

## Cantatas for the Second Sunday after Trinity

### Basilique Saint-Denis, Paris

Martin Luther's German hymn adaptation of Psalm 12 deplors how easily man is led astray by heresy. It provides the frame for Bach's cantata BWV 2 **Ach Gott, vom Himmel sieh darein**, its inner strophes paraphrased as recitative/aria pairings. In sharp contrast to the run of instrumentally elaborate chorale fantasia openings of his second Leipzig cycle (1724/5), and no doubt prompted by the grim vignette of isolated huddles of the faithful in a heathen world of persecution, Bach chooses to set Luther's opening verse as an archaic chorale motet. Within this austere, vocally dominant texture the *cantus firmus* stands out sung in long notes by the altos, doubled by a pair of oboes which add extra edge and glint to the chorale tune. Each line of the text is anticipated by successive fugal entries in the other voices doubled by cornetto, three trombones and strings. The progressive increase in the number of vocal-and-instrumental lines leading up to each new entry of the *cantus firmus* lends 'a special structurally conditioned dynamic' to this movement (Alfred Dürr). Like other cantatas in the archaic motet style, such as BWV 121 *Christum wir sollen loben schon*, it has the engrossing quality of ritualised worship, the musical equivalent of those earnest, gaunt faces one comes across in fifteenth-century Flemish religious painting. Bach's way of mitigating the severity of the extended fugue in D minor, with its chromatic descent through a fourth (*passus duriusculus*), is to insert its opposite, a chromatic ascent in the continuo line.

Like a preacher extrapolating his theme from the previous congregational hymn, the tenor fulminates against the idolatrous gang – 'Sie lehren eitel falsche List' ('They teach vain and false deceit'). As one would expect, this is Luther again, and to the same anonymous chorale tune that Bach now sets in slow canon with the continuo. The target

here is the 'törichte Vernunft' (foolish reason) that men use as their 'compass', and it leads to a savage denunciation of man's futile attempts to base his salvation on his own puny efforts: 'they are like the graves of the dead which, though fine from the outside, contain only rottenness and stench and display nothing but filth'.

The abrupt switch to the up-to-date *concertante* style for the alto aria with violin obbligato comes as a shock, though the sustained jeremiad against heretics and plotters is still present, audible in the combative chains of tripletised semiquavers in the violin part, the defiant staccato delivery of the continuo and the way the chorale melody resurfaces in the aria's 'B' section (bars 56-9). Eventually the piteous appeal to God by the afflicted sinner is answered at the point where the second recitative (No.4) turns into arioso. We are told how God responds: 'Ich muss ihr Helfer sein! Ich hab ihr Flehn erhört... Ich will mich ihrer Not erbarmen' ('I must be their Helper! I have heard their imploring... I shall take pity on their plight'), in a series of rising scalar phrases which counteract the overall descending tonal shape of this short cantata. The powerful tenor aria (No.5) perpetuates this recurring pattern of ascending lines in the upper strings and oboes against a series of counter-rotating figures in the continuo. Bach latches onto the analogy of 'silver... purified through fire' to signify the (re-) conversion of the Christian purified by the Cross. The allusion, and the way Bach suggests liquid movement or the flow of molten metal, is a reminder not just of his interest in precious metals and coins but of the contemporary search for the philosopher's stone by successive apothecaries and alchemists working underground in Dresden for Augustus the Strong, intent on turning base metal into gold and discovering the secret (*Arcanum*) of porcelain instead.

Two weeks after the first outing of BWV 2 on 18 June 1724 Bach introduced BWV 10 **Meine Seele erhebt den Herrn** for the feast of the Visitation – the fifth work in his second Leipzig cantata cycle. He

