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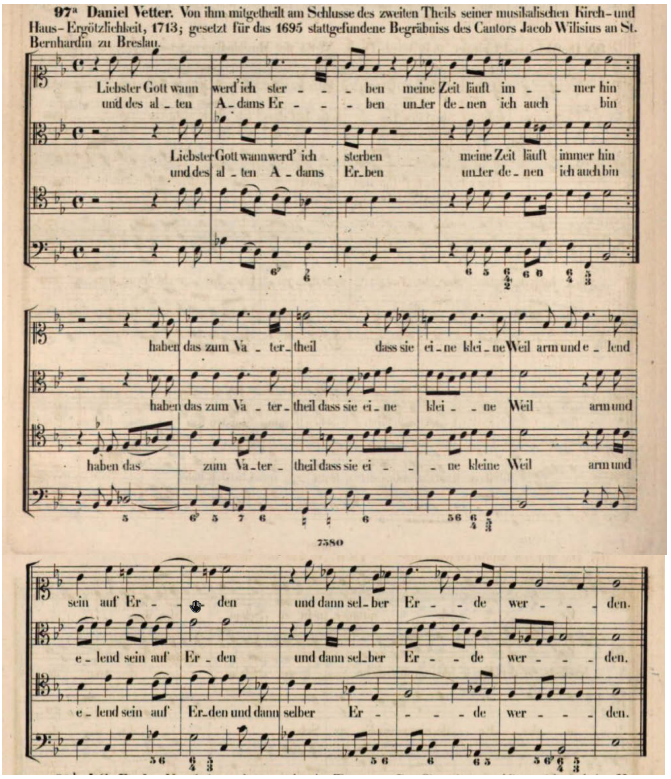
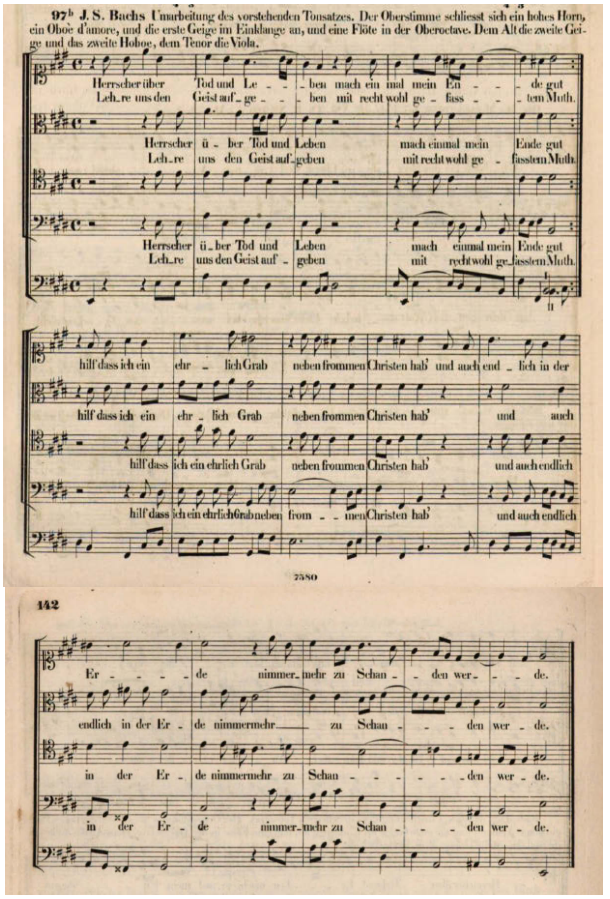
Cantate

Am sechszehnten Sonntage nach Trinitatis

„Liebster Gott, wann werd' ich sterben."

No. 8.





A comparison of Daniel Vetter's chorale setting with J. S. Bach's setting. Taken from Carl von Winterfeld. "Der evangelische Kirchengesang und sein Verhältniß zur Kunst des Tonsatzes. Dritter Theil: Der evangelische Kirchengesang im achtzehnten Jahrhunderte." Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel (1847), pp. 140–42. For a comprehensive discussion of the chorale's history see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liebster_Gott,_wann_werd_ich_sterben. Accessed 2 December 2021. Changes in the Abgesang are signficant, resulting in a setting one measure shorter than the model. See side note below for a discussion of Bach's approach to setting contemporary chorales.

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Form: Chorus/fantasia - A (T) - Recit (A) - Aria (B) - Recit (S) - Chorale (each voice gets 1 solo).

Regarding Bach's tonal plan, Eric Chafe writes, "E major...represents a special choice of key for Bach, one made in full knowledge that the other movements of a cantata in that key will be on the subdominant side of the key...a feature that encourages the idea of descent (flatward motion) followed by ascent (the return to the original key). Cantata 8, "Liebster Gott, wann werd' ich sterben," for example, "descends" from E trhough C# minor to A major before returning to E. ("Analyzing Bach Cantatas," pp. 151–52.)

For John Elliott Gardiner's discussion of funeral bells ("Leichenglocken"), see "Bach: Music in the Castle of Heaven," 458–62. Rerences to funeral bells, death knell, striking of last hour are found in BWV 8/1, 73/4, 95/5, 127/3, 161/4, 198/4 (flutes). Often pizzicato strings are involved.

NBA I/23; BC A137a/b
16 S. after Trinity (BWV 161, 95, 8, 27)
*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
FP: 24 September 1724 (St. Nicholas). Repeat performances probably 1736/40, 17 September 1747 (reworked, D major). See Petzoldt, "Bach Kommentar," vol. 1, p. 474, Wolff, "Bach's Musical Universe," 148–49.

Unlike most of the chorales in Bach's works, the text and tune of "Liebster Gott" were written by two of Bach's contempories, Caspar Neuman (1648–1715) and Daniel Vetter (ca. 1650–1721), respectively. The melody is in a "modern," aria-like style, as was common of chorales written during this time. See side note.

Text painting: Martin Petzold suggests that the flute imitates "the unrest of a clock" ("Bach Kommentar," vol. 1, 475). He disagrees with other writers who identify the sound as "funeral bells." See, for example, Dürr/Jones, 552–53 (more above).

Dominica 16 post Trinitatis.

„Liebster Gott, wann werd' ich sterben?"

●Death: Our imminent legacy from Adam (8/1) (Chorale Vs. 1).

8/1.

1. Oboes d'amore have running 16ths in imitation, probably signifying the second line of text: "My time runs on continuously."

Flauto traverso.
NBA: Flauto piccolo/Flauto traverso (originally flauto piccolo)
Oboe d'amore I.
Oboe d'amore II.

Bach experienced much death in his family. See side note.

Violino I.
Violino II.
Viola.

pizzicato sempre
pizzicato sempre
pizzicato sempre

Text painting: Pizzicato strings perhaps depict ticking clock.

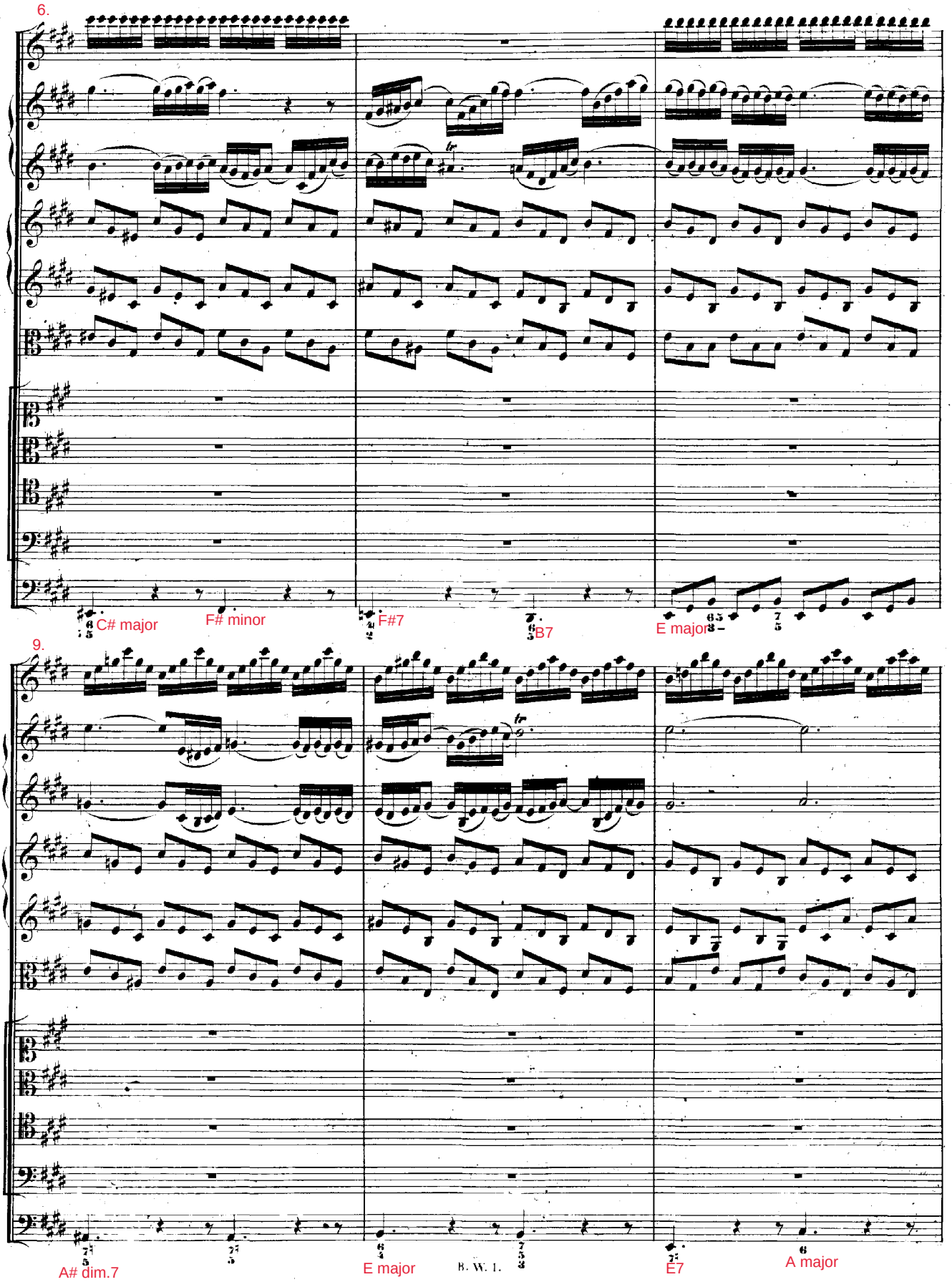
Soprano.
Corno col Soprano
Alto.
Tenore.
Basso.
Continuo.

Within the major tonality and lilting rhythm, chromatic inflections provide color to depict the anxiety of the text.

E major

3.

A major
E major
F#7
B# dim.
C# minor


6.
C# major
F# minor
F#7
B7
E major
9.
A# dim.7
E major
E7
A major

The chorale tune is adapted to 12/8 meter, the lower voices supporting the tune in a largely homophonic manner, thus reflecting the aria-style of chorale writing that was popular for chorales written in Bach's own day.

12.

Pizz. strings halt briefly to allow soprano to start the phrase.

Chorale Phrase 1. Melody ornamented somewhat, doubled by corno.

This text paraphrases Isaac's statement in Genesis 27:2b.

Liebster Gott, wann werd' ich

Lieb - ster Gott, wann

Lieb - ster Gott, wann

Lieb-ster Gott, wann

E7 A major A major E major E7 A major

15.

Text painting: Bach colors "die" with chromatic harmonies.

Chorale Phrase 2.

ster ben? Mei - ne

werd' ich ster ben?

werd' ich ster ben?

werd' ich ster ben?

D# dim. B7 E major A# dim.7 B major B7 E major A# dim.7 B major B7

18.

Full ritornello

Zeit läuft im - mer hin,

Mei - ne Zeit läuft im - mer hin,

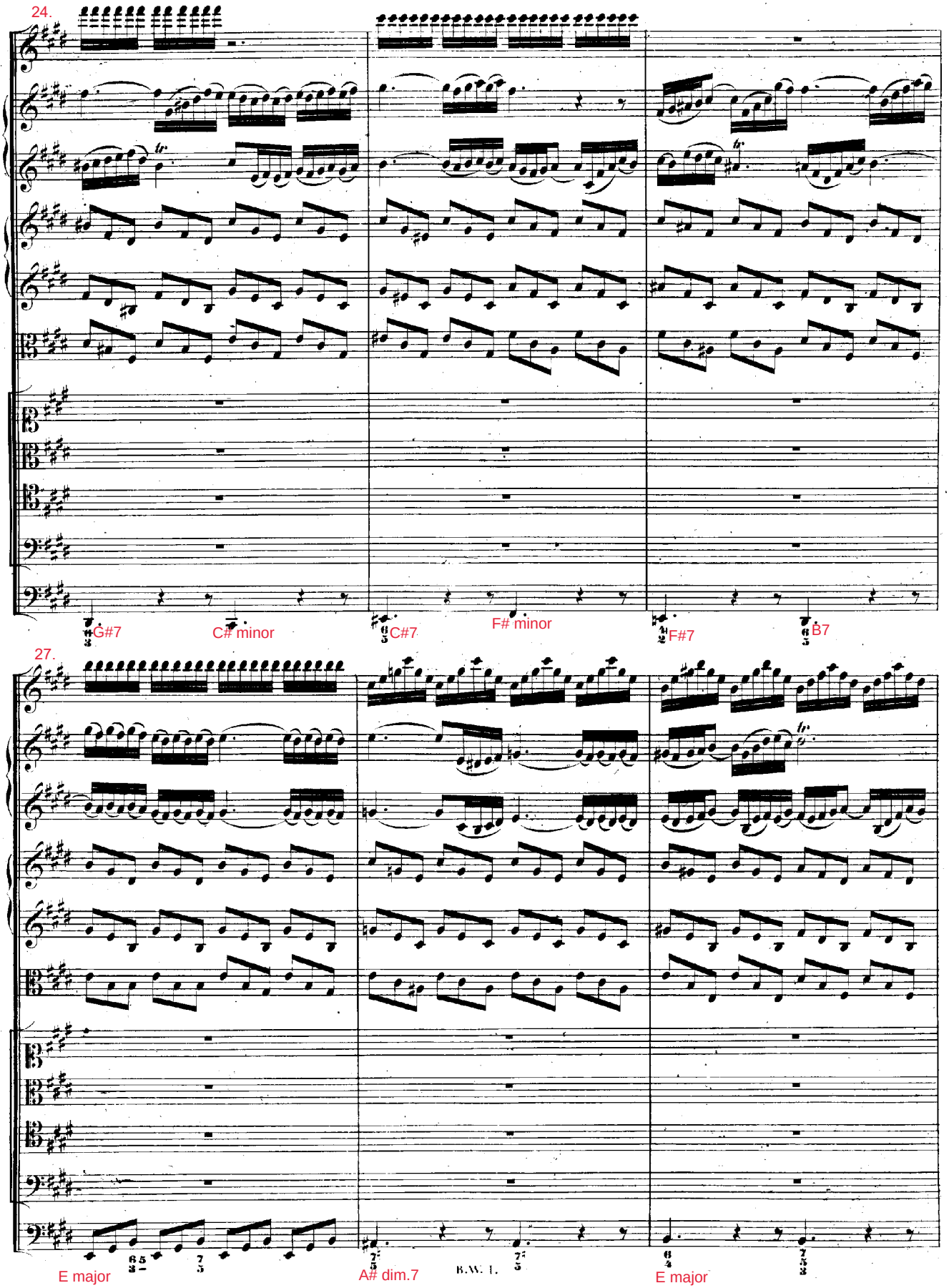
Mei - ne Zeit läuft im - mer hin,

Mei - ne Zeit läuft im - mer, im - mer hin,

E major F#7 B major B major B7 E major E7 A major

21.

