

WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 25 April 2024
7.30pm

Vox Luminis at St James's, Spanish Place JS Bach: Weimar Cantatas

Vox Luminis

Zsuzsanna Tóth soprano

Viola Blache soprano

Alexander Chance alto

Christopher Fischer tenor

Florian Sievers tenor

Felix Schwandtke bass

Lionel Meunier artistic

director, bass

Tuomo Suni violin, viola

Johannes Frisch violin, viola

Antina Hugosson viola

Wendy Ruymen viola

Octavie Dostaler-Lalonde cello

Jasu Moio oboe

Julien Martin recorder

Marine Sablonnière recorder

Anais Ramage bassoon

Marc Meisel organ

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Himmelskönig, sei willkommen BWV182 (1714)

Gleichwie der Regen und Schnee vom Himmel fällt
BWV18 (c.1713-5, rev. 1724)

Interval

Komm, du süsse Todesstunde BWV161 (1716)
Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen BWV12 (1714)



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Uncertainty surrounds *Himmelskönig, sei willkommen* BWV182. The *Neue Bach-Ausgabe* attests to at least six performances – three in Weimar and three in Leipzig – during Bach's lifetime. The **première** likely took place in Weimar on 25 March 1714, three weeks after the appointment of Bach as *Konzertmeister* was announced. The rest is muddy. Most scholars agree that the cantata was re-performed in Leipzig on 25 March 1724, which was the Feast of Annunciation. Bach gradually transformed the chamber-music-like conception of the cantata into a richly scored work: *ripieno* violins took over the entire violin part, an oboe doubled the violins, a new violin part doubled the recorder, and the continuo group became bolstered by violone (as well as the oboe substituting the concertante violin in the instrumental *Sonata*).

There's a hushed secrecy to how it begins. Against a pizzicato backdrop, the soloists trade short melodic figures, a dialogue that conjures a sense of inquisitiveness. The rhythmic profile of the writing gestures towards the French overture; yet there's none of the usual pomp. Indeed, in all versions of the *Sonata*, Bach employs the quietest instrument in the orchestra: the recorder. Are we to think of the dove, that image of the Holy Spirit, as it descended on Mary at the Annunciation? Is this the soundtrack to miraculous conception? The text of the first chorus describes a welcome to the King of Heaven and implores him to 'enter in' and dwell in their hearts. Yet it sounds more like we have been welcomed to heaven! Canonic imitation between the voices, embroidered by flutterings of semiquavers in the violins and recorder, create a splendid soundworld.

After a short recitative follows an unbroken sequence of three arias. The bass soloist describes the power of divine love, accompanied by flickering strings (are these trills the flames of Jesus's love?); an alto aria with obbligato recorder – strange intervallic leaps and deceptive ends of phrases encourage us to listen closer; and a tenor aria which Alfred Dürr praised for its 'expressive gestures'. Then an unexpected fugal chorale fantasia which recalls the 17th Century motet style. The sopranos in *cantus firmus*, supported by recorder and violin, quote a melody by Melchior Vulpinus of 1609. The overall effect is of glowing warmth. The short *da capo* chorus that closes this 'welcoming' cantata foregrounds joyful dance in spiralling phrases and smiling counterpoint that loop through the cycle of fifths.

The libretto for Bach's Sexagesima (the second Sunday before Lent) cantata, *Gleichwie der Regen und Schnee vom Himmel fällt* BWV18, opens with Isaiah 55:10–13. This passage likens God's Word to rain and snow that 'waters the earth, and makes it fruitful and growing, so that it may give seed to sow and bread to eat'. The tenor's recitative deals with the parable more explicitly as he presents his heart to God as a field.

It is therefore no surprise that propagative properties have been picked up in analyses of the music. In Michael Maul's interpretation of the *Sinfonia*, music grows like wheat: 'the motive – these are the seeds – and in the episodes where the motive is always spun differently, there the seed sprouts'. For John Eliot Gardiner, it is timbre that evokes the

agricultural theme: the scoring of four violas creates a texture of 'warm topsoil, fertile and well irrigated'. Read in this way, Bach's cantata engaged listeners with life outside the city walls, as well as reminding them about the 'soil' of their hearts in which God's Word was to be planted and brought to fruition. Music was, of course, a vital tool in this agriculture of the heart.

