

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 6 September 2021 7.30pm

London Handel Players

Adrian Butterfield director

Julia Doyle soprano

Tim Mead alto

Charles Daniels tenor

Edward Grint bass

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Non sa che sia dolore BWV209 (?1729)

Vereinigte Zwietracht der wechselnden Saiten BWV207 (1726)

Interval

Johann Sebastian Bach

Preise dein Glücke, gesegnetes Sachsen BWV215 (1734)

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Bach's secular cantatas were 'occasional' works; that is, pieces written for very specific events and festivities such as court and political tributes and celebrations of Leipzig individuals. The one-off nature of these pieces allowed him to give a new setting to some of his own existing music as well as compose new music which he could re-use in later works both secular and sacred. Composing secular vocal works gave him the chance to be more theatrical and light-hearted, and these works give us a glimpse of what might have been if the opportunity to write an opera had come his way.

Cantata 209, although it contains much beautiful music, is a slightly curious work. The text is, unusually for Bach, set in Italian. Moreover, it harbours a strange mixture of elegant and somewhat garbled language which fails to comply with the normal customs of aria writing and leads to the supposition that the music was originally written for a different text. The only surviving manuscript was written by an unknown copyist and has come down to us through Bach's biographer, Johann Nikolaus Forkel, who himself supplied both the composer's name and also the text. The fact that the work opens in one key and concludes in another is also surprising. The text seems to describe the departure of someone who was a native of Ansbach and it has been suggested that this work might have been intended to honour Bach's pupil Lorenz Christoph Mizler (originally from Ansbach) on his departure from Leipzig in 1734, though there is no firm evidence to support this.

The opening *Sinfonia* is quite substantial in length and the delicate string textures allow the solo flute to dominate. The brief initial accompanied recitative leads into a mournful first aria which contains much highly ornamental writing for solo flute as it weaves around the first violin and soprano lines. The second and final aria, however, is joyful and energetic, in a more galant style with some surprising harmonic twists such as the one that brings us to the subdominant before the *da capo*.

Cantata 207 was first performed on 11 December 1726 and written in honour of Gottlieb Kotte on his appointment as Professor of Law at Leipzig University. The text is by a Leipzig student, Heinrich Gottlieb

Schellhafer. The four singers are given allegorical titles: the soprano, Happiness; the alto, Gratitude; the tenor, Diligence; and the bass, Honour. This work has a subtitle of *dramma per musica*, a form in which Bach came closest to writing opera - yet the text has little in the way of narrative about it and is more concerned with encouraging the listener to follow the shining example of the honourable and diligent Professor Kotte!

Two celebratory choruses frame three arias (including one duet) and recitatives. Two movements contain significant self-borrowings from the third and fourth movements of Brandenburg Concerto No. 1 but with the F major music for horn transposed to the trumpet-friendly key of D major.

Cantata 215, performed on 5th October 1734, was composed in great haste due to the short notice given of a visit by Elector Augustus III and his family to Leipzig. Bach had sent the *Kyrie* and *Gloria* of what was to become the Mass in B minor to Augustus the previous year with a petition to be given the title of Kapellmeister from the Electoral Court of Dresden, and this occasion provided him with an opportunity to remind the Elector of his abilities. His wish was eventually granted in 1736.

The opening chorus employs music familiar to us from the *Osanna* of the Mass in B minor, and Bach may also have used it two years earlier for Augustus's father in a now lost cantata. This *dramma per musica* includes a 'rage' aria for bass which reminds us that Bach was familiar with current operatic forms. The soprano aria in B minor was reworked two months later for the *Christmas Oratorio*, and the work concludes with a celebratory chorus which is also connected with that joyous work.

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