THE VOCAL MUSIC OF J.S. BACH[1]

CLASS 7 Nov 2 LEIPZIG CANTATAS II

Outline

1. In early 1723 Bach was offered and accepted the post of cantor (director of church music) at the main churches in Leipzig. Bach's duties included teaching singing, violin, and other instruments at the church school, and providing all the music for Sunday services at the 4 major churches in the city.
2. In his first 6 years in Leipzig, Bach composed over 200 cantatas for performance at Sunday services; for long stretches during this time he was composing one cantata per week. This is perhaps the most astonishing feat of sustained musical creativity in history.
3. Bach's vocal style combines German-style chorales (hymn tunes) and large complex choruses, with Italian-style arias and solo pieces.

Musical selections from

- Brandenburg Concerto No. 4, Tempesta di Mare
- Cantata 105, "Herr, gehe nicht ins Gericht mit deinem Knecht" (Lord, do not pass judgment on your servant)
- Cantata 29, "Wir danken dir, Gott, wir danken dir," 1. sinfonia
- Cantata 21, "Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis" (I had much grief)
- Cantata 65, "Sie werden aus Saba alle kommen" (They will all come forth out of Sheba), 1. opening chorus, 4. aria for bass with oboe da caccia obbligato

Bach in Leipzig

Bach's 200-plus Leipzig cantatas and two surviving passions stand among the great monuments of western vocal music. Most of the cantatas were composed for Sunday services at the two main churches of the city. In addition to the sacred cantatas, he composed cantatas for weddings, anniversaries, birthdays, and even the installation of the new town council.

His Leipzig cantatas most often called for four vocal soloists and a four-part choir, accompanied by organ and strings, sometimes with oboes and flutes. For festive occasions he could add trumpets (the instrument associated with royalty), horns, and timpani. Undergirding the ensemble in nearly every cantata movement was the basso continuo of organ plus cello or double bass. A few cantatas called for only one solo voice, such as virtuosic soprano cantata no. 51, "Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen," (Praise God in all the lands) and the ruminative cantata no. 82 for alto or bass, "Schlummert ein," (Go to sleep).

Bach's texts combine quotes from scripture with contemporary poetry. In the Lutheran church, gospel readings were specified for each Sunday of the church year, generally including a passage from an epistle and a passage from one of the gospels.

A typical Leipzig church cantata by Bach has the following structure:

- Opening chorus
- Recitative
- Aria
- Recitative

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- Aria
- Chorale

The opening chorus is typically the largest and most complex movement. It is usually polyphonic, with themes introduced by the orchestra. Some cantatas open with a separate number for orchestra, such as the festive sinfonia of cantata 29. Some open with an aria rather than a chorus, to better reflect the text (such as BWV 120, whose first lines speak of silence). Arias generally follow the da capo format. The closing chorale generally sets a familiar hymn in 4-part harmony, sometimes accompanied by instruments.

Cantata 105, “Herr, gehe nicht ins Gericht mit deinem Knecht” (Lord, do not pass judgment on your servant)

Here is another cantata from Bach’s first year in Leipzig, first performed July 25, 1723. His cantata for the previous Sunday, BWV 136, left the impression of innocent delight. In Cantata 105, however, the dominant mood is foreboding. The text comes from the Gospel of Luke and Psalm 143, “Lord, enter not into judgment with thy servant/for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.”

The first bars of the opening chorus (“Lord, do not pass judgment on Your servant. For before You no living creature is justified”) announce a work of gravity, with the pulsing bass, dissonant harmonies, and the pleading low oboes and horns. Central to the movement is the harmonically complex eight-bar repeating section (ritornello) full of chromatic modulations. Bach used this sort of complex chromaticism in other works of depicting tortured suffering, including Cantata 12 and the Crucifixus movement of the B-minor Mass. After the orchestral introduction, the chorus enters, singing a six-bar canon. Tenor, alto, bass, and soprano each enter on “Herr” one beat apart, an riveting effect, followed by “gehe nichts ins Gericht” (go not in judgment), and finally a cadence on “mit deinem Knecht” (on your servant). Two episodes follow, increasingly elaborate. Now Bach begins a spirited fugue on the menacing lines, “Denn vor dir wird kein Lebendiger gerecht,” (For in thy sight no man living be justified). One writer said of the fugue, “It is not simply a matter of bowing to a just judge, but of showing the inevitable severity of justice.”