Komm, du süsse Todesstunde BWV161 was probably first performed on 27 September 1716. Though the libretto was taken from the Weimar court poet Salomon Franck's collection *Evangelisches Andachts-Opffer* published in 1715, the cantata's performance had to wait due to a six-month period of public mourning in the Duchy of Weimar. Bach re-performed the cantata in Leipzig between 1737 and 1746 with minor alterations.

The alto soloist is caressed by a pair of recorders (which in the Leipzig version Bach recast for transverse flutes and violins). It's a timbral scoring that might remind listeners of *Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit* BWV106. The pair of recorders here conjure that similar fragility for the 'sweet hour of death'. The chorale melody – a verse from the hymn *Herzlich tut mich verlangen* by Christoph Knoll (1611) – is played by the organ (though at the Leipzig performances of the cantata, the chorale was probably sung by a soprano). When the following tenor recitative unexpectedly blossoms, with rolling cello patterns that unlock our feet from stable ground, we understand the eschatological green pastures as the transformation of recitative into desiring arioso. The recorders return for the alto recitative. At first, this is some kind of lullaby, albeit a declamatory one ('Welt, gute Nacht!'). And then, the most extraordinary transformation: the recorders take us, God's sheep, through the pastoral landscape to become the ticking of time.

Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen BWV12 was first heard on 22 April 1714. Its opening *Sinfonia* feels like it's been snatched from a slow movement of an oboe concerto – the written-out embellishments are a stunning example of Bach's manipulation of the Italian style. The opening chorus is a song of lamentation (the A section of which Bach later arranged as the *Crucifixus* of the B Minor Mass). The sopranos, over a chromatic instrumental bass repeated 12 times, begin with a *Seufzermotiv* – an appoggiatura or 'sigh figure'. Given 18th Century performance practice, the long note of Bach's suspension was likely to have been shaped with a *messa di voce*; in other words, like a lone waterdrop, it grew in plumpness inevitably to give way to gravity. The sighs cascade through the choir, downwards from soprano to bass. There is thus the sensation that Bach's music did not merely represent tears with motivic shapes, but also enacted the kind of contagiousness ascribed to weeping in 18th Century Europe – the crying of the individual morphs into the sobbing trauma of the collective.

The final chorale, the last stanza of Samuel Rodigast's *Was Gott tut, das ist wohlgetan* (1674), is notable for its instrumental obbligato part. This part, which was probably intended for the first violins, is often performed on the oboe or the 'tromba' (though what this precisely means is squabbled over by Bach scholars to this day).

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Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Himmelskönig, sei willkommen BWV182

(1714)

*Liturgical text, Salomon
Franck, Paul Stockmann*

Sonata

Coro

Himmelskönig, sei
willkommen,
Lass auch uns dein Zion sein!

Komm herein,
Du hast uns das Herz
genommen.

Recitativo

Siehe, ich komme, im Buch
ist von mir geschrieben;
deinen Willen, mein Gott,
tu ich gerne.

Aria

Starkes Lieben,
Das dich, grosser
Gottessohn,
Von dem Thron
Deiner Herrlichkeit
getrieben,
Dass du dich zum Heil der
Welt
Als ein Opfer vorgestellt,
Dass du dich mit Blut
verschrieben.

Aria

Leget euch dem Heiland
unter,
Herzen, die ihr christlich
seid!
Tragt ein unbeflecktes
Kleid
Eures Glaubens ihm
entgegen,
Leib und Leben und
Vermögen
Sei dem König itzt
geweiht.

Aria

Jesu, lass durch Wohl und
Weh
Mich auch mit dir ziehen!
Schreit die Welt nur
'Kreuzige!'
So lass mich nicht fliehen,
Herr, von deinem
Kreuzpanier;

King of Heaven, thou art welcome

Sonata

Chorus

King of heaven, thou art
welcome,
let us also be thy
Zion!

Enter in,
thou hast won our
hearts.

Recitative

Lo, I come: in the volume
of the book it is written
of me, I delight to do
thy will, O my God.

Aria

It is your mighty love,
O great Son of
God,
that has driven thee
from the throne of thy
majesty,
and made thee offer
thyself as a sacrifice,
to save the world,
and make a covenant
with thy blood.

Aria

Prostrate yourselves
before the Saviour,
hearts of all
Christians!
Clothe yourselves in a
spotless robe
of your faith, and go out
to meet him,
may your body, your life
and possessions
be dedicated now to the
King.

