

J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 27

Form: Chorale + Recit (SAT) - Recit (T) - Aria (Alto) - Recit (S) - Aria (B) - Chorale
(See side note for more.)

Introduction and updates at melvinunger.com.

NBA I/23; BC A138

16. S. after Trinity (BWV 161, 95, 8, 27=meditations on death)

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

*Lk. 7:11-17 (Jesus raises young man of Nain from the dead)

Librettist: Unknown. Movement 6 is borrowed from Johann Rosenmüller. See notes below at individual movements for apparent sources of individual lines.

FP: 6 October 1726 (St. Thomas)

J.S. Bach Cantata No. 27

Motivic material unifying the movement:

- 1) descending arpeggios (mostly in Vln I & II),
- 2) dotted "questioning figure (mostly in oboes),
- 3) chains of 2-note upwardly "striving" figure.

Chorale lines are troped with recitatives. The connection to the Gospel lesson lies in the (unexpected?) death of the young man. See side note for more on hybrid movements.

Wer weiß, wie nahe mir mein Ende

(Coro.) 1. Chorale & Soprano, Alto, & Tenor Recits. (Chorale: see also 166/6).

•Death comes at any time, only God knows how soon (27/1). Our time (on earth) and death are contrasted.

27/1. (Larghetto $\text{♩} = 60$)

Oboe figure is apparently derived from the opening of the chorale tune. (See Dürr/Jones, 555).

Instrumentation (NBA):

Corno

Ob I (also Ob da caccia, Ob II)

Vln I, II

Vla

SATB

Basso

Cembalo o Organo obbligato

Continuo (see side note)

1. **C minor**

Note clashes (pain of death referenced in the text?)

Strings play unifying figure of descending 8th arpeggios (perhaps depicting slipping down to impending death [see continuo, mm. 2831]), while the oboes play a questioning figure (Dürr/Jones, 555).

5. **C minor**

Oboes play chains of 2-note sighing figure.

Vln I & II (see full score)

Continuo takes over the 8th-note arpeggio figure, this time ascending, violins play previous oboe motive.

8. **C minor**

Vln I & II

11.

Soprano.

Chorale Phrase 1. A

The chorale text is the first stanza of the chorale of the same name. The tune is more commonly associated with the text "Wer nur den lieben Gott läßt walten" (He who just lets God hold sovereign sway").

Alto. **CORO.**

Tenore. **CORO.**

Basso. **CORO.**

Wer weiss, wie nahe he

Wer weiss, wie nahe he

Wer weiss, wie nahe he

Wer weiss, wie nahe he

The chorale statements are mostly homophonic. An exception is the last chorale line, which is set polyphonically (mm. 65-74). The ends of individual lines also become polyphonic.

Chorale tune doubled by horn.

C minor

16.

Recit.

mir mein En - - - de? Das weiss der lie-be Gott al-

mir mein En - - - de?

mir mein En - - - de?

mir mein En - - - de?

E dim.7

Dürr notes that the cantata presents a childlike trust in the face of death. This attitude is reinforced by the use of "dear God" (here and twice in movement 5), the simplicity of the 2 chorale arrangements, the songlike alto aria, and the serene treatment of "Gute Nacht" in the bass aria. See Dürr/Jones, 556.

20.

Text painting: In the poem, the word "Erden" is the end of the line (rhyming with "werden" of m. 35). By moving immediately to the word "kurz" (short), which belongs to the next poetic line, followed by rests, Bach depicts the possibility of an untimely death.

lein, ob mei-ne Wallfahrt auf der Er-den kurz - - - - - o-der länger mö-ge

F minor (G7) C minor F7 F7

24. Chorale Phrase 2. Contrast between time and death: Time on earth departs; death approaches.

sein. Hin - geht die Zeit, her - kommt der

Hin - geht die Zeit, her - kommt der

Hin - geht die Zeit, her - kommt der

Hin - geht die Zeit, her - kommt der

B mf C7 F minor G7 F# dim.7 C minor

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28. Text painting: Death is depicted with a long (immovable) note.

Tod, der Tod, herkommt der Tod, und

Vln I & II

Vln I & II have 3 mm. of questioning figure before continuing with descending arpeggios.

C7 F minor

32. Continuo takes over 8th-note motion, with 2-note striving figure slipping down step by step to death.

endlich kommtes doch so weit, dass sie zusammentreffen werden. Ach,

Ach, Ach, Ach,

Text painting: Leap upward for "weit" (far: finally the point is reached).