B7 E major E7 A major B.W. I. D# dim.7 E major F#7


24.
G#7
C# minor
C#7
F# minor
F#7
B7
27.
E major
A# dim.7
B.W. 1.
E major

30.

Pizz. strings halt briefly to allow soprano to start the phrase.

Chorale Phrase 3.

und des

E7 A major E7 A major A major E major

33.

Text painting: Bach colors "Adam's heirs" harmonically.

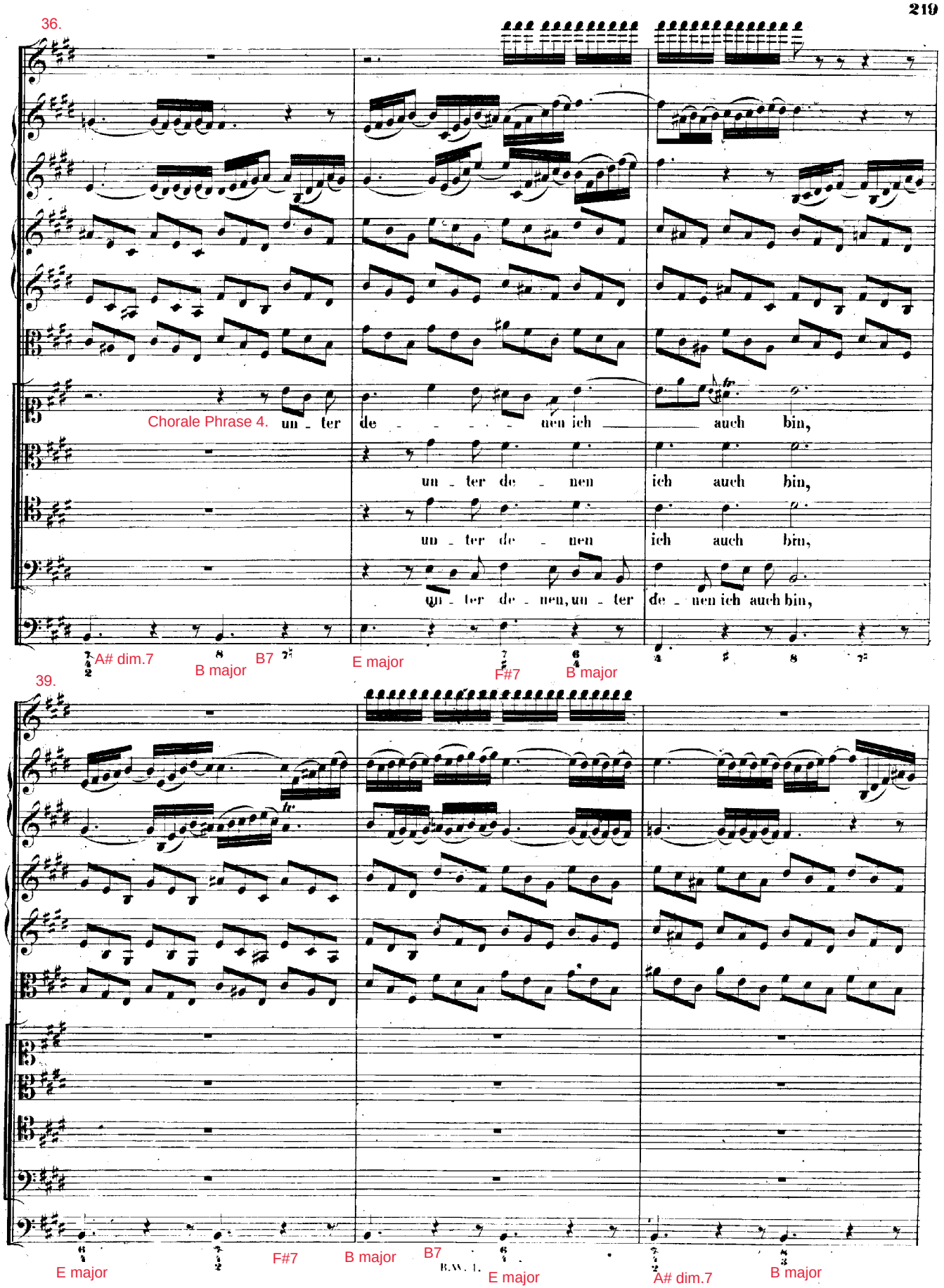
al - ten A - - - dams Er - - - - - - - ben,

und des al - - - - ten A - dams Er - - - - - ben,

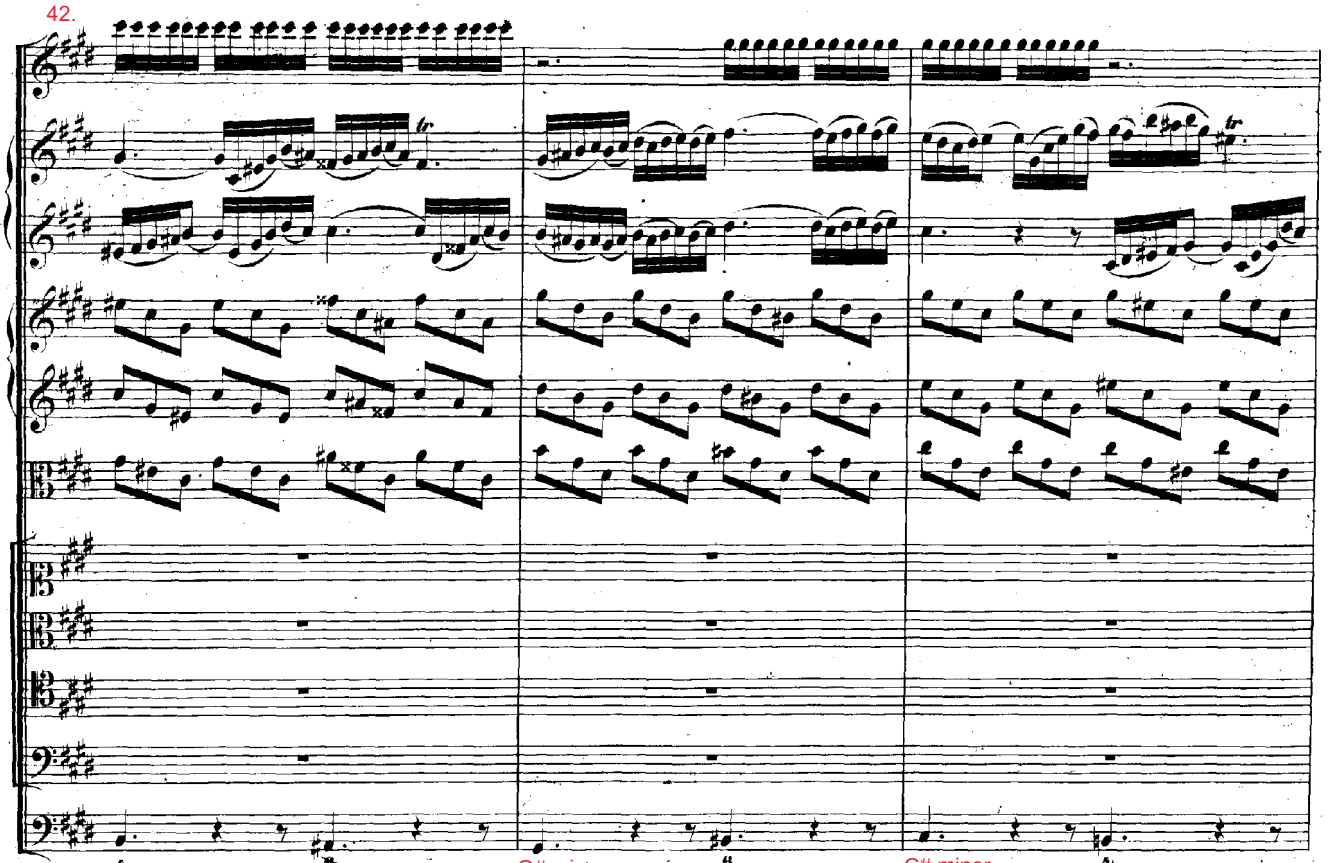
und des al - - - - ten A - - dams Er - - - ben,

und des al - - - ten A - - - dams Er - - - ben,

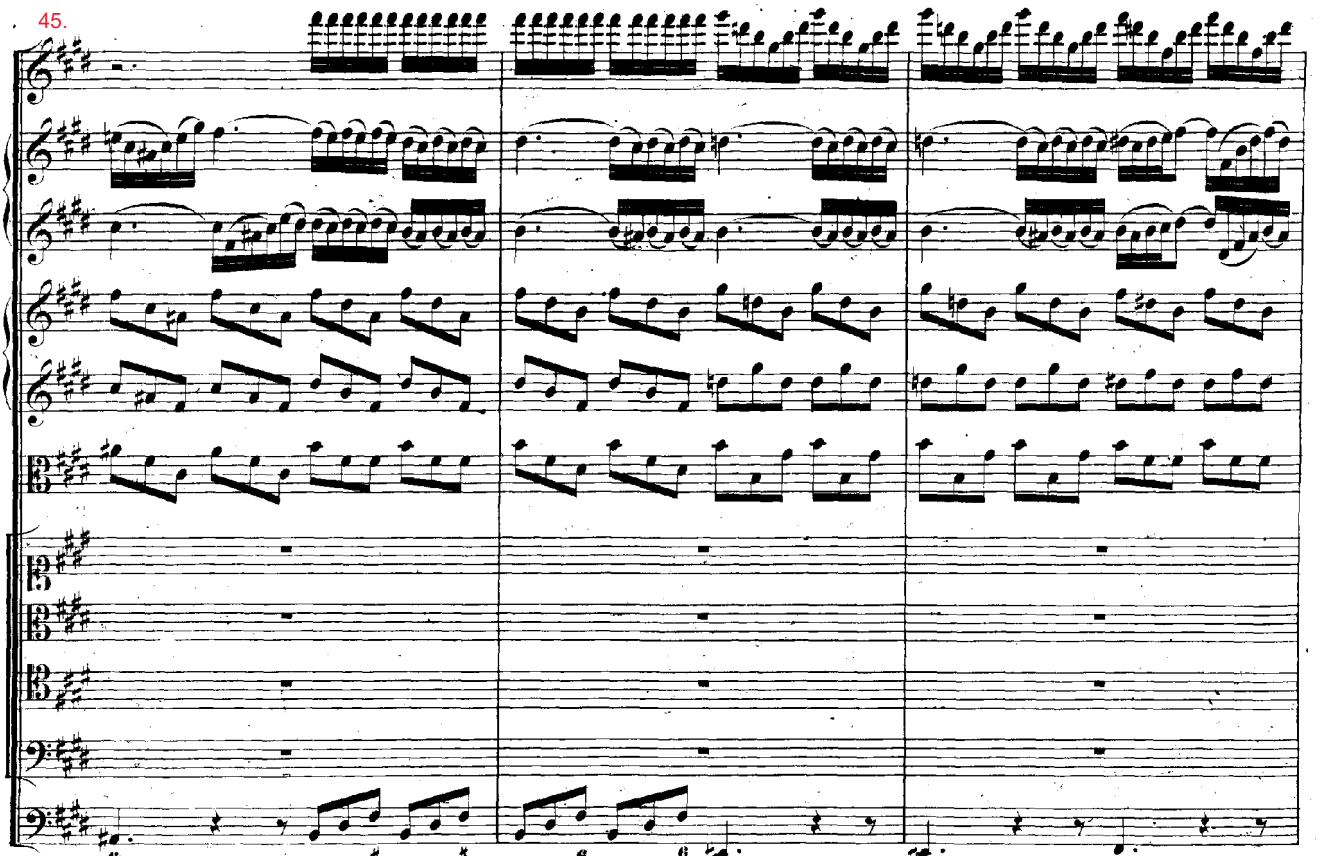
E major E7 A major B7 E major A# dim.7 B major B7 E major

