

J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 161

Form: Aria/Chorale (A) - Recit (T) - Aria (T) - Recit (A) - Chorus - Chorale.

Introduction & updates at melvinunger.com.

The cantata is in chiasmic form. Bach often used chiasmic (x-shaped/symmetrical) forms, in which center movements (where the mirror image begins) provide the crux of the matter. There antithetical elements meet or are paradoxically inverted (formal inversion reflects an aspect of reversal or turning in the text).

J.S. Bach

Cantata No. 161

Komm, du süße Todesstunde

Martin Petzoldt's Formal Outline (*Bach Kommentar* 1:452)

4. T aria. Being with Christ
5. A recit. World end and heavenly pasture
3. T recit. Worldly burden and vision of heaven
6. Choral aria. Last word
2. A aria. Last light
7. Chorale. Life in heavenly joy
1. S chorale. Longing for heavenly joy

Concerning the source material, see note.

Yearning for death: Sweetness comes out of death (161/1).

In the Leipzig revision, the first movement is recast for transverse flutes and violins, with the chorale sung by an (added) soprano.

Aria. (Adagio $\text{♩} = 92$.)

1. Rec I & II

Ritornello is derived from the vocal line, which is related to chorale tune.

Parallel 6ths & 3rds suggest sweetness.

Continuo alone.

For the significance of C, see note.

C major

G major

D7

G major

(G7)

(A7)

D minor

G7

A minor

C(7)

F major

G7

C major

Chromatic ascent

The brief dissonance of the chromatic approach to the cadence in C major may signify the brief agony of death or reaching for paradise.

9. Alto.

Alto is often the voice of faith. See Martin Petzoldt, *Bach Kommentar* 2:110.

Lines 1-4 (reference to Samson).
Line is related to the chorale tune.

Komm, du süsse Todesstunde, da mein Geist
Hönig

C major

Form (Rhyme: ABBACDDC)
Ritornello (mm. 1-9) CM
Lines 1-4 (9-20) CM
Rit (21-22) Em-GM-CM
Lines 1-4 (23-28) FM-Am
Rit (28-32) Am
Lines 5-8 (33-38) DM-Dm
Rit (39-40) Dm
Lines 5-8 (41-49) GM-CM
Rit (1-9) CM

Instrumentation:
Flauto dolce (Recorder) I, II
Vln I, II
Via
SATB
Continuo & Organo

FP: 27 September 1716
(Weimar Palace Chapel).
Revised in Leipzig, perhaps for
12 September 1723
(St. Thomas at Communion).

+Malachi 3:1-4 (The Lord will
suddenly come to his temple and
purify his people)

+Luke 2:22-32 (Mary presents Jesus
at the temple; Nunc Dimittis)

*Luke 7:11-17 (Resurrection of boy at Nain)

*Ephesians 3:13-21 (Paul's prayer for the Ephesians;
that they be spiritually strengthened)

16 S. after Trinity. Later, Bach also designated it for
Mary's Purification (Candlemas)

NBA I/23; BC A135a/b

sweetness found in death: The text alludes to Samson finding honey in the carcass of a lion that he had killed earlier (Judges 14). Theologians in Bach's day interpreted this story as an allegory for Christ's victory over Satan and death providing the sweetness of the Gospel (eternal life). See Martin Petzoldt's quotation of commentary by Johann Olearius in *Bach Kommentar* 1:453–454.

11

speist aus des Löwen Munde, komm du

D7 G major G7 C major

Implied chorale text as rendered in Vopelius and Carl Gottlob Hofmann, eds., *Das Privilegirte Vollständige Und Vermehrte Leipziger Gesangbuch: Darinnen Die Auserlesensten Lieder, Wie Solche In Hiesigen Und Andern Kirchen Gebräuchlich An Der Zahl 1015...* (Leipzig, 1758), p.381. For translation, see note.

14

süsse Todesstunde, komm du süsse Todesstunde, du süßlich thut mich verlan-gen nach

C7 F major G major C major E7

Rec II

Chorale is played on the organ (sesquialtera). In the Leipzig version, it is sung by an (added) soprano

5-part counterpoint. Alfred Dürr notes an internal contrast between the subjective aria melody and the objective chorale. See *The Cantatas of J. S. Bach*, p. 545.