Text painting: "So weit" (literally, "so far": finally, the point is reached where departing time and approaching death meet). Bach depicts the jarring and sudden event of death by with a clashing C against an E dim.7 chord. Martin Petzoldt notes that this is reminiscent of Isaiah's words: "I said, "In the prime of my life I shall go to the gates of Sheol; I am deprived of the remainder of my years." (Isaiah 28:10, New King James version. See Petzoldt, "Bach Kommentar, 1:482.

E dim.7 E dim.7 F minor G7

36. E dim.7 F minor G7 Second Stollen repeats music of first Stollen with a few alterations (cf. mm. 14-18, 25-31). This time there is no intervening recitative.

wie geschwinde und behen-

wie geschwinde und behen-

wie geschwinde und behen-

wie geschwinde und behen-

C minor

Text painting: sustained note and chromatic harmonies for "I pray" (plead).

spricht? Drum bet' ich al-le

56. D7 G minor D7 D dim.7 B dim.7 G7

Abgesang of chorale's bar form is a prayer. Chorale Phrases 5 & 6 are joined.

Petzoldt notes that the commitment to constant prayer is related to the foregoing concern about uttering one's final words and is reminiscent of Jesus' command in Luke 18:1b to pray without ceasing. Bach depicts praying constantly on all occasions with a held note (above), then quick notes on the repeated text. See Petzoldt, 1:483.

Zeit, al-le Zeit, drum bet' ich al-le Zeit: Mein Gott, mein Gott, ich

Mein Gott, ich

Mein Gott, ich

Mein Gott, ich

Oboes play chains of 2-note striving figure.

C minor F# dim.7 G minor A-flat major D-flat dim.

Text painting: Chromatic harmonies for "pleading through Christ's blood."

bitt' durch Christi Blut, mein Gott, ich bitt' durch

bitt' durch Christi Blut, ich bitt' durch

bitt' durch Christi Blut, ich bitt' durch

Vln I & II

C minor E-flat major E-flat 7 F minor B-flat 7 E-flat 7 A-flat major E-flat 7

Continuo takes over 8th-note motion, with 2-note striving figure slipping down step by step to death. Vln I & II have 4 mm. of questioning figure before continuing with descending arpeggios.

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64.

Chorale Phrase 6. Final chorale line is set polyphonically, the chorale tune prefigured with imitation in alto and tenor, the material derived from the chorale phrase. The imitation serves to emphasize the repeated request for a "good end."

68. A-flat major

E-flat major

G7

C minor

72.

C7

F minor

C7

F minor

C minor

Chromatic harmonies continue...

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Oboes play chains of the 2-note striving figure.

76.

tr tr

Ob I Ob II

E dim.7 C7 F minor B dim.7 C minor D#7

80.

Vln I & II play chains of the 2-note striving figure.

G major G7 The ascending form of the arpeggios now predominates, expressing the positive end mentioned in the text. See Chafe, "Tonal Allegory," 189. A-flat major C minor

83.

Secco C minor

27/2. **Recitativo.** •Goal of my life is to prepare for death (27/2).

Chromatic Saturation in the vocal part in 9 mm.

1. Tenore. D G F# B-flat A C

Mein Le - ben hat kein an - der Ziel, als dass ich mö - ge se - lig

Continuo alone (secco recitativo)

G minor

This phrase connects the recitativo to the foregoing movement's statement "Drum bet ich allezeit."

3.

ster - ben und meines Glaubens An - theil er - ben. Drum leb' ich

G minor B-flat major (see NBA)

"Selig sterben" alludes to Revelation 14:13: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord...that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"

5.

al - le - zeit zum Gra - be fer - tig und be - reit, und was das Werk der Hän - de

Apparent allusion to Psalm 90:14: "Establish thou the work of our hands upon us..."

G major

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7. D-flat E

thut, ist gleichsam ob ich si - cher wüs - te, dass ich noch heu - te ster - ben

9. C minor E-flat major B See side note. C7

müss - te; denn **En - de gut, mach: Al - les gut.**

"Ende gut" gets virtually the same rhythm as "Flügel her" in movement 4.

F minor G7 C minor C minor

27/3. **Aria.** (First two lines based on Neumeister aria; more below.) • Death is welcome; I take afflictions to the grave (27/3).
 (Moderato $\text{♩} = 116$).

