

Information about Bach's Motets with a Specific Examination of BWV 226

Extracted from Klaus Hofmann's Book on This Subject

Summaries and Translations by Thomas Braatz © 2010

Appearing in a series of books providing introductions to specific works or sets of compositions by famous composers, the *Bärenreiter Werkeinführungen*, Klaus Hofmann's book, *Johann Sebastian Bach: Die Motetten*, Bärenreiter (Kassel), 2003, provides a wealth of detailed information and reasonable, up-to-date speculations about the category of Bach's compositions called the motets. The following is a selection of questions and topics treated by Hofmann that are frequently asked and may be of interest to those musicians and listeners who wish to probe into this matter more deeply in order to satisfy their curiosity about the current state of scholarship regarding Bach's motets.

Bach's motets are the only category of his vocal works which continued in an unbroken tradition of performances until the present time, although the function of these motets changed from occasional sacred music under Bach's direction to assuming a more integrated part of a regular church service after Bach's death when Harrer and Doles, Bach's successors as cantor, continued to perform them on a regular basis. For at least a century and a half, beginning with Johann Nikolaus Forkel, one of the earliest Bach biographers, experts believed that Bach had composed these double-choir motets as practice pieces for his *Thomaner* so that "sie wenigstens sichere Treffer und reinliche Chorsänger werden konnten" ["they could at least hit the notes with certainty and become choral singers who could sing faultlessly with good intonation"]¹ In the second volume of his extensive Bach biography, Philipp Spitta considered that Bach used his motets in place of the regular cantata performances during the main church services in the *Thomaskirche* and *Nikolaikirche*.²

It was not until early in the 20th century that Bernhard Friedrich Richter proposed that all of Bach's motets were occasional sacred compositions.³ Subsequently Bach researchers have expended great effort to uncover the occasions which gave rise to their composition. Despite numerous imaginative approaches that were applied, only one motet, "Der Geist hilft unser Schwachheit auf" BWV 226, can be incontrovertibly linked to a documented occasion (on his score Bach personally identifies what this was and thus gives us the reason why he composed this motet). More recent discoveries have established the chronology of two other motets: the score for "Ich lasse dich nicht, du segnest mich denn" can be dated to the period 1712/13 and "Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied" was composed in 1726/27. However, beyond this information there are many hypotheses and speculations that are being proposed and heatedly discussed.

¹ Johann Nikolaus Forkel, *Ueber Johann Sebastian Bachs Leben, Kunst und Kunstwerke. Für patriotische Verehrer echter musikalischer Kunst*, Leipzig, 1802, p. 36.

² Philipp Spitta, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, vol. 2. Leipzig 1880.

³ Bernhard Friedrich Richter, *Über die Motetten Seb. Bachs*, Bach-Jahrbuch 1912, pp. 1-32.

As a result of the assumed occasional reasons for the motets, an old notion often reflected in the sets of motets that have been published has been abandoned: Bach had created or at least intended to create a set of motets (the number six is most often cited in analogy to other sets Bach had composed) with one specific goal in mind. The picture that has now emerged is that each motet is a special solution to a musical task or problem that Bach took up on an individualized basis. What is remarkable is the richness of the musical means Bach utilized within the limited framework offered by purely vocal settings such as the motet tradition he had inherited. This he combines with forms he had used in the larger choral movements of his cantatas, and where they are chorale-based, he clearly falls back on the tradition of the organ chorale.

The Motet as a Musical Form and Tradition

In Western polyphony there is probably no other musical form that has been as enduring as the motet which has existed and was used continuously for eight centuries from the Middle Ages until today. To be sure, during this time it has manifested itself in a wide variety of forms, but nevertheless has always been restricted to vocal music, a considerable portion of compositions including both voices and instruments, and it was not uncommon for motets to be set to secular texts. Only after the beginning of the 16th century were motets mainly restricted to sacred music only. After 1800, particularly in Germany, they were church compositions performed by voices only without instruments, or at most an organ accompaniment. From the time of the Early Baroque, the definition of motet underwent regional and confessional changes and even extended to including vocal solos and cantata-like forms.

Even during Bach's time, the definition of motet was not set to any single type. This is evident upon examination of Johann Gottfried Walther's music dictionary printed in Leipzig in 1732. It is quite clear that Bach was acquainted with it as he probably collaborated with Walther on portions of the text and/or in editing it and even sold copies of it from his house. Walther's definition reads as follows:

“Motetto...ist eigentlich eine mit Fugen und Imitationibus starck ausgeschmückte, und über einen Biblischen Spruch bloß zum Singen ohne Instrumente (den General-Baß ausgenommen) gefertigte musicalische Composition, doch können die Sing-Stimmen auch mit allerhand Instrumenten besetzt und verstärckt werden.”

[“a motet...is really a musical composition on a biblical quotation intended for voices without instruments (with the exception of a figured-bass part) and decorated with fugues and imitative parts, but it is also the case that the vocal parts can be scored for all sorts of instruments to give support to the voices.”]⁴

Walther has defined the motet by emphasizing its three characteristics: 1. its musical style, contrapuntal with fugal and imitative passages; 2. the type of text used, biblical; and 3. its scoring or orchestration, for voices alone (basso continuo excepted), but its performance allows that instruments may be used to double [play *colla parte*] the vocal parts. What is amazing here is that Walther's definition does not include any mention of

⁴ Johann Gottfried Walther, *Musicalisches Lexicon oder Musicalische Bibliothec*, Leipzig, 1732, entry under “Motetto”.

the chorale which plays an obvious role in Bach's motets composed in the Protestant tradition, but otherwise they conform to the points stated by Walther. The third point, particularly, is illustrated by Bach's motet "Der Geist hilft unser Schwachheit auf" BWV 226, for which the original instrumental parts exist and serve to prove that he performed this motet, at least for one of the first performances of this work, with a complement of instruments beyond the basso continuo group which was a more common instrumental support associated with these motets. To his credit, Walther does mention at the end of his definition motets composed by foreigners (probably Italians are meant here) on Latin texts for solo voice with obbligato instruments. It is no surprise then that Bach's focus on the definition of motet is soft enough to allow his composition of motets that do not agree with Walther's definition of motet regarding the nature of its text and even its musical characteristics: cf. BWV 71, BWV 118, and BWV 1083. Here BWV 118 does stick out as being a non-conforming motet: it has a simple 4-part choir instead of the 'classical' 8-part double choir; in addition there were two "litui" (horns or possibly trumpets), cornetts [zink] and three trombones parts (or in a later version litui, strings and continuo along with three oboes and bassoon *ad libitum*). Here the instrumental parts, contrary to the usual method of only doubling the vocal parts, have independent passages.