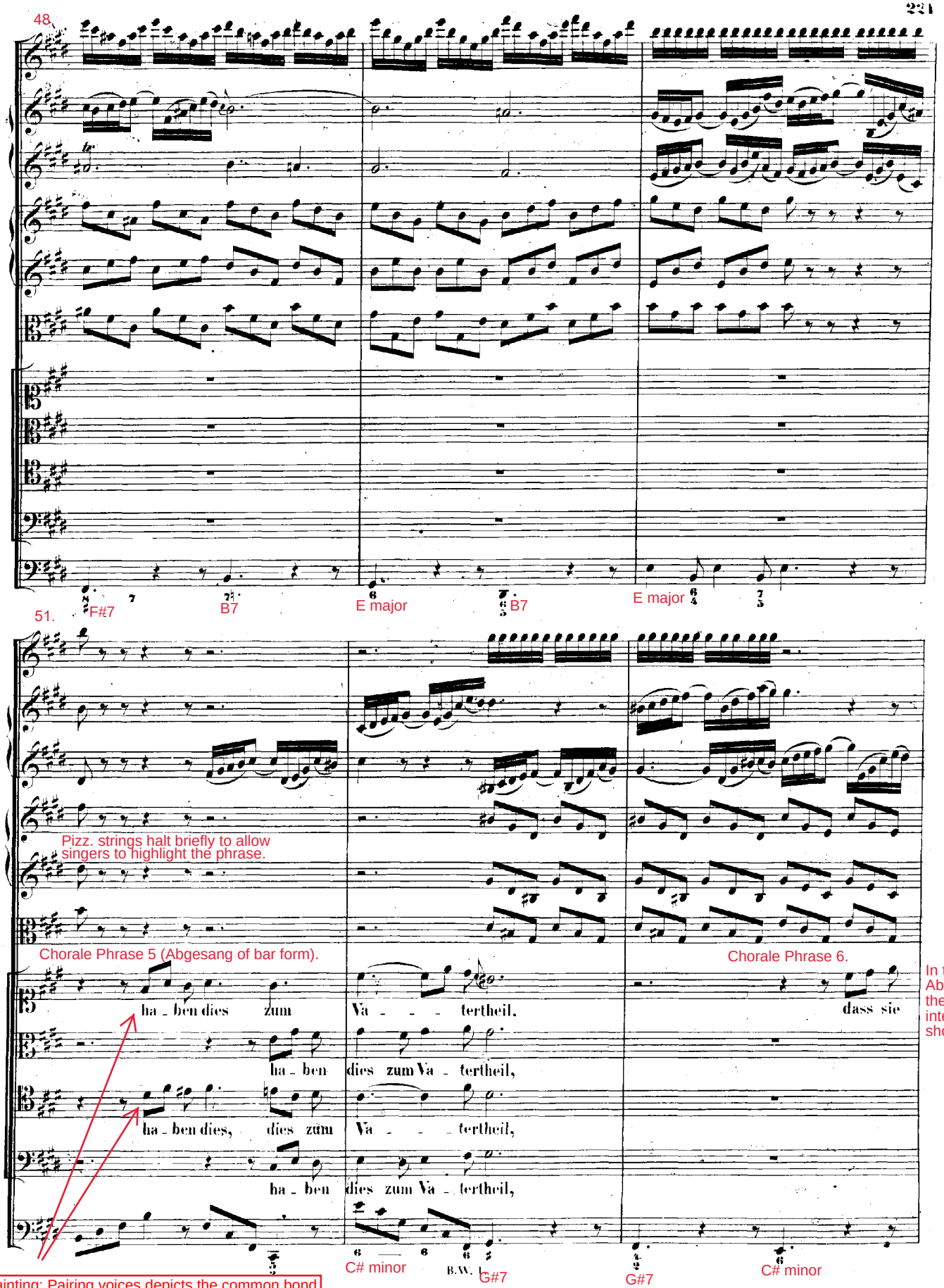

36.
Chorale Phrase 4.
un - ter de - - - - - nen ich — auch bin,
un - ter de - nen ich auch bin,
un - ter de - nen ich auch bin,
un - ter de - nen, un - ter de - nen ich auch bin,
A# dim.7
B major
B7
E major
F#7
B major
39.
Full-length ritornello, (modified), which interrupts the flow of the text.
E major
F#7
B major
B7
E major
A# dim.7
B major

42.


C#7
Fx dim.
G# minor
G#7
C# minor
C#7

45.


F#7
B major
B major
B.W. I.
E# dim.7
B major



Text painting: Pairing voices depicts the common bond with Adam's descendents: all must die (see Genesis 3:19). Bach departs here from Vetter in the distribution of voices. See Petzoldt, "Bach Kommentar," vol. 1, pp. 478–79.

54.

ei - ne klei - ne Weil

Chorale Phrase 7.

arm und

dass sie ei - ne klei - ne Weil

dass sie ei - ne klei - ne Weil

dass sie ei - ne klei - ne Weil

F#7 G# minor B major E major A# dim.7 B major B7

57.

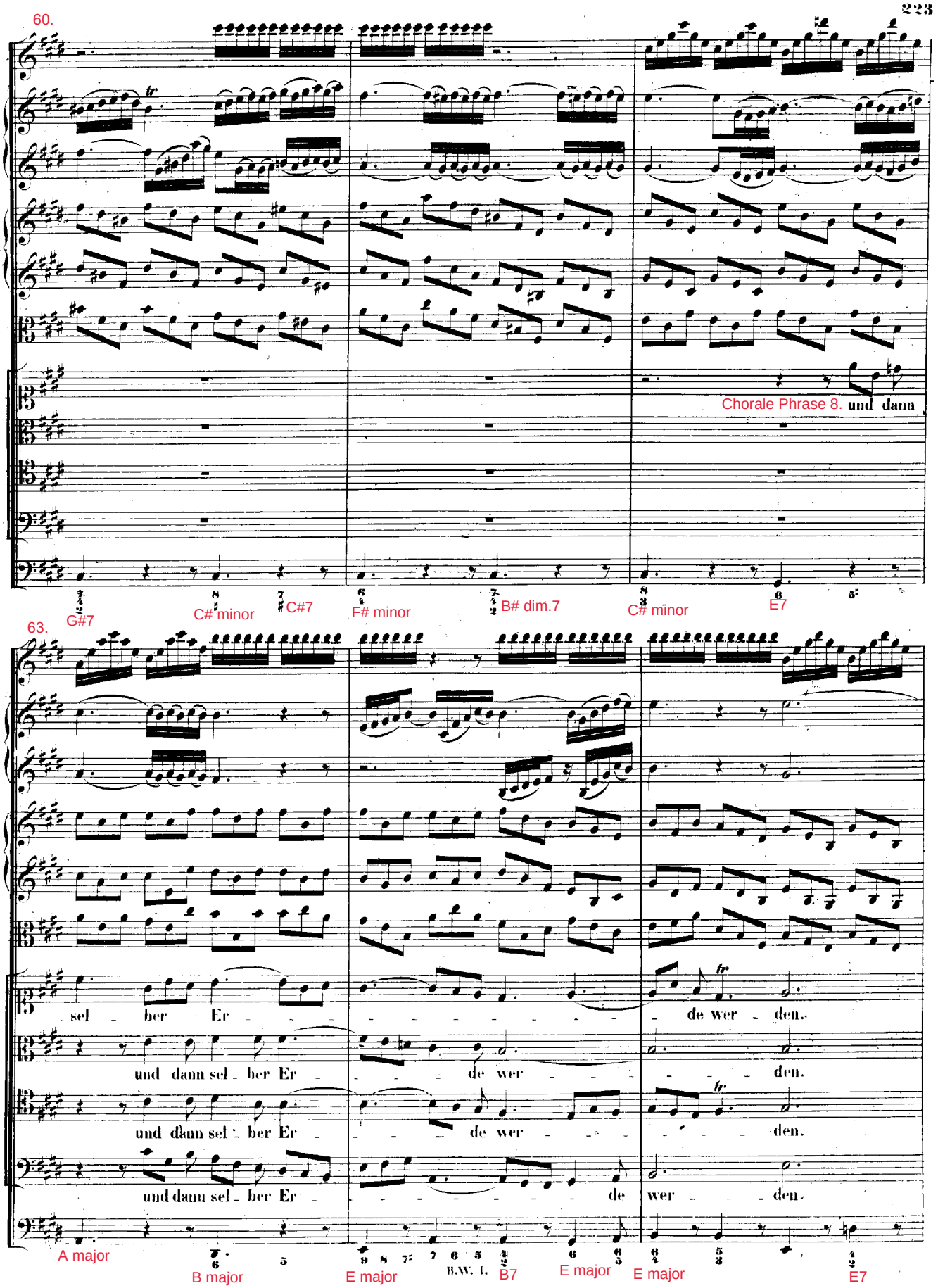
e - lend sein auf Er - - - - - den,

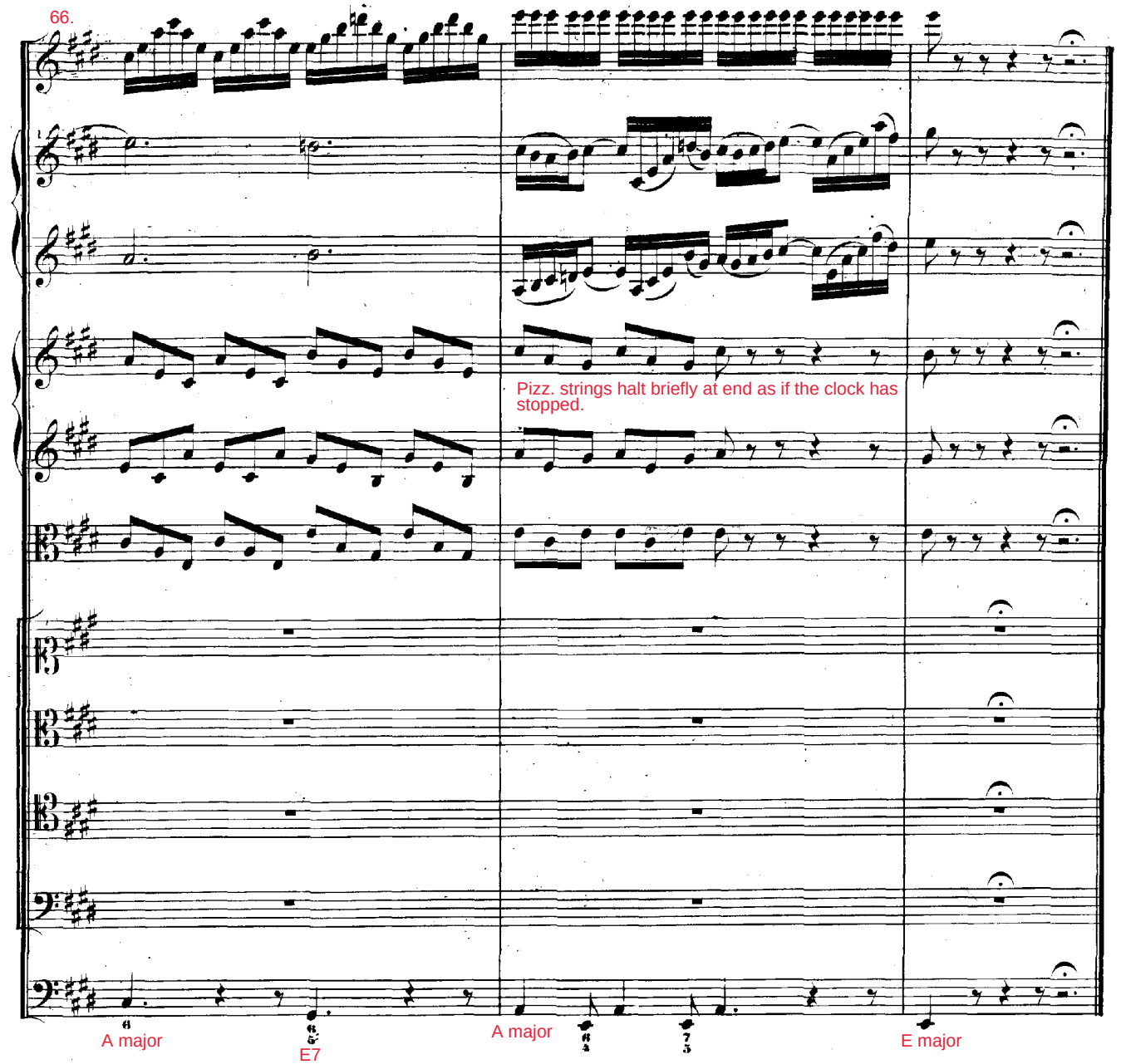
arm und e - - - lend sein auf Er - - - - den,

arm und e - lend sein auf Er - - - - den,

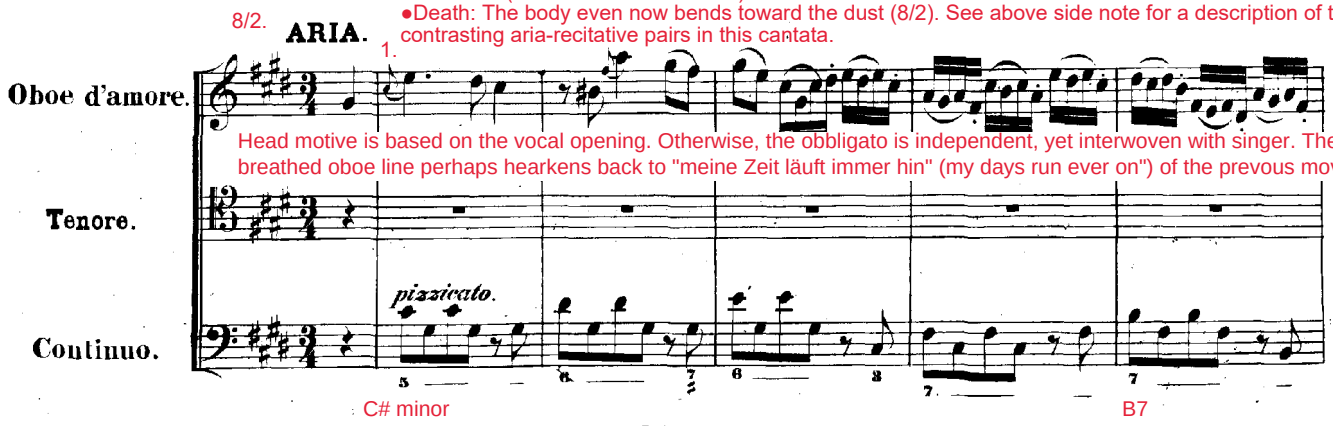
arm und e - - lend sein auf Er - - - - den,