16

süsse Todesstunde, da mein Geist Honig speist aus des Löwen ei-nem sel-gen End

A minor G7 E7 A minor D major G major

Rec I Up 8va

(tr) 19

Munde, aus des Löwen Munde

B(7) E minor E minor B7

Rec I Ritornello

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21. Lines 1-4 repeated.

Komm, du sü - sse To - des -

Rec 2 up 8va.

E minor D7 G major G7 C major

24.

stunde. komm, komm, du sü - sse To - - - - desstun - de,

weil ich hier bin um - fan - - - - gen mit

C7 F major G7 C major C major E7

26.

da - mein Geist Ho - nig speist aus des Lö - - - - wen Mun -

Trüb - sal und E - - - - lend:

A minor D7 E7 A7 D minor (G7) E7

29.

de. Ritornello

A minor E7 A minor A minor

31.

Text painting: Upwardly striving lines perhaps suggest reaching for paradise.

Ma - che mei - nen Ab - schied

A minor D(7)

34.

The text makes a cyclical connection with movement 5: "letztes Licht - letztes Wort" ("final light - final word").

süsse, säu - me nicht. **letz - tes Licht**, dass ich mei - nen Hei - land

Ich hab' Lust ab - zu - schei - - den von

G7 C major A minor C major C7

36.

küs - - se, dass ich mei - nen Hei - land küs - se, mei - nen Hei - land küs -

die - ser ar - gen Welt;

F major D minor A7 D minor

39.

se; Rec I ma - che

Rec II up 8va Ritornello

D minor D minor D minor

Lines 5-8 repeated.

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41.
mei - nen Ab - schied sü - sse, säu - me nicht, letz - tes

G(7) C major A7

43.
Licht. dass ich mei - nen Hei - land küs - -
sehn/ mich nach ew - - gen

D major D7 G major

Text painting: Upwardly striving lines suggest reaching for paradise.

45.
- - se. säu - me nicht, letz - tes Licht. dass ich mei - nen Hei - land
Freu - - den: O Je - su, komm nur

G7 C7 F major C major

47.
kü - - - se, mei - nen Hei - - - land kü - - se.
bald!

C7 F major (G major) C major

Ritornello

Dal Segno.

Secco
Recitativo.

•Worldly pleasures detested; death yearned for (161/2). The aria comments on and contemplates the sentiments of the foregoing aria, often by means of opposites offered by the deceitful world and heaven (the appearance of things is contrasted with the reality of their essence).

161/2.

Te-re.

Chromatic saturation in the vocal part in 9 mm.

1. A B C F D G#

Welt, deine Lust ist Last, dein Zucker ist mir als ein Gift verhasst, dein

Play on words with occasional alliteration: "Your pleasure ('Lust') is burden ('Last'), your sugar ('Zucker') is poison ('Gift')."

A minor B dim. E7 D# dim.7

4. F# D# C# G

Freu - - - den Licht ist mein Ko - me - te, und wo man dei - ne Ro - sen

Play on words: "Your (i.e., the world's) light of joy ('Freudenlicht') is my comet ('Komete'), a 'symbol of calamity.'" (See Dürr, *The Cantatas of J. S. Bach*, p. 544).

B7 E minor A7

6. Tritone for "der blasse Tod" ("pale death")

Play on words: "Where one picks your roses there are thorns without number."

briecht, sind Dornen oh - ne Zahl zu mei - ner See - len Qual. Der

Chromatic inflection for "Seelen Qual" "soul's torment".

D# dim.7 B7 E minor N6 B major E minor

9. B-flat

blas - se Tod ist mei - ne Mor - gen - rö - the, mit sol - cher geht mir auf die

Play on words: pale death ("blasse Tod") is the pink light of dawn ("Morgenröte").

C7 F7 B dim. C minor C minor Leipzig: C major C major

Text painting: Leap up of a 7th for "drum seufz'" "thus [I] sigh").

12.