Klaus Hofmann provides an overview and categorization of Bach's motets:⁵

1. Motets in the narrow sense or definition:

a) the core group of authenticated motets

BWV 225 *Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied*
BWV 226 *Der Geist hilft unser Schwachheit auf*
BWV 227 *Jesu, meine Freude*
BWV 228 *Fürchte dich nicht, ich bin bei dir*
BWV 229 *Komm, Jesu, komm*

b) authenticity disputed

BWV 230 *Lobet den Herrn, alle Heiden*
BWV Anh. 159 *Ich lasse dich nicht*
BWV Anh. 160 *Jauchzet dem Herrn, alle Welt*

c) proven to be unauthentic

BWV Anh. 161 *Kündlich groß ist das gottselige Geheimnis*
BWV Anh. 162 *Lob und Ehre und Weisheit*
BWV Anh. 164 *Nun danket alle Gott*

d) from the Bach family (authorship unclear)

BWV Anh. 163 *Merk auf, mein Herz, und sieh dorthin*
BWV Anh. 165 *Unser Wandel ist im Himmel*

2. Motets in the wider or extended sense or definition (choir with orchestra)

a) genuine

BWV 118 *O Jesu Christ, meins Lebens Licht*

b) contested

BWV 50 *Nun ist das Heil und die Kraft*

c) uncertain

BWV deest *Der Gerechte kommt um*

3. Motets in the widest possible sense or definition (cantata-like with soloists and orchestra)

BWV 71 *Gott ist mein König*
BWV 1083 *Tilge, Höchster, meine Sünden*

4. Specialized forms (motetlike mvts. in cantatas and other vocal works {this is a selection only})

a) cantata movements

BWV 2/1 *Ach Gott, vom Himmel sieh darein*
BWV 28/2 *Nun lob, mein Seel, den Herren*
BWV 38/1 *Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir*
BWV 64/1 *Sehet, welche eine Liebe*
BWV 144/1 *Nimm, was dein ist, und gehe hin*

b) Magnificat inserts

BWV 243a/A *Vom Himmel hoch, da komm ich her*
BWV 243a/B *Freut euch und jubiliert*

⁵ *ibid*, p. 17.

Today no one knows just how many motets J. S. Bach had composed. In all probability there were more than those which have survived to the present day, just as is the case in other categories of his music where considerable losses can have occurred. Also, as in this case with occasional works composed for events which were not repeated, the chances were that these works would have been lost more easily because they were not deliberately collected, like the church cantatas, in annual cycles for reuse in later years.

It is therefore not at all surprising that Bach's sons and pupils had no real idea regarding the extent of his compositional activities in this area. In the Bach obituary published by C. P. E. Bach, J. F. Agricola, and others in 1754, a somewhat vague reference in a list of unpublished works to the motets appears as "Einige zweychörige Moteten" ["several motets for double choir"].⁶ In contrast to the latter statement, Forkel, in his Bach biography almost a half century later in 1802 (he obtained much of his information from Bach's sons, W. F. and C. P. E. Bach), speaks of a greater number of motets as he claims that there were "sehr viele Motetten, hauptsächlich für das Chor der Leipziger Thomas-Schule" ["very many motets, mainly for the choir at the *Thomasschule* in Leipzig"]⁷ and, in an additional comment, he extends this claim to state that there were "viele ein- und zweychörige Motetten" ["many motets for a single or a double choir"] and goes on to explain: "Die meisten dieser Werke sind aber nun zerstreut...Bloß von den doppelchörigen Motetten sind noch 8 bis 10 vorhanden, aber ebenfalls nicht in einer, sondern in mehrern Händen" ["But now most of these compositions are scattered about...Regarding the motets for double choir only 8 to 10 are still in existence and these likewise are not owned by a single but rather by several individuals"].⁸ As seen from today's perspective, these numbers appear to be exaggerated. This could, however, be due to obtaining information from various sources and treating them as separate entries while they may have been referring to the same composition which appeared in various manuscript copies

In 1802/1803 the first edition of the motets was printed by Breitkopf & Härtel in two volumes as follows:

Book I

Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied (BWV 225)

Fürchte dich nicht (BWV 228)

Ich lasse dich nicht (BWV Anh. 159)

Book II

Komm, Jesu, komm (BWV 229)

Jesu, meine Freude (BWV 227)

Der Geist hilft unser Schwachheit auf (BWV 228)

In subsequent years, other motets followed: "Lob und Ehre und Weisheit" (BWV Anh. 162) in 1819; "Jauchzet dem Herrn, alle Welt" (BWV Anh. 160) in 1819; "Lobet den Herrn, alle Heiden" (BWV 230) in

⁶ Bach-Dokumente III, No. 666, p. 86.

⁷ Forkel, p. 36.

⁸ Forkel, p. 61.

1821. By the time Spitta wrote his Bach biography in 1880, he had assembled 14 motets which he variously categorized as genuine, doubtful or unauthentic.

Background History on the Motet as a General Category

After its beginnings around 1200 and an early period of flourishing during the French *Ars nova* in the 14th century, the motet eventually assumed a role as one of the most important musical art forms in Europe as it spread widely throughout the 15th and 16th century. It reached its culmination as an ideal, perfected art form in the motet compositions by Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina and Orlando di Lasso. These compositions served as examples of perfection in the art of vocal polyphony, particularly in Germany, where its influence could still be strongly felt in Heinrich Schütz' *Geistliche Chormusik*, published in 1648. But here new trends that had appeared since about 1600 were already being incorporated: basso continuo, monody and concerto-like forms. The motet now began assimilating monodic-concertanto, song- and madrigal-like forms which increasingly led to a cantata-like structure which became a predominant form in Middle and North Germany. This *Geistliches Konzert* served as an intermediate form which eventually was superseded by the cantata at the end of the 17th century. The latter then replaced the Gospel motet which had played a very important role in German churches during most of the 17th century. In the 18th century, the motet then gradually retreated from this prominent position to a secondary role where it was used primarily as occasional music and no longer had a regular function within the church services.

The 'musical memory' of Bach's time, as far as polyphonic music is concerned, reaches back about two centuries. The boundaries of this experience are marked by the 'classic' examples of Palestrina and di Lasso. The techniques used in setting words to music were an established part of the era of basso continuo. These were not dry, abstract doctrines that were being taught but rather part of a living tradition as seen from Bach's performance in his later years of *Kyrie* and *Gloria* from a Mass by Palestrina. Omnipresent, also, were the motets from Erhard Bodenschatz' collection, *Florilegium Portense*, or Abraham Schadaeus' *Promptuarium musicum* which were performed every Sunday and on other occasions as well. These two collections contained a wide array of motets from the period at the beginning of the 17th century. The texts were mainly in Latin and the settings predominantly for double choir. Early on Bach would have become acquainted with this material in Eisenach, Ohrdruf, Lüneburg and later in Weimar and very likely would also have sung in the choirs which performed this music. Throughout his tenure in Leipzig, the *Florilegium Portense* was constantly in use. Another important source for models of the German-style motets would have been the "Altbachisches Archiv".

Hofmann now indicates the method he will use to describe the diversity of motet types: to present the important principles governing the forms of the 'classical' motets and to analyze specific examples of the different variations of this form found in typical examples from the 17th century.

The Principles Governing 'Classical' Motet

The main principle of the motet is based upon a series of sections. Each section comprises a meaningful segment or statement of text for which the music provides its own theme or motif (subject or *soggetto*). For the invention and development of the musical material, the principle of *varietas* (variety or change) is invoked. Thus each section has its own unique characteristics. The theme of each section is distinguishable and different from all of the others, thus enhancing the uniqueness of each section. In addition, the compositional techniques used in each section are different as well. As an example, Hofmann uses Palestrina's motet "Super flumina Babylonis" (Psalm 137,1-2) to illustrate these principles and point out a few examples from Bach's motets.

Various Manifestations of the 17th Century Motet

Hofmann lists and discusses a number of examples from the German-Protestant motet tradition.

Example 1: Use of a Double Choir

"Herr, wenn ich nur dich habe" (Psalm 73:25-26) from Schütz' *Musicalische Exequien* (1636) illustrates the possibilities of double- or polychoral settings. The origin of this type of setting goes back to the late 15th century in the sacred music performed in San Marco Cathedral in Venice where the performance practice included musical choirs (vocal and instrumental) playing and singing from different balconies. This practice was adopted by Michael Praetorius and Heinrich Schütz in Germany. In the dialogue or confrontation of opposing choirs, the first choir presents a phrase (the *proposta*) and this phrase (now the *risposta*) is repeated by the second choir *en bloc* which is basically homophonic with a series of chords which are simplistically treated in a polyphonic manner (*polyphonisiert*).