E major E major B# dim.7 B.W. I. G#7 C# minor


60.
Chorale Phrase 8. und dann
G#7
C# minor
C#7
F# minor
B# dim.7
C# minor
E7
63.
sel - ber Er - - - - - - - - de wer - den.
und dann sel - ber Er - - - - de wer - - - den.
und dann sel - ber Er - - - - de wer - - - den.
und dann sel - ber Er - - - - - - - de wer - - den.
A major
B major
E major
B.W. I.
B7
E major
E major
E7



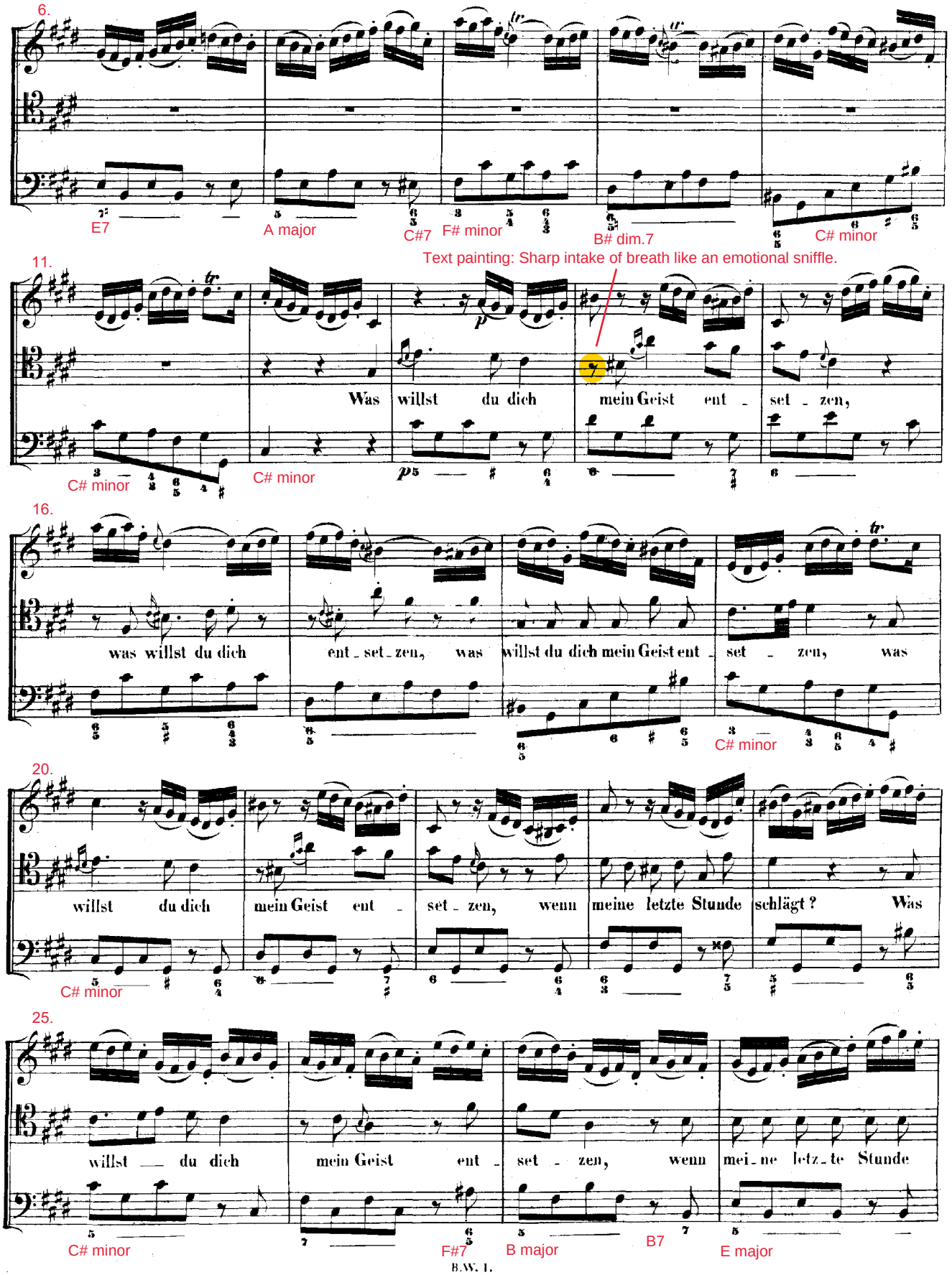
Tenor Aria (Based on Chorale Vs. 2).
•Death: The body even now bends toward the dust (8/2). See above side note for a description of the contrasting aria-recitative pairs in this cantata.



Head motive is based on the vocal opening. Otherwise, the obbligato is independent, yet interwoven with singer. The long-breathed oboe line perhaps hearkens back to "meine Zeit läuft immer hin" (my days run ever on") of the prevous movement.

Text painting: Pizzicato continuo perhaps depict ticking clock (as in first movement).

Movements 1 & 2 both begin with questions, the first addressed to God, the second to the speaker him/herself ("I"). Martin Petzoldt notes that the movements thus correspond to movements 5 & 6: in movement 5 the speaker addresses the world with an imperative, in movement 6, the speaker addressed God. See "Bach Kommentar," vol. 1, p. 476.


6.
E7
A major
C#7
F# minor
B# dim.7
C# minor
Text painting: Sharp intake of breath like an emotional sniffle.
11.
Was willst du dich mein Geist ent - set - zen,
C# minor
C# minor
16.
was willst du dich ent - set - zen, was willst du dich mein Geist ent - set - zen, was
C# minor
20.
willst du dich mein Geist ent - set - zen, wenn meine letzte Stunde schlägt? Was
C# minor
25.
willst — du dich mein Geist ent - set - zen, wenn mei - ne letz - te Stunde
C# minor
F#7
B major
B7
E major

Text painting: Singer's separated 8th notes depict the striking of the hour; the oboe d'amore plays corresponding staccato notes on downbeats while filling in the texture.

29.

schlägt? Was willst du dich mein

B7 E major B7 E major

33.

Geist ent - set - - zen, wenn mei - ne letz - te Stun - de schlägt?

F#7 B major B7 E major E7 A major

37.

Mein Leib neigt täg - -

"Dying daily" is perhaps an allusion to 1 Cor. 15:31b.

B7 B7 E major E major B# dim.7

42.

Text painting: Declining health is depicted with drooping, sighing figures.

- lich sich zur Er - den, und da muss sei - - ne Ruh' - statt wer - den, wohin

G#7 C# minor D#7...

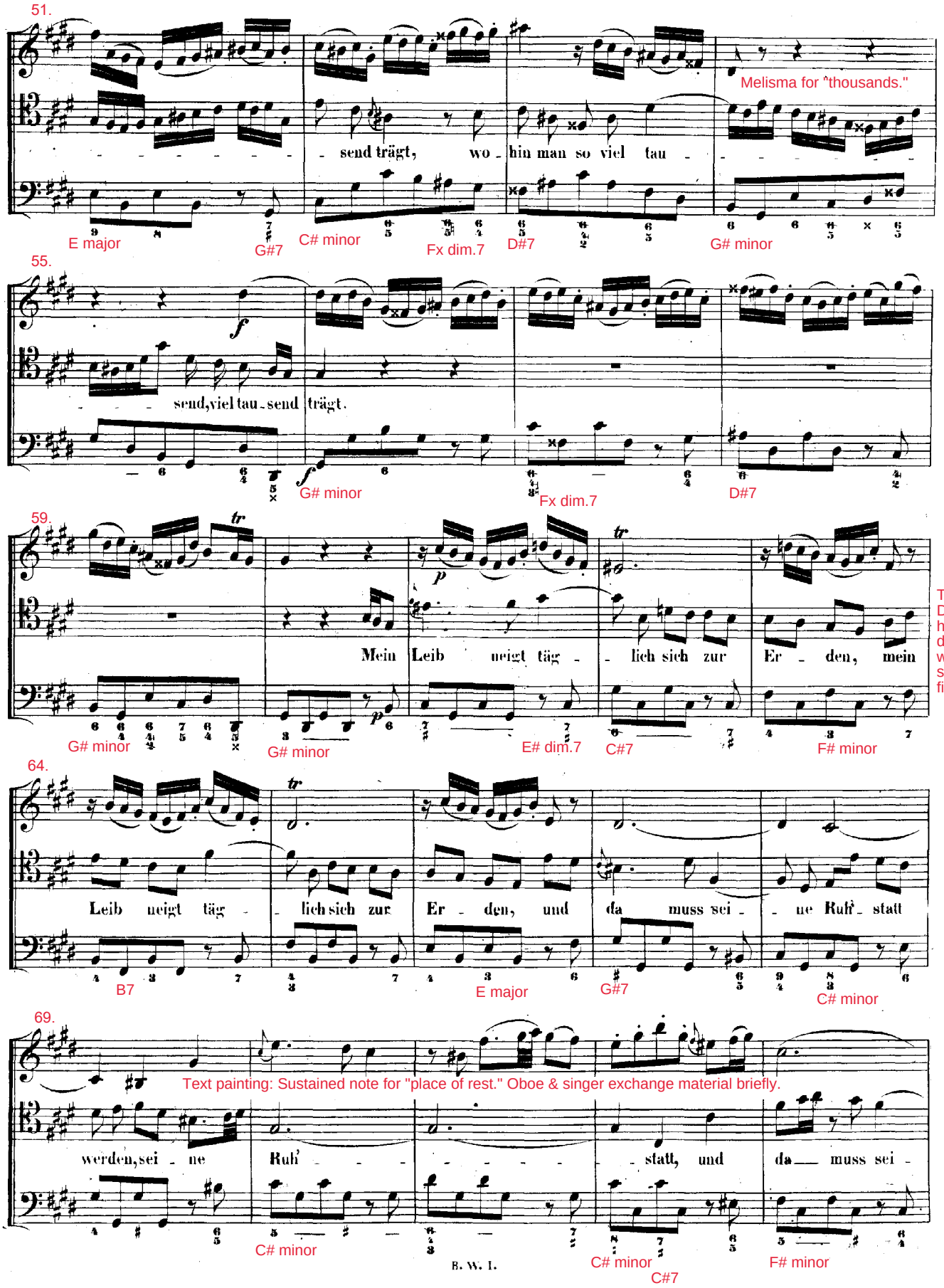
47.

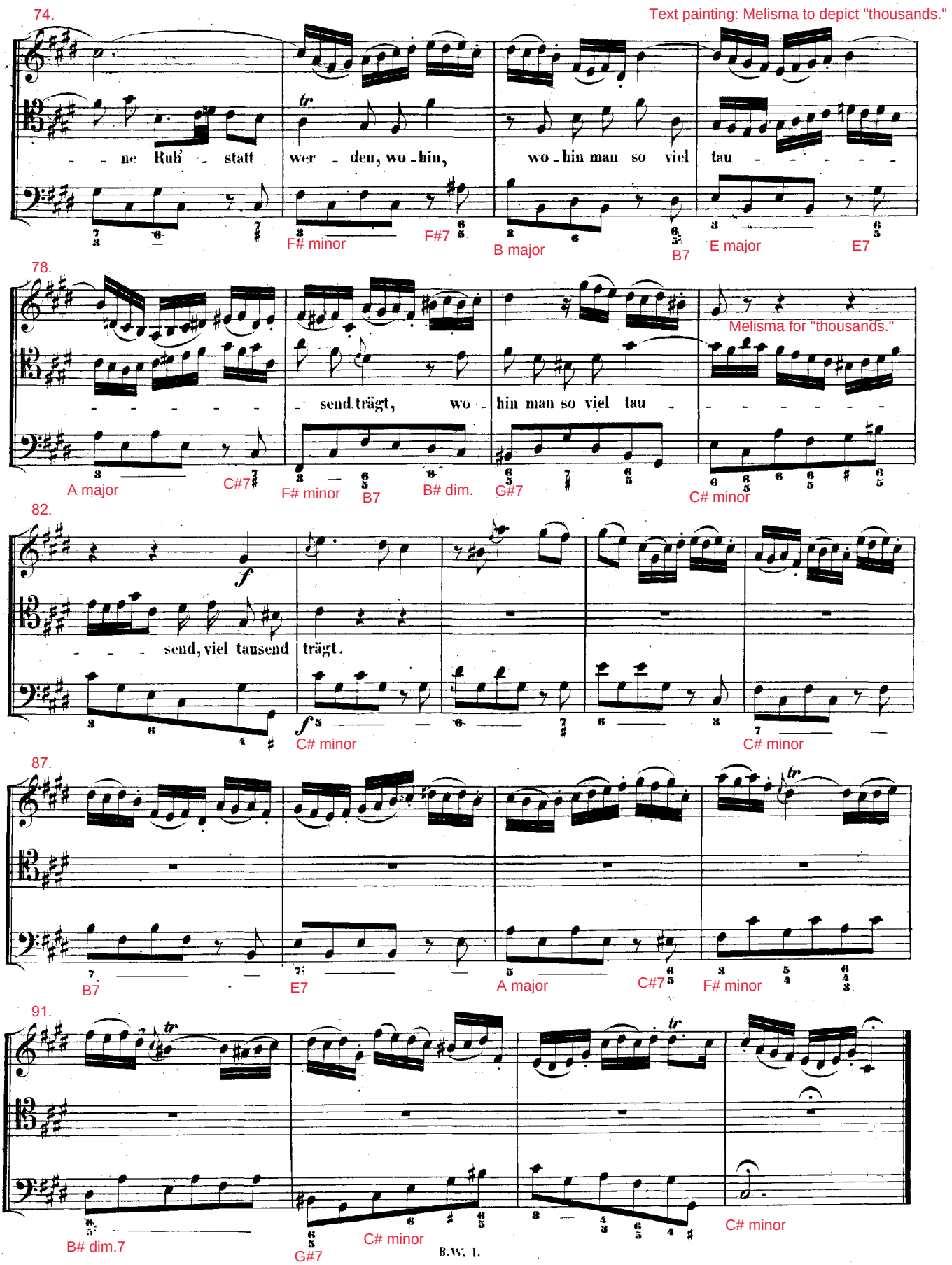
Text painting: Parallel 16ths & vocal melisma (taken from the ritornello) depict thousands who have died.

man so viel tau - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -

G# minor G#7 C# minor B major B7

B. W. 1.


51.
send trägt, wo - hin man so viel tau -
Melisma for "thousands."
E major
G#7
C# minor
Fx dim.7
D#7
G# minor
55.
send, viel tau - send trägt.
G# minor
Fx dim.7
D#7
59.
Mein Leib neigt täg - lich sich zur Er - den, mein
Text painting: Declining health is depicted with drooping, sighing figures.
G# minor
G# minor
E# dim.7
C#7
F# minor
64.
Leib neigt täg - lich sich zur Er - den, und da muss sei - ne Ruh' - statt
B7
E major
G#7
C# minor
69.
Text painting: Sustained note for "place of rest." Oboe & singer exchange material briefly.
werden, sei - ne Ruh' - - - - - statt, und da muss sei -
C# minor
C# minor
C#7
F# minor


74.
Text painting: Melisma to depict "thousands."
- - ne Ruh' - statt wer - den, wo - hin, wo - hin man so viel tau - - - - -
F# minor
F#7
B major
B7
E major
E7
78.
Melisma for "thousands."
- - - - - - send trägt, wo - hin man so viel tau - - - - - -
A major
C#7
F# minor
B7
B# dim.
G#7
C# minor
82.
f
- - - send, viel tausend trägt.
f
C# minor
C# minor
87.
B7
E7
A major
C#7
F# minor
91.
B# dim.7
G#7
C# minor
C# minor

Chromatic Saturation in the vocal part in 8 mm.