Aria

Jesus, let me follow
thee
through weal and woe!
Though the world shout
'Crucify!'
let me not abandon, Lord,
the banner of thy
cross;

Kron und Palmen find
ich hier.

Choral

Jesu, deine Passion
Ist mir lauter Freude,
Deine Wunden, Kron
und Hohn
Meines Herzens Weide;
Meine Seel auf Rosen geht,
Wenn ich dran gedenke,
In dem Himmel eine Stätt
Uns deswegen schenke.

Coro

So lasset uns gehen in Salem
der Freuden,
Begleitet den König in
Lieben und Leiden.
Er gehet voran
Und öffnet die Bahn.

Gleichwie der Regen und Schnee vom Himmel fällt BWV18

(c.1713-5, rev. 1724)

*Liturgical text, Erdmann
Neumeister, Lazarus
Spengler*

Sinfonia

Recitativo

*Gleichwie der Regen und
Schnee vom Himmel fällt
und nicht wieder dahin
kommt,
Sondern fruchtet die Erde
und macht sie fruchtbar
und wachsend,
Dass sie gibt Samen zu säen
und Brot zu
essen:
Also soll das Wort, so aus
meinem Munde gehet,
auch sein;
Es soll nicht wieder zu mir
leer kommen,
sondern tun, das mir
gefället,
Und soll ihm gelingen, dazu
ich's sende.*

crown and palm shall I
find here.

Chorale

Jesus, thy passion
is unalloyed joy to me,
thy wounds, thy crown
and scorn
are my heart's pasture;
my soul walks on roses,
when I think of this:
that thou dost prepare
a place in Heaven for us.

Chorus

Let us thus enter joyful
Salem,
attend the King in love
and sorrow.
He leads the way
and prepares the path.

For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven

Sinfonia

Recitative

*For as the rain cometh
down, and the snow
from heaven, and
returneth not thither,
but watereth the earth,
and maketh it bring
forth and bud,
that it may give seed to
the sower, and bread to
the eater:
so shall my word be that
goeth forth out of my
mouth:
it shall not return unto me
void, but it shall
accomplish that which I
please,
and it shall prosper in the
thing whereto I sent it.*

Song continues overleaf. Please turn the page as quietly as possible.

<i>Recitativo e Litania</i>	<i>Recitative and Chorale (Litany)</i>
Mein Gott, hier wird mein Herze sein, Ich öffne dir's in meines Jesu Namen: So ströme deinen Samen als in ein gutes Land hinein. Mein Gott, hier wird mein Herze sein, Lass solches Frucht und hundertfältig bringen. O Herr, hilf! O Herr, lass wohl gelingen. Du wolltest deinen Geist und Kraft zum Worte geben. Erhör uns, lieber Herre Gott!	My God, here shall my heart abide: I open it to thee in Jesus's name; so scatter thy seed, as if on fertile land. My god, here shall my heart abide: let it bring forth fruit a hundredfold. O Lord, Lord, help! O Lord, let it prosper! Mayest thou add thy spirit and power to the Word. Hear us, dear Lord!
Nun wehre, treuer Vater wehre, Dass mich und keinen Christen nicht des Teufels Trug verkehre. Sein Sinn ist ganz dahin gericht, Uns deines Rats zu berauben mit aller Seligkeit. Den Satan unter unsre Füsse treten. Erhör uns, lieber Herre Gott!	Prevent, faithful father, prevent the devil's guile from turning me and any Christian away from thee. That is his sole intention, to deprive us of thy word and of all happiness. May Satan be trodden beneath our feet. Hear us, dear Lord!
Ach! Viel' verleugnen Wort und Glauben und fallen ab wie faules Obst, Wenn sie Verfolgung sollen leiden. So stürzen sie in ewig Herzeleid, Da sie ein zeitlich Weh vermeiden. Und uns für des Türken und des Pabst' grausamen Mord und Lästerungen, Wüten und Toben Väterlich behüten; erhör uns, lieber Herre Gott!	Ah! many renounce both Word and faith and fall away like rotting fruit, when they suffer persecution, and so they are plunged into lasting grief for avoiding earthly woe. And from the Turk's and the Papist's cruel murder and blaspheming, raging and fury, fatherlike protect us. Hear us, dear Lord!
Ein Andrer sorgt nur für den Bauch; inzwischen wird der Seele ganz vergessen. Der Mammon auch hat Vieler Herz besessen. So kann das Wort zu keiner Kraft gelangen.	Another man may only tend his belly; his soul meanwhile is quite forgotten; and Mammon too has possessed the heart of many. The Word, therefore, cannot increase in strength.

