

AMERICAN
BACH
SOLOISTS



JEFFREY THOMAS
music director

support materials for our recording of

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH
EARLY CANTATAS FOR HOLY WEEK

Julianne Baird, Christine Brandes, Judith Nelson, sopranos
Judith Malafronte, Drew Minter, Daniel Taylor, altos
Benjamin Butterfield, Jeffrey Thomas, tenors
Kurt-Owen Richards, James Weaver, basses
AMERICAN BACH SOLOISTS
Jeffrey Thomas, conductor

PROGRAM NOTES

by John Butt

Himmelskönig, sei willkommen, BWV 182
Cantata for Palm Sunday

Cantata 182 was composed as the opening of the cycle of monthly cantatas Bach wrote for the Weimar court following his promotion to Konzertmeister early in 1714. By happy coincidence it marked the celebration of Palm Sunday, Christ's entry into Jerusalem, so Bach doubtlessly saw the work, in several senses, as an essay on "arrival." Poetically too, the Weimar court librettist, Franck, emphasized another sense of entry and arrival: the entry of Christ into the heart of the believer. The opening sinfonia might furthermore allude to the French overture with its royal connotations, thus functioning as a musical allegory, "welcoming the King of Heaven."

The first vocal movement shows an interesting combination of old and new compositional techniques: Bach took the notion of "permutation fugue" (a near canonic form where each voice in the choir takes the same succession of phrases) from the culture of the late seventeenth century, while the overall form is the "modern" da capo recently introduced into German church music (and often eschewed owing to its operatic connotations). Another modern element is the "dry" recitative for the next movement; again, many critics considered this to be too secular, but it is difficult to conceive of a musical texture more suited to the faithful and expressive pronunciation of a biblical text. Many of the "archaic" elements of cantata 4 can also be traced in this work, written roughly six years later: the obsessive repeated figures, the attention to local elements of the text, and the fore-imitation in the setting of "*Jesu, deine Passion.*" Nevertheless, the piece is generally written in the broader brush strokes of Bach's later style, so each movement is more developed as an extended musical form.

Aus der Tiefen rufe ich, Herr, zu dir, BWV 131

Bach's first post, at Arnstadt, seems to have been primarily an organist's position. Although there were apparently opportunities for directing church music performed by local students, Bach seems resolutely to have declined, either from a disinclination to write and perform concerted music, or—more likely—owing to the mediocre quality of the

musicians. In any event, his celebrated visit to Lübeck to hear Buxtehude probably did more than encourage the young composer to mix "strange notes" into his accompaniment of the chorales back in Arnstadt; the highly professional, concerted "*Abendmusik*" in Lübeck probably gave him a thirst to compose sacred music for practiced singers and instrumentalists. The position of organist at St. Blasius Mühlhausen, which Bach held from 1707-8, probably tempted him with opportunities of this kind, although the Blasius church was in the hands of a pastor who belonged to the Pietist movement, which eschewed complex church ceremonies and music. However, Bach was permitted to perform concerted music in St. Mary's church on special occasions, and indeed Cantata 131 was—according to a note in the autograph score—composed at the request of the pastor there; it is a complete setting of Psalm 130 combined with two verses of the chorale "*Herr Jesu Christ, du höchstes Gut.*"

The cantata is a perfect example of Bach's assimilation of seventeenth century church style. Although it contains none of the newer "operatic" features—specifically the *da capo* aria and the *secco* recitative—it is, in fact, more dramatic and more closely allied to the sense and rhetoric of the text than the newer operatic forms would normally allow (e.g. the vivid echoes on "*meines Flehens*" at the end of the first chorus. In fact, this style is just as operatic as the newer idioms; but it takes its expressive elements from an earlier style, a lineage that can be traced right back to the operatic career of Monteverdi. When the text does not have a direct influence on the rhythm and shape of the musical lines (as it does, for instance, for "*Herr, Herr, höre meine Stimme*"), the instrumental figures often function as if they were words, acting as if they were in dialog with or commentary on the vocal lines (e.g. "*meine Stimme harret*").