Oboe da caccia
 Cembalo obbligato
 (earlier version)
 or Organo obbligato

Modified ternary form
 (A-B-A').

Although the overall mood is happy, the frequent shifts between major and minor suggest ambivalence (as also the pulsing, sighing motive, which could depict the soft, stealthy tread of approaching death).

1. mf Ob da caccia prefigures vocal melody ("Willkommen ich will sagen").

E-flat major E-flat pedal... E-flat 7

3. The "sighing" figures may also depict the soft, stealthy tread of approaching death.

Ob da caccia plays sighing figures (see full score) = "der Tod."

B-flat 7 E-flat major E-flat major F7 B-flat major G minor (F major) B-flat major

Later, the sighing figure (= "der Tod") & the descending line (= "Willkommen will ich sagen") are combined (see mm. 27, 70).

6. Line derived from "Willkommen will ich sagen"

Ob da caccia plays descending line (descent to grave?)

B-flat minor B-flat minor

8. B-flat major E-flat major B-flat pedal...

10.

E-flat major E dim.7 F minor F minor C minor

12.

B dim.7 C minor E-flat 7 A-flat major (B-flat 7)

14.

E-flat 7 B dim.7 E-flat major

16. **Alto.**

Eric Chafe sees the rising fifth of the opening (fore-shadowed by the oboe da caccia in the ritornello) as a sign of hope. See "Tonal Allegory," 190.

Will - kom - men! will ich sa - gen, wenn der

E-flat major E-flat major

18.

Tod ans Bet - te tritt, — will - kom - men, will - kom - men! will ich —

E-flat 7 A-flat major A-flat pedal...

20.

sa - gen, wenn der Tod ans Bet - te - tritt, will - kom - men! will ich

B-flat 7 E-flat major E-flat pedal...

23.

sa - gen, will - kom - men! will ich sa - gen, wenn der Tod ans Bet - te tritt, will -

E-flat 7 A-flat major (B-flat 7) B-flat major

25.

kom - men! will ich sa - gen, will - kom - men! will ich sa - gen, wenn der Tod, - - der

Ob da caccia

F7 B-flat minor

The sighing figure and descending line are combined.

Though death is welcomed, it is still disturbing, so Bach moderates the joyful mood by moving to minor (cf. mm. 70-72). See Petzoldt, 1:485.

28.

Tod, will - kom - men! will ich sa - gen, wenn der Tod ans Bet - te tritt.

Ob da caccia

B-flat minor B-flat minor B-flat major

mf

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30. Ritornello

B-flat pedal... B-flat major (F7) B-flat 7

33.

B-flat major B-flat minor A dim.7 B-flat minor

35. Middle Section

"Fröhlich" always begins with upbeat, set as melisma.

Fröhlich will ich folgen, fröhlich will ich

Text painting: Oboe da caccia and obbligato organ follow voice in imitation to depict "I will follow joyously" (see full score).

B-flat major B-flat 7 E-flat major C7

38. Text painting: Descending 8va for into the grave.

folgen, wenn er ruft, in die Gruft, fröhlich folg' ich, fröhlich

Bach chooses to link this phrase to the foregoing line. In the poem, this phrase could just as easily relate to the following line.

F minor F# dim.7 G7 C minor C pedal...

40.

lich will ich folgen, wenn er ruft, in die Gruft, wenn er

C minor

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42.

ruft, fröh - lich folg' ich, fröh - lich folg' ich, wenn er ruft, in die

C minor
G pedal... C minor

45.

Gruft. → Ritornello

In the poem, this phrase could easily go with the next line.

C minor

47.

In the poem, "In die Gruft" relates just as easily to this line.

Alle, al - le - mei - ne

C minor C major C7

50.

Pla - gen nehm' ich mit, alle, al - le - mei - ne Pla -

Text painting: Chromatic descent for "Plagen"

F minor F minor B-flat major B-flat 7

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52.

gen nehm' ich mit, alle. al -

B-flat 7 E-flat major E-flat major

55.

le mei-ne Pla - gen nehm' ich mit. Will -

E-flat 7 A-flat major E dim. 7 F minor E-flat 7 B-flat 7

57.

kom-men! will ich sa-gen,

Only 2 mm. or ritornello before the A section repeats (modified from m. 67 on).