thought sufficiently highly of it to repeat it at least once during the 1740s. It was intended for the liturgy of the Vesper service in Leipzig, and his unknown librettist presents the German *Magnificat* unaltered for movements 1 and 5 and paraphrased in 2, 3, 4 and 6, with a concluding choral doxology rather than a chorale. For the unaltered words Bach finds ways to weave in the *tonus peregrinus*, the congregational chant associated with these words in Lutheran tradition. It makes a fascinating foil to his Latin *Magnificat* (BWV 243), first performed (with Christmas interpolations) on Christmas Day the year before. Less flamboyantly scored and less overtly theatrical, the cantata yields nothing to the canticle in terms of canny musical craftsmanship and word painting. Bach's challenge here is to find a workable synthesis between the modal character of the *tonus peregrinus* and the festive mood of the text, and what that suggests to him in choral and instrumental ebullience. There is equivalent rhythmical propulsion to the opening chorale fantasia (marked *vivace*), with Italianate violin concerto-style arpeggios for the upper strings and vigorous declamation from the three lower choral voices. For the second verse the *tonus peregrinus*, now assigned to the altos, migrates to the subdominant before a characteristically skilful meshing together of the opening *sinfonia* with the choral texture, but this time without the *cantus firmus*.

The second movement, a festive *concertante* soprano aria in B flat, maintains the rhythmical élan to describe the Lord as 'stark und mächtig' (strong and mighty). A comparison of the autograph score with the original parts suggests that the unison oboes, which complete the four-part texture when the singer pauses, may have been added only as an afterthought when Bach came to copy out the parts. The tenor recitative (No.3) culminates with a thirty-six note *melisma* to evoke the proud being scattered like chaff that might have brought a smile of recognition to Bach's congregation recalling the Evangelist's scourging motif heard in the *St John Passion* some four months earlier. Next

comes a pompous, implacable aria for bass, emphasising the forceful ejection of the proud in the hammered notes of the basso continuo descending to the bottom of the 'Schwefelpfuhl' (the sulphurous pit) and leading to a witty way of describing the rich left empty and desolate ('bloß – und – leer'). It makes for an intriguing comparison with the 'Deposit' from the Latin *Magnificat*. As in the 'Suscepit Israel' of that work, Bach brings back the *tonus peregrinus* (assigned to the trumpet) now as a foil to an alto/tenor duet of the utmost tenderness and lyricism (No.5).

But perhaps he leaves the best till last, a tenor recitative (No.6), beginning *secco* and then enriched by a lapping semiquaver accompaniment for the upper strings to describe how God's seed 'had to be strewn so far abroad like sand by the sea and stars in the firmament', and for a paraphrase of the opening words of St John's Gospel ('And the Word was made flesh') which rounds off this cantata with a wonderful and satisfying promise of solace and grace. The doxology is redolent of Heinrich Schütz in the vigour of its choral declamation – the way Bach seems to savour the alternation of strong and weak stresses of the German language.

Schütz (1585-1672) is the unsung hero linking Monteverdi and Bach. He was, I believe, the conduit for that rich vein of musical expression and the near-scientific exploration of the human passions that Monteverdi pioneered, responsible for passing it on via such pupils as Jonas de Fletin to Johann Christoph Bach, and from him to his great first-cousin-once-removed. More than any other Baroque composer Schütz recognised the rhythms, sensual patterns and rhetorical force of sung German. Juxtapose him therefore with Bach and the spotlight is turned on the latter's word-setting: not always felicitous, nor even the main consideration. With Bach other priorities rule, though when he chooses to he shows himself not only perfectly capable of clarity and sensitivity in his treatment of words, but even a master rhetorician.

To me Schütz's superb motet **Die Himmel erzählen die Ehre Gottes**, published in 1648 and dedicated to the choir of St Thomas in Leipzig, is evergreen in its satisfying alternation of lightly scored 'verse' passages set between the 'full' refrains that cry out for instrumental enrichment (and which Schütz endorsed). I suppose I've known it since I was six or seven, and can still hear my father's ringing tenor declaiming 'und dieselbige gehet heraus / wie ein Bräutigam aus seiner Kammer / und freuet sich, wie ein Held zu laufen'. Could Bach have known it? His own cantata **Die Himmel erzählen die Ehre Gottes** (BWV 76) was the second to be performed after he took up his post as *Thomaskantor* in the summer of 1723. It occurs at almost exactly the mid-point of the Lutheran liturgical year, the crossover from 'the time of Christ' (Advent to Ascension) to 'the era of the church' (the Trinity season dominated by the concerns of Christian believers living in the world without the physical presence of Christ but under the guidance of the Holy Spirit). The interesting thing here is the way Bach chose to seize on this coincidence, not just to emphasise the important seasonal time-switch, but to present himself to his new congregations in Leipzig in terms of his fundamental approach to the way music can interpret and intersect with doctrine. This cantata is clearly more than just a sequel to the previous Sunday's *Die Elenden sollen essen* (BWV 75, SDG Vol 1): together they form a diptych revealing a thematic continuity extended over two weeks, with plentiful cross-referencing between the two set Gospels and Epistles beyond the obvious parallels between the injunction to give charitably to the hungry (BWV 75) and of brotherly love manifested in action (BWV 76). Unusually for Bach, both works are substantial bipartite cantatas, each comprising fourteen movements divided into two equal parts. After opening with a setting of a psalm verse, each cantata goes on to interpret it by referring to the parable told in the Gospel for the day and pinpointing the way Jesus' presence on earth fulfilled an Old Testament *dictum*. In Part II these themes are

