

AMERICAN
BACH
SOLOISTS



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music director

support materials for our recording of

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH
SOLO CANTATAS

Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen, BWV 51
Widerstehe doch der Sünde, BWV 54
Ich armer Mensch, ich Sündenknecht, BWV 55
Ich habe genug, BWV 82

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American Bach Choir

PROGRAM NOTES

by John Butt

Bach's solo cantatas are, in some sense, his only *true* cantatas since the term 'cantata' was drawn from an Italian genre which was designed for solo voice. Bach indeed used this term for the solo works and named those with more voices 'concerto'; however, this latter term has been dropped in modern musical practice to avoid confusion with the purely instrumental works of that name. However, it would be a mistake to consider the solo cantatas as vastly different from the concerted works since they are products of the same environment.

In Lutheran schools from the time of the Reformation until well beyond Bach's death, music was considered an important art, one which was intended to move both the pupil and the listener towards closer faith. Indeed all boys were divided into singing classes and many earned their living by singing chorales around the town. Bach was often criticized for neglecting this basic vocal training. He was interested only in the musical boys, those he selected to sing in the choirs which performed cantatas. For this more complex 'figural' music it was customary to train a singer—the 'concertist'—in all the florid coloratura and expressive devices of performance, something quite different from the skills required for chorales and simple motets. Thus, for a standard cantata, Bach employed four concertists who were responsible for each of the demanding lines.

Clearly, concertists could not be trained in a vacuum. They had to learn by example and experience. Therefore, the less experienced and weaker singers were employed to sing in the motet choirs or were assigned 'ripieno' parts to boost the 'concertists.' While all that has been said so far is standard knowledge in the field of Bach scholarship, it is still a matter of dispute as to how much, in fact, Bach employed the doubling ripienists; is it possible that he generally performed his concerted works with the single 'concertists' and dispensed with the reinforcements? However, at least we can see that the 'solo' cantatas are similar to the regular cantatas in that the latter were performed by a core of four soloists.

But the solo cantatas do offer a more contemplative approach to the text since the standard form for a 'single' soloist was the aria, that form which so potently internalizes emotion. On the other hand, Bach's formal principles are exactly the same whatever the vocal genre: from the Weimar years onward the basic content of each movement

is the opening 'ritornello,' the instrumental introduction which not only contains the seed for the entire movement but also sets the tone or *affect*. The vocal part is woven into this pre-established sound world and—contrary to the work of a more melodic or operatic composer—shares its dominance with the instrumental parts. This is not to say that Bach's writing is inexpressive or inhuman. Rather it is curiously moving since the vocal 'human' part is woven into a larger context of the same form but different substance: an aspect of religion or at least metaphysics which is more aptly expressed in music than words.

Widerstehe doch der Sünde, BWV 54

Cantata for the 7th Sunday after Trinity

This cantata, which seductively reminds the congregation of the dangers of sin, was written in 1714 while Bach was organist and Konzertmeister at the court of Weimar. While many commentators assume it was written for the seventh Sunday after Trinity (July 15), its text was written (librettist, G. C. Lehms, 1711) for Oculi Sunday. If Bach did in fact compose the music for this occasion (March 4) it would have been the first work he wrote for his newly acquired position of Konzertmeister (which he acquired, incidentally, by seeking a more satisfactory offer of employment elsewhere). One can easily imagine the surprise of the royal congregation in the intimate court chapel at Weimar, where the performers were placed almost out of sight in the high organ gallery, for this cantata opens with a dissonant chord, something which conjures up both the waywardness of sin and the command to reject it. Although the Weimar cantatas were performed by small forces, they often required an extra viola line, something which contributes to the luscious texture of this movement. The final movement shows another typical feature of Bach's early works: the opening ritornello is a fugue consisting of two subjects which combine with each other in various ways. This not only results in an extremely economical movement but it also contributes to the severity of its message: the rules of fugue reflect the rules which sin attempts to break. The use of chromatic motion is another device typical of the entire Baroque: being difficult to sing, it reflects some sort of strained emotion, pain or sorrow (literally!) represented in sound.

