



## MARSH CHAPEL AT BOSTON UNIVERSITY

University Interdenominational Protestant  
Service of Worship

Sunday, April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2016 -11:00 a.m.

The Fourth Sunday of Easter

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The Reverend Doctor Robert Allan Hill, Dean

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### THE BACH EXPERIENCE

*Performed during the Interdenominational Protestant Worship Service*

*This program is an insert to your worship bulletin.*

Johann Sebastian BACH  
(1685-1750)

Christ lag in Todesbanden, BWV 4

MaryRuth Lown, soprano  
Kim Leeds, mezzo-soprano  
Patrick T. Waters, tenor  
Sam Kreidenweis, baritone

MARSH CHAPEL CHOIR AND COLLEGIUM

SCOTT ALLEN JARRETT *CONDUCTING*

*For more information about Music at Marsh Chapel, visit [www.bu.edu/chapel/music](http://www.bu.edu/chapel/music).*

## J. S. BACH Christ lag in Todesbanden, BWV 4

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*Johann Sebastian Bach was born in Eisenach on 21 March 1685 and died in Leipzig on 28 July 1750. He composed hundreds of cantatas for both sacred and secular purposes, over 200 of which survive. This is the twenty-eighth cantata performed by the Marsh Chapel Choir and Collegium as part of The Bach Experience. Its duration is approximately 22 minutes.*



Christ lag in Todesbanden (sometimes written as “Todes Banden”), BWV 4, has long been thought of as one of Sebastian’s earliest cantatas, composed perhaps as early as 1707. Nevertheless, the first performance known with any degree of certainty occurred as late as Easter Sunday 1725, two full years after Bach arrived in Leipzig. It is scored for SATB soloists, SATB chorus, one cornetto, three trombones, string ensemble (with divided violas), and continuo. The cornetto and trombones double the vocal parts and are dispensed with today. The only other Marsh Chapel performance occurred last evening, 16 April 2016, with the same soloists and conductor as today.

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The devotion of Johann Sebastian Bach to the Lutheran church and its theology is largely accepted by scholars and performers of his music today. Often cited as evidence are his marginalia in an annotated copy of Luther’s German translation of the Bible, his regular participation in personal confession at Leipzig, and his habit of inscribing SDG (*Soli Deo Gloria*, “for the glory of God alone”) on many of his manuscripts of sacred music. Otherwise, however, his church works are largely assessed by their secular characteristics: the balance between Italian and French styles of composition, the use of operatic forms such as recitative and *da capo* aria, and even the recomposition of explicitly secular music into church pieces, as experienced by attendees to last night’s performance of the *Easter Oratorio* BWV249 at Marsh Chapel (a process, interestingly, never conducted vice versa – sacred pieces were never recomposed for secular use, as far as we can tell). The conclusion might appear to be that, yes, Bach was religious, but his church works are little more than spectacular examples of secular-style music containing sacred texts.

Understudied in all of this, however, is an element that Bach used in his church music from his early years in Weimar: the chorale. If a Baroque musical element could be described not just as unequivocally German, but unequivocally Lutheran (the distinction being largely academic given the absence of any unified political entity of “Germany” at the time), it must be the chorale. And unlike his immediate contemporaries, Bach spent his entire career inventing myriad ways with which to incorporate the chorale into his church music. We may stumble across chorales in arias, recitatives, and even free choruses (the opening chorus of the *St. Matthew Passion* BWV244, for one famous example); the tune might be the center of attention at its entrance, or perhaps snuck into a thick texture as an ornamental line or drawn-out *cantus firmus*. He devoted his entire second year at Leipzig to the composition of a new chorale cantata for every Sunday. Often, he quotes a chorale not called for explicitly by the cantata or its text, using its music to imply a certain theological connection. This near-obsession with the chorale could be assessed as the musical expression of Bach’s devotion to his Lutheran faith.

If that is true, *Christ lag in Todesbanden* BWV4 is the *summa* of that devotion. We do not know when it was composed; numerous stylistic traits imply an origin early in his career (there exists speculation of Mühlhausen origin ca. 1707, but a later dating to Weimar ca. 1713 is more tenable), but the earliest extant sources are performance materials dating from 1724. This stylistic dating largely rests upon the cantata's exclusive reliance upon its namesake chorale tune and text, both composed by Martin Luther as a paraphrase on the Catholic Easter Sequence *Victimae paschali laudes*. Through seven verses, plus its short introductory sinfonia, Bach demonstrates his remarkable ability to variate Luther's austere tune in a wealth of creative displays. Only three (!) cantatas by Bach for Easter Sunday survive, including this one, but its high quality of composition and relative universality of content (avoiding the perhaps datable or contentious aspects of a poetic text in recitatives and arias) no doubt allowed Bach to perform it regularly over the span of many years.