Example 2: The Gospel Motet

"Gehet hin und saget Johanni wieder" (Matthew 11:4-6) by Melchior Franck from his collection *Gemmulae Evangeliorum Musicae* (1623) is typical for a collection or cycle of motets intended for use throughout the liturgical year. During the church services, they were usually sung immediately after the Gospel reading and thus repeated in the music the entire reading or a portion thereof. The emphasis was placed on transmitting the text to the congregation and the polyphonic techniques played only a secondary role with some passages being treated homophonically.

Example 3: The Madrigal Motet

"Die mit Tränen säen" (Psalm 126:5-6) by Johann Hermann Schein from his collection, *Fontana D'Israel. Israelis Brunnlein Auserlesener KrafftSprüchlin Altes und Neuen Testaments...auf eine sonderbar Anmütige Italian Madrigalische Manier*, published in 1623 serves as an example of how the madrigal and motet were

synthesized. Here the serious style of sacred music (*stylus gravis*) which gradually evolved to what was later called *stylus antiquus* was combined with the completely different style of the Italian madrigal, a courtly vocal chamber music emphasizing a literary, highly poetic style of text that was musically set to express the expression of emotions and to illustrate the figurative language typical of courtly poetry. Harmonic effects and chromaticism as well as sudden and abrupt shifts of the *soggetto* are used to express a new affect.

Without Schein's amalgamation of the 'classical' motet with the Italian madrigal in the tradition of the motet in Protestant Germany, Bach's motets would most likely not have turned out as they did. An interesting fact to bring to bear here is that Schein was one of Bach's predecessors as *Thomaskantor* in Leipzig.

Example 4: The Gospel Motet with Aria

"Es ging ein Sämann aus, zu säen seinen Samen" (Luke 8:5-8) by Wolfgang Carl Briegel from his collection, *Evangelischer Blumengarten...auff leichte madrigalische Art* (1666), appeared four decades after Schein's deliberate move away from the strict, traditional polyphony of the 'classical' motet and the assimilation of madrigal techniques. Briegel's innovation is that his motets consist of two parts: a motet movement based on a Gospel text and an aria, a homophonically treated chorale. The latter was considered theologically as an *applicatio*, hence a 'summing up' where the congregation is able to understand in simple terms as well as emotionally what should be concluded from hearing the Gospel text.

Example 5: The Chorale Motet

"Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir" (Psalm 130 in the Luther version) by Hans Leo Haßler from his collection, *Psalmen und Christliche Gesäng mit vier Stimmen auff die Melodeyen fugweiß componiert*, published in 1607, is based on the text and chorale melody by Martin Luther. No longer is a biblical quotation the basis for the text of the motet, but now it is a rhymed version typical for chorales, each line of which determines a section of the motet. The use of the bar-form also causes the repeated lines (sections) to be similar, in this way contradicting the usual mandate of *varietas* required by the 'classical' motet.

Example 6: The Thuringian Motet

"Ich weiß, dass mein Erlöser lebt" (Job 19:25) composed by Johann Michael Bach, Bach's great uncle and father of his first wife, Maria Barbara, is a type of motet typically found in Thuringia and consisting of a biblical quotation and a chorale where the quotation is usually first presented homophonically by the alto, tenor and bass parts using a chordal structure. Later the soprano enters with the *cantus firmus* singing all the lines in longer note values with pauses between each line of the chorale.

On the Performance Practices Associated with Bach's Motets

Based on the printed editions of the motets published after 1800, the motets were presented as *a capella*, but the 're-'discovery and careful analysis of the original materials for "Der Geist hilft unser Schwachheit auf" BWV 226 has provoked for a long time a discussion about the original performance conditions of the motets generally. This motet, along with the autograph score for a double choir, has a set of parts including no less than 10 instrumental parts, four of which are for string players who play *colla parte* with the vocal parts of the first choir and four for a wind quartet consisting of two oboes, a taille (alto oboe) and a bassoon doubling the vocal parts of the second choir. There are also two basso continuo parts (one with figured bass for organ) and the other for "Violon[e] e Continuo" (contrabass and possibly another continuo instrument, even perhaps a harpsichord). The questions that this has raised for more than a century are: "Does this authentic set of original instrumental parts prove that Bach, as a general practice, performed his motets in this manner?" and "Can we accordingly assume that Bach, for his motets, used an orchestral accompaniment including a continuo group, or were they intended as purely vocal pieces or even something else?"

Seen from the perspective of music history, the 'classical' motet was primarily a vocal form, but this never resulted in the total exclusion of instruments in its performance since the instruments not only gave support to the vocal parts but also enriched the sound. At the beginning of the 17th century, *basso continuo*, although not generally accepted in the motet because it appeared to contradict its inherent polyphonic linearity, was also occasionally used. During the 18th century the performance of the traditional motet evidently had three performance possibilities:

1. voices only
2. voices with *basso continuo*
3. voices with *colla parte* instruments and *basso continuo*

The question remains as to which of these did Bach use and did he differentiate between his motets and change his performance practices accordingly. He may have changed these practices even for the same motet adjusting them to variable conditions as he confronted them. Another important consideration here is that Bach's motets are not part of a connected and related series of works intended to be viewed as a unit. Instead they are individual compositions composed for different occasions with differing performance environments. It is even possible that these motets were not composed solely for the *Thomanerchor* in Leipzig, but perhaps for performances outside of Leipzig with different choirs or even with Leipzig university students at the university church, the *Paulinerkirche*, where the *Thomanerchor* did not sing.

In addition to "Der Geist hilft unser Schwachheit auf" BWV 226, there are four other motets that quite apparently were intended as funeral music. According to older customs, there were limitations imposed on funeral music and these included the omission of instruments. Christian Gerber in his *Historie der Kirchen-Ceremonien in Sachsen* (1732) indicates that "bey den Leichen- und Gedächtniß-Predigten auch der Nahme

des HErrn mit Psalmen, Lobgesängen, geistlichen und lieblichen Liedern pflēget geehret zu werden, jedoch ohne Orgel-Klang” [“when funeral or remembrance sermons are delivered, it is customary that the Lord’s name be honored with Psalms, songs of praise, pleasant-sounding songs/chorales, however without the sound of the organ”].⁹ Gerber does admit, however, that “auch wohl von dem Cantore eine Trauer-Music aufgeföhrt, sonderlich bey vornehmer und hoher Personen Leichen- und Gedächtniß-Predigten, dabey auch bißweilen Instrumenta douçe gespielt werden” [“a funeral music composed and performed by the cantor is presented, particularly in the case of funeral and remembrance services with sermons for distinguished and high-ranking persons where occasionally instruments are also played softly”]. According to Bernhard Friedrich Richter (1901/1925, 1912) who does not document his sources, instruments were not allowed to be played in Leipzig’s main churches when funeral music was being performed, while there was no such restriction at the university church. Possibly, however, this type of prohibition was not strictly enforced.

If Bach’s funeral motets were performed in Leipzig, three possibilities for their performances can be considered:

1. at or in front of the home of the deceased before the funeral procession begins
2. as part of the funeral service in the church
3. as part of the remembrance service held several weeks later at a Sunday Vespers service

#1 very likely involved an open-air performance by the *Thomaner* for which a portativ (organ) has been documented since Johann Kuhnau’s cantorship. It is unlikely that other orchestra instruments would have participated.

Trying to determine how Bach originally performed his motets is like working with an equation having several unknowns. There is no definite solution, at most a number of attempts with some indications and arguments of which the most important will be mentioned here in three categories:

1. with basso continuo?
2. with orchestra?
3. with voices/choir only?