Ich habe genug, BWV 82

Cantata for the Feast of the Purification

This cantata, written for the Feast of the Purification, February 2, 1727, has become one of the most celebrated of Bach's cantatas. Listeners today should not be ashamed

of its popularity: Bach himself clearly liked it, too, and performed it repeatedly, changing the scoring to suit the forces for each occasion. The appearance of the second aria in Anna Magdalena's musicbook suggests that it was a particular favorite in the Bach household. Based on the Song of Simeon (Nunc Dimittis) this cantata concerns a theme typical of the Lutheranism of Bach's age: the longing for death ('sleep') after one has seen the light of Christ. The opening aria must have provided an impulse for the composition of "Erbarne dich," one of the most moving arias from the *St. Matthew Passion*, barely a month later. The jewel of the cantata is usually considered to be the second aria, "Schlummert ein," a movement which shows Bach's characteristic thoroughness in writing (notice the continuous movement in the continuo) but one which is also extremely effective in its emotional impact. Is it the frequent rhetorical pauses which force the listener to reflect on the bitter-sweetness of death? Or is it the flattened seventh degree of the scale, suggesting in musical terms the subdominant key, the 'past history' of the tonic?

Ich armer Mensch, ich Sündenknecht, BWV 55
Cantata for the 22nd Sunday after Trinity

The solo tenor in this cantata is the personification of that unrighteous servant described in the Gospel for the 22nd Sunday of Trinity (November 17, 1726), Matthew 18: 23-35. Much of the text is based on the antithesis of the merciful Lord and the mean servant; the formal structure also reflects this with the first two movements relating to the sinfulness of man and the remainder to the mercy of God. The unknown librettist also uses some of Psalm 139 in the first recitative to portray the ever-present God; however high and tortuously the tenor is forced to sing, he cannot escape the 'chastening rods of sin' and the presence of his maker. It is interesting that both the third and fourth movements begin with the exclamation "Erbarne dich" (Have mercy), the opening words of the great aria from the *St. Matthew Passion*. The latter was written only a few months later, so it is likely that this cantata influenced Bach's later ideas. Indeed the third movement begins with the rising minor-sixth which so characterizes the Passion movement. This interval, banned

from the strict polyphonic idiom of the Renaissance, was employed for special effect in music of the late Baroque as a means of conveying 'exclamation.'

Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen, BWV 51
Cantata for the 15th Sunday after Trinity

The original purpose of Cantata 51 is somewhat obscure: while the partially autograph performance parts point to a performance on September 17, 1730, the score shows that all but the last two movements were probably adapted from an earlier composition. Moreover, a recent hypothesis by Klaus Hofmann suggests that Bach wrote this work as a birthday cantata for the court at Weißenfels (where he was an honorary Kapellmeister)—certainly works with similar Italianate scoring were frequently heard there. If this is true it would seem that the Leipzig performance was a repeat, perhaps occasioned by the presence of a particularly talented singer in Bach's choir (Joshua Rifkin has suggested the name of Christoph Nichelmann). Some changes to the text in Bach's later hand show that the composer returned to this cantata at least once again. Wilhelm Friedemann used this work for his own performances after his father's death, adding a part for second trumpet and timpani. Furthermore, in using Bach's original performing parts, he added trills at several points, particularly for the solo soprano.

Cantata 51 is usually renowned for the superlative virtuosity of its soprano part, extending the range up to top c'''. Nevertheless, while the part is very exposed, it is barely more complex than lines found in some other vocal works, for instance the solo and chorus lines of the *Mass in B minor*. What is particularly appealing in Cantata 51 is the conciseness of the cantata and the variety achieved in its five movements: it opens in a concerto-ritornello style, proceeding through expressive arioso and ostinato movements to a chorale arrangement and the stunning fugal finale. Furthermore, its text of praise and thanksgiving is less tethered to a specific festival (fifteenth Sunday after Trinity; Bach added the words 'et in ogni Tempo') and would be appropriate for any number of occasions.

Widerstehe doch der Sünde
BWV 54

Countertenor, Strings and Basso Continuo

1 1. ARIA (Countertenor, Strings, Bc.)

*Widerstehe doch der Sünde,
Sonst ergreifet dich ihr Gift.
Laß dich nicht den Satan blenden;
Denn die Gottes Ehre schänden,
Trifft ein Fluch, der tödlich ist.*

Stand steadfast against transgression, or its poison will
seize thee. Be thou not blinded by Satan, for to
dishonor God's glory brings a curse of fatal doom.

2 2. RECITATIVE (Countertenor, Bc.)