Movement three is an expressive and memorable aria for soprano, expressing both terror and grief (“How the thoughts of the sinner tremble and waver”). The oboe begins with a mournful theme that will return several times. In a rare bit of scoring, Bach omits the basso continuo, leaving a feeling of unrootedness and lack of connection. (Bach did this again in the St. Matthew Passion of 1727, in another aria for soprano, “Aus liebe.” Christ is hanging on the cross, without support from the crowd or even his disciples.) The soprano enters with the first theme heard in the introduction, with the oboe following in imitation. Soprano and oboe go back and forth with upward runs full of dissonances.

Musical selections:
Movement 1, chorus
Movement 3, Aria soprano. Arlene Auger soprano with Helmuth Rilling conducting the Gächinger Kantorei Stuttgart.

Herr, gehe nicht ins Gericht mit deinem Knecht. *Denn vor dir wird kein Lebendiger gerecht.* *(Psalm 143:2)*	1. Chorus *Lord, do not pass judgment on Your servant. For before You no living creature is justified.*

3. Arie S Wie zittern und wanken Der Sünder Gedanken, Indem sie sich untereinander verklagen Und wiederum sich zu entschuldigen wagen. So wird ein geängstigt Gewissen Durch eigene Folter zerrissen.	3. Aria S How the thoughts of the sinner tremble and waver, while they make accusations among themselves and again and again try to excuse themselves. Thus an anxious conscience is torn apart by its own torment.
6. Choral Nun, ich weiß, du wirst mir stillen Mein Gewissen, das mich plagt. Es wird deine Treu erfüllen, Was du selber hast gesagt: Daß auf dieser weiten Erden Keiner soll verloren werden, sondern ewig leben soll, Wenn er nur ist Glaubens voll. ("Jesu, der du meine Seele," verse 11)	6. Chorale Now, I know, You shall quiet in me my conscience which gnaws at me. Your faithful love will fulfill what You Yourself have said: that upon this wide earth no one shall be lost, rather shall live forever, if only he is filled with faith.

Cantata 29, “Wir danken dir, Gott, wir danken dir,” (We thank thee, God, we thank thee)
1. Sinfonia

Bach adapted the Preludium from his Violin Partita No. 3 for this exuberant introduction to a cantata celebrating the annual installation of a new Leipzig Town Council. This must rank as the most splendid music ever written for the swearing in of new municipal office holders.

Cantata 21, “Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis” (I had much grief)

Bach wrote this, his longest cantata, at Weimar, around 1713, later revising it for his first cantata cycle at Leipzig in 1723. The opening sinfonia is a good example of the many cantata movements that feature an oboe, here expressing pathos, set against a voice or strings (here, violins), plus a steady bass line, suggesting the inevitable suffering ahead.

In the opening chorus, Bach might have been thinking of the young prince Johann Ernst, who had been a favorite student of his, and who at the time of the cantata’s premier lay close to death. The prince had introduced Bach to Vivaldi’s concertos when he returned from a trip to the Netherlands with a sheaf of works by the famous Italian. This complex dense chorus can be heard as describing the concerns of someone close to death. Bach follows with an aria for solo soprano (“Sighs, tears, anguish, sorrow”) voicing unrelieved sorrow until near the end when the tempo quickens, perhaps reflecting the believer’s hope that God will enliven her spirit. The tenor follows with a recitative lamenting, like Job, his distance from God (“What? have You therefore, my God, in my trouble, in my fear and despair, turned completely away from me?”), and an aria, “Streams of salty tears, floods pour continually forth.” The believer’s mood brightens in the following chorus (“Why do you trouble yourself, my soul, and are so restless in me? Wait for God”) , ending with a choral fugue that includes a repeated descending pattern.

