this extraordinary work on a scale worthy of the occasion.”

More information to follow in due course. This project is generously supported by the Rupert Musiekstigting, the Spier Arts Trust, the Ohlthaver Trust (2026/27), United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany, the Richard Wagner Society and several private donors.

***

PRESS RELEASE
For immediate release

Saturday 13 March 2027, 16:00 - St George's Cathedral, Cape Town
Sunday 14 March 2027, 16:00 - Endler Hall, Stellenbosch

Ticket sales will open via **Quicket** by the end of November 2026. Advance booking is strongly recommended.

For **media enquiries** and to arrange interviews with any of the artists involved, contact Alida van der Walt, Kari Johannes and John Woodland via email at info@ctbaroque.co.za (CC: stellenboschscholacantorum@gmail.com and hello@voxcapetown.com) or via WhatsApp at +27818943026.