

Northern Iowa Bach Cantata Series

Featuring

Cantorei and members of the Northern Iowa Symphony Orchestra

3 March 2023

12:15pm

McElroy Lobby of the Gallagher Bluedorn Performing Arts Center

Es ist ein trotzig und verzagt Ding, BWV 176, Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

1. [chorus] Es ist ein trotzig und verzagt ding
2. [alto recitativo] Ich meine, recht verzagt
3. [soprano aria] Dein sonst hell beliebter Schein
4. [bass recitative] So wundre dich, O Meister, nicht
5. [alto aria] Ermuntert euch, furchtsam und schüchterne Sinne
6. [chorale] Auf daß wir also allzugleich

Notes on the Program

When the poet Christiane Mariane von Ziegler wrote this cantata text, which was set by Bach for 27 May 1725, she was particularly intrigued by the thought that Nicodemus, a ‘ruler of the Jews’ (John 3.1), risked meeting Jesus only by night. Here she finds a general human characteristic: ‘The heart is a perverse and desperate thing; who can fathom it?’, says the prophet Jeremiah (17.9), and the poet prefaces her text with these words – slightly modified – as a motto. Unlike in the days of Joshua, when the sun stood still at Gibeon till the hoards of the Amorites had been vanquished (Joshua 10.12 f.), Nicodemus longs for night to come (no. 2). The following aria first takes up the same ideas and then proceeds with the words of Nicodemus: no one could do the signs that Jesus does unless God were with him. The second recitative-aria pair gives an indication of the comfort that the fearful Christian derives from faith in Jesus. Bach himself lends still greater weight to this reflection by adding to the recitative words of the poet a paraphrase of John 3.16: ‘For all who but believe in You shall not be lost’. With praise and thanks for this promise, the aria leads to the concluding chorale, the eighth verse of the hymn *Was alle Weisheit in der Welt* by Paul Gerhardt (1653).

Bach’s opening chorus to words from Jeremiah is concise and pithy. A single great choral fugue – with the strings independent but unthematic and the oboes doubling the voice parts – takes up the entire movement. There is no instrumental prelude or postlude at all, and the inner dynamic of the movement is achieved not, as often in Bach, by concerto-like solo-tutti or group contrasts, but by the text-engendered dynamic of the fugue subject itself and by the string accompaniment that underpins its character. The fugue subject, which enters in the bass characterizes the textual distinction between the ‘perverse’ and ‘desperate’ sides of the human heart by means of rising triadic and scale motion on the one hand and sinking chromaticism on the other. Once the fugue has achieved full texture with the entry of all four voice parts, it maintains it without change to the end, forming a unique musical monolith – like an erratic block

left by a retreating glacier – whose overall character gives expression to defiance rather than despair.

The aria *'Dein sonst hell beliebter Schein'* (no. 3), which is prefaced by a brief, contemplative recitative, forms a palpable contrast to this powerful introduction. Here again, the composer was essentially guided by a single image from a libretto rich in ideas, namely the bright light with which Jesus the Master, upon whom God's Spirit rests, confronts the timorous hearts of men. Consequently, the aria takes the form of a spirited *gavotte* whose relaxed triplet figuration does not cease even when the soprano holds a long note on the word *'ruhn'* ('rest'). The second recitative, no. 4, though brief, is extended by an *andante arioso* for the paraphrase of John 3.16 appended by Bach, which is longer than the preceding recitative altogether. This *arioso* is made up of two similar passages of highly expressive melody, which derive their impulse from an *ostinato* figure.

Like the first aria, the second, no. 5, is somewhat dance-like, a quality that now emerges more self-evidently from the comforting words of the text. As in the opening fugue, the theme is a direct product of the text, as is clear from its upward surge on *'ermuntert euch'* ('rouse yourselves') and its narrow, semitone steps on *'furchtsam und schüchterne'* ('fearful and diffident'). The passages that follow also prove to be text-engendered: note the calling leaps of a seventh on *'höret'* ('hear') and the coloraturas on *'Loben'* and *'preisen'* ('praise' and 'glorify'). In the instrumental obbligato part, Bach unites all three instruments of the oboe family – two oboes and oboe da caccia (performed on english horn in today's performance) – in unison, forming dynamic contrasts by requiring that two of them rest during the vocal passages.