Son - ne der Herrlich - keit und Him - - mels - - won - ne. Drum seufz' ich recht von

Alliteration: "Herrlichkeit" (glory) / "Himmelswonne" (heavenly bliss).

A minor D7 G major G7

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Uwe Wolf notes, "According to the annotation, 'strom: [enti]. unis.[ono],' it is possible that Bach intended for the violins and viola (an octave higher) to double the bass line from the start of the arioso ending (2nd half of m. 16) onwards." See Johann Sebastian Bach. *The Sacred Vocal Music Complete Edition. Cantatas* (Stuttgart: Carus Verlag, 2017), vol. 13, p. 576 (Uwe Volf, translated by Linda Marianiello).

Text painting: Another leap up of a 7th for "nur nach" ("just for").

(Arioso $\text{♩} = 92$.)

14. *Herzens-grun-de nur nach der letzten To - des-stun - de. Ich*

The rocking continuo figure suggests the anticipated comfort.

The text alludes to Philippians 1:23: My desire (Luther 1545: Ich habe Lust) is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better (see also 2 Corinthians 5:8) with pastoral love language from Song of Solomon 6:2-3: My beloved has gone down to his garden...I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine; he pastures his flock among the lilies.

17. *ha - be Lust, bei Chri - sto bald zu - wei - den, ich ha - be Lust, von*

The chorale tune is an editorial addition.

19. *die-ser Welt zu scheiden.*

The descending continuo line suggests the "departure" in death, as referenced in the text.

Aria.

Martin Petzoldt suggests that the repeated "yearning figure" alludes to the last line of the chorale, with the words of the first stanza, "O Jesu, komm nur bald!" (O Jesu, just come soon)—particularly in view of the aria text's repeated use of the word "bald." See Bach Kommentar 1:457.

161/3. (Allegro moderato $\text{♩} = 112$.) Yearning to depart & be with Christ in heaven (161/3).

1. *mf* *Strings*

Ritornello is derived from the vocal line, which is related to chorale tune's opening.

Form (Rhyme: AABCCBA)
Ritornello (mm. 1-11) Am
Lines 1-3 (3x: 11-50) Am
Rit (50-60) Am [Fine]
Lines 4-7 (60-89) Am-*CM*
(extravagant melismas)
Rit (89-92) *CM*
Lines 4-7 (92-109) *CM-Em*
(continuo alone)
da capo

6. *hemiola*

"Mein Verlangen" ("my yearning") is set with a sighing figure that dominates the entire movement with many repetitions, often haltingly, with the strings responding.

Regarding the modular construction of this aria, see comments by Christoph Wolff in note.



The first notes may be derived from the last phrase of the chorale.

11 Tenore.

Mein Ver - lan - gen, mein Ver - lan - gen ist, den Heiland zu um - fan - gen

Notes 5-10 are related to the chorale tune.

A minor C major D7 G major G7 C major

17. und bei Chri - sto - bald, bald zu sein,

C major C# dim. 7 D minor A minor iv6 Phrygian cadence V A minor

22. mein Ver - lan - gen, mein Ver - lan - gen, mein Ver - lan - gen,

G7 E7 A minor (A minor)

28. mein Ver - lan - gen ist, den Heiland zu um - fan - gen

G7 C major C major C7 F major

33. und bei Christo bald, bald zu sein, mein Ver - lan -

"Verlangen" ("yearning") becomes active with a melisma.

A7 D minor E7 A minor iv6 Phrygian cadence V A minor G7

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39.

gen ist. den Heiland zu um-fan-gen und bei

C major D7 G major G7 C major C# dim.7

44.

Christo bald zu sein, den Heiland zu umfassen und bei Christo

D minor A minor A minor A7 D minor E7 A minor

49.

bald zu sein.

Ritornello

A minor C major D7 G major G7 C major

56.

Ob ich sterb-lich' Asch'und

hemiola

C major C# dim.7 D minor A minor A minor D7 G major

The B section of the aria is accompanied by just continuo with some string interjections. Sequential, descending triads (twice as tritones) for "Though I, being mortal, by death."

63.