Part 2 opens with a dialogue between the soul (soprano) and Jesus (bass) (“Ah, Jesus, my peace, my light, where are You? - O soul behold! I am with you”), a love duet of the sort that also appears in Cantata 140, “Wachet auf.” A large complex and chorus with chorale suggests comfort with support of the church. A buoyant tenor aria (“Rejoice, soul, rejoice, heart, fade now, troubles, disappear, pains!”) extends the upward trajectory of the believer’s journey. Finally comes the brilliant final chorus, which includes a fugue, scored for trumpets and drums, and an ascending pattern that is the counterpart of the descending pattern of the chorus that ended part 1.

2. Chor *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis in meinem Herzen; aber deine Tröstungen erquicken meine Seele. (Psalm 94:19)*	2. Chorus *I had much trouble in my heart; but your consolations revive my soul.*
9. Chor - Choral T S *Sei nun wieder zufrieden, meine Seele, denn der Herr tut dir Guts. (Psalm 116:7)* Was helfen uns die schweren Sorgen, Was hilft uns unser Weh und Ach? Was hilft es, daß wir alle Morgen Beseufzen unser Ungemach? Wir machen unser Kreuz und Leid Nur größer durch die Traurigkeit. Denk nicht in deiner Drangsalshitze, Daß du von Gott verlassen seist, Und daß Gott der im Schoße sitze, Der sich mit stetem Glücke speist. Die folgend Zeit verändert viel Und setzet jeglichem sein Ziel. ("Wer nur den lieben Gott läßt walten," verse 5)	9. Chorus - Chorale T S *Be at peace again, my soul, for the Lord has done good things for you.* What good are heavy worries? What can our woe and sighing do? What help is it, that every morning we bemoan our hard lot? We make our torment and sorrow only greater through melancholy. Think not, in your heat of despair, that you are abandoned by God, and that God places in His lap the one who feeds on constant happiness. The coming time changes much and sets a destiny for each.
11. Chor *Das Lamm, das erwürget ist, ist würdig zu nehmen Kraft und Reichtum und Weisheit und Stärke und Ehre und Preis und Lob.* *Lob und Ehre und Preis und Gewalt sei unserm Gott von Ewigkeit zu Ewigkeit. Amen, Alleluja! (Rev. 5:12-13)*	11. Chorus *The Lamb, that was slain, is worthy to receive power, and riches, and wisdom and strength, and honor and glory and praise.* *Praise and honor and glory and power be to our God for ever and ever. Amen, Alleluia!*

Cantata 65 “Sie werden aus Saba alle kommen” (They will all come forth out of Sheba)

Bach wrote this cantata during his first year in Leipzig, to be performed on Twelfth Night, the festival of the three kings, on January 6, 1724. It is one of five cantatas written for the two week period between Christmas Eve and January 6. As we listen, we can imagine that we are in Bach’s church in Leipzig, listening to the minister recount the story of the three kings arriving in Bethlehem with their gifts for the Christ child. The opening chorus, in 12/8 time, has a peaceful lilt, something like the sinfonia of the Christmas Oratorio, which would have been heard the previous week. Bach gives an oriental sound to the movement by his choice of instruments. Next comes a sensitive, intimate chorale, as the three kings arrive. Next comes a recitative and aria for the bass, the central movement of the cantata, in which the singer asks what we ordinary people, who are not kings, can offer if we have no gold or frankincense. The answer is that we can offer ourselves, our hearts. A lively aria follows for tenor with oboe da caccia and two recorders. The cantata concludes, as did so many others, with a chorale, a simple familiar tune beautifully harmonized.