connected to the believer via a characteristically Lutheran interpretation of the first of John's Epistles – the relationship of faith to love and of love to good deeds. The two Gospel parables (both from St Luke) are full of metaphors of eating and drinking: the rich man's table, from which Lazarus tried to gather fallen crumbs (BWV 75), standing in opposition to the 'great supper' and God's invitation through Christ to the banquet of eternal life (BWV 76). Evidently a lot of thought and pre-planning had gone on while Bach was still in Köthen, as well as discussions with his unknown librettist and possibly with representatives of the Leipzig clergy, before he could set the style, tone and narrative shaping of these two impressive works.

The first movement of BWV 76 fans out from a festive, concerto-like opening into a powerful fugue led by the *Concertisten*. We have no means of knowing how it was received at the time, but there is nothing in the surviving music of Johann Kuhnau, Bach's predecessor, to match this in complexity or forwardly propulsive energy. New too to the Leipzig congregants, surely, was the musical weight their new Cantor gave to recitative: the way, for example, that a gentle *accompagnato* for tenor (No.2) could burgeon into *arioso* with a mimetic use of violins to evoke the spirit of God moving upon the face of the waters. Not that Bach made it hard work for his listeners *all* the time: he seems to address them very directly in the soprano aria with violin obbligato, 'Hört, ihr Völker, Gottes Stimme' (No.3), that unfolds with an easygoing lilt and in canonic imitation with its continuo line.

Bach now introduces his bass soloist to inveigh against Belial, the evil spirit to whom crowds often turn, a theme he elaborates in the ensuing aria with trumpet and strings, 'Begone, idolatrous tribe!'. What is significant here is less the robust depiction of a topsy-turvy world ('die Welt gleich verkehren') than the reference to Christ as 'the light of reason', a Lutheran interpretation of reason exactly opposite to the one we heard in BWV 2. There it is seen as the stumbling block to salvation;

here it is interpreted in a passive sense as being illuminated by faith, God's gift to man to help him manage his earthly affairs.

Where Part I begins with the stirring sound of a trumpet in celebration of God's glory as creator of the universe, for Part II, presumably performed after the sermon and during the Communion, and concerned with 'brüderliche Treue' ('brotherly devotion'), Bach introduces a totally fresh, intimate sonority, a viola da gamba in dialogue with an oboe d'amore. This instrumental pairing is presented first in a fetching *sinfonia*, in effect a *sonata da chiesa*, and later in the alto aria (No.12), all part of Bach's strategy to set out a fair sample of his compositorial wares and not hold back as he did back in February in his two tactically cautious audition pieces (BWV 22 and 23). As in Part I, two soothing, euphonious movements precede an ill-tempered outburst, this time by the tenor (No.10) over an *ostinato* bass line, a masochistic invitation to 'Hate me, then, hate me with all your might, o hostile race!'. Bach adds a wiggly line indicative, in contemporary parlance, of a 'shake' (a violent burst of vibrato) over the tenor's first dissonant entry. This mood of revelling in being detested by the opposition persists in the middle section, its expression softened only by the singer's melismas on 'umfassen' (embrace) and 'Freude' (joy). It takes the *arioso* section of the ensuing alto recitative (No.11), with its reference to celestial manna and the strengthening of community, to re-establish the mood of 'brotherly devotion'. This is as a prelude to the E minor aria in 9/8, 'Liebt, ihr Christen', its gentle phrases suggestive of the embrace that Jesus extends to his 'brothers', but also uncannily reminiscent of Charles Aznavour's *Les feuilles mortes*. How many of the French audience, I wonder, picked up that improbable link ringing out strangely in the formal Gothic spaces of Saint-Denis?