E-flat major E-flat pedal... E-flat 7 A-flat major E-flat major (B-flat 7) E-flat major

60.

will - kommen! will ich sa-gen, wenn der Tod ans Bet-te tritt, - will -

E-flat major

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62.

kommen, will - kommen! will ich sa - gen, wenn der Tod ans Bet - te tritt,

E-flat 7 A-flat major A-flat major B-flat 7

Detailed description: This system shows measures 62-64. The vocal line is in E-flat major. The piano accompaniment features a complex texture with sixteenth-note patterns in the right hand and a steady eighth-note bass line. Chord changes are indicated below the piano part.

65.

will - kommen! will ich sa - gen, will - kommen! will ich sa - gen, wenn der

E-flat major E-flat 7 E-flat pedal... A-flat major

Detailed description: This system shows measures 65-66. The vocal line continues with the same melodic material. The piano accompaniment maintains its rhythmic drive. A red annotation 'E-flat pedal...' is placed under the piano part.

67.

Tod ans Bet - te tritt, will - kommen! will ich sa - gen, will - kommen! will ich

A section is modified to remain in E-flat (compare m. 24ff.)

E-flat major

Detailed description: This system shows measures 67-69. The vocal line has a trill (tr) over the first measure. The piano accompaniment continues with its characteristic texture. A red annotation explains a modification to the key signature.

70. Text painting: Change to minor for "death."

sa - gen, wenn der Tod, der Tod, will - kom - men! will ich sa - gen, wenn der

Ob da caccia

E-flat minor E-flat minor

The sighing figure and the descending line are combined.

Detailed description: This system shows measures 70-71. The vocal line features a 'sighing figure' (a half note followed by a quarter note) and a descending line. The piano accompaniment changes to E-flat minor, highlighted by a yellow bar. A red arrow points from the text 'Ob da caccia' to the piano part. A red annotation explains the combination of the sighing figure and the descending line.

Though death is welcomed, it is still disturbing, so Bach moderates the joyful mood by moving to minor (cf. m. 29). See Petzoldt, 1:485.

72. *tr*
 Tod ans Bet - te tritt.

E-flat minor E-flat major D-flat major

74.

E dim. 7 F minor

76.

B dim. 7 C minor (E-flat 7) A-flat major

78.

B dim. 7 E-flat major E-flat major

27/4. **Recitativo.** •Yearning for heaven where the Lamb and bridegroom is (27/4). Text appears to be derived from hymn (see side note). Biblical allusion to Phil. 1:23. "My desire is to depart (Luther 1545: Ich habe Lust abzuschneiden) and be with Christ, for that is far better."

1. **Soprano.**

Ach, wer doch schon im Himmel wär! Ich habe Lust zu scheiden und mit dem Lamm,

This phrase is used verbatim also in 146/4. It begins and ends this recitativo. The first time it is a wish, the second time, a question.
 Text painting: Diminished chord for "ah" and high note for "heaven."

String accompaniment provides a kind of halo.

B dim. 7 G major C minor E dim. 7 C7

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4. Allusion to passages from Revelation. See side note.

das al-ler Frommen Bräuti-gam, mich in der Se-lig-keit zu wei-den. Flü-gel

C7 F minor E-flat 7 A-flat major

7.

her! Flügel her! Ach, wer doch schon im Him-mel wär!

Text painting: Vln I depicts the wings signaling flight to heaven with 32nd notes.

Phrygian cadence suggests a question.

F7 G7 C minor B dim. 7 F minor G major

27/5. **Aria.** •Farewell world! I am going to heaven! (27/5).

Ternary form:
A. Gm—B-flat—Dm (mm. 1–53)
B. Dm—E-flat (53–78)
A'. (E-flat—Gm (78–96)

(Larghetto ♩ = 60).

Aria is unified with descending/ascending scales and the agitated, "stile concitato" figures.

Strings

Vln I

Opening motive of the ritornello derived from vocal opening.

Text painting: Descending line to depict descent into grave, ascending line to depict ascent into heaven (compare B section).

G minor B-flat major

Ritornello reflects the contradictory ideas in the text: serene motive in sarabande rhythm for "good night" (farewell theme); concitato style for "tumult of the world." The agitated motive predominates in the A section. Scales in opposite directions appear throughout.

Stile concitato (agitated style), followed by continued 8ths (term invented by Monteverdi in "Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda," one of the pieces in "Madrigali guerrieri, et amorosi").