*Die Art verruchter Sünden
Ist zwar von außen wunderschön,
Allein man muß
Hernach mit Kummer und Verdruß
Viel Ungemach empfinden.
Von außen ist sie Gold;
Doch will man weiter gehn,
So zeigt sich nur ein leerer Schatten
Und übertünchtes Grab.
Sie ist den Sodomsäpfeln gleich,
Und die sich mit derselben gatten,
Gelingen nicht in Gottes Reich.
Sie ist als wie ein scharfes Schwert,
Das uns durch Leib und Seele fährt.*

The shape of vile transgression in truth is outwardly wondrous fair; but yet one must receive with sorrow and dismay much toil and woe thereafter. The outside is pure gold, but, should one look within, appears nought but an empty shadow and whited sepulchre. It is like Sodom's apple, and those who are united with it shall never reach God's heavenly realm. It is like a sharpened sword which pierces our soul and body.

3 3. ARIA (Countertenor, Strings, Bc.)

*Wer Sünde tut, der ist vom Teufel,
Denn dieser hat sie aufgebracht;
Doch wenn man ihren schnöden Banden
Mit rechter Andacht widerstanden,
Hat sie sich gleich davongemacht.*

Who commits sin is of the devil, for it was he who brought it forth; but if one stands steadfast against its haughty fetters with true devotion, it shall take flight from here at once.

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Ich habe genug

BWV 82

Bass, Oboe, Strings and Basso Continuo

4 1. ARIA (Bass, Oboe, Strings, Bc.)

*Ich habe genug,
Ich habe den Heiland, das Hoffen der Frommen,
Auf meine begierigen Arme genommen;
Ich habe genug!
Ich hab ihn erblickt,
Mein Glaube hat Jesum ans Herze gedrückt;
Nun wünsch ich, noch heute mit Freuden
Von hinnen zu scheiden.*

I have enough, I have my Savior, the hope of the faithful within my desiring embrace now enfolded; I have enough! On Him have I gazed, my faith now hath impressed Jesus on my heart; I would now, today with gladness make hence my departure.

5 2. RECITATIVE (Bass, Bc.)

*Ich habe genug.
Mein Trost ist nur allein,
Daß Jesu mein und ich sein eigen möchte sein.
Im Glauben halt ich ihn,
Da seh ich auch, mit Simeon
Die Freude jenes Lebens schon.
Laßt uns mit diesem Manne ziehn!
Ach, möchte mich von meines Liebes Ketten
Der Herr erretten.
Ach! wäre doch mein Abschied hier,
Mit Freuden sagt ich, Welt, zu dir:
Ich habe genug.*

I have enough. My hope is thee alone, that Jesus might belong to me and I to Him. In faith I hold to Him, for I, too, see with Simeon the gladness of that life beyond. Let us join in this man's burden! Ah! Would that from the bondage of my body the Lord might free me. Ah! My departure, were it here, with joy I'd say to thee, O world: I have enough.

6 3. ARIA (Bass, Strings, Bc.)

*Schlummert ein, ihr matten Augen,
Fallet sanft und selig zu!
Welt, ich bleibe nicht mehr hier,
Hab ich doch kein Teil an dir,
Das der Seele könnte taugen.
Hier muß ich das Elend bauen,
Aber dort, dort werd ich schauen
Süßen Frieden, stille Ruh.*

Slumber now, ye eyes so weary, fall in soft and calm repose! World, I dwell no longer here, since I have no share in thee which my soul could offer comfort. Here I must reckon with sorrow, but yet, there, I shall witness sweet repose and quiet rest.

7 4. RECITATIVE (Bass, Bc.)

*Mein Gott, wenn kömmt das schöne: Nun!
Da ich im Friede fahren werde
Und in dem Sande kühler Erde
Und dort bei dir im Schoße ruhn?
Der Abschied ist gemacht,
Welt, gute Nacht!*

My God! When comes that blessed "Now!" when I in peace shall walk forever in the sand of earth's own coolness and there within thy bosom rest? My parting is achieved, O world, good night!

8 5. ARIA (Bass, Oboe, Strings, Bc.)

*Ich freue mich auf meinen Tod,
Ach hätt' er sich schon eingefunden.
Da entkomm ich aller Not,
Die mich noch auf der Welt gebunden.*

Rejoicing do I greet my death, ah, would that it had come already. I'll escape then all the woe which doth confine me here in the world.