With Basso Continuo?

There are many good arguments in favor of including the instruments of a basso continuo group in the performance of Bach’s motets where no instrumentation in the sources has been indicated. The use of basso continuo with motets existed for more than a century before Bach regularly performed the motets from *Florilegium* collection in Leipzig during church services. There is also documentary evidence that he also followed this practice with other motets as well, when, in the 1740s, Bach performed two motets by Johann

⁹ Dresden and Leipzig, 1732, p. 25.

Christoph Bach (1642-1703) from the *Altbachisches Archiv*, “Der Gerechte, ob er gleich zu zeitlich stirbt” and “Lieber Herr Gott, wecke uns auf” as well as the motet “Erforsche mich, Gott” by Sebastian Knüpfer.¹⁰ A basso continuo accompaniment had certain advantages: a keyboard instrument (generally an organ or positiv and possibly in addition a harpsichord)¹¹ could have been the conductor’s instrument and would have served to support intonation along with a 16-foot stop on the organ and a violone (also an octave below the actual vocal bass line).

A comment by a Bach pupil, Johann Philipp Kirnberger, in his *Grundsätze des Generalbasses* (1781) appears to refer to Bach’s performance practice in performing motets:

Von jeher wurden Kirchenmusiken, wenn dieselben auch ohne Instrumente waren, vier-, acht- oder mehrstimmig gesungen, mit der Orgel zum Fundament und Aufrechthaltung der Musik begleitet, oder wenigstens ein Positiv gebraucht, wenn eine Musik beim Grabe Christi oder andern Gelegenheiten unten in der Kirche aufgeführt wurde, wobei Contra-Violons nach Proportion der Anzahl von Sängern waren. Man begleitete zwar auch auf eine andere Art jede Singstimme mit Posaunen und Zinken, ließ aber nie die Anwendung wenigstens eines Positivs außer Acht.

[From time immemorial when music was performed in the church and when it was sung with four, eight, or more vocal parts even without any instrumental accompaniment, an organ or at least a positiv was used as an accompaniment to provide a foundation and support for the music whenever the music was performed “at Christ’s grave” {a reference to the regular performance during a Good Friday service in Leipzig of a motet from the *Florilegium* collection} or other events taking place down in the church, on which occasion contrabasses would be used in proportion to the singers. There were also other means of accompaniment, as for example, when each voice had trombones and cornets play *colla parte* whereby a positiv was always present.]¹²

Hofmann gives details on attempts that have been made to establish the principles Bach followed in providing continuo accompaniment which are not the same as those he used in his cantatas. He suggests that reconstruction of the missing continuo parts for some of Bach’s motets should be possible when these principles are followed.

With Orchestral Accompaniment?

The existence of a complete set of instrumental parts for “Der Geist hilft unser Schwachheit auf” BWV 226 does not offer sufficient proof that Bach had in mind that such parts were always intended for his performances of the motets. Commissions for motets also resulted from private requests or came from places outside of Leipzig where the performance conditions as well as the availability of musicians could allow for a motet to be performed with an orchestra. Because of the expense involved for such performances and also the strictures imposed by Leipzig traditions on funeral music, it is likely that an orchestral accompaniment would have been employed in some but not all situations where a motet was called for as part of funeral ceremonies.

¹⁰ Daniel R. Melamed, *J. S. Bach and the German Motet*, Cambridge (Mass.), 1995, pp. 178ff. and 189ff.

¹¹ This undocumented assertion by Arnold Schering in his *Johann Sebastian Bachs Leipziger Kirchenmusik*, Leipzig, 1936, p. 127, appears to be highly questionable. See Hans-Joachim Schulze, *Studien zur Bach-Überlieferung im 18. Jahrhundert*, Leipzig and Dresden, 1984, Chapter 6, “Zur Überlieferung und Aufführungspraxis der Motetten”, p. 177, footnote 693.

¹² quoted from Spitta, 1880, p. 110.

One can easily imagine that Bach was attracted by the idea that the instruments not only gave additional support to the vocal parts, but also by the fact that they would enhance the choral sound by providing more color and a fuller sound in addition to making the attacks sharper and maintaining intonation. In performing the 8-part motets from the 17th century by Knüpfer and J. Christoph Bach [mentioned above] during the 1740s, J. S. Bach personally copied and also had a copyist help in preparing instrumental parts for these motets according the same principle he used for the parts for “Der Geist hilft unser Schwachheit auf” BWV 226: the supporting, *colla parte* string instruments (violins 1 & 2, viola, violoncello) supported the vocal parts of the first choir and the wind instruments (oboes 1 & 2, taille, bassoon) likewise for the second choir. There were also continuo parts for organ and violone (contrabass) and also a separate harpsichord part. Here Bach clearly differentiates between each of the choirs by contrasting the strings with the winds, thus helping to delineate the choral groups from each other just as he had in “Der Geist hilft unser Schwachheit auf” BWV 226. Thus we can see a pattern emerging, even if it is not a hard-and-fast rule that could be followed exclusively, of a performance method that Bach found appealing and did use from time to time.

It is also possible that Bach used another type of orchestral accompaniment with strings only, as a set of parts for the motet “Fürchte dich nicht” reveals. These parts were prepared by someone in the circle of C. P. E. Bach’s acquaintances in Berlin around 1760. It is probable that the performance was for a funeral service. Here only strings were used for both choirs, perhaps in order to mute the sounds of the instruments which may even have played *con sordino*, a practice that has been variously documented.

A Capella Only?

Despite all of the evidence listed above, it is still probable and quite likely that Bach sometimes did perform his motets in this manner without any instruments. There were the Leipzig strictures dictating the limits on the type of music that was allowed during the formal events surrounding a funeral and extending to the mourning period thereafter.

A question is also raised by the parts for “Der Geist hilft unser Schwachheit auf” BWV 226, where there is a possible indication for a purely vocal performance of at least a part of the motet, the final chorale. All the instrumental parts have a *Fine* marked before the final chorale which is missing from all of them. Only the vocal parts contain the final chorale. This contradictory finding could be due to the fact that there were two performances of this motet, one with the instruments and without the final chorale and one *a capella* with the final chorale included.

Another aspect that should be included here is that the *Thomaner* tradition of *a capella* performances without any instruments whatsoever can be documented as early as during Johann Friedrich Doles cantorship at the *Thomaskirche* from 1756-1789. Ernst Ludwig Gerber recalls in his *Neues historisch-biographisches Lexikon der Tonkünstler* (Leipzig, Part 1, 1812) how he attended a Leipzig church service on Christmas Day, 1767, and heard “von den herrlichen lateinischen 2 chörigen Motetten, welche die Thomasschüler zu Anfange des Frühgottesdienstes in Leipzig ohne einige Begleitung abzusingen pflegen” [“the *Thomaner*, at the beginning of

the early church service in Leipzig, sing two splendid Latin motets for double choir without any accompaniment whatsoever”].

In the Breitkopf 1761 and 1764 catalogues of available manuscripts for sale under the category “Motetten – Ohne Instrumente” [“Motets – without Instruments”] several of Bach’s motets are listed. Evidently this type of performance practice was already taking hold.

The question that needs to be raised is: “When did this practice begin in Leipzig?” The answer is that it could possibly already have begun during Bach’s tenure. Johann Adolph Scheibe, music theoretician, commented on the manner of composition and the performance practices associated with motets. Having only recently settled in Hamburg in 1737, he most likely was reflecting on his first-hand experiences in Leipzig with Bach’s music and performances when he wrote as follows:¹³

Der Generalbaß sollte zwar allezeit dabey seyn; allein, man kann ihn selten gebrauchen, weil die meisten Motetten nur von einem Chore Sanger aufgeföhret werden, es müßten denn andere Instrumente mehr dabey seyn, oder man müßte sie bey gewissen Gelegenheiten in der Kirche aufföhren.