Er-de durch den Tod zer-mal-

(tr)

B7 E minor E7 A minor

Text painting: Long, chromatically sinuous melisma for "zermalmet" (the body "pulverized" into dust and ashes).

The continuo participates in the "pulverizing" figure.

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Chromatic, sequential ascent increases tension.

69.

met wer de wird der See le

Strings interject the "yearning" figure.

A minor A7 D# dim.7 E minor B(7) E minor

74.

rei - ner - Schein den noch gleich - den En - geln pran - gen.

D7 G major G7 C major C7 F major G7 C major

80.

rei - ner - Schein den noch gleich - den En - geln pran - gen.

C major D7 G major G7 C major

The voice sings a long melisma to depict the shining splendor of the soul in paradise but its line descends (suggesting the death of the body). Meanwhile, the strings interject the descending "triads of death and disintegration" (cf. mm. 60-65). This construction captures the two opposing realities: while the body dies, the soul shines.

86.

dennoch gleich den En - geln pran - gen.

C major C major C major

Ritornello hemiola

The text of the B section is repeated but with continuo only, as if the spirit has been "shed" of its physical clothing ("der Seele reiner Schein," "the soul's pure luster").

92.

Ob ich sterb - lich' Asch' und Er - de durch den Tod zer -

C major C7 C7 F major D minor

98. (tr)
 mal met wer de, wird der See le rei ner Schein den noch

G major G7 C major A minor
 D7 G# dim.7

104. hemiola
 gleich den En - geln pran - gen, den noch gleich den En - geln pran - gen.

A minor D# dim.7 E minor B7 E minor

Da Capo. (without pause)

Recitativo.

161/4. 1. Alto. •Death's sleep welcomed for Jesus will awaken me (161/4).

Der Schluss ist schon ge-macht, Welt, gu - te Nacht, Welt, gu - te

Recorders & Strings

Welcoming death

C major (D7)

This is the central (pivot) movement in the cantata's chiasmic form, where antithetical elements meet or are paradoxically inverted (formal inversion reflects an aspect of reversal or turning in the text). Here the focus pivots to the hope of the resurrection.

4. Nacht! Und kann ich nur den Trost er-wer-ben, in Je - su Armen bald zu

The reference to dying in Jesus' arms recalls Simeon's canticle, the Nunc dimittis (see note), though there it is Jesus lying in Simeon's arms.

Sleep of Death

G major G# dim.7 E7 A minor

7. sterben, er ist mein sanfter Schlaf, er

1. "Falling gently asleep" is set with falling scales with lullaby-like duples in voice, recorders, and continuo, and with sustained notes by the strings.

The gentle sleep of death is set 3 times in different ways.

Rec I
 Strings sustain chords.
 Rec II

B7 E minor E minor

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2. "Gentle sleep" is embellished with a descending melisma on "sanft" ("gentle").

3. "Gentle sleep" is set to a melisma of rocking duples.

11. *ist mein sanft - - ter_ Schlaf, er ist_ mein sanft - - - ter_ Schlaf, mein sanft.*

A minor F major B7 E minor N6 A minor E minor N6 A minor

15. *- ter Schlaf. Das kühl - le Grab wird mich mit Rosen decken. bis Jesus mich wird*

B7 E minor C# dim.7 D minor G major C major

Word painting: Fast, rising melisma for "reawaken" (i.e., resurrect), which relates to Jesus raising the young man to life in the day's Gospel (see note).

18. *auf - - - er - wecken, bis er sein Schaf führt auf die sü - sse Himmels.*

C major

The return to C major is significant (see note at no. 1 about the significance of C major for Bach).

21. *weide, dass mich der Tod von ihm nicht scheidet. So brich herein, du froher Todes.*

A major D minor G(7)

Regarding Bach's depiction of funeral bells and the ticking of the clock to set text references to the hour of death, see note.

Ticking of the clock (or deeper bells)...

23.

tag, so schlage doch, schlage doch. du letz - ter Stunden.schlag. so

Rec I (funeral bells).

Ticking of the clock (or deeper bells)...

C major C7 F major

26.

schlage doch, schlage doch, schlage doch, du letz - ter Stundenschlag!