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Ich armer Mensch, ich Sündenknecht
BWV 55

Tenor, Chorus, Flute, Oboe, Strings and Basso Continuo

9 1. ARIA (Tenor, Flute, Oboe, Strings and Bc.)

*Ich armer Mensch, ich Sündenknecht,
Ich geh vor Gottes Angesichte
Mit Furcht und Zittern zum Gerichte.
Er ist gerecht, ich ungerecht.
Ich armer Mensch, ich Sündenknecht!*

I, wretched man, I, slave to sin, I go before God's very
presence with fear and trembling unto judgment. Ever
just is He, unjust am I, I, wretched man, I, slave to sin!

10 2. RECITATIVE (Tenor, Bc.)

*Ich habe wider Gott gehandelt
Und bin demselben Pfad,
Den er mir vorgeschrieben hat,
Nicht nachgewandelt.
Wohin? soll ich der Morgenröte Flügel
Zu meiner Flucht erkiesen,
Die mich zum letzten Meere wiesen,
So wird mich doch die Hand des Allerhöchsten finden
Und mir die Sündenrute binden.
Ach ja!
Wenn gleich die Höll ein Bette
Für mich und meine Sünden hätte,
So wäre doch der Grimm des Höchsten da.
Die Erde schützt mich nicht,
Sie droht mich Scheusal zu verschlingen;
Und will ich mich zum Himmel schwingen,
Da wohnt Gott, der mir das Urteil spricht.*

I have offended against my god and have not traveled
steadfast upon the path which he did once prescribe for
me. Where now? Should I elect now the rosy morning's
pinions for this my flight, to take me to the ocean's
limits, yet even still would the hand of God Almighty
find me and chastise me with the rods of sin. Ah yes!
If even hell could make ready a bed for me and all my
sins, yet would indeed the wrath of God be there. The
earth protects me not, it threatens to swallow wicked
me; and I would lift myself to heaven, where God doth
dwell, who shall tell my judgement.

11 3. ARIA (Tenor, Flute, Bc.)

*Erbarne dich!
Laß die Tränen dich erweichen,
Laß sie dir zu Herzen reichen;
Laß um Jesu Christi willen
Deinen Zorn des Eifers stillen!
Erbarne dich!*

Have mercy, Lord! Let my tears now make thee soften, let
them reach into thy bosom; let for Jesus Christ's own glory
all thy zealous wrath grow calm now! Have mercy, Lord!

12 4. RECITATIVE (Tenor, Bc.)

*Erbarne dich!
Jedoch nun
Tröst ich mich,
Ich will nicht für Gerichte stehen
Und lieber vor dem Gnadenthron
Zu meinem frommen Vater gehen.
Ich halt ihm seinen Sohn,
Sein Leiden, sein Erlösen für,
Wie er für meine Schuld
Bezahlet und genug getan,
Und bitt ihn um Geduld,
Hinfüro will ichs nicht mehr tun.
So nimmt mich Gott zu Gnaden wieder an.*

Have mercy, Lord! However, I now hope that I'll not stand
before His judgement, but rather venture to the throne
of grace of this my righteous Father. I'll offer Him His
Son, His passion, His redemption then, how He hath all
repaid sufficiently for my sin, and beg Him to forbear,
henceforth will I my sin forswear. Thus take me God
into Thy grace again.

13 5. CHORALE (Chorus, Flute, Oboe, Strings, and Bc.)

*Bin ich gleich von dir gewichen,
Stell ich mich doch wieder ein;
Hat uns doch dein Sohn verglichen
Durch sein Angst und Todespein.
Ich verleugne nicht die Schuld,
Aber deine Gnad und Huld
Ist viel größer als die Sünde,
Die ich stets in mir befinde.*

Though I now from Thee have fallen, I will come to Thee
again; for now hath Thy Son redeemed us through His
fear and pain of death. I do not deny my guilt, but Thy
mercy and Thy grace are much greater than my sins
are, which I ever find within me.

Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen
BWV 51

Soprano, Trumpet, Strings and Basso Continuo

14 1. ARIA (Soprano, Trumpet, Strings, Bc.)

*Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen!
Was der Himmel und die Welt
An Geschöpfen in sich hält,
Müssen dessen Ruhm erhöhen,
Und wir wollen unserm Gott
Gleichfalls itzt ein Opfer bringen,
Daß er uns in Kreuz und Not
Allezeit hat beigestanden.*

Praise ye God in every nation! All that heav-en and the world of created order hold must be now his fame exalting, and we would to this our God likewise now present an offering for that he midst cross and woe always hath stood close beside us.

15 2. RECITATIVE (Soprano, Strings, Bc.)

*Wir beten zu dem Tempel an,
Da Gottes Ehre wohnt,
Da dessen Treu,
So täglich neu,
Mit lauter Segen lohnet.
Wir preisen, was er an uns hat getan.
Muß gleich der schwache Mund von seinen Wundern lallen,
So kann ein schlechtes Lob ihm dennoch wohlgefallen.*

In prayer we now thy temple face, where God's own honor dwelleth, where his good faith, each day renewed, the purest bliss dispenseth. We praise him for what he for us hath done. Although our feeble voice before his wonders stammers, perhaps even modest praise to him will yet bring pleasure.

16 3. ARIA (Soprano, Bc.)

*Höchster, mache deine Güte
Ferner alle Morgen neu.
So soll vor die Vatertru
Auch ein dankbares Gemüte
Durch ein frommes Leben weisen,
Daß wir deine Kinder heißen.*

Highest, make thy gracious goodness hence-forth every morning new. Thus before thy father's love should as well the grateful spirit through a righteous life show plainly that we are thy children truly.

17 4. CHORALE (Soprano, Violins, Bc.)

*Sei Lob und Preis mit Ehren
Gott Vater, Sohn, Heiligem Geist!
Der woll in uns vermehren,
Was er uns aus Gnaden verheißt,
Daß wir ihm fest vertrauen,
Gänzlich verlass'n auf ihn,
Von Herzen auf ihn bauen,
Daß uns'r Herz, Mut und Sinn
Ihm festiglich anhangen;
Drauf singen wir zur Stund:
Amen, wir werdn's erlangen,
Glaub'n wir aus Herzensgrund.*

Now laud and praise with honor God Father, Son, and Holy Ghost! May he in us make increase what he us with grace hast pledged, so that we firmly trust him, entirely turn to him, make him our true foundation, that our heart, mind and will steadfast to him be cleaving; to this we sing here now: Amen, we shall achieve it, this is our heart's firm faith!

ARIA (Soprano, Trumpet, Strings, Bc.)

Alleluja!

Alleluja!

THE INSTRUMENTS

VIOLIN: Jean Robert Chibon, France, 1779; Sebastian Klotz, Mittenwald, 1737; Santo Seraphim, Venice, circa 1720; Aegidius Klotz, Mittenwald, circa 1780; Rowland Ross (copy of Stradivarius), England, 1989; Rowland Ross (after Amati), England, 1989; Joseph Kriner, Mittenwald, circa 1770; Michael G. Fischer (copy of Amati 1688), Los Angeles, 1984; Anonymous, England, late 17th century; Anonymous, Germany, 18th century.

VIOLA: Matthias Albani, Bolzano, Tyrol, 1687; Frederick Haenel, 1950; Aegidius

Kloz, Mittenwald, 1790; Matthieu J. R. Besseling (Stradivarius tenor viola, circa 1690), Amsterdam, 1983.

VIOLONCELLO: Giovanni Grancino, Milan, Italy, 1725; Anonymous, England, 18th Century.

VIOLONE: Hammond Ashley Luthiers (after 17th century models), Seattle, Washington, US, 1977.

FLUTE: Volkens & Powell (after T. Lot, circa 1737).

OBOE: H. A. Vas Dias (after Thomas Stanesby, Sr.), US.

BASSOON: Peter de Koningh (copy of Prudent, 1760), 1979; Philip Levin (copy of Eichentopf, circa 1725), US, 1989.

TRUMPET: David Edwards (after John Harris, London, 1715), England, 1990.

ORGAN: Gerrit C. Klop, Holland, 1989; Greg Harrold, Los Angeles, California, US, 1981.

HARPSICHORD: Willard Martin (after Andreas Ruckers, 1640), US, 1989.

ARCHLUTE: Reid Galbraith (after J. C. Hoffmann, circa 1714).

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES ARE AVAILABLE ONLINE AT:

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