Luther's translations of Latin Catholic texts for the reformed church are noteworthy for their earthy, graphic imagery, unsurprising when seen in light of his attempt to enable the believer's direct connection with Christ. *Christ lag in Todesbanden* is fertile ground for Bach's imagination. The first four verses describe Jesus' battle with death in hell, a *wunderlicher Krieg* or "fantastic war" between life and death. At the end, death is not just defeated, it is *fraß* or literally "eaten." Luther's goal of making the language of the church accessible to a wide array of German dialects resulted in texts relatable to everyday life, visceral in their interpretation of God's word.

*Christ lag in Todesbanden* is a difficult cantata to write about, if not simply because of its sheer purity in adherence to the chorale. An academic outline of how Bach manipulates the chorale tune in each verse might serve a purpose in the classroom, but one does not need such an outline to be wowed by Bach's ability to compose this set of variations of great variety while preserving the chorale tune so audibly in each verse. Bach would, as mentioned, later compose an entire year-long cycle of chorale-based cantatas for Leipzig. But *Christ lag in Todesbanden* stands out even among these examples for not just its textual but its *musical* purity, something not exhibited to such a degree by those later cantatas. The choruses in particular (verses 2 and 5) resemble music from the *Orgelbüchlein*, a collection of short chorale fantasias for organ from early in Bach's career, more than any of Bach's other vocal music: as the soprano sings the chorale tune lightly adorned, the counterpoint in the lower voices is relentless contrapuntal accompaniment - "vocal" in its polyphonic style, but more idiomatic for the keyboard than the voice in its execution, and always supportive and subservient to the chorale tune above.

We are unsure of whether *Christ lag in Todesbanden* was performed on Easter Sunday in 1724, Bach's first year in Leipzig; we only have definitive proof of a 1725 performance. The later date seems appropriate given its pairing that year with the early version of the *Easter Oratorio* BWV249, a work exceptionally light in character and thin on theology; Alfred Dürr goes so far as to refer to it as an "Easter play," not to be taken all too seriously from a religious perspective. Indeed, if Bach and his listeners regarded it this way, its complement by the austerity, seriousness, and uncompromising devotion of *Christ lag in Todesbanden* on that Easter Sunday made for a musical commemoration of the Resurrection that left virtually no Lutheran theological stone unturned. In my view, Bach's *Christ lag in Todesbanden* outweighs any vague historical factoid in revealing the composer's deep Lutheran convictions. His ability to express those convictions in music go no small way toward explaining why we gather centuries later to play, sing, and hear such masterpieces. (Brett Kostrzewski, April 2016)

# Texts and Translations

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## I. Sinfonia

### II. Chorus - Verse 1

Christ lag in Todesbanden  
Für unsre Sünd gegeben,  
Er ist wieder erstanden  
Und hat uns bracht das Leben;  
Des wir sollen fröhlich sein,  
Gott loben und ihm dankbar sein  
Und singen halleluja,  
Halleluja!

Christ lay in death's bonds  
given over for our sins,  
He has risen again  
and brought us life;  
therefore we should be joyful,  
praise God and be thankful to Him  
and sing Hallelujah,  
Hallelujah!

### III. Duet (SA) - Verse 2

Den Tod niemand zwingen kunnt  
Bei allen Menschenkindern,  
Das macht' alles unsre Sünd,  
Kein Unschuld war zu finden.  
Davon kam der Tod so bald  
Und nahm über uns Gewalt,  
Hielt uns in seinem Reich gefangen.  
Halleluja!

No one could defeat death  
among all humanity,  
this was all because of our sins,  
no innocence was to be found.  
Therefore death came so soon  
and took power over us,  
held us captive in his kingdom.  
Hallelujah!

### IV. Aria (T) - Verse 3

Jesus Christus, Gottes Sohn,  
An unser Statt ist kommen  
Und hat die Sünde weggetan,  
Damit dem Tod genommen  
All sein Recht und sein Gewalt,  
Da bleibt nichts denn Tods Gestalt,  
Den Stach'l hat er verloren.  
Halleluja!

Jesus Christ, God's son,  
has come in our place,  
and has done away with sin,  
thereby taking from death  
all his rights and power,  
nothing remains but death's form;  
he has lost his sting.  
Hallelujah!

### V. Chorus - Verse 4

Es war ein wunderlicher Krieg,  
Da Tod und Leben rungen,  
Das Leben behielt den Sieg,  
Es hat den Tod verschlungen.  
Die Schrift hat verkündigt das,  
Wie ein Tod den andern fraß,  
Ein Spott aus dem Tod ist worden.  
Halleluja!

It was a strange battle,  
that death and life waged,  
life claimed the victory,  
it devoured death.  
The scripture had prophesied this,  
how one death gobbled up the other,  
a mockery has been made out of death.  
Hallelujah!