The melody of the plain four-part concluding chorale originally belonged to Luther's hymn *Christ unser Herr zum Jordan kam*. Bach's harmonization reveals how the tension between church-tone melody and 'modern' major- minor tonality was endured and overcome. Notes adapted from: Dürr, Alfred; Jones, Richard (Translator). *The Cantatas of J.S. Bach*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Text and Translation

1. Chorus

*'Es ist ein trotzig und verzagt Ding um aller
Men- schen Herze.'*

'There is something perverse and desperate
about all human hearts.'

2. Alto Recitativo

*Ich meine, recht verzagt,
Daß Nikodemus sich bei Tage nicht,
Bei Nacht zu Jesu wagt.
Die Sonne mußte dort bei Josua so lange
stille stehn,
So lange bis der Sieg vollkommen war
geschehn;
Hier aber wünschet Nikodem: O säh ich sie
Rüste gehn!*

I think that, truly desperate,
Nicodemus ventured to meet Jesus
Not by day but by night.
There the sun had to stand still so long for
Joshua,
So long until the victory was fully
accomplished;
But here Nicodemus wishes; 'Oh, if only I saw
it setting!'

3. Soprano Aria

*Dein sonst hell beliebter Schein
Soll vor mich umnebelt sein,
Weil ich nach dem Meister frage,
Denn ich scheue mich bei Tage.
Niemand kann die Wunder tun,
Denn sein Allmacht und sein Wesen,
Scheint, ist göttlich außerlesen,
Gottes Geist muß auf ihm ruhn.*

Your otherwise bright beloved light
Shall be befogged for me, Since I ask for the
Master,
For I am afraid by day.
No one can do such miracles,
For His almighty power and His essence,
It seems, are divinely chosen: God's Spirit
must rest on Him

4. Bass Recitativo

*So wundre dich, o Meister, nicht,
Warum ich dich bei Nacht ausfrage!
Ich fürchte, daß bei Tage
Mein Ohnmacht nicht bestehen kann.
Doch tröst ich mich, du nimmst mein Herz
und Geist
Zum Leben auf und an,
Weil alle, die nur an dich glauben, nicht
verloren werden.*

So marvel not, O Master, Why I question You
by night!
I fear that by day
My powerlessness cannot endure.
Yet I comfort myself: You take up and accept
my heart and spirit
Into Life,
For all who but believe in You shall not be
lost.

5. Alto Aria

*Ermuntert euch, furchtsam und schüchterne
Sinne,
Erholet euch, höret, was Jesus verspricht:
Daß ich durch den Glauben den Himmel
gewinne.
Wenn die Verheißung erfüllend geschicht,
Werd ich dort oben
Mit Danken und Loben Vater, Sohn und
Heiligen Geist
Preisen, der dreieinig heißt.*

Rouse yourselves, fearful and diffident spirits,
Recover, hear what Jesus promises:
That I gain heaven through faith.
When the promise is fulfilled,
I shall there above With thanks and praise
Glorify Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
Which are called triune.

6. Chorale

*Auf daß wir also allzugleich Zur
Himmelsporten dringen
Und dermaleinst in deinem Reich
Ohn alles Ende singen,
Daß du alleine König seist,
Hoch über alle Götter,
Gott Vater, Sohn und Heilger Geist,
Der Frommen Schutz und Retter,
Ein Wesen, drei Personen.*

Thus all at once
We break through to heaven's gates
And someday in Your Kingdom
Sing without end
That You alone are King,
High above all gods:
God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
Protector and deliverer of the devout,
One Essence, three Persons.

Personnel

John Wiles, conductor
Alyssa Piper, soprano
Calista Rowe, mezzo soprano
Marcos Antunez, bass

Orchestra

Oboe

Lin Nikkel
Kristina Graham*
Lauren Geerlings (English Horn)

Violin I

Emma Becker

Violin II

Maggie Ierien

Viola

Caleb Burdine

Violoncello

Turner Sperry

Bass

McCaffrey Brandt

Harpsichord

Mariko Morita+

*guest artist

+faculty artist

Chorus

Soprano

Katelyn Bakker
Julia Fink
Lillian Kallenberger
Alyssa Piper

Alto

Emily Carlo
Emily Clouser
Abigail Edlemon
Jaime Knox
Ayanna Reckman
Calista Rowe

Tenor

Juan Morales
Brennan Regan
Logan Stapp
Brady Van Waardhuizen

Bass

Marcos Antunez
Noah Frederiksen
Brock Trenkamp
Jon Turner