

WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 7 December 2023
7.30pm

Bach 300

Solomon's Knot

Zoë Brookshaw soprano I
Clare Lloyd-Griffiths soprano I
Ciara Hendrick soprano II
Lucy Page soprano II
Kate Symonds-Joy alto
Michał Czerniawski alto
Thomas Herford tenor
Andrew Tortise tenor
Jonathan Sells artistic director,
bass
Alex Ashworth bass

George Clifford violin I, leader
Guy Button violin I
Gabriella Jones violin II
Rebecca Harris violin II
Joanne Miller viola
Sarah McMahon cello
Jan Zahourek double bass
Robert de Bree oboe, oboe
d'amore, recorder I
Nicola Barbagli oboe, oboe
d'amore, recorder II

Inga Maria Klaucke bassoon
Russell Gilmour trumpet I
William Russell trumpet II
Katie Hodges trumpet III
Anna Drysdale horn
Sarah Hatch timpani
James Johnstone organ,
harpsichord

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort BWV60 (1723)

Wachet! betet! betet! wachet! BWV70 (1723)

Interval

Magnificat in E flat BWV243a with Christmas
interpolations (1723)



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O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort BWV60 was first performed in Leipzig on 7 November 1723. On the folder containing the original performing parts, Bach described the work as a 'Dialogus'. This dialogue cantata contains two allegorical figures, Fear (*Furcht*) and Hope (*Hoffnung*) – they discuss the route to salvation. The shaping of a cantata around two voices is unusual – indeed, none of the movements employ a single vocal soloist.

We're plunged into a soundworld of anticipation. Even before the alto soloist has joined in, we might be able to predict the libretto: Fear's trembling of the heart is depicted by the repeated-note palpitations in the strings. The movement teems with illustrative details: a sustained pedal-note in the continuo represents 'Ewigkeit', and the tenor also has to contend with controlling his melismatic breath during what must feel like a small eternity on 'warte'.

Bach's characterisation of Fear and Hope is most clear in the first recitative. Hope's melodic writing is simple, and his large intervals seem to convey something of his positive stance. In contrast, Fear's melodies are angular with dissonance: turning to *arioso* for 'martert' ('tortures'), they slither in syncopation. Hope describes how God provides a way from the torments of temptation, carrying us on a melisma intertwined with the basso continuo.

Wachet! betet! betet! wachet! BWV70 was first performed two weeks later, on 21 November 1723. It is an adaptation of the Weimar cantata for the second Sunday of Advent of 1716 (BWV70a). Leipzig, however, observed *tempus clausum* during Advent. Bach's repurposing of the Weimar cantata for the 26th Sunday after Trinity – whose readings shared liturgical themes – is grounded in this set of circumstances. Bach expanded the cantata to include recitatives, as well as an additional chorale; he also added trumpet and oboe.

The opening movement sets the stakes for this impressive two-part cantata. It was seemingly the first time Bach had tried out the compositional technique of choral insertion in large scale. As Alfred Dürr remarked, the chorale insertion within the reprise of expanded sections of the orchestral *ritornello* gives rise to a 'form of alternation, rich in tension'. There's a thrilling immediacy to the colour of the ensemble, too: the trumpet conjures a sense of warning, and its fanfares and trilling sirens rouse an alertness among the other musicians. Of course, the timbre alludes to the end times – what will happen when the 'trumpet shall sound' for real?

Terror, simply put. The second movement is more an earthquake than an accompanied recitative. More earthly snares are brought to bear in the aria for soprano and strings: the violins scorn the soloist in rattling motives – representations of the 'tongues of mockers' – and the sudden entries and scalic disappearances of the unison obbligato create an unpredictability to the exchange. Part I closes with the last verse of the hymn *Freu dich sehr, o meine Seele* (Freiburg, 1620).

Part II brings more melodic and dance-like music. But the final recitative and aria bring the two affective

aspects of Judgement – terror and joy – into close contact. The trumpet intones the chorale 'Es ist gewisslich an der Zeit' in extraordinary temporal superimposition. The *arioso* conclusion then brings the bliss we've been promised: an extensive melisma on 'joy' (*Freuden*) unravels into the following aria, an exploration of tranquil refreshment. Through this slow-moving, open expanse created by the solo bass and continuo, we move towards a place with no more earthly pain; but first, the 'sound and crack' of the last stroke (*Schalle, knalle, letzter Schlag*). A seven-part chorale closes the cantata in appropriate grandeur.