[The basso continuo should always be present, but, unfortunately, you can rarely use it because most motets are performed only by a single choir; actually, there should be more instruments of various types playing along or they should be performed at special occasions in church.]

Hofmann rephrases this statement to mean: Actually a basso continuo should be employed, but as a general practice this is seldom done because most motets are performed *a capella*. It is a completely different matter when more instruments are added to play along or when motets are performed on special occasions in the church. All of this seems to imply that purely *a capella* performances must have been common in the 1720s and 1730s in Leipzig, but we can only suspect that Scheibe may have heard Bach’s motets in these types of settings. In any case, however, one should not any longer put any faith in the common assertion that the *a capella* performance of Bach’s motets is an unauthentic later fabrication based upon the Romantic choral ideal that existed 50 to a 100 years after Bach’s death. On the contrary, existing evidence points to the fact that Bach did, under certain circumstances, present a motet in a purely vocal performance without the aid or addition of any additional instruments.

Often overlooked in this discussion of the performance practices Bach employed for his motets with its fixation on the aspect of instrumental accompaniment is the question about Bach’s vocal forces. Bach’s choir was not of a constant size nor was it clearly defined. It is hardly possible to imagine today what the *Thomanerchor* sounded like under Bach’s direction. The physiological and intellectual prerequisites were distinctly different than those today. Some boys, due to the later maturation of the voices, could sing soprano until they were 16 or 17 years old. Among the sopranos and altos there were younger boys with their ‘chest’

¹³ Johann Adolph Scheibe (1708-1776) attended the Nikolaischule in Leipzig from 1719-1725 and applied for the position of organist at the Thomaskirche in 1729 and was not accepted in this or any other position as organist in Germany. In 1737 he founded and began publishing in Hamburg his periodical, “Der Critische Musicus” where the cited quotation appeared during its first year.

voices as well and falsettists with their ‘head’ voices. These sopranos and altos were no longer children but young, maturing musicians with years of vocal and instrumental experience who were accustomed to choral practices and routines and often even had gained experience in singing solos. Thus with the addition of these talented falsettists, Bach’s first and second choirs were accomplished, professional ensembles. A constant problem that Bach faced with these choirs was the lack of strong (full volume) voices particularly among his basses but also among his tenors as well. For this, however, he could fall back on the services of university students.

No specific information about the number of singers on each part for these motet performances has come down to us, except that he had to distribute about 50 singers between four churches for Sunday and holiday church services. However, for the special occasions when the motets were sung, he could easily recruit the best singers primarily from the primary and secondary choirs without being concerned about staffing the singers in the other churches at the same time. With special honoraria or money from commissions, Bach could more easily rely upon musically very talented university students. Based on the original set of parts for “Der Geist hilft unser Schwachheit auf” BWV 226, there was a part prepared for each vocal part (a total of eight for the double choir). Accordingly, three choristers would have sung from a single part (one singer who held the part and his two neighbors on either side looking on). In the case of “Singet dem Herrn”, there is also a similar set of parts; however, in addition there is a fragment of second (doublet) part for the bass voice of the first choir. This could signify that only this part had more singers singing it, or possibly this was the remainder of a set of doublets for each voice part, thus indicating an even greater number of singers.¹⁴

Aside from these indications, we do not know just how many singers Bach used in his motet performances. It may well have been that the number of singers varied from one occasion to another and that fewer than three singers per part may have been used. The use of OVPP cannot be entirely excluded, though Johann Adolph Scheibe argues for as large a number of singers as is possible when he states that one should “die Motetten, wo es nur möglich ist, sehr stark von Sängern besetzen” [“use as many singers as possible in performing the motets”].¹⁵ Toward the end of this article, he repeats the same admonition about the choral singers: “Sie müssen alle deutliche, vernehmlich und reine Stimmen haben, und es muß auch jedwede Stimme mehr verschiedenemal besetzt seyn” [“All of them {the singers} should have clear, audible voices with good intonation, and each part should have a number of different singers singing it”].¹⁶

Another point which is usually omitted in discussions of this sort and yet which is very important to present-day performance is just how did Bach place his choirs when performing the motets for double choir. A century earlier Michael Praetorius and Heinrich Schütz had propagated the Venetian tradition which made full use of acoustical properties provided by performing from various balconies and from the floor of the nave. They even supported placing the choirs and instrumental groups in a crosswise fashion so that the music would be coming from four different directions. Unfortunately the Thirty-Years War put an end to the

¹⁴ This possibility was proposed by Konrad Ameln in the NBA KB III/1 published in 1967.

¹⁵ Scheibe in his first year of publication of “Der Critische Musicus” Hamburg, 1737, p. 182.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 185.

unfolding of such musical splendor in the churches. Bach's motets no longer made use of such a distribution. What is recommended today is a common area with a moderate distance between the choirs. As seen from some of the earlier examples of Bach's motets, Bach, with the help of instruments intended to distinguish one choir from the other by giving each a distinctive coloring, thus emphasizing even more the dialogue character already inherent in the music of the motet. By physically separating these groups, the dialogue is enhanced. On the other hand, Bach's rhythmical and harmonic subtleties prevent these groups from being separated too far apart. One useful setup is to place the continuo group in the middle between the two choirs.

To conclude this section, Hofmann once again cites Scheibe as he summarizes the essence of a good motet performance: "Eine geistliche Motette, wenn sie in ihrer völligen Stärke genommen wird, verursacht eine außerordentliche Fröhlichkeit des Herzens; sie machet uns munter und doch bedachtsam; sie erhebet das Gemüthe zur Betrachtung" ["A sacred/spiritual/devotional motet, if you perform it with its full potential {using as large a number of performers as possible} creates {within the listener} an extraordinary, heartfelt joyfulness/cheerfulness; it enlivens us and yet makes us thoughtful; it uplifts our spirit/soul for contemplation"].¹⁷ Here Scheibe is trying to describe what Bach's generation had called "Gemüths-Ergötzung" ["the heavenly delight perceived by the soul/spirit—a joy that is perceived when you forget everything in and around you"].

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 197f.

DER GEIST HILFT UNSER SCHWACHHEIT AUF

BWV 226

Selected, summarized and translated by Thomas Braatz © 2010
The beginning material is based on NBA KB III/1, pp. 63-87

Provenance

Original Source Materials:

A. The autograph score

This is bundled with the autograph score for BWV 225 and is located in the Staatsbibliothek Berlin under the shelfmark or call number: *Mus. ms. Bach P 36*. The autograph score for BWV 226 consists of two folio pages, one laid on top of the other and then folded. In addition there are two separate pages (p. 3-18 according the penciled-in page numbers). The size of the pages is 35.5 x 22.3 cm. Compared to the BWV 225 score, the paper for this score is strong, brownish but lighter and cleaner than BWV 225 and shows less signs of use. The black-brown ink has penetrated through the paper in several spots. Just below the middle of p. 3 the ink has eaten its way through the paper so that a hole appears. The watermark is the average size MA type (listed in the Bach watermark catalog, *NBA IX/1* as #122) with actually verified dates established by Bach's use being 1727, 1729 and 1730 and the probable complete range of use given as 1727 to 1731.