VI. Aria (B) - Verse 5

Hier ist das rechte Osterlamm,  
Davon Gott hat geboten,  
Das ist hoch an des Kreuzes Stamm  
In heißer Lieb gebraten,  
Das Blut zeichnet unsre Tür,  
Das hält der Glaub dem Tode für,  
Der Würger kann uns nicht mehr schaden.  
Halleluja!

Here is the true Easter-lamb,  
offered up by God,  
which was, high on the cross' stalk  
roasted in hot love,  
the blood marks our door,  
faith holds it against death,  
the strangler can no longer harm us.  
Hallelujah!

VII. Duet (ST) - Verse 6

So feiern wir das hohe Fest  
Mit Herzensfreud und Wonne,  
Das uns der Herre scheinen läßt,  
Er ist selber die Sonne,  
Der durch seiner Gnade Glanz  
Erleuchtet unsre Herzen ganz,  
Der Sünden Nacht ist verschwunden.  
Halleluja!

So we celebrate the high festival  
with joy of heart and delight,  
which the Lord radiates upon us,  
He himself is the sun,  
that through the splendor of his grace  
illuminates our hearts completely,  
the night of sin has disappeared.  
Hallelujah!

VIII. Chorale - Verse 7

Wir essen und wir leben wohl  
In rechten Osterfladen,  
Der alte Sauerteig nicht soll  
Sein bei dem Wort der Gnaden,  
Christus will die Koste sein  
Und speisen die Seel allein,  
Der Glaub will keins andern leben.  
Halleluja!

We eat and live well  
on the true Easter bread,  
the old leaven shall not  
exist next to the word of grace,  
Christ will be our food  
and nourish the soul alone,  
faith will live in no other way.  
Hallelujah!

Translation: Pamela Dellal

# MARSH CHAPEL CHOIR

Scott Allen Jarrett, Conductor

Justin Thomas Blackwell, Associate Conductor

Sean Watland, Conducting Fellow

Margaret Weckworth and Kevin Neel, Managers

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## Sopranos

Jaime Guyon, Brewster, MA

Bernie Lai, Singapore

Catherine Lindsay, Hamden, CT

\*MaryRuth Lown, West Columbia, SC

Phoebe Oler, Boston, MA

Erin Sanborn, Wakefield, MA

Kasey Shultz, Holden Village, WA

\*Carey Shunskis, Upper Darby, PA

Sharon Solomon, Marietta, GA

\*Jacquelyn Stucker, Jamaica Plain, MA

Margaret Weckworth, Greensboro, NC

Rebecca Whittington, Hanover, NH

## Tenors

\*Ethan DePuy, Rochester, NY

George Silvis, III, Cambridge, MA

John Verkuilen, Green Bay, WI

\*Patrick T. Waters, Guilford, CT

Sean Watland, Chicago, IL

\* Choral Scholar

## Altos

Ivy Alphonse-Leja, Miramar, FL

Candace Brooks, Branford, CT

Anna Carro, Nashville, TN

Wee-Kiat Chia, Johor Bahru, Malaysia

Meredith Cler, Ripon, WI

\*Douglas Dodson, Spearfish, SD

Elizabeth Eschen, Natick, MA

Maddy Frumkin, Charlotte, NC

\*Kim Leeds, Watertown, MA

Melissa Lesh, Doylestown, PA

Kimi Macdonald, Londonderry, NH

Nellie Morley, Nantucket, MA

Britt Simonson, Okemos, MI

## Basses

David Ames, Newton Centre, MA

Benjamin Coleman, Bethesda, MD

Daniel Fallu, Goffstown, NH

Alex Handin, Guilderland, NY

\*Sam Kreidenweis, Cincinnati, OH

\*Dominick Matsko, Philipsburg, PA

Kevin Neel, Charlotte, NC

Steve Pinner, Hudson, MA

Tim Sullivan, Somerville, MA

# MARSH CHAPEL COLLEGIUM

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## **Violin I**

Heidi Braun-Hill, *concertmaster*  
Sean Larkin  
MaeLynn Arnold

## **Violin II**

Heather Braun  
Rose Drucker  
Kay Rooney Matthews

## **Viola I**

Daniel Doña  
Chris Nunn

## **Viola II**

Emily Rome  
Andrew Salo

## **Cello**

Joshua Rohde  
Sassan Haghighi

## **Contrabass**

Nathan Varga

## **Organ**

Justin Blackwell

## **Managers/Librarians**

Margaret Weckworth  
Kevin Neel

**BOSTON UNIVERSITY Marsh Chapel**

**Rev. Dr. Robert Allan Hill**

Dean and Chaplain of the University

**Br. Lawrence A. Whitney, LC+**

University Chaplain for Community Life

**Jessica Chicka**

University Chaplain for International Students

**Ray Bouchard**

Director of Marsh Chapel

**Scott Allen Jarrett, DMA**

Director of Music

**Justin Thomas Blackwell**

Associate Director of Music

**Kaitlin Noe**

Director of Hospitality



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