Und wie viel Seelen hält die Wollust nicht gefangen! So verführet sie die Welt, Die ihnen muss anstatt des Himmels stehen, Darüber sie vom Himmel irregehen. Alle Irrige und Verführte wiederbringen. Erhör' uns, lieber Herre Gott!	And how many souls are held captive by lasciviousness? The world leads them so astray, the world, which replaces heaven for them, so that they wander far from heaven. Bring back all who have been led astray. Hear us, dear Lord!
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<i>Aria</i> Mein Seelenschatz ist Gottes Wort; Ausserdem sind alle schätze solche Netze, Welche Welt und Satan stricken, Schnöde Seelen zu berücken. Fort mit allen, fort, nur fort! Mein Seelenschatz ist Gottes Wort.	<i>Aria</i> My soul's true treasure is God's Word; all other treasures are mere snares, set by the world and Satan, to bewitch contemptible souls. Away with them all, away, away! My soul's true treasure is God's Word.
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<i>Choral</i> Ich bitt, o Herr, aus Herzens Grund, Du wollst nicht von mir nehmen Dein heil'ges Wort aus meinem Mund; So wird mich nicht beschämen Mein Sünd und Schuld, denn in dein Huld Setz' ich all mein Vertrauen: Wer sich nur fest darauf verlässt, Der wird den Tod nicht schauen.	<i>Chorale</i> I bid thee, Lord, from the depths of my heart, do not take thy holy Word away from my mouth; my sin and guilt will not then shame me, for in thy care I place all my trust: he who truly trusts in that shall never look on death.
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Interval

**Komm, du süsse
Todesstunde BWV161**
(1716)
*Salomo Franck, Christoph
Knoll*

Aria con choral
Komm, du süsse
Todesstunde,
Da mein Geist
Honig speist
Aus des Löwen Munde;

**Come, O sweet hour
of death**

Aria with chorale
Come, O sweet hour of
death,
when my spirit
feeds on honey
from the lion's mouth;

Mache meinen Abschied süsse, Säume nicht, Letztes Licht, Dass ich meinen Heiland küsse.	make my departure sweet, do not delay, O my last light, the moment when I shall kiss my Saviour.
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<i>Recitativo</i>	<i>Recitative</i>
Welt, deine Lust ist Last, Dein Zucker ist mir als ein Gift verhasst, Dein Freudenlicht Ist mein Komete, Und wo man deine Rosen bricht, Sind Dornen ohne Zahl Zu meiner Seele Qual. Der blasse Tod ist meine Morgenröte, Mit solcher geht mir auf die Sonne Der Herrlichkeit und Himmelswonne. Drum seufz ich recht von Herzengrunde Nur nach der letzten Todesstunde. Ich habe Lust, bei Christo bald zu weiden, Ich habe Lust, von dieser Welt zu scheiden.	World, your delights weigh heavily, your sweetness is loathsome to me as poison, your light of joy is my comet, leading me astray; and where your roses are picked, are thorns without number to torment my soul. Pale death is my dawn, with it the sun of splendour and heavenly rapture rises for me. And so I sigh from the depth of my heart for nothing but my final hour. I long soon to feed with Christ, I long to depart from this world.

<i>Aria</i>	<i>Aria</i>
Mein Verlangen Ist, den Heiland zu umfassen Und bei Christo bald zu sein. Ob ich sterblich' Asch und Erde Durch den Tod zermalmet werde, Wird der Seele reiner Schein Dennoch gleich den Engeln prangen.	My desire is to embrace the Saviour and soon to be with Christ. Though death crushes me as mortal earth and ashes, the pure gleam of my soul will shine like the angels' glory.