On the first page of the score, the title in Bach's handwriting reads as follows:

J. J. Motetta à doi Cori. Bey Beerdigung des seel. H[err]n. Prof: und | Rectoris Ernesti di J. S. Bach.

Pages 1-6 uniformly contain 16 staves on each page, but pages 7-8 have 22, 22, 22, and 21 staves each. At first, at the beginning of this manuscript, the handwriting is almost calligraphic, but beginning with the bottom of p. 3 (m. 124) it changes to a hurriedly written form typical of a composing score with various kinds of corrections. Then beginning on p. 5 recto (m. 176), it begins to improve and become more calligraphic again with fewer errors. Also, both choirs are written out in full although both choirs sing in unison from m 146 to the end. The final chorale is missing and in its place there is an indication: *Choral. seqt.* Underneath this in someone else's handwriting in pencil and almost unreadable, there is this comment: (*Komm heil. Geist, Herre Gott*).

Arrangement of the manuscript sheets and pages:

Sheet 1 recto (p. 3): Under the title (see above) there are 2 accolades with 8 staves each containing mm 1-18. Written sideways in front of the first accolade there is *Coro 1* and in front of the second *Coro 2*.

Sheet 1 verso to 7 recto (pp. 4-15): 2 accolades with 8 staves each, mm 19-41, 42-63, 64-86, 87-108, 109-125, 126-136, 137-145, 146-163, 164-181, 182-197, 198-216, 217-232. On sheet 7 recto between both accolades and after the second, 5 staves were left empty (not notated).

Sheet 7 verso (p. 16): mm 233-244 only 2 accolades with 8 staves and empty staves like on sheet 7 recto. The second accolade fills out only half of the available 8 staves. In the remaining space that follows, between the 3rd and 4th staves there is the comment: *Choral. seqt.*

Sheet 8 recto (p. 17): 22 staves not used.

Sheet 8 verso (p. 18): here Bach has a sketch or actual beginning of a cantata entitled as follows:

J. J. Concerto Doia 19 post Trinitatis à 4 Voci. 1 Violino Conc: 2 Violini | Viola e Cont. di Bach.

As already indicated, mm 1-123 have extraordinarily few corrections. This, together with the fact that Bach penned the staves (with a *Rastral* that draws 5 lines simultaneously) for only two accolades with a noticeable space between them, supports the fact that Bach is creating a clean copy of an already existing sketch or composing score. There is an extensive correction in mm 8-10 where Bach erased an original eighth-note rest and decided to add three notes to make the text *der Geist hilft* fit in properly. Beginning with m 124 and even earlier in m 123 in the alto choir 1 and 2 and the tenor of choir 2, there is a sudden change to a composing score. In m 126 Bach had forgotten to include the word *selbst* causing him to change the form of the musical subject. In another place, m. 133, Bach had to modify the sequence of notes after he had already written out the text. Beginning with m 146, there is a return to a cleaner copy but nevertheless there are numerous corrections. Because he could not properly plan how much paper he would need to complete this composition, Bach was required to add another sheet for the conclusion of the motet because sheet which had already been pre-ruled by him was insufficient to complete the task.

B. The Original Set of Parts

These are now in the Staatsbibliothek Berlin under the call number or shelfmark: *Mus. ms. Bach St 121*. There is a set of vocal parts for choir 1 and 2 (the alto and tenor parts for choir 2 are missing), a complete set of instrumental parts, and a transposed organ part. The autograph title on the folder in which the parts are enclosed reads:

Motetta. | Bey Beerdigung des seel. Herrn | Profefſoris u. Rectoris | Ernesti. | Röm. 8. [something crossed out here] 26 & 27. | Der Geist hilfft unser Schwachheit auff. | a due Cori. | di | Joh: Sebast: Bach.

There are some indications on cover that it may once have been part of the Pölchau Collection.

Here are the parts as numbered by the NBA:

1. Soprano I: *Canto Chori primi* 3 notated pages

Johann Ludwig Krebs: mm.1-145; J. S. Bach: mm.146 to end including the chorale but not its text except for the word *Halleluja* or *Alleluja*.

2. Alto I: *Alto Chori primi* 3 notated pages
Johann Ludwig Krebs: entirely.
3. Tenore I: *Tenore Chori primi* 3 notated pages
J. L. Krebs mm. 1-145; J. S. Bach mm. 146 to end as in #1 above
4. Basso I: *Basso Chori primi* 3 notated pages
J. L. Krebs mm. 1-145; J. S. Bach mm. 146 to end as in #1 above
5. Soprano II: *Canto Chori secundi* 4 notated pages
J. L. Krebs mm. 1-145; Anna Magdalena Bach mm. 146 to end as in #1 above
- [6.] Alto II: missing probable title: *Alto Chori secundi*
? Assumption: like #5 or completion by anonymous instead of A. M. Bach
- [7.] Tenore II: missing probable title: *Tenore Chori secundi*
? Assumption: like #5 or completion by anonymous instead of A. M. Bach
8. Basso II: *Basso Chori secundi* 3 notated pages
J. L. Krebs mm. 1-145; Anonymous mm. 146 to end as in #1 above
9. Violino I: *Violino 1. del Coro 1.* 2 notated pages
J. S. Bach
10. Violino II: *Violino 2 del Coro 1.* 2 notated pages
J. S. Bach
11. Viola: *Viola del Coro 1.* 2 notated pages
J. S. Bach
12. Violoncello: *Violoncello del Coro 1.* 2 notated pages
J. S. Bach
13. Oboe I: *Hautbois 1. del Coro 2.* 2 notated pages
C. P. E. Bach
14. Oboe II: *Hautbois 2 del Coro 2.* 2 notated pages
C. P. E. Bach

15. Taille: *Taille del Coro 2*. 2 notated pages
C. P. E. Bach

16. Fagotto: *Bassono. del Coro 2*. 2 notated pages
C. P. E. Bach

17. Violone e Continuo: *Violon e Continuo*. 2 notated pages
J. S. Bach mm. 1-145; C. P. E. Bach mm. 146-to end of part

18. Organo: *Organo*. 2 notated pages
J. S. Bach

The final chorale is missing in 9-18 as well as in the autograph score. Accordingly a *Fine* appears in its place at the end of each of these parts.

Including J. S. Bach, 5 copyists were involved in copying out these parts from the autograph score. Another unidentified scribe filled in the text of the final chorale with many errors in distributing the syllables correctly under the notes so that Bach's intentions are often not clear.

From the above description of the parts, it becomes clear that the parts were copied in stages: the first copyist copied the content of the first of both of the sheets that have been placed into each other (on top of each other and then folded together). Apparently J. S. Bach had the copyists begin copying the content of both of the completed sheets onto the parts while he was still busy composing the section found on the following sheet. When Bach finished composing the score up to m 244, he then commenced helping the copyists with the parts that still needed to be finished.

More on the autograph score

From all appearances, as described above, Bach intended to create a clean copy of this work. It is unknown whether he was working from a sketch or from an earlier complete composition which he wanted to reuse under different circumstances. But then the section from mm 124-145 and perhaps even the subsequent measures until m 244 are clearly evident as a composing score, the first time that Bach committed this music to paper. The final chorale may have been taken from an earlier work because the autograph does not include it. Stranger still is the fact that there would have been ample space at the end of the score for the final chorale to be included there if Bach had wanted to do this. There is a mystery here that will be difficult, if not impossible to solve.

The sequence for copying the parts would have been like this:

First the vocal parts (B 1-8) would have been copied from the score with a mistake occurring because there was a page turn in the score and the copyist temporarily lost his place. Wherever a repetition occurred or

where the parts of both choirs are sung *unisono*, J. S. Bach, or the copyist involved in completing what J. L. Krebs had started, could refer to other completed parts as their source rather than to the score. Thus we have copies being made from copies wherever this is possible.