James Halliday writes that given the extraordinary choral and instrumental writing in Bach's *Magnificat in E flat* BWV243a, the Kantor must have worked hard to gather such a virtuosic group of singers and players. He also notes Bach's unimaginably heavy workload at this time of year. The *Magnificat* reflects how Bach composed incredible music in spite of – perhaps even as a result of – these pressures. It was composed for Bach's first Christmas Day in Leipzig, and so predates the more familiar D major, revised version BWV243. The setting of the Virgin Mary's song is interspersed with texts by Martin Luther and from Luke's Gospel. Additional Christmas texts, including three carols and a *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*, were interpolated between the verses of this work.

Most obvious is Bach's playing with different colours and musical imagery. The choir enters with musical laughter – rhetoric which is later drawn upon by the trilling trumpets. Even within the enveloping polyphony, there are moments of intricate detail: a pair of flutes momentarily emerge, as if to grab air. It's a celebration of all human life – grand and small.

Reflective verses of the *Vespers* are assigned to the soloists. In the 'Et misericordia', a duet for alto and tenor – the opening of the *St Matthew Passion* distilled into domestic drama, perhaps – the flutes shadow the violins with the fragility of pious fear. In 'Suscepit Israel', Bach gives the oboes a plainsong melody – the melody Mozart would go on to use in the 'Lux Aeterna' of his *Requiem* – against which the alto and soprano soloists weave mournful lines.

But there are aspects of boyish transgression, too. Bach's interest in genealogy is all too apparent in 'Omnes generationes', a vigorous fugal chorus. In two separate sections, Bach arranges the fugal entries in a stepwise ascending pattern. Each vocal part imitates the last, at a regular distance of two beats, and one degree of the scale higher. These fugal entries, each superseding the last, cover the range of an entire octave – twice; it's like a huge family tree painted in sound. But my favourite musical pun is Bach's final trick. As the doxology closes 'as it was in the beginning', Bach treats us to a condensed recapitulation of the opening movement. A move that's as fresh and brilliant as it was 300 years ago.

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Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort BWV60

(1723)

*Liturgical text, Johann Rist,
Franz Joachim Burmeister
and Anonymous*

Choral ed Aria (Duetto)

Furcht

O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort,

O Schwert, das durch die
Seele bohrt,

O Anfang sonder Ende!

O Ewigkeit, Zeit ohne Zeit,

Ich weiss vor grosser
Traurigkeit

Nicht, wo ich mich hinwende.

Mein ganz erschrocknes
Herze bebt

Dass mir die Zung am
Gaumen klebt.

Hoffnung

Herr, ich warte auf dein
Heil.

Recitativo (Dialogo)

Furcht

O schwerer Gang zum
letzten Kampf und Streite!

Hoffnung

Mein Beistand ist schon da,

Mein Heiland steht mir ja

Mit Trost zur Seite.

Furcht

Die Todesangst, der letzte
Schmerz

Ereilt und überfällt mein
Herz

Und martert diese Glieder.

Hoffnung

Ich lege diesen Leib vor Gott
zum Opfer nieder.

Ist gleich der Trübsal Feuer
heiss.

Genung, es reinigt mich zu
Gottes Preis.

Furcht

Doch nun wird sich der
Sünden grosse Schuld vor
mein Gesichte stellen.

Hoffnung

Gott wird deswegen doch
kein Todesurteil fällen.

Eternity, O word of thunder

Chorale and Aria (Duet)

Fear

Eternity, O word of thunder,

O sword, that pierces our
soul,

O beginning with no ending!

O eternity, O timeless time,

with my great grief, I do
not know

which way I should turn;

my terrified heart quakes
so,

that my tongue cleaves to
my gums.

Hope

Lord, I wait for thy
salvation.

Recitative (Dialogue)

Fear

O arduous path to the final
combat and struggle!

Hope

My help is at hand,

for my Saviour is at my side,

bringing consolation!

Fear

The feat of death, the
final pain

overtakes and
overwhelms my heart

and tortures my limbs.

Hope

I sacrifice my body before
the Lord.

And though affliction's
fire may fiercely blaze,

enough! It purifies me to
God's own praise.

Fear

But now I shall see my
sins' great guilt process
before my eyes.

Hope

God will on that account not
sentence you to death.

Er gibt ein Ende den
Versuchungsplagen,
Dass man sie kann ertragen.