<i>Recitativo</i>	<i>Recitative</i>
Der Schluss ist schon gemacht, Welt, gute Nacht! Und kann ich nur den Trost erwerben, In Jesu Armen bald zu sterben: Er ist mein sanfter Schlaf. Das kühle Grab wird mich mit Rosen decken,	The decision is already made, world, good night! And my only comfort is that soon I shall die in the arms of Jesus: he is my gentle sleep. The cool grave shall cover me with roses

Bis Jesus mich wird auferwecken, Bis er sein Schaf Führt auf die süsse Lebensweide, Dass mich der Tod von ihm nicht scheide. So brich herein, du froher Todestag, So schlage doch, du letzter Stundenschlag!	till Jesus shall wake me again, till he leads his sheep onto life's sweet pasture, that death might not keep me from him. Close in, then, happy day of death, ring out, then, O final hour!
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<i>Coro</i>	<i>Chorus</i>
Wenn es meines Gottes Wille, Wünsch ich, dass des Leibes Last Heute noch die Erde fülle, Und der Geist, des Leibes Gast, Mit Unsterblichkeit sich kleide In der süssen Himmelsfreude. Jesu, komm und nimm mich fort! Dieses sei mein letztes Wort.	If it is my God's will, let the earth even today take the burden of my body. And let the spirit, the body's guest, dress in immortality in the sweet delight of heaven. Jesus, come and take me hence! Let this be my final word.

<i>Choral</i>	<i>Chorale</i>
Der Leib zwar in der Erden Von Würmen wird verzehrt, Doch auferweckt soll werden, Durch Christum schön verklärt, Wird leuchten als die Sonne Und leben ohne Not In himml'scher Freud und Wonne. Was schadt mir denn der Tod?	Though the body be consumed in the earth by worms, yet it shall be awakened and through Christ be transfigured, and shine like the sun and live without affliction in heavenly joy and rapture. How can death, then, harm me?

Please do not turn the page until the song and its accompaniment have ended

**Weinen, Klagen,
Sorgen, Zagen BWV12**

(1714)

Liturgical text, Salomo

Franck, Samuel Rodigast

Sinfonia

Coro

Weinen, Klagen,
Sorgen, Zagen,
Angst und Not
Sind der Christen
Tränenbrot,
Die das Zeichen Jesu
tragen.

Recitativo

*Wir müssen durch viel
Trübsal in das Reich
Gottes eingehen.*

Aria

Kreuz und Krone sind
verbunden,
Kampf und Kleinod sind
vereint.
Christen haben alle
Stunden
Ihre Qual und ihren
Feind,
Doch ihr Trost sind Christi
Wunden.

Aria

Ich folge Christo nach,
Von ihm will ich nicht lassen
Im wohl und Ungemach,
Im Leben und
Erblassen.
Ich küsse Christi Schmach,
Ich will sein Kreuz umfassen.
Ich folge Christo nach,
Von ihm will ich nicht lassen.

*Aria con
Choral*

Sei getreu, alle Pein
Wird doch nur ein Kleines
sein.
Nach dem Regen
Blüht der Segen,
Alles Wetter geht vorbei.
Sei getreu, sei
getreu!

Choral

Was Gott tut, das ist
wohlgetan,
Dabei will ich verbleiben,

**Weeping, wailing,
fretting, fearing**

Sinfonia

Chorus

Weeping, wailing,
fretting, fearing,
anxiety and distress
are the tearful bread of
Christians,
who bear the sign of
Jesus.

Recitative

*We must through much
tribulation enter into
the kingdom of God.*

Aria

Cross and crown are
bound together,
conflict and jewel are
united.
Christians have at every
hour
their torment and their
foe,
but Christ's wounds are
their comfort.

Aria

I shall follow after Christ,
I shall not abandon him
in well-being or hardship,
in life or at the hour of
death.
I kiss Christ's humiliation,
I shall embrace his cross.
I shall follow after Christ,
I shall not abandon him.

*Aria with instrumental
chorale*

Be steadfast, all affliction
will be but a
trifle.
After rain
blessings will bloom
and all storms pass over.
Be steadfast, be
steadfast!

Chorale

What God doth, is well
done,
to this I shall be constant,

Es mag mich auf die rauhe
Bahn
Not, Tod und Elend
treiben,
So wird Gott mich
Ganz väterlich
In seinen Armen halten:
Drum lass ich ihn nur
walten.

though I be cast onto the
rough road
by affliction, death and
misery,
God shall hold me
just like a father
in his arms:
that is why I let him
prevail.

*All translations by Richard Stokes from J S Bach: The Complete
Cantatas, published by Long Barn Books (Ebrington, Gloucestershire,
1999)*