Alto Recit. (Based on Chorale Vs. 3.) •Anxiety concerning death (8/3). No explicit connection to the widow in the Gospel reading except expressions of fear, worry, and pain in the face of death and its consequences for the family.

8/3. **RECITATIVO.**

1.

Violino I.
Violino II.
Viola.
Alto.
Continuo.

Zwar fühlt mein schwaches Herz Furcht, Sorgen, Schmerz: wo wird mein Leib die Ruhe

col arco.

D# major D#7 Fx dim.7 D#7

4.

finden? wer wird die Seele doch vom auf_ge_legten Sünden Joch be_frei_en und ent_binden? Das

G# minor E# dim.7 C#7 F# minor B minor C# major

Phrygian cadence for question about sin.

7.

Meine wird zerstreut, und wo_hin werden meine Lieben in ih_rer Trau_rigkeit zerstreut ver_trieben?

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

Phrygian cadence for question about fate of family.

Flute parts of considerable technical challenge are prevalent in cantatas written from July to November 1724. Striking examples (in chronological order) include BWV 113/5, 99/3, 8/4, 130/5, and 26/2. See side note for a more complete list.

Bass Aria (Based on Chorale Vs. 4.) ●Away anxieties! Jesus calls me to a glorious future! (8/4). Complete change of affect; the speech is in the imperative mood (as opposed to the indicative mood of movements 1–3), addressing cares/anxieties & the morning.

8/4. **ARIA.**

1.

Flauto traverso.

Violino I.

Violino II.

Viola.

Basso.

Continuo.

Italianate ritornello movement with gigue-like rhythm, homophonic texture with soloistic (concertante) flute. Martin Petzoldt notes the similarity of the flute's role (in relation to strings and singer) to that of the oboe in BWV 78 two weeks earlier. See "Bach Kommentar," vol. 1, p. 477. With its fast patter-like diction, the movement approaches the style of comic opera (compare BWV 181/1), perhaps intended to convey the futile/vain nature of earthly concerns. Bach's reference to "lovely Dresden ditties" may be in this same vein. See Forkel's biography of Bach in "New Bach Reader," p. 461.

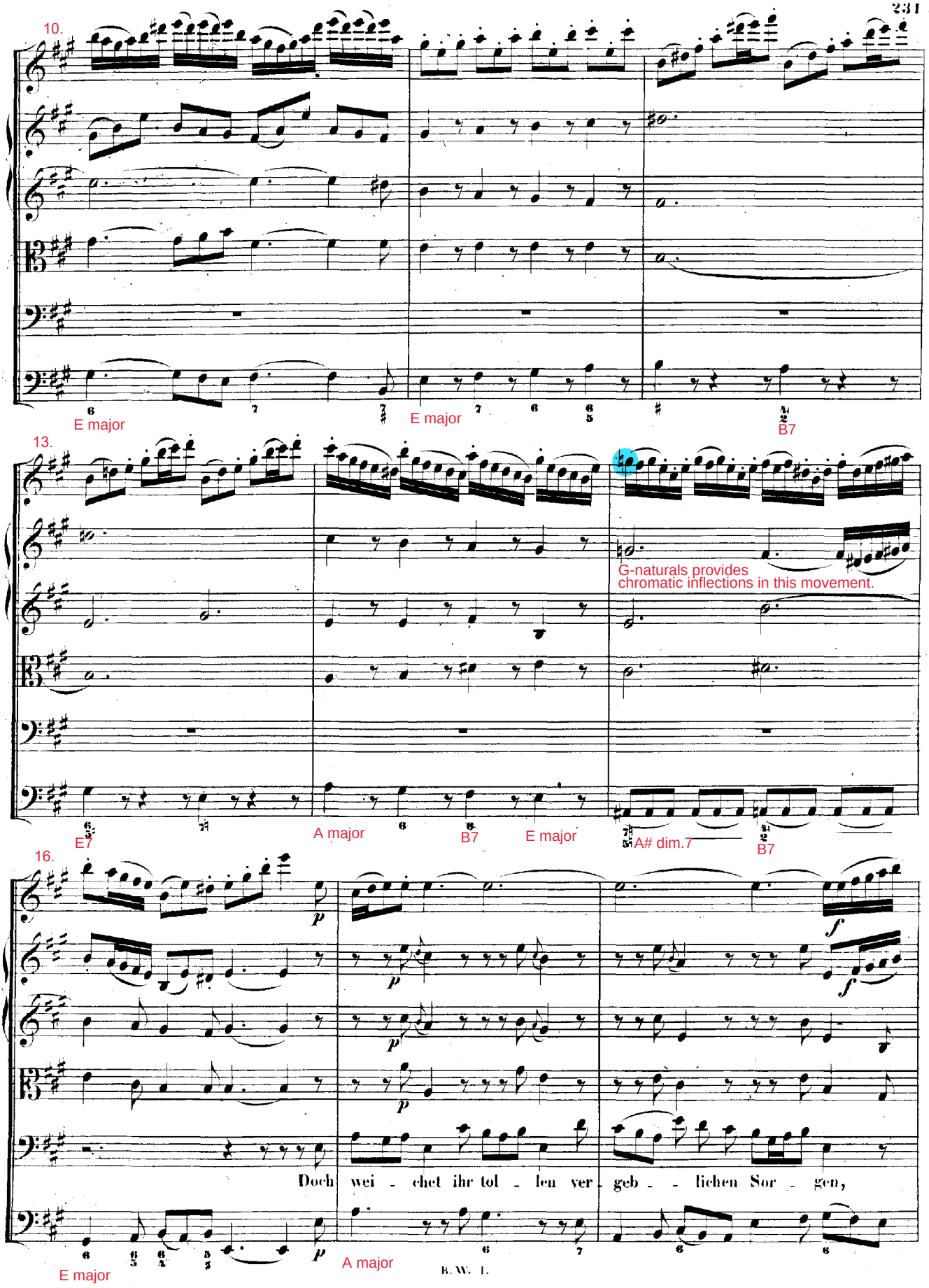
A major (B7)

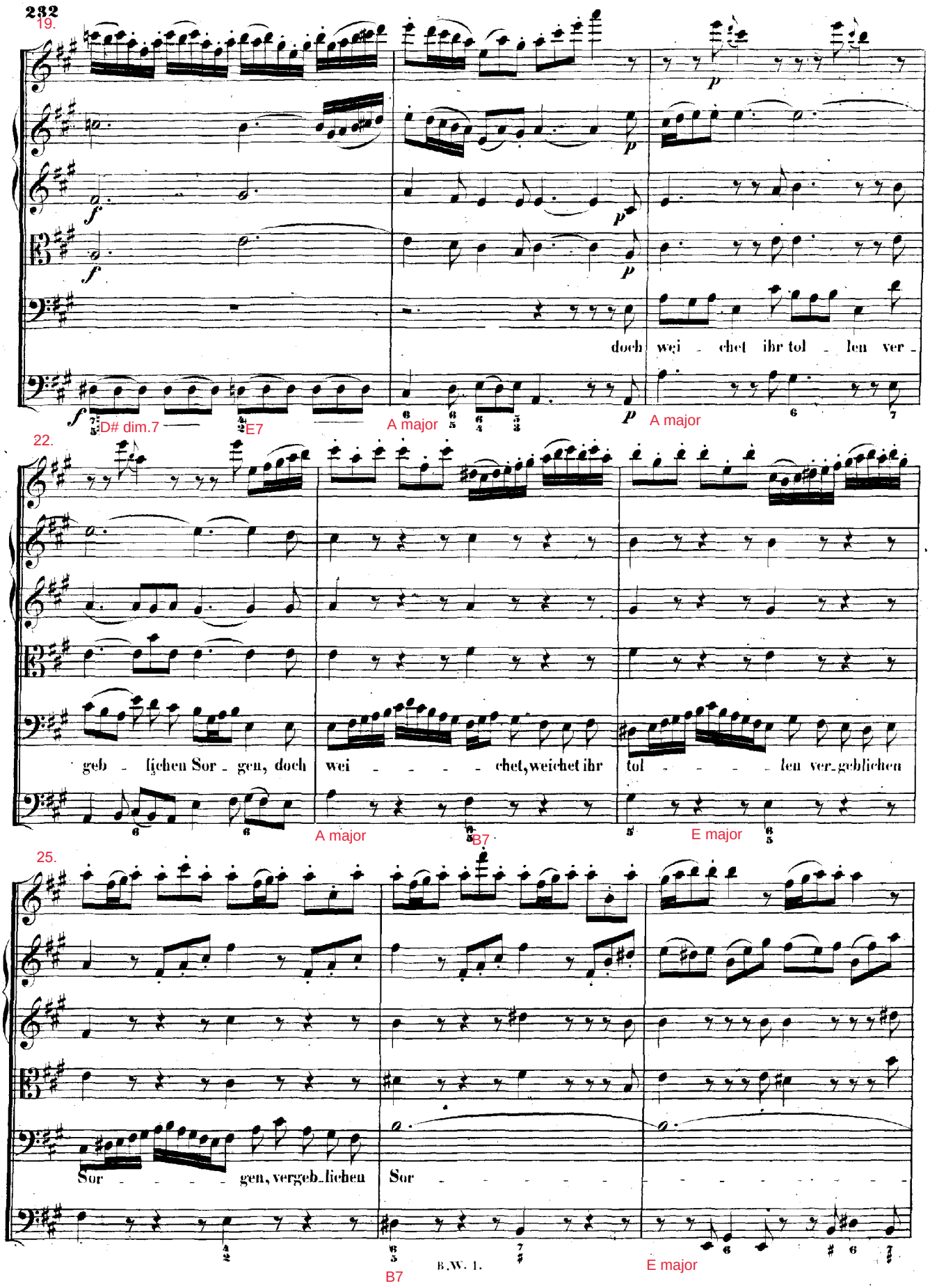
4.

E major B7

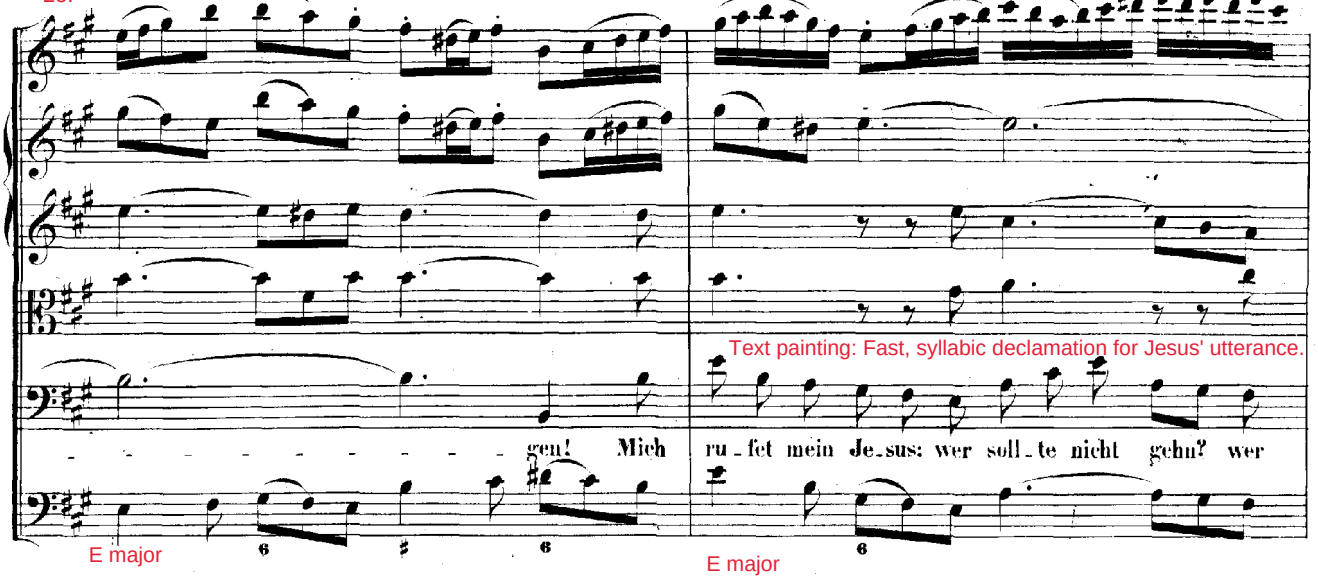
7.