The instrumental parts, B 9-16 were apparently not copied from the autograph score, A, but rather from the then already existing vocal parts, B 1-8. This can be assumed because the appoggiaturas, and the dynamic, trill and phrase markings which do not exist in the score have obviously copied from the vocal parts, where Bach had inserted them after the copies of those parts had been completed. Bach personally copied the continuo parts, B 17-18, from the score with, of course, the exception of the latter part of B 17.

There is no evidence of a later revision of either the parts or score for a performance at a later point in time.

The History of the Origin of BWV 226

Bach personally indicated at the top of the title page of the score as well as on the folder in which the original parts were enclosed (see above), that this motet was composed for the funeral/burial of Johann Heinrich Ernesti, the rector of the *Thomasschule* and a professor of poetry at the University of Leipzig. The music was part of the solemn, academic ceremony held at the *Paulinerkirche*, the university church. A report by C. E. Sicul in his Leipzig annals¹⁸ reads as follows:

Den 19 Febr. 1729 starb Jungfer Regina Christina, eine Tochter Joh. Heinrichs E r n e s t i , P. P. und den 16 Oct. der Vater selbst,...
NOch ist von seinem, des Vaters, Begräbnisse mit anzumercken, Daß solches / zu Folge seiner Verordnung / auf die nun fast gantz abgekommene *solemne* Art mit einer öffentlichen *Procession* gehalten werden müssen. Und war so nach einmahl wieder ein *funus Academicum* zu sehen!...
Seine Ruhe-Stätte hat der seel. *Prof. Ernesti*, als gewesener *Decemvir Academiae* in der Pauliner-Kirche gefunden, wo ihm auch eine *solemne* Leichen-Predigt am 24 Oct. 1729 gehalten worden.

[On February 19, 1729 Miss Regina Christina {Ernesti}, the daughter of Johann Heinrich Ernesti, praemissis praemittendis, {died}; and on October 16 the father himself died....
In addition it is worth noting about the father's funeral that it was necessary, following his request, to have as part of the ceremony a public procession carried out in a solemn manner that has almost been entirely forgotten. And so once again we were able to see an academic funeral....Professor Ernesti, as an emeritus regent of the university, found his final resting place in the *Paulinerkirche* {the university church}, where a solemn funeral ceremony with a sermon was held on October 24, 1729.]

¹⁸ C. E. Sicul, *Annalium Lipsiensium*...Section 35, Leipzig, 1730, p. 920 and Section 36, Leipzig, 1731, pp. 928-929.

In contrast to the motets BWV 227 and 228 which were most likely performed as part of remembrance services, this motet BWV 226 was composed for and performed at a funeral/interment ceremony. Between the day when Ernesti died and when this ceremony took place, there was a time span of eight days, a rather short period in which to compose and correct errors in the score, copy out all the parts for a double choir and orchestra and rehearse the musicians before its first and perhaps even only performance. Considering Ernesti's advanced age (77 years old), it is probable that, as a precaution, he had already ordered a funeral motet before he died. Sicul's comment above seems to infer as much when he states: "zu Folge seiner Verordnung" ["following the instructions he had given in advance"] the burial should take place "auf die nun fast gantz abgekommene solenne Art" ["according to the solemn manner that is almost no longer customary"]. In the end Bach must still have almost run out of time in his preparations since he not only had to use several copyists but also needed to copy some of the parts himself.

The information given up to this point is extracted from the NBA KB III/1 which was prepared by Konrad Ameln and printed in 1967. Since then other materials have come to light. The date of the funeral service at which Bach's motet was performed has been given by Bach experts as Oct. 20, 21, 23, or 24. The funeral sermon delivered by Christian Weiß, however, did appear in print and clearly states the date and location as October 21, 1729 in the *Paulinerkirche*. This would have meant that Bach would only have had five days to compose and prepare the materials for this important funeral service.

Behind the scenes as the funeral ceremonies and service were being planned, there was a veritable tug-of-war between the Leipzig City Council who 'claimed' Ernesti because he had become an institution as the rector of the *Thomasschule*, a position he had held since 1684 even before Bach had been born and the University of Leipzig authorities who insisted on special academic ceremonies. The city council members wanted the funeral to take place in one of the main city churches while the university insisted on its own church as the most appropriate venue. For a few days Bach would not have known for which environment and under which circumstances he would be performing his new music. Bach must have followed this decision-making very carefully because he needed to know whether he could use a full complement of instruments in addition to the vocalists which would be needed in any case. As a general rule and a practice that was followed in the city churches, instruments should not be used for funeral services conducted in a church. However, the university church was free from any such restrictions.

It is not clear just when and under which circumstances Bach's motet was performed. Bach writes "Bey Beerdigung" which literally means the interment, when the corpse is lowered into the ground. Sicul indicates that Ernesti's final resting place was IN the *Paulinerkirche*. The printed sermon by Christian Weiß emphasized the words *Ehren-Gedächtniß* [remembrance in the honor of] and *Todes-Bereitung* [in preparation of death] all of which sound more like a remembrance service which in the city churches would have taken place a few weeks after the actual burial. Perhaps Bach had two opportunities to perform his motet: on the Oct. 21 and on Oct. 24, 1729, once with instruments and once without when the final chorale was performed by the vocal choirs only, or on the same day, once with instruments in the organ loft and later on the ground floor of the church only the chorale sung *a capella*. As Klaus Hofmann astutely observes: "In jedem Falle kann Bach für die Vorbereitung der Aufführung nicht viel Spielraum geblieben und er muss

schließlich, wie die Quellen erkennen lassen, in beträchtliche Zeitbedrängnis geraten sein.” [“In any case this would not have allowed Bach very much leeway in preparing the performance(s) and in the end, as the sources reveal, he must have encountered considerable difficulties in finding sufficient time to complete the task.”]¹⁹

Bach experts, based on the findings presented in the NBA KB III/1, have interpreted the changes from clean copy to composing score hypothetically as the result of working from an already existing score or sketch. Daniel Melamed had even proposed, after analyzing the first part of the motet carefully, that Bach was possibly working from a duet for two sopranos, but then examining the final part of the motet, rejected his own idea.²⁰

Others have pointed out that Bach could have begun preparing the sketches or selecting probable existing scores for reutilization well before Ernesti died since Bach would have received the commission from Ernesti in advance as inferred from Sicul’s account. Also, the biblical reference upon which the funeral sermon by Weiß was based had been chosen before Ernesti’s death and was known to Bach and would not have been a surprise for him. Nevertheless Bach, in his preparations for the performance of the motet, appears to have encountered difficulties in meeting his deadline as is evident from a closer examination of the original parts that had to be prepared.

Bach does not indicate the use of any instruments anywhere in his score. Their appearance in the original set of parts comes as a complete surprise. Even the continuo parts are not given a special staff in the score. The organ part generally follows mainly the bass vocal part as a *basso seguente* which is derived from whichever vocal part happens to be the lowest part at any given time. This means that whenever the vocal bass part has rests and other voices are still singing, the organ part will jump from the bass to the tenor vocal part for its cues. The violone (contrabass) and harpsichord part stays only with the vocal bass part and does not play at all when the latter part has rests.

A contradictory situation prevails in regard to the performance of the final chorale: the autograph score simply states *Choral. segt.* [which may have been added at a later point in time during this busy week of preparation] to indicate that a chorale will follow at the end of the motet; the vocal parts have the chorale added to each of them, but the instrumental parts have no final chorale and end with a *Fine* and no *Tacet* to tell them be silent at this point. This has prompted much discussion. Some possibilities include: 1. there were two performances of the motet, one with voices only including the final chorale and another with voices and instruments without the final chorale (perhaps the final chorale had not yet been added to the choral parts and was added after such a performance). The authors of the *Bach Compendium* suggest that the chorale was performed only by the choirs separately without instruments at a different point in the elaborate funeral ceremony, perhaps at

¹⁹ Klaus Hofmann, *Johann Sebastian Bach: Die Motetten*, Bärenreiter, 2003, p. 90.