1. Chor *Sie werden aus Saba alle kommen,* *Gold und Weihrauch bringen* *und des Herren Lob verkündigen.* *(Isaiah 60:6)*	1. Chorus *They will all come forth out of Sheba,* *bringing gold and incense* *and proclaiming the praise of the Lord.*
4. Arie B Gold aus Ophir ist zu schlecht, Weg, nur weg mit eitlen Gaben, Die ihr aus der Erde brecht! Jesus will das Herze haben. Schenke dies, o Christenschar, Jesu zu dem neuen Jahr!	4. Aria Bass Gold from Ophir is too meager; away, away with vain gifts that you mine from the earth! Jesus wants to have your heart. Offer this, o Christian throng, to Jesus for the new Year!
6. Arie T Nimm mich dir zu eigen hin, Nimm mein Herze zum Geschenke. Alles, alles, was ich bin, Was ich rede, tu und denke, Soll, mein Heiland, nur allein Dir zum Dienst gewidmet sein.	6. Aria Tenor Take me to Yourself as Your own, take my heart as a present. All, all that I am, what I say, do, and think, shall alone, my Savior, be dedicated to Your service.

Resources:
Nicholas Kenyon, *The Faber Pocket Guide to Bach*,
Boyd, Malcolm, ed. *J.S. Bach.* Entries for the cantatas discussed here are listed alphabetically by the German title.

Choral singers can find vocal scores for the cantatas as follows
Cantata 65 at https://www.bach-cantatas.com/Scores/BWV065-V&P.pdf
Cantata 105 at https://www.bach-cantatas.com/Scores/BWV105-V&P.pdf
Cantata 21 at https://www.bach-cantatas.com/Scores/BWV021-V&P.pdf

Appendix

https://bachtrack.com/nov-2013-baroque-historically-informed

Notes on Cantata 65
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Many cantatas for the Christmas season are not deeply involved with the Christmas story, but assume a contemplative attitude with a minimum of narrative. The Cantata BWV 65 not only directly quotes Isaiah's prediction of the Wise Men, but contrasts it with a chorale description of how that prediction came true. Thus, the unusual placement of a chorale immediately after the opening chorus sets off the principal thrust of the piece: the gifts of the Wise Men are a reflection of the gift of God in fulfilling the words of Isaiah.

The opening chorus has a wonderful, exotic, "Eastern" sounding orchestration with pairs of recorders, oboes da caccia and horns as well as the usual strings and continuo. The loping 9/8 meter gives the piece a charming "camel music" quality. This cantata contains the only example of horns in C in all of Bach's music. The beginning tutti shows the richness of color available to Bach with this combination of

instruments. The sound of the piece comes not only from the exotic combination of instruments but also from the abundance of octave doublings. This interest in octaves culminates in the final cadence of the tutti, which contains a rarely-heard unison from the entire orchestra. The choral writing is marvelously varied with block-like writing, imitative writing, and a full-fledged choral fugue. In his book "The Compositional Process of J.S. Bach," Robert Marshall describes ingeniously how Bach "thinks on his feet" in the writing of this fugue. In fact, one of the great glories of the first Jahrgang is the new way in which Bach is able to fold choral fugues into a more homophonic texture. This is particularly striking in a work such as this that has horns with few available chromatic notes. Bach makes an event out of the return of the horns to the orchestral texture by surprisingly overlapping them with the end of the fugue.

The chorale that follows, a verse of "Ein Kind, geborn zu Bethelehem," is austere, almost barren in its harmonization. It is as if the richness of Isaiah's prophecy is contrasted with the meager circumstances of Christ's birth. The recitative that follows is a classic example of Bach's sensitivity to the shape and function of the text. The first half, which recounts the story of the wise men, begins in F major and modulates to G major. At the beginning of the contemplative section, where the speaker examines how these events affect him, the bass moves down to a six-four-two chord and sends the recitative in a harmonically different direction.