E major E major E major


10.
E major
E major
B7
13.
G-naturals provides
chromatic inflections in this movement.
E7
A major
B7
E major
A# dim.7
B7
16.
Doch wei - chet ihr tol - len ver - geb - - lichen Sor - gen,
E major
A major


19.
doch wei - chet ihr tol - len ver -
D# dim.7
E7
A major
A major
22.
geb - lichen Sor - gen, doch
wei - - - - chet, weichet ihr
tol - - - - len ver-gebliehen
A major
B7
E major
25.
Sor - - - - gen, vergeb-liehen
Sor - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -
B7
E major

28.

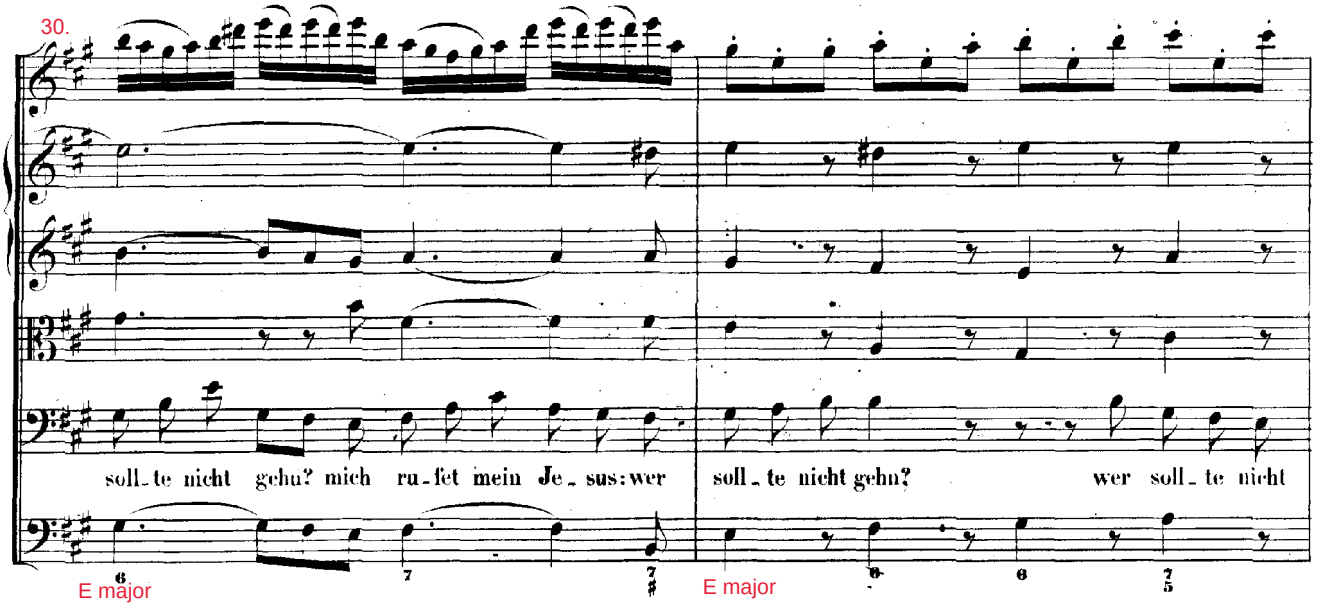


Text painting: Fast, syllabic declamation for Jesus' utterance.

E major

E major

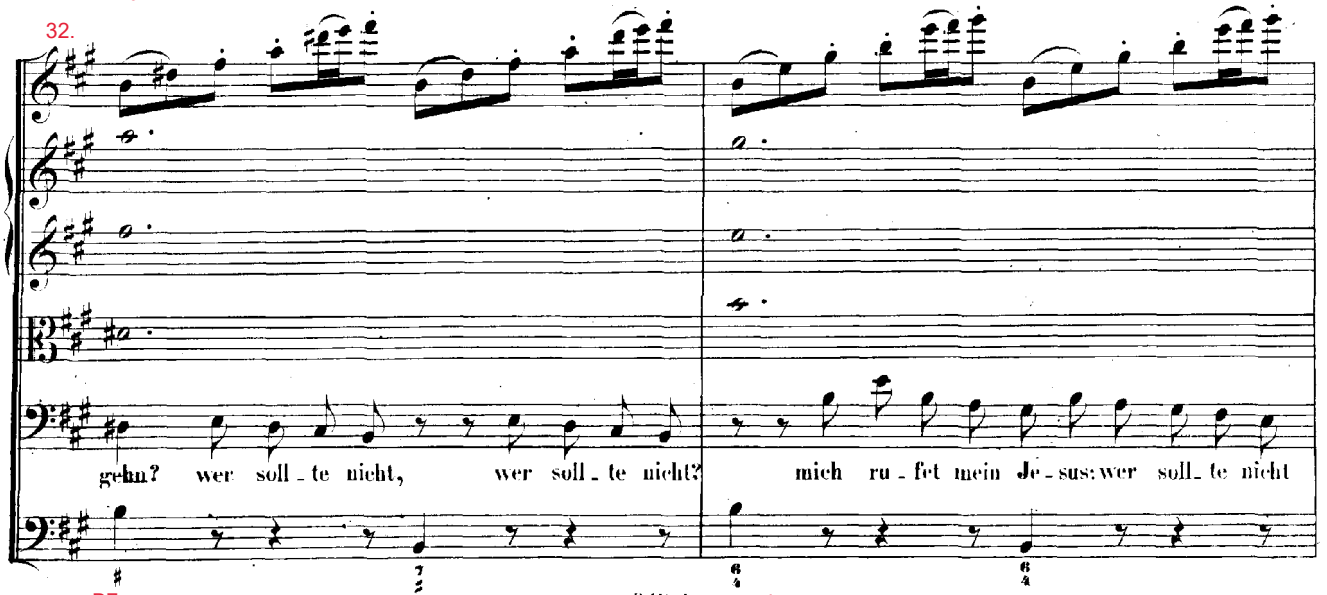
30.



E major

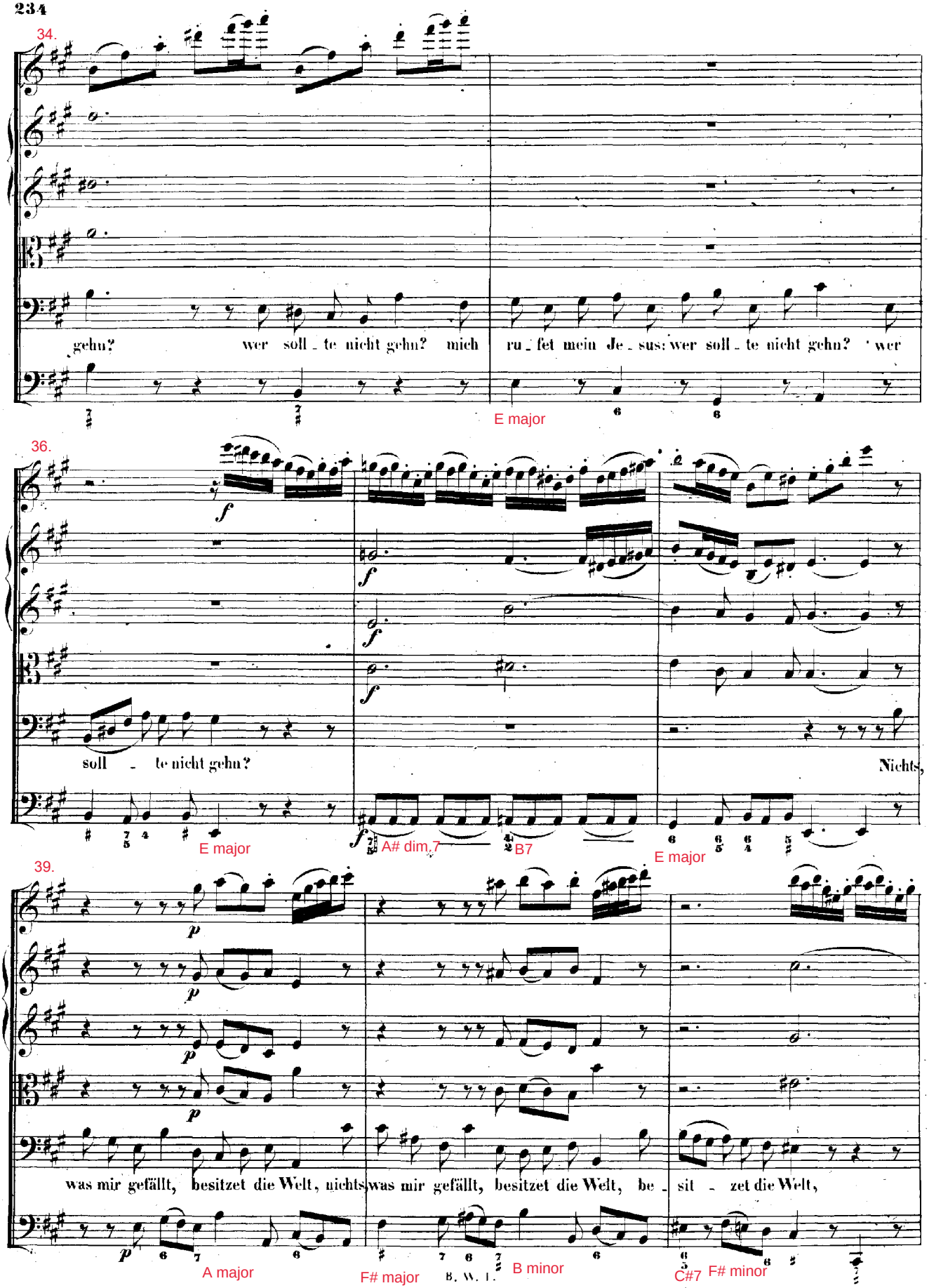
E major

32.



B7

E major


34.
gehn? wer soll - te nicht gehn? mich ru - fet mein Je - sus: wer soll - te nicht gehn? wer
E major
36.
soll - te nicht gehn?
Nichts,
E major
A# dim 7
B7
E major
39.
was mir gefällt, besitzet die Welt, nichts was mir gefällt, besitzet die Welt, be - sit - zet die Welt,
A major
F# major
B. W. I.
B minor
C#7
F# minor

The singer's fast syllabic declamation and melismas in parallel with flute require secure rhythmic coordination. (Martin Petzoldt quoting Konrad Küster in "Bach Kommentar," vol. 1, p. 477.

42.

Text painting: Rests to depict "nothing."

nichts, nichts, nichts, nichts, was mir ge - fällt, be - sit - zet die Welt! Er -

F# minor C#7 F# minor C#7

44.

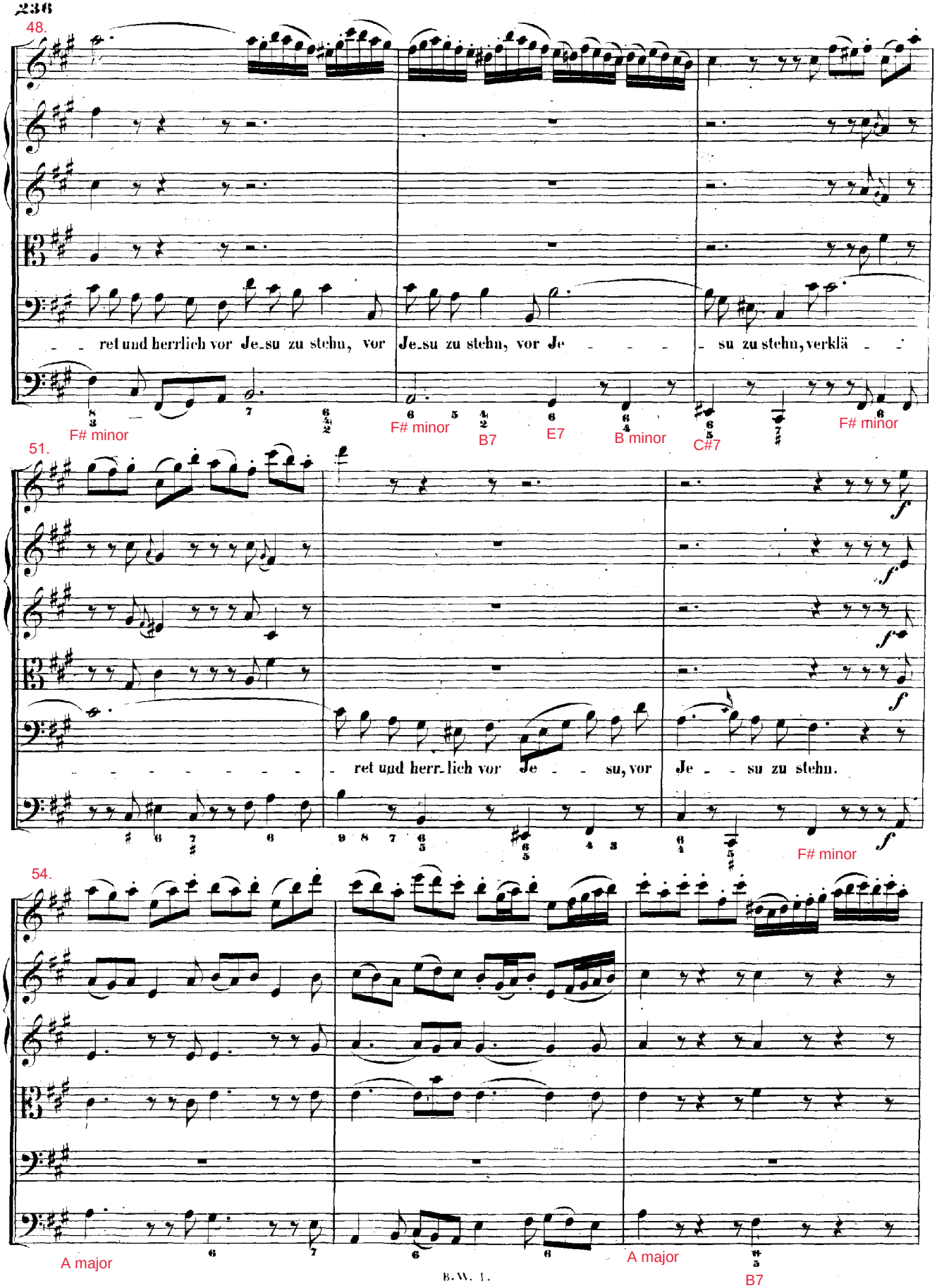
- scheine mir se - li - ger fröh - li - cher Mor - - - gen, er - scheine mir se - li - ger

F#7 B minor F# minor G#7

46.

fröh - li - cher Mor - - - - gen, ver - klä - - - - - - - - - - - -

C#7 F# minor


48.
ret und herrlich vor Je-su zu stehn, vor
Je-su zu stehn, vor Je
su zu stehn, verklä
F# minor
F# minor
B7
E7
B minor
C#7
F# minor
51.
ret und herr-lich vor Je
su, vor
Je
su zu stehn.
F# minor
54.
A major
A major
B7

57.