Christ lag in Todes Banden, BWV 4
Cantata for Easter Day

Most Bach scholars are agreed that Bach's cantata "*Christ lag in Todes Banden*" is one of his earliest surviving church compositions and certainly the first to employ a chorale as the main source of its text and melodic material. Indeed, Bach later incorporated the work into his second cycle of Leipzig cantatas, the so-called chorale cycle. However, while the majority of these later cantatas only use the text and melody directly for the opening and closing movements, cantata four preserves Luther's original text (and usually

the melody, too), presenting each verse in successive movements. Thus the piece sounds as one long variation form, within which Bach creates an astonishing variety of textures and moods.

The opening sinfonia sets the emotional scene by presenting both a version of the opening line of the chorale and by creating a solemn, almost mournful, affect. To Luther, the joy of Easter is acquired only through the tragedy of Christ's passion. Immediately noticeable is the constant repetition of melodic fragments, figures which act as the main substance of every movement to come. This is basically the style adopted by composers of the late seventeenth century, and it is easy

to surmise that such incessant repetition of motives could be extremely tedious in the hands of a mediocre composer. Fortunately, Bach is one of the better composers, so that he could use this technique to create a vibrant, intense and extremely dramatic succession of movements. Furthermore, within the limitations of the variation form, Bach employs an astonishing variety of forms during the course of the piece: motet, ostinato bass, string concerto and fugue. Nor does he ignore the local details of text setting, something which is especially evident in the bass solo, where death is represented by an astonishing leap of one and a half octaves and the word "strangler" is given a delightfully picturesque highlight.

Himmelskönig, sei willkommen

BWV 182

Alto, Tenor, Bass, Chorus, Recorder, Strings, Basso Continuo

[1] 1. SONATA (Recorder, Violin, Strings, Continuo)

[2] 2. CHORUS (Recorder, Violin, Strings, Continuo)

*Himmelskönig, sei willkommen,
Laß auch uns dein Zion sein!
Komm herein,
Du hast uns das Herz genommen.*

King of heaven, be welcome, let us be your Zion, too!
Come inside, you have won our hearts completely.

[3] 3. RECITATIVE (Bass, Continuo)

Siehe, ich komme, im Buch ist von mir geschrieben; deinen Willen, mein Gott, tu' ich gerne.

Look, I am coming, in the Book is written of me: your will, my God, I do gladly.

[4] 4. ARIA (Bass, Violin, Violas, Continuo)

*Starkes Lieben,
Das dich großer Gottes-Sohn,
Von dem Thron
Deiner Herrlichkeit getrieben,
Daß du dich zum Heil der Welt
Als ein Opfer fürgestellt,
Daß du dich mit Blut verschrieben.*

Strong compassion, which drove you, mighty Son of God, from the throne of your majesty, and made you offer yourself as a victim to heal the world and sentence yourself with blood.

[5] 5. ARIA (Alto, Recorder, Continuo)

*Leget euch dem Heiland unter,
Herzen, die ihr christlich seid!
Tragt ein unbeflecktes Kleid
Eures Glaubens ihm entgegen,
Leib und Leben und Vermögen
Sei dem König itzt geweiht.*

Prostrate before your Savior, all you Christian hearts! Wear a spotless robe of your faith in which to meet him, consecrate your body and life and possessions to the king.

[6] 6. ARIA (Tenor, Continuo)

*Jesu, laß durch Wohl und Weh
Mich auch mit dir ziehen!
Schreit die Welt nur „Kreuzige!“,
So laß mich nicht fliehen,
Herr, vor deinem Kreuz-Panier;
Kron' und Palmen find' ich hier.*

Jesus, let me, too, go with you through well-being and woe! When all the world shouts "Crucify!" don't let me abandon, Lord, the banner of your cross; crown and palm I find here.

[7] 7. CHORUS (Recorder, Strings, Continuo)

*Jesu, deine Passion
Ist mir lauter Freude,
Deine Wunden, Kron' und Hohn
Meines Herzens Weide;
Meine Seel' auf Rosen geht,
Wenn ich dran gedenke,
In dem Himmel eine Stätt'
Uns deswegen schenke.*

Jesus, your passion brings me purest pleasure, your wounds and crown and scorn are my heart's pasture: my soul walks on roses when I consider that through this there is a place in heaven for us.

[8] 8. CHORUS (Tutti)

*So lasset uns gehen in Salem der Freuden,
Begleitet den König in Lieben und Leiden.
Er gehet voran
Und öffnet die Bahn.*

So let us go into Salem of gladness, let us attend the King in love and in sorrow. He leads the way and opens the path.