Aria (Duetto)

Furcht

Mein letztes Lager will mich
schrecken,

Hoffnung

Mich wird des Heilands Hand
bedecken,

Furcht

Des Glaubens Schwachheit
sinket fast,

Hoffnung

Mein Jesus trägt mit mir die
Last.

Furcht

Das offene Grab sieht greulich
aus,

Hoffnung

Es wird mir doch ein
Friedenshaus.

Recitativo ed Arioso

Furcht

Der Tod bleibt doch der
menschlichen Natur verhasst

Und reisset fast

Die Hoffnung ganz zu Boden.

Christus

Selig sind die Toten;

Furcht

Ah! aber ach, wieviel Gefahr

Stellt sich der Seele dar,

Den Sterbeweg zu gehen!

Vielleicht wird ihr der
Höllensachen

Den Tod erschrecklich
machen,

Wenn er sie zu verschlingen
sucht;

Vielleicht ist sie bereits
verflucht

Zum ewigen Verderben.

Christus

Selig sind die Toten, die in
dem Herren sterben;

He will put an end to
temptations' torments,
that we may endure them.

Aria (Duet)

Fear

My final resting place will
frighten me,

Hope

The Saviour's hand will
protect me,

Fear

My faith is weak and
falters,

Hope

My Jesus bears the
burden with me.

Fear

The open grave fills me
with horror,

Hope

It will become for me a
house of peace.

Recitative and Arioso

Fear

Death is detested by
every mortal,

and almost drags

hope into the depths.

Christ

Blessed are the dead;

Fear

Ah! But alas! What danger

will the soul have to face

on the journey to death!

Perhaps the jaws of
hell

will depict death as full of
terror,

when death attempts to
devour the soul;

perhaps the soul is
already condemned

to everlasting damnation.

Christ

Blessed are the dead
which die in the Lord;

<i>Furcht</i> Wenn ich im Herren sterbe, Ist denn die Seligkeit mein Teil und Erbe? Der Leib wird ja der Würmer Speise! Ja, werden meine Glieder Zu Staub und Erde wieder, Da ich ein Kind des Todes heisse, So schein ich ja im Grabe zu verderben.	<i>Fear</i> If I die in the Lord, can Salvation be my lot and portion? For worms shall surely devour my body! And my limbs shall return once more to dust and earth, since I am reckoned a child of death, and seem, in truth, to perish in the grave.
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<i>Christus</i> Selig sind die Toten, die in dem Herren sterben, von nun an.	<i>Christ</i> Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth.
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<i>Furcht</i> Wohlan! Soll ich von nun an selig sein: So stelle dich, o Hoffnung, wieder ein! Mein Leib mag ohne Furcht im Schlafe ruhn, Der Geist kann einen Blick in jene Freude tun.	<i>Fear</i> So be it! If from now on I shall be blest, appear once more, O Hope, beside me! My body may rest in peace, unfearing, my spirit can gaze into that bliss.
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<i>Choral</i> Es ist genug; Herr, wenn es dir gefällt, So spanne mich doch aus! Mein Jesu kömmt; Nun gute Nacht, o Welt! Ich fahr ins Himmelshaus, Ich fahre sicher hin mit Frieden, Mein grosser Jammer bleibt danieden. Es ist genug.	<i>Chorale</i> It is enough: Lord, if it be thy will, free me from my burden! My Jesus comes; O world, good night! I go to heaven's house, I go with confidence and peace, my great misery remains here on earth. It is enough.
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Wachet! betet! betet!
wachet! BWV70 (1723)
*Anonymous, Salomo
Franck, Christian Keymann
and Christoph Demantius*

Part I

Coro
Wachet! betet! betet! wachet!
Seid bereit
Allezeit,
Bis der Herr der Herrlichkeit
Dieser Welt ein Ende
machtet.

Recitativo
Erschrecket, ihr verstockten
Sünder!
Ein Tag bricht an,
Vor dem sich niemand
bergen kann:
Er eilt mit dir zum strengen
Rechte,
O! sündliches Geschlechte,
Zum ewgen Herzeleide.
Doch euch, erwählte
Gotteskinder,
Ist er ein Anfang wahrer
Freude.
Der Heiland holet euch,
wenn alles fällt und bricht,
Vor sein erhöhtes Angesicht;
Drum zaget nicht!