E major

B7

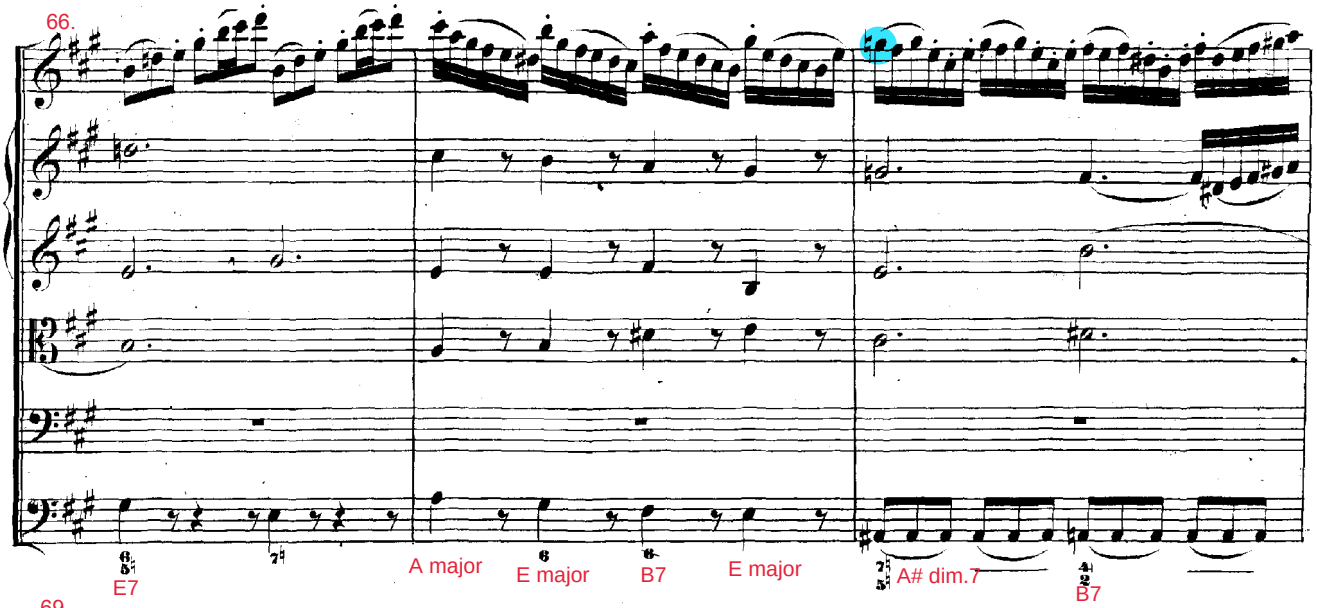
60.

E major

63.

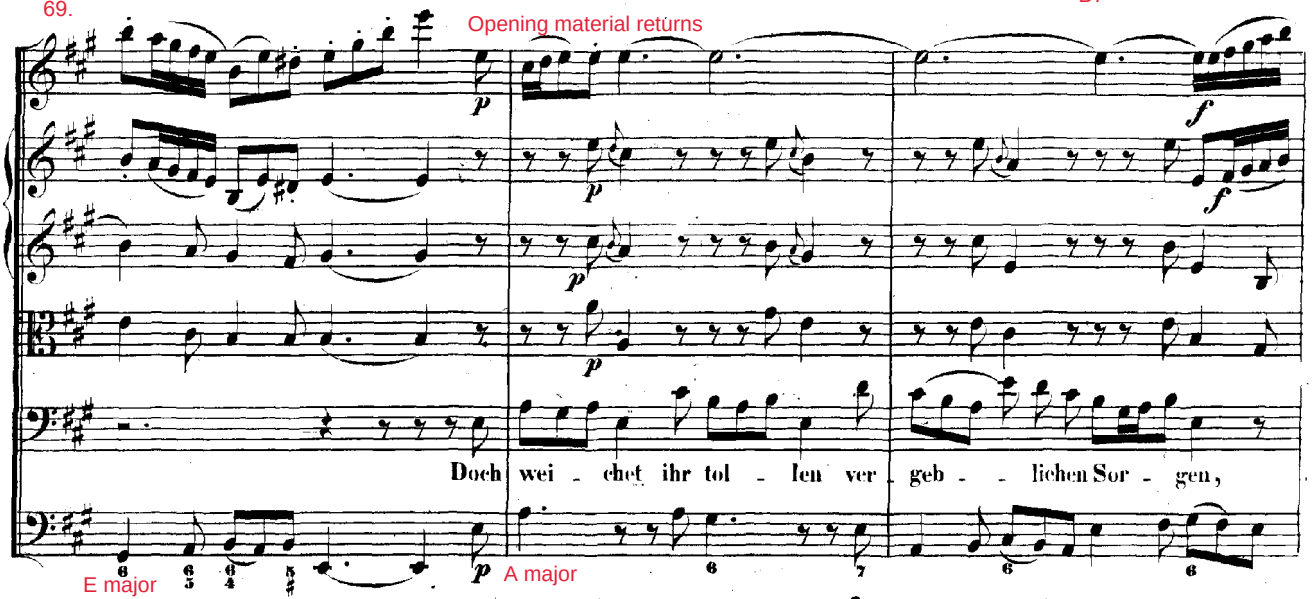
E major

66.

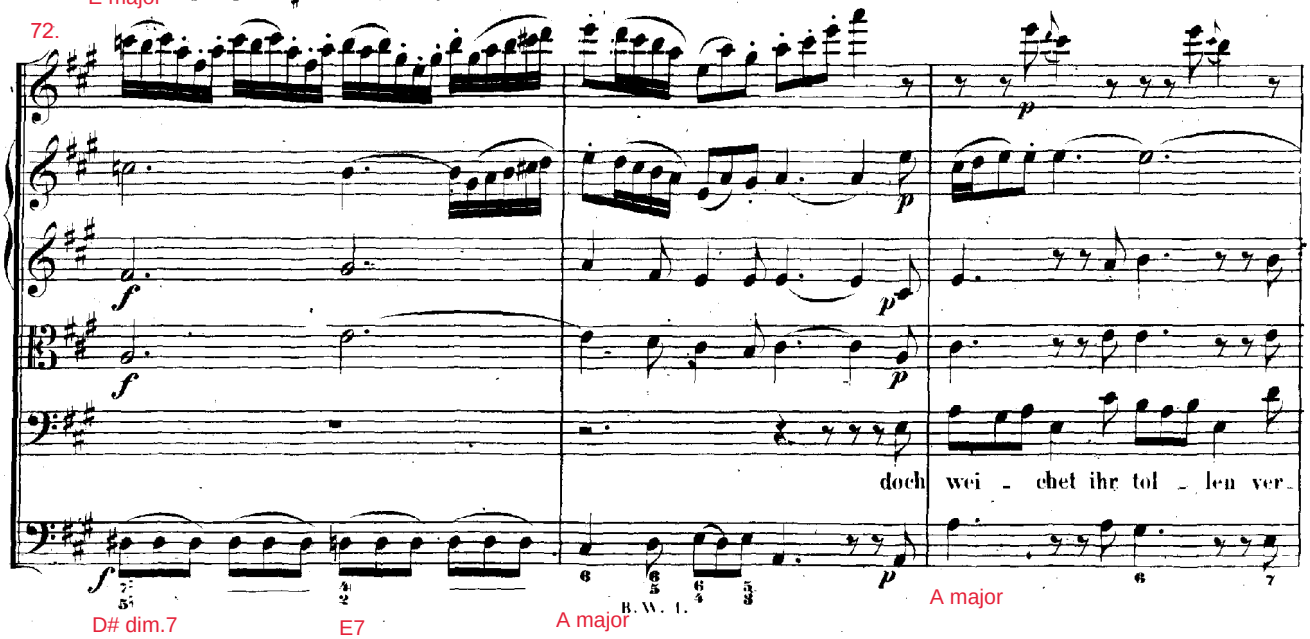


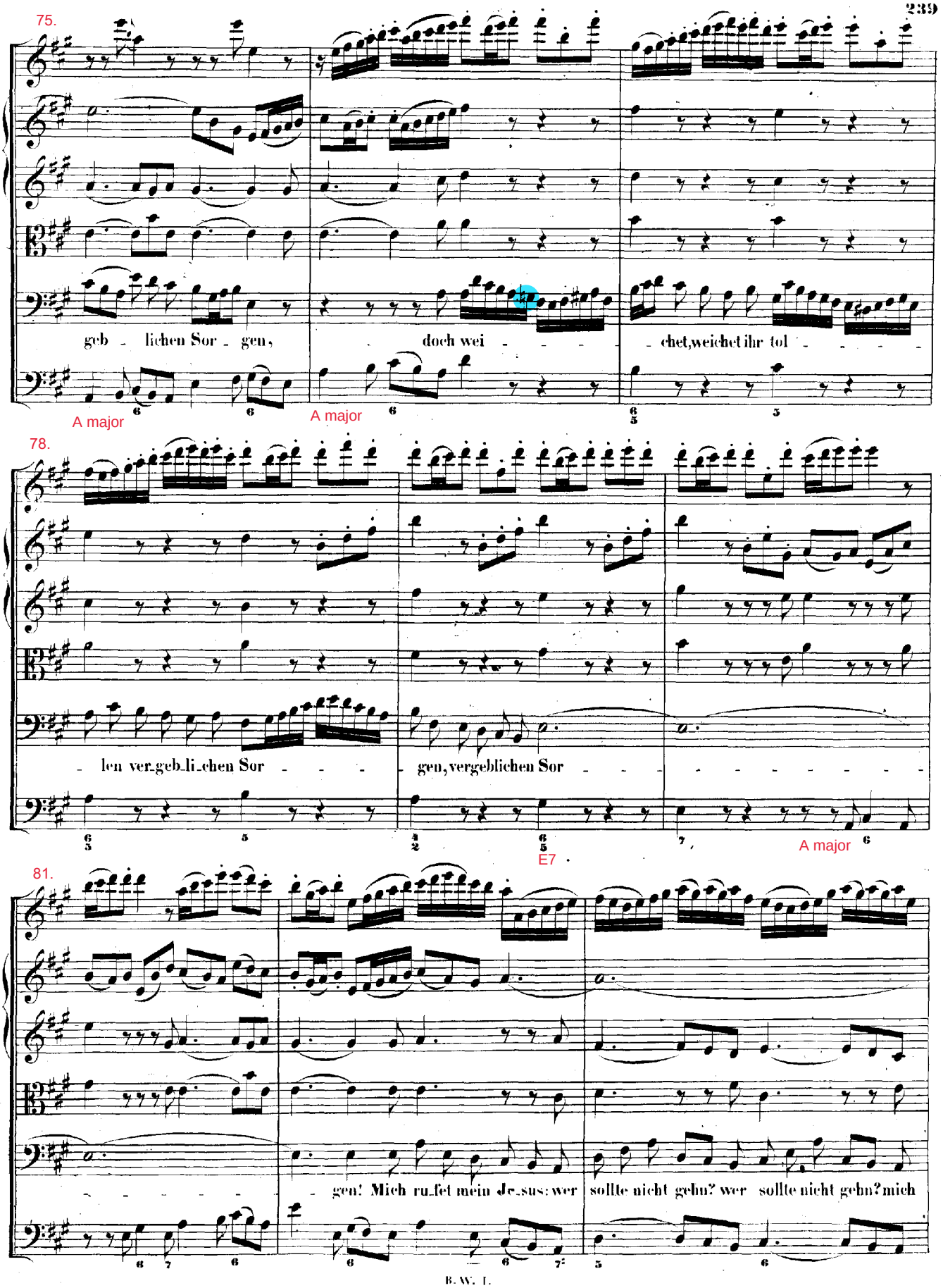
69.