Violins & viola play on open strings.

(G7) C major C major

Coro. Parallel 3rds suggest sweetness.

For comments by Martin Petzoldt on the first sections of the movement, see note.

161/5. (Allegro moderato $\text{♩} = 112$.)

•Yearning for death: Body to earth, soul to heaven (161/5).

Ritornello. The strings are related to the vocal lines; the recorder motive recalls the first movement, and alludes to the chorale tune.

1. Rec I & II

mf

Strings

C major

Form (Rhyme: ABABCCDD, which Bach does not follow)
 Ritornello (mm. 1-16) CM [Fine]
 Lines 1-3 (17-32) CM-GM
 Rit (33-40) GM
 Lines 4-6 (41-58) E7-Em
 Rit (59-70) Em
 Line 7 (71-80) A7-CM
 Rit (80-85) CM
 Lines 7-8 (85-96) CM da capo

While the movement borrows the descending sighing figures of the opening movement, the faster tempo and courtly, minuet-like triple meter suggest joyful anticipation of heaven with Jesus, as referenced in the text. Meanwhile, the florid recorder passages suggest the ecstasy of the transfigured believer in heaven.

6.

C major

10.

hemiola

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15. Soprano.

Lines 1-3.

The soprano line appears to allude to the chorale tune. Parallel 3rds suggest sweetness..

CORO.

Alto. **W**enn es mei - nes Got - tes Wil - le.

Tenore. **W**enn es mei - nes Got - tes Wil - le,

Basso.

Despite the fact that the text is in the first person singular, Bach sets it for a four-voice ensemble in homophonic (sometimes responsorial) fashion. Nevertheless, the embellishment in the soprano line gives it the predominance of a solo.

21.

C major

wenn es mei - nes Got - tes Wil - le, wünsch' ich,

wenn es mei - nes Got - tes Wil - le, wünsch' ich.

Wenn es mei - nes Got - tes Wil - le, wünsch' ich.

Wenn es mei - nes Got - tes Wil - le, wünsch' ich.

D7

D7

G major

26.

dass des Lei - bes Last heu - te

dass des Lei - bes Last heu - te

dass des Lei - bes Last heu - te

dass des Lei - bes Last heu - te

G major

30. noch die Er - de fül - le,
 noch die Er - de fül - le,
 noch die Er - de fül - le,
 noch die Er - de fül - le.

Ritornello

mf

G major G major

35.

G major

A 41. Lines 4-6. The spirit is seen as the "guest" of the physical body, an idea expounded in several biblical passages (see note).

und der Geist, des Lei - bes Gast, und der Geist,
 und der Geist, des Lei - bes Gast, und der Geist,
 und der Geist, und der Geist, des Lei - bes
 und der Geist, und der Geist, des Lei - bes

p

E7 A minor A7



47.

und der Geist, des Lei - bes Gast, mit Un -
und der Geist, des Lei - bes Gast. mit Un -
Gast. der Geist, des Lei - bes Gast. mit Un -
Gast. der Geist, des Lei - bes Gast, mit Un -

D7 G major B7 hemiola

52.

sterb - lich - keit sich klei - de in der sü - ssen Him - mels - freu -
sterb - lich - keit sich klei - de in der sü - ssen Him - mels - freu -
sterb - lich - keit sich klei - de in der sü - ssen Him - mels - freu -
sterb - lich - keit sich klei - de in der sü - ssen Him - mels - freu -

E minor

58.

de.
de.
de.
de. Ritornello

E minor

61.

E minor

E minor

65.

70. **B** Lines 7.

The prayer for Jesus to come is reminiscent of Simeon's canticle (Nunc dimittis—see above), Elijah's prayer in 1 Kings 19:4 ("It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life") and the Christian prayer, "O Lord, come" in 1 Corinthians 16:22 and Revelation 22:20. Here the statement is sung responsorially in duets of sweet parallel 3rds and 6ths, suggesting sweetness.