²⁰ Daniel R. Melamed, “Probleme zu Chronologie, Stil und Zweck der Motetten Johann Sebastian Bachs” in “Johann Sebastian Bach. Schaffenskonzepzion – Werkidee – Textbezug. Bericht über die Wissenschaftliche Konferenz zum VI. Internationalen Bachfest Leipzig, 1989 (Beiträge zur Bach-Forschung, No. 9/10, Leipzig, 1991, pp. 277-284.

the graveside proper.²¹ Another conceivable possibility is that the news that the chorale would be dropped came to Bach too late, after the vocal parts had already included them but the instrumental parts had not yet been completed, so he forgot in his hurry to delete the *Choral. seqt.* at the end of his score and to cross out the chorale in the vocal parts.

Another thing worth mentioning about the chorale is that it appears not to have composed for this occasion but may have existed as a final chorale for a lost cantata, possibly from the Picander cantata cycle, and it may have originally been in a different key. In the collection of 4-part Bach chorales of 1765 and 1784 it appears in a different key and may have been transposed for use as part of the motet.

As already pointed out, the parts indirectly mirror the preparations required for a performance of this motet. The score and parts must have been completed in the shortest possible time so that a rehearsal, at least for vocalists, might still take place before the performance. The production process Bach employed demonstrates a high degree of planning to avoid wasting any time and making use of every spare minute and using all the available help that he could muster quickly. In addition to his own efforts, Bach also used his pupil, Johann Ludwig Krebs, for a major portion of the task and then with varying degrees of difficulty for the tasks at hand Anna Magdalena Bach, Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, an *Incertus* I, 152 whom some experts think might be Wilhelm Friedemann Bach and another two anonymous individuals who wrote out the text for chorale (and made quite a few mistakes in doing so). The abbreviations used in the following description of the process used are quite obvious: JSB, JLK, AMB, CPEB, ?WFB. The motet will be divided into two movements: the first movement with three sections or parts and the second movement being the final chorale so that I/1-2 would signify parts one and two of the first movement, I/3 = mvt. 1, part 3; and II = mvt. 2.

There are two stages: 1. the preparation of the vocal parts (phases 1-5) and 2. the preparation of the instrumental parts (6-8). Within these stages eight phases can be identified as indicated. Perhaps while the specific venue for the main funeral ceremony in a church still had not been agreed upon, Bach went ahead with the composition of the motet for double choir only and the production of the vocal parts with the help primarily of his main copyist at that time, JLK, giving him the score for sections I/1-2 while he was still working on I/3. When Bach finished composing I/3 [still lacking the chorale], he began adding I/3 to the existing parts JLK had completed up to that point. Before leaving this marathon copying session, JLK managed to complete entirely the part for Alto I [there still was no chorale at this point]. During this time and after JLK had left, Bach personally added the missing sections for the S I, T I, and B I parts; however, there still was no chorale at this point in the process. As the set of vocal parts for choir I was being completed, AMB and ?WFB began copying the vocal parts for choir II and JSB could begin revising all the parts (correcting and adding dynamic, phrasing markings and ornamentation). [We do not know whether, at this point in the process, a performance of the motet took place without the final chorale and without any instruments.] Now Bach suddenly receives word that the venue will, after all, be the university church, the *Paulinerkirche*, and not either the *Thomaskirche* or the *Nikolaikirche* as the city authorities had hoped. Now Bach would not be restricted by old, conservative customs that prohibited the use of instruments or organ

²¹ *Bach Compendium. Analytisch-bibliographisches Repertorium der Werke Johann Sebastian Bachs*, Hans-Joachim Schulze and Christoph Wolff, Leipzig, vol. I/3 (1988) in the entry C 2, p. 949.

during funeral services. He decides to have two ‘choirs’ of instruments play *colla parte* with the vocal choirs, one consisting of strings only, the other winds only and a continuo group consisting of organo, contrabass, and harpsichord. With very little time remaining before the actual performance, JSB begins creating an organo part first, then followed by the violone+continuo part (there were no such parts in the autograph score) following the method described above). He lets CPEB finish the final section of the continuo (violone+harpsichord) part and begins copying the parts for the string instruments from the already existing parts for choir I. CPEB is instructed to do the same simultaneously with the existing vocal parts for choir II, but these will constitute the choir of wind instruments instead. Each of the instrumental parts ends with a *Fine* at the end of I/3 with no indication of any chorale to follow. On the morning of October 21, 1729, Bach hears about another change in the funeral ceremony to take place that afternoon: there would be gathering including Reverend Weiß and other important officials at the site on the main floor of the church where the coffin would be lowered into the ground. Could Bach have the choir sing an appropriate ‘anthem’ for this solemn moment? Bach quickly decided to add a harmonization for a Luther hymn from a Pentecost cantata that he had composed earlier that year. Using most of the family copyists as well as JLK and joining in himself, Bach completed this final task just in the nick of time and he even made a note to himself at the end of the score that a chorale would follow later in the program. There simply was insufficient time to change the *Fine* markings at the end of each of the instrumental parts, but that information could be conveyed by word of mouth and the prevailing situation that would not accommodate all the instruments. Now the memorial service at the *Paulinerkirche* takes place as scheduled just five days after Ernesti’s death. At one point in the service, a large group of university students (sans *Thomaner* who were not allowed to sing in this church) who had assembled as vocalists and instrumentalists in the choir loft near the organ, which was being played by the organist who held this position at the *Paulinerkirche*, began the performance of this exquisite motet directed by JSB who also played the harpsichord just as he had done two years previously during the performance of BWV 198 (*Trauerode für die sächsische Kurfürstin Christiane Eberhardine*). Later during the service, at the place where Ernesti’s body was interred inside the church, all the members of both choirs assembled to sing the final chorale *a capella*. It was the third verse of Martin Luther’s “Komm, Heiliger Geist, Herr Gott”:

Du heilige Brunst, süßer Trost,
 nun hilf uns frölich und getrost,
 in deinem Dienst beständig bleiben,
 die Trübsal uns nicht abtreiben.
 O Herr durch dein Krafft uns bereit,
 und stärck des Fleisches Blödigkeit,
 daß wir hie ritterlich ringen,
 durch Tod und Leben zu dir dringen
 Halleluja. Halleluja.

The following scheme by Klaus Hofmann seeks to illustrate the sequence and division of tasks necessary for composing and preparing the materials needed for the performance(s) of this motet.

Other abbreviations used below are: S = soprano; A = alto; T = tenor; B = bass. The Roman numeral after the vocal part identifies either the first or second choir: A I = alto of the first choir; B II = bass of the second choir. The instruments are: V. = violin; Va. = Viola; Vc. = Violoncello; Viol. = Violone (contrabass); V. 1/2 = first and second violins.

Phase	JSB	JLK	AMB	?WFB	2 Anon	CPEB
---	<i>Score I/1-2</i>					
1	<i>Score I/3</i>	SATB I+S{AT}B II: I/1-2				
2	S I, {A II}, T I, B I: I/3 Chorale w/o text					
3		A I:I/3+Chorale using A II	S II: I/3+Chorale w/o Text using S I	B II: I/3+Chorale w/o Text using B I		
4					STB I, SB II+{AT II}? Chorale Text	
5	Revision of vocal parts					
6	Organo: I entire; Viol. I/1-2					
7						Viol.:I/3 using B I or Vc.
8	V. 1/2, Va., Vc. From SATB I					4 Winds using SATB II