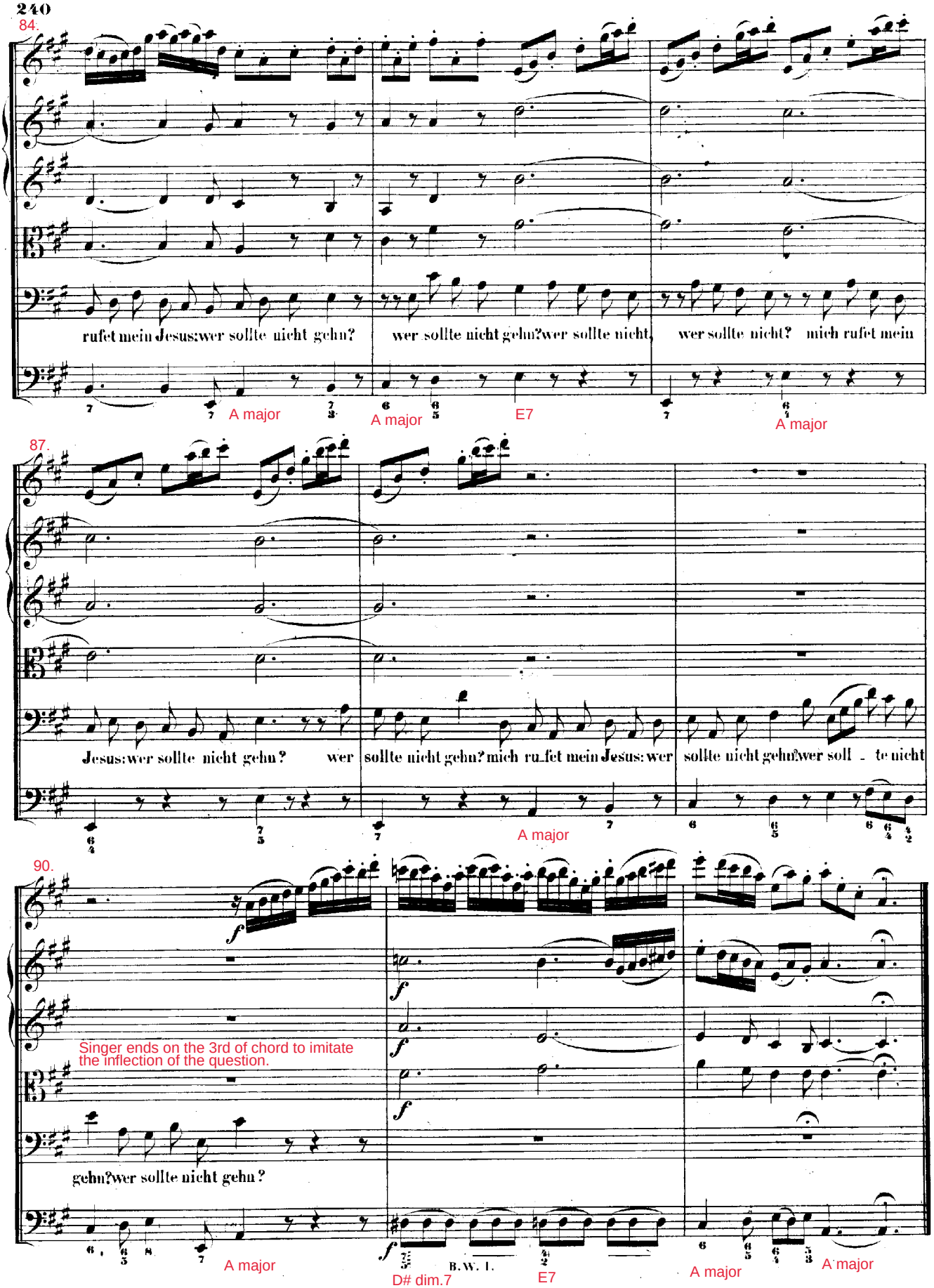
Opening material returns



72.




75.
geb - lichen Sor - gen,
doch wei - - - -
- chet, weichet ihr tol - - - - -
A major
A major
78.
- len ver-geb-li-chen Sor - - -
- gen, vergeblichen Sor - - -
A major
E7
81.
- - - - - - -
- gen! Mich ru-fet mein Je-sus: wer
sollte nicht gehn? wer sollte nicht gehn? mich


84.
rufet mein Jesus: wer sollte nicht gehn?
wer sollte nicht gehn? wer sollte nicht,
wer sollte nicht? mich rufet mein
A major
A major
E7
A major
87.
Jesus: wer sollte nicht gehn?
wer
sollte nicht gehn? mich ru-fet mein Jesus: wer
sollte nicht gehn? wer soll - te nicht
A major
90.
Singer ends on the 3rd of chord to imitate the inflection of the question.
gehn? wer sollte nicht gehn?
A major
D# dim.7
B. W. I.
E7
A major
A major

Soprano Recit. (Based on Chorale Vs. 4.) ●Rejecting the world; looking to blessings hereafter (8/5). The speech is in the imperative mood (as opposed to the indicative mood of movements 1–3), addressing the world.

8/5. **RECITATIVO.**

1.

Soprano.

Behalte nur o Welt das Meine! Du nimmst ja selbst mein Fleisch und mein Gebeine, so

Continuo.

F# minor

B major

4.

nimm auch mei-ne Ar-muth hin; ge-nug, dass mir aus Got-tes Ü-ber-fluss das höchste Gut noch werden

B# dim.7 C# minor F#7 B minor A major

7.

muss, genug, dass ich dort reich und se-lig bin. Was a-ber ist von mir zu er-ben, als meines

A major B7 E major F# major

10.

Allusion to Lamentations 3:22–23.

Got-tes Va-ter-treu? Die wird ja al-le Mor-gen neu, und kann nicht ster - - - ben.

F#7 D# major D#7 G# minor N6 (A-C#-E-Fx) Cx dim.7 D#7 G# minor G# minor

Chorale (Vs. 5; largely following the setting by Vetter; see note at movement 1 for a comparison). ●Prayer: Lord of life and death, let me die well (8/6). The speech is again in the imperative mood, addressing God in prayer.

8/6. **CHORAL.**

1.

Soprano.
Violino I. Flauto traverso in 8va. Oboe d'amore I. Corno col Soprano.

Herrscher ü-ber Tod und Le - - ben, mach' ein-mal mein En - -

Alto.
Violino II. Oboe d'amore II. coll'Alto.

Herrscher ü-ber Tod und Leben, mach' einmal mein

Tenore.
Viola col Tenore.

Herrscher ü-ber Tod und Leben, mach' einmal mein

Basso.

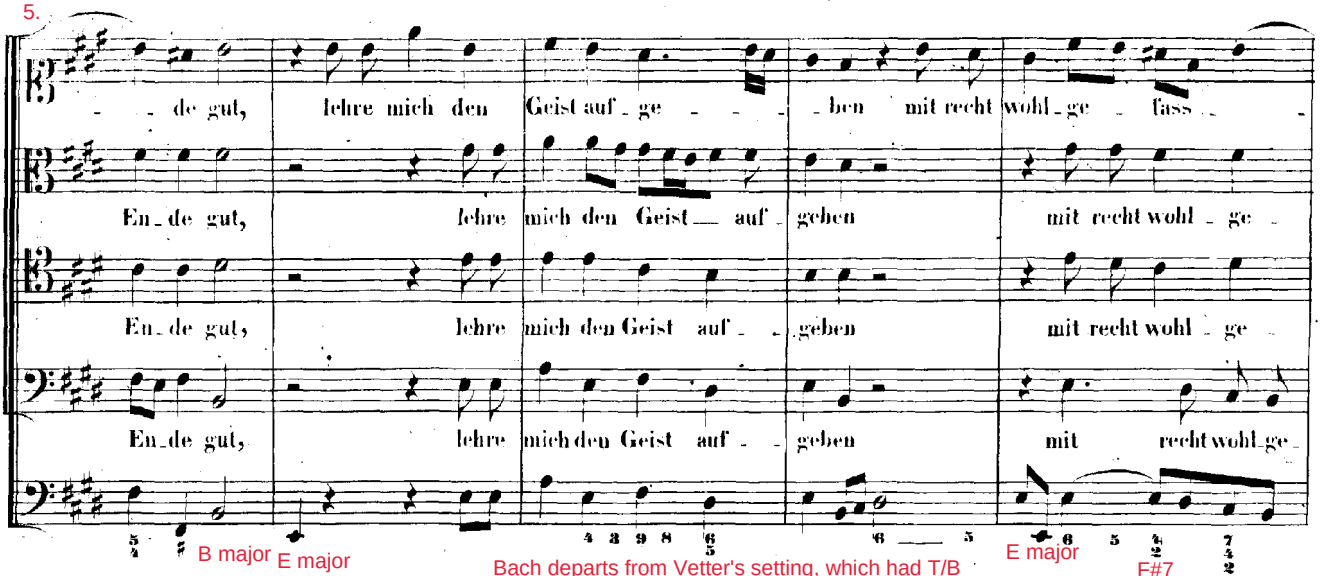
Herrscher ü-ber Tod und Leben, mach' einmal mein

Continuo.

E major E major F#7

Bach's setting emphasizes the "modern" aria-like style of chorales written in Bach's time, with each phrase beginning after the continuo plays the downbeat. For more about Bach's approach to setting contemporary chorales, see side note above at movement 1.

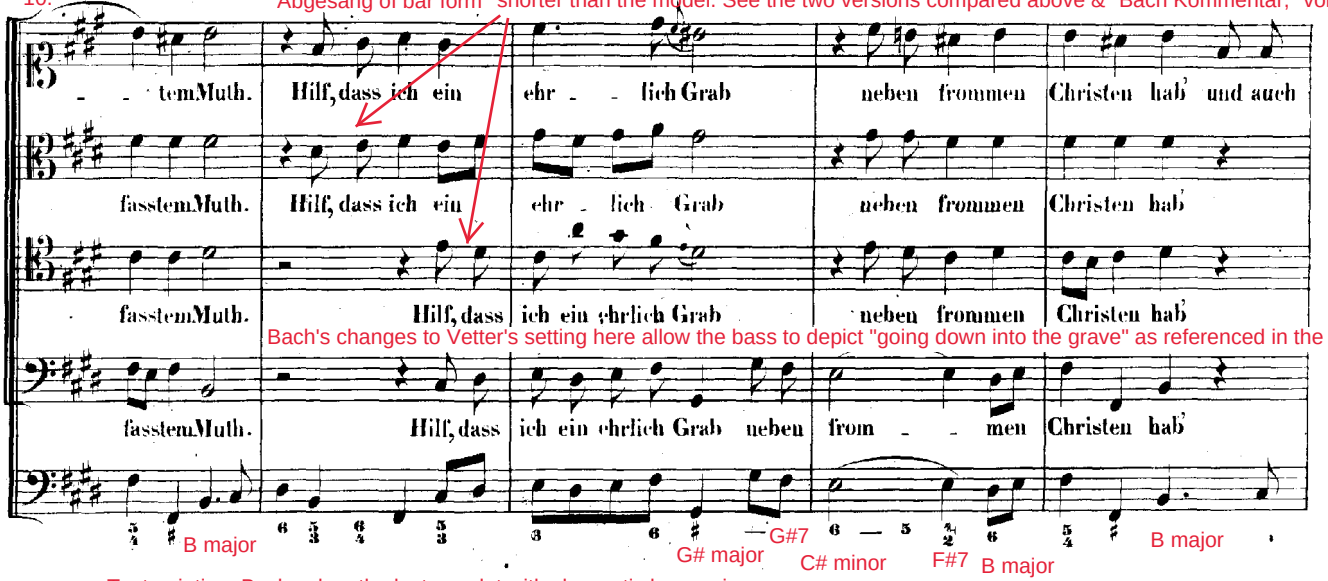
5.



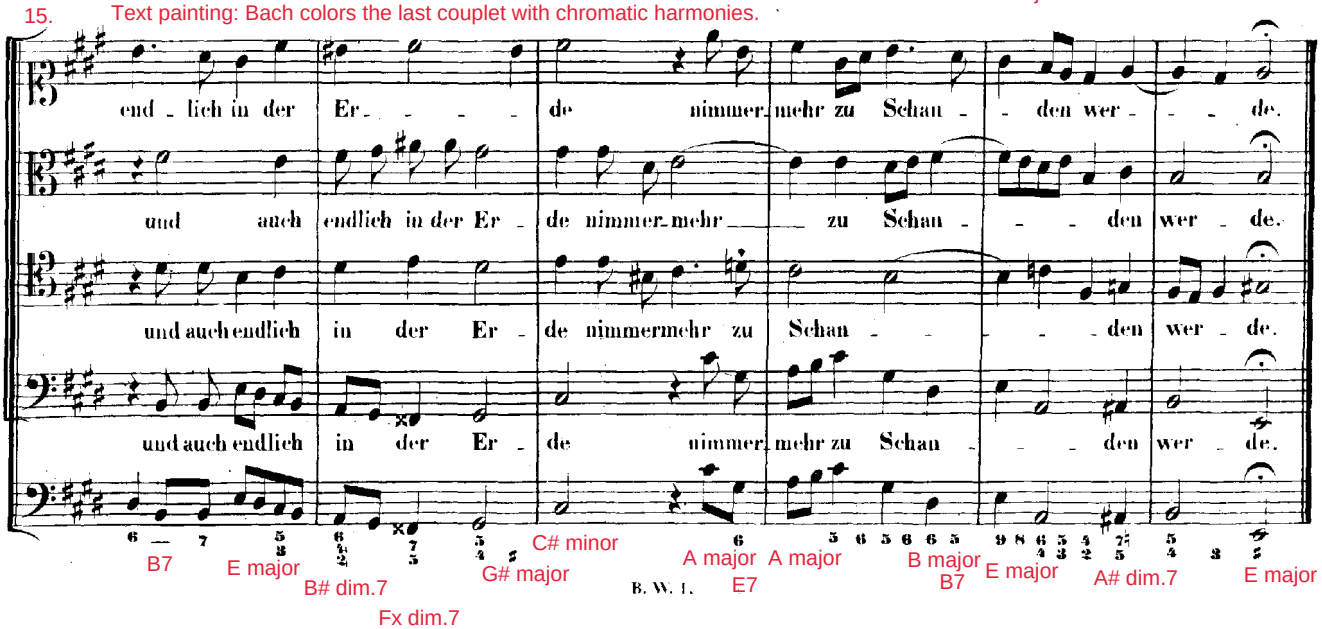
Bach departs from Vetter's setting, which had T/B followed by S/A. Changes in the Abgesang are signficant, resulting in a setting that is one measure shorter than the model. See the two versions compared above & "Bach Kommentar," vol. 1, 478–79.

10.

Abgesang of bar form



Bach's changes to Vetter's setting here allow the bass to depict "going down into the grave" as referenced in the text.

15.

Text painting: Bach colors the last couplet with chromatic harmonies.