Bach uses the dark sound of the two oboes da caccia as obbligati for the bass aria. Notice how the opening theme, so closely imitative and evocative of gold, is transformed into the gold torn from the earth by the drop of an octave at the end of the third line. The canon here is exclusively associated with the inadequacy of the gold offerings. The offering of the Christian's heart is accompanied by euphonious parallel thirds in the obbligato instruments.

The secco tenor recitative is appropriately didactic, and offers a perfect foil for the return to the extravagant orchestration that accompanies the opening of the next tenor aria. The main tune of this aria is clearly related to the opening idea of the chorus. Even more, the "oriental" octave doublings bring us back into that world. There is something popular in the character of this spirited piece. It is bar-form, something rather unusual in non-chorale related pieces in Bach. The simple folksy vocal writing at the beginning is a wonderful contrast to the exuberant melismas of the final section.

Not only the choice of a verse from "Was mein Gott will, das g'scheh allzeit," but also its austere harmonization, is surprising compared to the color of the rest of the cantata. Perhaps Bach is preparing us for the sobriety of the Epiphany season. Its simplicity is very much in keeping with the presentation of the other chorale, and gives us a slightly different relationship between the chorale and the concerted music that we are used to in first Jahrgang pieces.

Notes on Cantata 105
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Last week's cantata, BWV 9, focused on salvation. Today's cantata, BWV 105, is similarly a meditation on Christian faith and redemption. From instrumental and vocal canons in the opening chorus, to the trembling and doubt of the soprano aria that leads to promised redemption and blissful acceptance, to the divine assurance of the final chorale, BWV 105 serves as a reminder that salvation is everlasting.

Bach Cantata BWV 105 is one of his gigantic masterpieces. BWV 105 and its companion work the cantata BWV 46 were written for adjacent Sundays in July of 1723.

What is most remarkable about these two twin pieces is that Bach reaches a peak of conceptual organization with each piece using common compositional material throughout to create a sense of unity that is unique in all of the cantatas.

Our work opens with a mighty chorus. Heavy treading footsteps in the bass instruments accompany the wide reaching wailing line of the oboes strings and trumpet. The chorus enters almost chaotically; gradually the work's organization becomes clear and a striding and extraordinarily energetic fugue brings the movement to a striking close. After a pleading alto recitative, the soprano aria with strings and oboe but no bass instruments creates a world shaking with fear. The shuddering strings, with no foundation of bass instruments, are a shaky base for the heavenly pleading oboe and soprano duet. The voice of Christ reintroduces the bass instruments and stability with its gently rocking texture like a swinging censer. The tenor aria brings back the trumpet. Here, however, it is confident, even swaggering, rather than the mournful wail of the first movement. The skittering strings retain some of the shuddering quality of the soprano aria. Bach saves the most striking gesture for the last. The shaking strings accompany the chorale but gradually slow down to soothing quarter notes by the end of the movement.

Notes on BWV 21, "Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis" (I had much grief), by Craig Smith and Michael Beattie for Emmanuel Church, Boston

Several years into his tenure as music director to the court of Weimar, Johann Sebastian Bach was instructed to write one cantata a month for the chapel services. Near the beginning of this series Bach wrote what was to be his largest sacred Cantata, "Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis," BWV 21. Not only was this work written to go with the readings for the third Sunday after Trinity, but it served as a farewell to the gravely ill Prince Johann Ernst of Sachsen-Weimar. The young prince, who had been one of Bach's favorite and most talented pupils, was on his way to a spa in Swabia where he later died. Bach uses the main tune from a movement of Vivaldi's D Minor Concerto, Opus 3 #11, as the theme for the opening chorus. The concerto had been a favorite of the prince and with its moving text describing a grave illness, the whole movement should be seen as an homage to the young prince.
The work itself covers many different styles. The second and last choruses probably date from very early in Bach's career. The opening and the great chorale prelude "Sei nun wieder zufrieden," were written in 1714. Many of the movements were extensively revised for Bach's first Leipzig Cantata cycle in 1723. Certainly the work has a refinement and finish to it unknown in his early Weimar years.