Aria
Wenn kömmt der Tag, an
dem wir ziehen
Aus dem Ägypten dieser Welt?
Ach! lasst uns bald aus
Sodom fliehen,
Eh uns das Feuer
überfällt!
Wacht, Seelen, auf von
Sicherheit
Und glaubt, es ist die letzte
Zeit!

Recitativo
Auch bei dem himmlischen
Verlangen
Hält unser Leib den Geist
gefangen;
Es legt die Welt durch ihre
Tücke
Den Frommen Netz und
Stricke.
Der Geist ist willig, doch das
Fleisch ist schwach;
Dies presst uns aus ein
jammervolles Ach!

Watch! Pray! Pray!
Watch!

Part I

Chorus
Watch! Pray! Pray! Watch!
Be prepared
at all times,
till the Lord of Glory
brings this world to an
end.

Recitative
Take fright, you hardened
sinners!
A day will dawn
from which no one can
hide:
it hurries you to the harsh
judgment,
O race of sinners,
to eternal suffering,
but to you, God's chosen
children,
it brings the onset of true
gladness.
The Saviour summons you,
when all else crumbles,
before his exalted presence;
therefore be not afraid!

Aria
When wil the day come,
when we leave
the Egypt of this world?
Ah! let us soon flee
Sodom,
before the fire
overwhelms us!
Awaken, souls, from your
complacency,
and believe: this is the
final hour!

Recitative
Even though we long for
Heaven,
our body holds the spirit
captive;
the world through its
cunning
sets snares and meshes
for the pious.
The spirit is willing, but
the flesh is weak;
this draws from us a
pitiful lament!

<i>Aria</i>	<i>Aria</i>
Lasst der Spötter Zungen schmähen, Es wird doch und muss geschehen, Dass wir Jesum werden sehen Auf den Wolken, in den Höhen. Welt und Himmel mag vergehen, Christi Wort muss fest bestehen. Lasst der Spötter Zungen schmähen; Es wird doch und muss geschehen!	Let deriding tongues revile us, it shall and must come to pass that we shall see Jesus in the clouds up on high. Heaven and earth may perish, but Christ's Word must remain unshaken. Let deriding tongues revile us; it shall and must come to pass!

<i>Recitativo</i>	<i>Recitative</i>
Jedoch bei dem unartigen Geschlechte Denkt Gott an seine Knechte, Dass diese böse Art Sie ferner nicht verletzet, Indem er sie in seiner Hand bewahrt Und in ein himmlisch Eden setzet.	Yet amidst this wicked race God thinks of his servants, that this evil might not afflict them further, for he holds them in his hand and leads them to a heavenly Eden.

<i>Choral</i>	<i>Chorale</i>
Freu dich sehr, o meine Seele, Und vergiss all Not und Qual, Weil dich nun Christus, dein Herre, Ruft aus diesem Jammertal! Seine Freud und Herrlichkeit Sollt du sehn in Ewigkeit, Mit den Engeln jubilieren, In Ewigkeit triumphieren.	Rejoice greatly, O my soul, and forget all need and torment, for Christ, your Lord, now summons you from this vale of tears! His joy and majesty you shall see eternally, rejoicing with the angels in eternal exultation.

Part II **Part II**

<i>Aria</i>	<i>Aria</i>
Hebt euer Haupt empor Und seid getrost, ihr Frommen, Zu eurer Seelen Flor! Ihr sollt in Eden grünen, Gott ewiglich zu dienen.	Lift up your heads and be comforted, you righteous ones, so that your souls might flourish! You shall blossom in Eden and serve God eternally.

<i>Recitativo</i>	<i>Recitative</i>
Ach, soll nicht dieser grosse Tag, Der Welt Verfall Und der Posaunen Schall, Der unerhörte letzte Schlag, Des Richters ausgesprochne Worte,	Ah, shall not this great day, the end of the world, the sound of the trumpets, the monstrous final clap, the words uttered by the Judge,

Des Höllenrachens offene Pforte In meinem Sinn Viel Zweifel, Furcht und Schrecken, Der ich ein Kind der Sünden bin, Erwecken? Jedoch, es gehet meiner Seelen Ein Freudenschein, ein Licht des Trostes auf. Der Heiland kann sein Herze nicht verhehlen, So vor Erbarmen bricht, Sein Gnadenarm verlässt mich nicht. Wohlan, so ende ich mit Freuden meinen Lauf.	the gaping jaws of Hell, awaken in me, a child of sin, much doubt, fear and terror? Yet there passes through my soul a beam of joy, a ray of comfort. The Saviour cannot conceal his heart, which bursts with compassion, his gracious arm shall not forsake me. Come, then! I end my life with joy!
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<i>Aria</i>	<i>Aria</i>
Seligster Erquickungstag, Führe mich zu deinen Zimmern! Schalle, knalle, letzter Schlag, Welt und Himmel, geht zu Trümmern! Jesus führet mich zur Stille, An den Ort, da Lust die Fülle.	Most blessèd, reviving day, lead me into thy mansions! Sound, crack, O final thunder! Heaven and earth, collapse in ruin! Jesus leads me to stillness, to that place of abundant joy.