Je - su, komm und nimm mich fort. Je - su,
 Je - su, komm und nimm mich fort, Je - su.
 Je - su, komm, Je - su, komm und
 Je - su, komm, Je - su, komm und

B

76. E minor

A7

D major

D7

komm. Je - su, komm und nimm mich fort!
 komm, Je - su, komm und nimm mich fort!
 nimm mich fort, komm und nimm mich fort!
 nimm mich fort, komm und nimm mich fort!

Ritornello

G major

G7

E minor

C major

82.

Je - - su. komm und
Je - - su. komm und

C major

87.

Je - - su, komm und nimm_ mich
Je - - su, komm und nimm_ mich
nimm_ mich fort, Je - - su, komm und nimm_ mich
nimm_ mich fort. Je - - su. komm und nimm_ mich

G major D7 G major G7 D minor A7

92.

fort! Die - - ses sei hemiola mein **letz. tes Wort.**
fort! Die - - ses sei mein letz - tes Wort.
fort! Die - - ses sei mein letztes Wort.
fort! Die - - ses sei mein letz - tes Wort.

D minor D minor G major C major C major Da Capo.

The words "letztes Wort" ("final word") create a cyclical connection with the words "letztes Licht" ("final light") in movement 1. "Final word" may allude to the end of the day's Gospel reading: "[Jesus] came and touched the bier...and he said, 'Young man, I say to you, arise.' And he that was dead sat up again, and began to speak." It is noteworthy that "Come, Lord Jesus" is the "last word" in the bible (see Revelation 22:21)..

Petzoldt quotes Johann Olearius (1611-1684), whose commentary was in J. S. Bach's personal library, showing that Olearius interpreted the young man's "speech" as a proclamation of the resurrection, arguing that anyone affirming belief in the resurrection as Christ's "final word" becomes a "teacher of immortality from the professional chair of death." See *Bach Kommentar* 1:459-460.

Bach underscores the finality of the chorale stanza's last sentence by stating it only once.

This is the 4th stanza of 11 in the chorale "Herzlich tut mich verlangen" by Christoph Knoll (1563–1621). The chosen stanza is set with a descant of unison recorders, suggesting that the yearning for heavenly bliss in no. 1 (the movement's counterpart in the cantata's symmetrical structure) has been fulfilled.

Choral. (Mel: „O Haupt, voll Blut und Wunden“.)

161/6. (♩ = 60.)

Soprano. 1/5.

+Vln I

Der doch Leib zwar in der
auf - - er - - weckt soll

Alto.

+ Vln II

Der doch Leib zwar in der
auf - - er - - weckt - soll

Tenore.

+Vla

Der doch Leib zwar in der
auf - - er - - weckt soll

Basso.

Der Leib zwar in der

Unison recorders suggests the "transfigured radiance of the resurrected body described in the text" (Alfred Dürr, *The Cantatas of J. S. Bach*, translated by Richard Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 546.

Rec I, II

C major

2/6.

Er - - - den von Wür - mern wird ver - zehrt,
wer - - - den, durch Chri - stum schön ver - klärt,

Er - - - den von Wür - mern wird ver - zehrt,
wer - - - den, durch Chri - stum schön ver - klärt,

Er - - - den von Wür - mern wird ver - zehrt.
wer - - - den, durch Chri - stum schön ver - klärt,

Er - - - den von Wür - mern wird ver - zehrt.
wer - - - den, durch Chri - stum schön ver - klärt,

E7 A minor A major A minor

20

9.

wird leuch - ten als die Son - - - ne und
 wird leuch - ten als die Son - - - ne und
 wird leuch - ten als die Son - - - ne und
 wird leuch - ten als die Son - - - ne und

A minor

C major

11.

le - ben oh - ne Noth in himml' - scher Freud' und
 le - ben oh - ne Noth in himml' - scher Freud' und
 le - ben oh - ne Noth in himml' - scher Freud' und
 le - ben oh - ne Noth in himml' - scher Freud' und

14.

Won - - - ne. Was schad't mir dann der Tod?
 Won - - - ne. Was schad't mir dann der Tod?
 Won - - - ne. Was schad't mir dann der Tod?
 Won - - - ne. Was schad't mir dann der Tod?

A minor

E7

A minor

E major