The cantata opens with a marvelous sinfonia for oboe and strings. It is virtually a duet between the first violins and the oboe. After the complexity and density of the first chorus, the soprano aria with oboe obbligato "Seufzer, Tränen" is spare and startlingly angular. The tenor recitative and aria returns to the richness of the opening music. These two solo pieces are set to texts of Bach's favorite poet, Salomo Franck. Franck was probably the best contemporary poet that Bach ever set; certainly these intense texts inspired the composer to write some of his greatest music. The first two choruses are from Psalm texts. Between the first and second parts of the cantata was a sermon with further commentary on the designated texts for the third Sunday after Trinity. The second part of the cantata begins with a dialogue between Christ and the Soul. This was a favorite didactic device of Lutheran theology of the period. These dialogues are often associated with the erotic love poetry of the Song of Songs. A popular example are of this genre are the love duets in the cantata "Wachet auf!" Today's cantata was one of the few Bach pieces in Baron von Swieten's library in Vienna. Clearly Mozart saw this piece there, for the duet is inspiration for both "La ci darem" from Don Giovanni and the third act Susanna-Count duet from Le Nozze di Figaro.

The gigantic chorale prelude "Sei nun wieder zufrieden" is in a way the most ambitious and advanced piece in the cantata. It is one of the few chorale settings in the cantatas in which the darkness of the chorale text is undercut by the hope of the words sung by the other three voices. The sprightly tenor aria with continuo is a jolly interlude between the two monumental choruses that end the cantata. Trumpets and drums finally make their entrance in the last chorus punctuating the bravura choral writing. The fugue that ends the cantata is one of the composer's most brilliant creations.

Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis, BWV 21 - in two parts - is the longest and grandest of all the cantatas. It has a complicated history. The first nine movements may have constituted a cantata *per ogni tempo* [for any occasion] written in Weimar as early as 1713. There were many subsequent revisions, culminating in today's 1723 version (minus the trombones!) which includes two additional movements.

Given the wide range of styles found in this cantata, it is a piece of remarkable dramatic cohesion. It moves progressively from darkness into light. The mysterious opening sinfonia is a dialogue between oboe and solo violin (accompanied by a halo of strings) which seems to lead directly into the first chorus. Almost all of the choruses of BWV 21 are based on psalm texts. In Part I, the choral writing is very text specific. Like the great motet composers of the previous generation, Bach finds a striking new character for each line of text. In some cases even a single word is given its own special color (the freeze-frame moment on the word *aber* [but] in the first chorus is one example). Bach was mocked by his contemporaries for the stuttering repetition of the first word (*Ich, ich, ich…*);today it seems a moment of breathtaking drama.

The soprano aria "Seufzer, Tränen", in spite of its overwrought text, is a marvel of stark simplicity, especially given the density of everything that surrounds it. The anguish of the text is mirrored in the tortured intervals found in the voice and oboe part. The tenor recitative and aria are on a different scale entirely. Bach's response to this highly dramatic text is appropriately extravagant, with especially picturesque orchestra writing.

The monumental choral prelude "Sei nun wieder zufrieden" moves in yet another stylistic direction. The interpolated chorale text appears first in the tenor section surrounded by complex counterpoint in the solo voices. Later it is taken over by the sopranos upon the entrance of full chorus and strings.
The intimate tenor aria that follows is scored only for continuo - its lightness and optimism providing a perfect bridge to the final brilliant chorus. The text of the closing chorus is the same as that which concludes Handel's *Messiah* ('Worthy is the Lamb'). The entrance of the trumpets and timpani is a thrilling moment. After a brief introduction, the piece concludes with one of the most viscerally exciting fugues that Bach ever wrote. It cranks along at an almost hyperventilating pace before exploding ecstatically heavenward.
http://www.emmanuelmusic.org/notes_translations/notes_cantata/n_bwv021.htm#pab1_7