B-flat major

11.

Stile concitato (agitated style) cresc.

B-flat 7 E-flat major F7

14. *dim.*

B-flat major B-flat major D7

17. **Basso.**

Gu - te Nacht, gu - te Nacht, gu - te Nacht, du

G minor G minor B-flat 7 E-flat major

23. *Stile concitato*

Welt - ge - tūm - mel, du Welt - ge - tūm - mel, gu - te Nacht, du Welt - ge -

F7 B-flat major B-flat major

27. tūm - mel, gu - te Nacht, gu - te Nacht, du Welt - ge -

B-flat 7 E-flat major F7

30. tūm - - - mel, gu - te Nacht!

B-flat major B-flat major

33.

Gu - te - - - Nacht,

Opening motive ornamented, perhaps indicating a shiver of fear.

p

B-flat major F# dim.7

37.

du Welt - ge - tüm - - mel, gu - te

Stile concitato

D7 G minor A major A7

40.

Nacht, du Welt - ge - tüm - mel, gu - te Nacht, gu - te

cresc.

D minor D7

43.

Nacht, du Welt - ge - tüm - - - mel, gu - te Nacht!

dim.

mf

G minor A7 D minor D minor

Shortened ritornello restricted to the "Good night" material.

47.

53. B Section (no tumult music) D minor

Text painting: Elongated notes for "standing with one foot in the heaven" (contrasts with having one foot in the grave).

Jetzt mach' ich mit dir Be - schluss; ich steh' schon mit einem

Stile concitato not used in B section.

Vln I

Vln I descends by thirds to the low C, depicting descent into the Grave. See Chafe, "Tonal Allegory," 190. Later, the voice ascends to depict the ascent into heaven as referenced in the text (mm. 72-74).

59.

D minor C7 F major F major G major C major

Fuss, ich steh' schon mit einem Fuss bei dem lie - ben Gott

65.

im Him - mel, ich steh' schon mit einem Fuss

Text painting: Descending line for descent into grave, ascending line for ascent into heaven.

71.

Text painting: Ascent to heaven.

bei dem lie - ben Gott im Him - mel.

Dürr notes that the use of "dear God" (twice here and also in the soprano recitative of movement 1) suggests a childlike trust in the face of death. See Dürr/Jones, 556.

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A section returns, modified and shortened (quasi da capo).

77.

Gu - te Nacht, du Welt - ge - tũm -

E-flat major G7

81.

- mel, gu - te Nacht, du Welt - ge -

Stile concitato

C minor D major D7 G minor

84.

tũm - mel, gu - te Nacht, gu - te Nacht, du Welt - ge -

G7 C minor D7

87.

tũm - mel, gu - te Nacht!

G minor G minor

91.

G minor

27/6.

Choral.

1. Soprano I.

This five-voice movement is borrowed verbatim from Johann Rosenmüller (printed 1649). See side note for more. The chorale text is the first of seven stanzas in the chorale. •Farewell to the world; comparing world and heaven (27/6).

Previous ideas are summed up: farewell to world, yearning for heaven. There is also a parallel to movement 1, which presented a contrast between time and death; here the contrast is between the tiresome world (with its war, strife, and vanity) and restful heaven (with its peace, joy, and blessedness). The contrast between world and heaven is mentioned twice. Chafe notes that Bach this Rosenmüller setting is appropriate because of the antiphonal (low vs. high) beginning and the archaic switch to triple meter at the end.

+Corno, Ob I, II
Soprano II. Welt, a - de! ich bin dein mü - de, ich will nach dem

+Vln I
Alto. Welt, a - de! ich bin dein mü - de, ich will nach dem

+Vln II
Tenore. Welt, a - de! ich bin dein mü - de, ich will nach dem

+Vla
Basso. Welt, a - de! ich bin dein mü - de, ich will nach dem

B-flat major

5.

Himmel zu, da wird sein der rech-te Frie - de und die ew' - ge, stol - ze

Him-mel zu, da wird sein der rech-te Frie - de und die ew' - ge, stol - ze

Himmel zu, da wird sein der rech-te Frie - de und die ew' - ge, stol-ze

Himmel zu, da wird sein der rech-te Frie - de und die ew'ge, stol - ze

Himmel zu, da wird sein der rech-te Frie - de und die ew'ge, stol - ze

B-flat major

G minor

F7 B-flat major