**Aus der Tiefen rufe ich, Herr, zu dir
BWV 131**

Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass, Oboe, Bassoon, Strings, Basso Continuo

9 1. CHORUS (Tutti)

*Aus der Tiefen rufe ich, Herr, zu dir.
Herr, höre meine Stimme, laß deine Ohren merken
auf die Stimme meines Flehens!*

From the depths I call to you, Lord. Lord, hear my voice
and let your ears listen to my supplication!

10 2. ARIOSO and CHORALE (Bass, Soprano, Oboe,
Continuo)

*So du willst, Herr, Sünde zurechnen, Herr, wer wird bestehen?
Erbarm dich mein in solcher Last,
Nimm sie aus meinem Herzen,
Dieweil du sie gebüßet hast
Am Holz mit Todesschmerzen,
Denn bei dir ist die Vergebung, daß man dich fürchte.
Auf daß ich nicht mit großem Weh
In meinen Sünden untergeh,
Noch ewiglich verzage.*

If you will, Lord, mark all our sins, Lord, who will abide it?
Have mercy on me in such grief, take it from my heart,
because you have paid for it with your painful death
on the cross,

For with you there is forgiveness, and we stand in awe
of you. Don't let me perish with such enormous grief
within my sinful state or give up hope forever.

11 3. CHORUS (Tutti)

*Ich harre des Herrn, meine Seele harret, und ich hoffe auf sein
Wort.*

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits for him, and I put trust in
his word.

12 4. ARIA and CHORALE (Tenor, Alto, Continuo)

*Meine Seele wartet auf den Herrn von einer Morgenwache bis zu
der andern.
Und weil ich denn in meinem Sinn,
Wie ich zuvor geklaget,
Auch ein betrübter Sünder bin,
Den sein Gewissen naget,
Und wollte gern im Blute dein
Von Sünden abgewaschen sein
Wie David und Manasseh.*

My soul waits for the Lord from one morning watch to the
next.

Because in my mind, as I have long lamented, I, too, am a
distressed sinner, torn by my conscience, and I would
want so much to be washed with your blood from my
sins like David and Manasseh.

13 5. CHORUS (Tutti)

*Israel hoffe auf den Herrn; denn bei dem Herrn ist die Gnade und
viel Erlösung bei ihm. Und er wird Israel erlösen aus allen
seinen Sünden.*

Israel, trust in the Lord; for with the Lord there is mercy
and much redemption. And he will deliver Israel from
all her sins.

**Christ lag in Todes Banden
BWV 4**

Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass, Chorus, Strings, Cornetto,
Trombones, Basso Continuo

14 1. SINFONIA (Strings, Continuo)

15 2. CHORUS - Verse 1 (Strings, Continuo)

*Christ lag in Todes Banden
Für unsre Sünd gegeben,
Er ist wieder erstanden
Und hat uns bracht das Leben;
Des wir sollen fröhlich sein,
Gott loben und ihm dankbar sein
Und singen halleluja,
Halleluja!*

Christ lay bound into death, given for our sin: he arose
and brought us true life; for this we shall be joyful,
give God praise and gratitude and sing hallelujah,
hallelujah!

16 3. DUET - Verse 2 (Soprano, Alto, Continuo)

*Den Tod niemand zwingen kunnt
Bei allen Menschenkindern,
Das macht' alles unsre Sünd,
Kein Unschuld war zu finden.
Davon kam der Tod so bald
Und nahm über uns Gewalt,
Hielt uns in seinem Reich gefangen.
Halleluja!*

No one could subdue death among all mankind's children;
this all was caused by our sin, no innocence was found
then. From this came death so quick and seized power
over us, held us in his realm as captives. Hallelujah!

17 4. ARIA - Verse 3 (Tenor, 2 Violins, Continuo)

*Jesus Christus, Gottes Sohn,
An unser Statt ist kommen
Und hat die Sünde weggetan,
Damit dem Tod genommen
All sein Recht und sein Gewalt,
Da bleibet nichts denn Tods Gestalt,
Den Stachel hat er verloren,
Halleluja!*

Jesus Christ, God's Son, came in our place and set aside all sin for us, thus taking from death all his rule and power: so nothing is left but death's mere form, his sting he lost, hallelujah!