<i>Choral</i>	<i>Chorale</i>
Nicht nach Welt, nach Himmel nicht Meine Seele wünscht und sehnet, Jesum wünsch ich und sein Licht, Der mich hat mit Gott versöhnet, Der mich freiet vom Gericht, Meinen Jesum lass ich nicht.	Not for the world, not for Heaven does my soul desire and long, I desire Jesus and his light, he has reconciled me with God, he sets me free from Judgment, I shall not leave my Jesus.

Interval

Magnificat in E flat BWV243a with Christmas interpolations (1723)

Liturgical text

<i>Chorus</i> Magnificat, anima mea, Dominum.	<i>Chorus</i> My soul doth magnify the Lord:
<i>Aria</i> Et exultavit spiritus meus in Deo, salutari meo	<i>Aria</i> And my spirit rejoiceth in God my Saviour.
<i>Chorus</i> Vom Himmel hoch, da komm ich her, Ich bring euch gute neue Mär; Der guten Mär bring ich so viel, Davon ich sing'n und sagen will.	<i>Chorus</i> From heaven above to earth I come, to bear good news to every home; glad tidings of great joy I bring, whereof I now will say and sing.
<i>Aria</i> Quia respexit humilitatem ancillae suae. Ecce enim ex hoc beatam me dicent	<i>Aria</i> For he hath regarded the lowliness of his handmaiden. For behold from henceforth
<i>Chorus</i> Omnes generationes.	<i>Chorus</i> All generations shall call me blessed.
<i>Aria</i> Quia fecit mihi magna, qui potens est, Et sanctum nomen eius.	<i>Aria</i> For he that is mighty hath magnified me, and holy is his name.
<i>Chorus</i> Freut euch in jubiliert; Zu Bethlehem gefunden wird Das herzeliebe Jesulein, Das soll euer Freud und Wonne sein.	<i>Chorus</i> Rejoice and celebrate; in Bethlehem will be found the dearest Jesus child, and he will be your joy and delight.
<i>Duet</i> Et misericordia eius a progenie in progenies, Timentibus eum.	<i>Duet</i> And his mercy is on them that fear him throughout all generations.
<i>Chorus</i> Fecit potentiam in brachio suo, Dispensit superbos mente cordis sui.	<i>Chorus</i> He hath showed strength with his arm, he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

<i>Chorus</i> Gloria in excelsis Deo! Et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis.	<i>Chorus</i> Glory to God in the highest! And on earth peace, good will towards men.
<i>Aria</i> Deposuit potentes de sede Et exaltavit humiles.	<i>Aria</i> He hath put down the mighty from their seat and exalted the humble and meek.
<i>Aria</i> Esurientes implevit bonis, Et divites dimisit inanes.	<i>Aria</i> He hath filled the hungry with good things and the rich he hath sent empty away.
<i>Duet</i> Virga Jesse floruit, Emmanuel noster apparuit; Induit carnem hominis, Fit puer delectabilis. Alleluia.	<i>Duet</i> The branch of Jesse has blossomed, our Emmanuel has appeared; he has assumed mortal flesh to become a delightful boy. Alleluia.
<i>Trio</i> Suscepit Israel puerum suum Recordatus misericordiae suae.	<i>Trio</i> He remembering his mercy hath holpen his servant Israel:
<i>Chorus</i> Sicut locutus est ad patres nostros, Abraham et semini eius in saecula	<i>Chorus</i> As he promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed for ever.
<i>Chorus</i> Gloria Patri et Filio Et Spiritui Sancto, Sicut erat in principio et nunc, Et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.	<i>Chorus</i> Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost: as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be: world without end. Amen.

Translations of 'O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort' and 'Wachet! betet! betet! wachet!' by Richard Stokes from J S Bach: The Complete Cantatas, published by Long Barn Books (Ebrington, Gloucestershire, 1999)