18 5. CHORUS - Verse 4 (Continuo)

*Es war ein wunderlicher Krieg,
Da Tod und Leben rungen,
Das Leben (da) behielt den Sieg,
Es hat den Tod verschlungen.
Die Schrift hat verkündigt das,
Wie ein Tod den andern fraß,
Ein Spott aus dem Tod is worden.
Halleluja!*

It was strange that war, when death and life did wrestle: life won the victory, it devoured death. The Scripture foretold how one death ate the other, now death is given to scorn. Hallelujah!

19 6. ARIA - Verse 5 (Bass, Strings, Continuo)

*Hier ist das rechte Osterlamm,
Davon Gott hat geboten,
Das ist hoch an des Kreuzes Stamm
In heißer Lieb gebraten,
Das Blut zeichnet unsre Tür,
Das hält der Glaub dem Tode für,
Der Würger kann uns nicht mehr schaden.
Halleluja!*

Here is the real Easter lamb which God has offered, high up on the cross it was burned in ardent love: the blood signs our door, the faith sets this against the death, the strangler can harm us no more. Hallelujah!

20 7. DUET - Verse 6 (Soprano, Tenor, Continuo)

*So feiern wir das hohe Fest
Mit Herzensfreud und Wonne,
Das uns der Herr erscheinen läßt,
Er ist selber die Sonne,
Der durch seiner Gnaden Glanz
Erleuchtet unsre Herzen ganz,
Der Sünden Nacht ist verschwunden.
Halleluja!*

So we commemorate the high feast with heartfelt joy and pleasure, which the Lord makes shine on us: he himself is the sun who through his shining grace fills all our hearts with light, the sin-filled night has vanished. Hallelujah!

21 8. CHORALE - Verse 7 (Tutti)

*Wir essen und leben wohl
In rechten Osterfladen,
Der alte Sauerteig nicht soll
Sein bei dem Wort der Gnaden,
Christus will die Koste sein
Und speisen die Seel allein,
Der Glaub will keins andern leben.
Halleluja!*

We eat and live well on this true bread of Easter: the old leaven shall not bide with the word of grace, Christ wants to be our nourishment and feed the soul alone, faith won't live on anything else. Hallelujah!

THE INSTRUMENTS

ARCHLUTE - Reid Galbraith; after J. C. Hoffmann circa 1714.

BASSOON - Peter de Koningh, Hall Netherlands, 1989; copy of Preudent, Paris, 1740.

CORNETTO - Treble cornett by Christopher Monk, 1970.

OBOE - H. A. Vas Dias, Georgia USA; after Thomas Stanesby, Sr., London, circa 1700.

ORGAN - Jürgen Ahrend, Germany, 1975.

RECORDER - Alto in F: David Coomber, Utrecht, Netherlands, 1983; copy of J.C. Denner, Musikhistorisk Museum Copenhagen, 1720. Alto in F: Kanji & Sorel, Den Haag, Netherlands, 1993; copy of J.C. Denner, Musikhistorisk Museum Copenhagen, 1720. Voice Flute in D: Peter van der Poel, Utrecht, Netherlands, 1984; copy of J.C. Denner, 1720.

TROMBONE - Alto posaune: Meister Latsch in Bremen in 1983. Tenor posaune: John Webb, London, England, 1991; copy of Anton Schnitzer, Nurnberg, 1591. Bass posaune: 1976 by Boehm and Meinel, after Pierre Colbert 1593.

VIOLA - Aegidius Klotz, Mittenwald, 1790. Otto Erdesz, New York, 1963; after G.B. Maggini, Brescia. Anonymous; copy of Mathias Eberl, Salzburg, 1696. Coutureaux, Paris, France, circa 1800.

VIOLIN - Johann Gottlob Pfretzsehner, 1791. Rowland Ross, England, 1989; after Amati. Johann Georg Thir, Vienna, Austria, 1754.

VIOLONCELLO - Vincenzo Panormo, Sicily, circa 1780.

VIOLONE - John Pringle, Chapel Hill NC, 1992; after Ernst Busch, Nürnberg, circa 1640.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES ARE AVAILABLE ONLINE AT:

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