The chorale strophes that conclude both parts derive from Luther's hymn 'Es woll uns Gott genädig sein' (1524), presented in a puzzling form: each strain of the melody is pre-announced by the

trumpet (reminiscent of a bugle intoning the 'Last Post') accompanied by gently-weaving syncopated contrapuntal lines in the upper strings over a persistently fragmented bass line. The overall effect is wistful and slightly melancholy – more prayerful than celebratory.

We performed this cantata sequence initially in the Lutheran church of Saint-Guillaume in Strasbourg, the gateway between Germany and France and the conduit through which Bach's music trickled into France at the turn of the twentieth century (thanks largely to Albert Schweitzer and Fritz Münch), before moving on to one of the great architectural landmarks of Catholic Europe, dedicated to the patron saint of France: the Basilique Saint-Denis, that first great Gothic edifice on the northern outskirts of Paris, a national shrine where all but three of the Kings of France from the tenth century until the outbreak of the Revolution are buried, and whose vast spaces threatened to engulf Bach's music. We were greeted by an audience of more than 1200 on a night when France faced Italy in the final of the UEFA Euro 2000 competition. The concluding 'Amen' of Bach's prodigious cantata BWV 76 faded into the vaulting just seconds before the announcement of a French victory in extra time and the ensuing cacophony of car horns.

This concert marking the halfway point of our Bach cantata pilgrimage coincided with augmented fears for the continuation of the pilgrimage should we fail to come up with a fresh injection of funds over the next three weeks, and the dilemma of how to present this to all those who had kept faith with the project thus far – singers, players, benefactors and those members of our audiences who had travelled across Europe with us. This is where the intersection of Bach's more penitential cantata movements and the unfolding of actual real-life events can become peculiarly intense. The thing about confining oneself to the music of a single composer for an entire year is that with this degree of familiarity you begin to know (or at least you *think* you know) the wrinkles of his mind as well as the rhythm and pattern of his

well-crafted responses to theological stimulus (also those moments when he goes off-piste!). Here was someone whose experience of life was marked by a succession of personal tragedies and professional setbacks, but whose tenacity of faith and the courage he showed both as man and as composer led him to explore the full range of human emotions in intimate detail. Through the stunning mastery of his craft and the wealth of his imaginative musical response, he was conveying to us, 250 years after his death, unfamiliar ways of dealing with the thorny side of life, projecting an end to distress and the prospect of release from disappointment and frustration. Without this amazing weekly blood transfusion in music, I doubt whether I'd have been able to cope with all the uncertainty and to shoulder the responsibility for keeping the pilgrimage on course.

### **Cantatas for the Third Sunday after Trinity**

#### **Fraumünster, Zürich**

I first conducted BWV 21 **Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis** in 1979. It struck me then as one of the most extraordinary and inspired of Bach's vocal works, and remains so now when I have become much more familiar with all the other cantatas. Crucial gaps in the surviving source material make the genesis of this two-part Weimar cantata a subject of contention amongst Bach scholars. Most would now accept a chronology in which a shorter version probably antedates its first documented outing (Weimar, 17 June 1714) and expands to an 11-movement work '*per ogni tempo*', possibly for performance in Halle in December 1713. It is then revised in Bach's Köthen years (transposed up a tone and perhaps performed in conjunction with his application for the post of organist at the *Jacobikirche* in Hamburg in November 1720), and reaches its familiar form as the third cantata Bach performed (13

June 1723) on taking up his duties in Leipzig, where it was possibly revived more than once in later years. In every version it is the psalm verses (Nos 2, 6 and 9) that provide the supporting pillars for the whole structural edifice. Their close resemblance to the psalm choruses of his earliest cantatas (BWV 150 and 131) in the sectional switches of tempo and texture point to their having been conceived soon after Bach's move to Weimar in 1708 (despite the fact that his cantata output there is thought to have begun some five years later), an impression strengthened by the similarity of the dialogue between the Soul and Jesus (No.8) to the *Actus tragicus* (BWV 106), and of the chorale arrangement in motet style (No.9) to the second and fifth movements of BWV 4. Yet it is precisely the juxtaposition of these earlier styles with two 'modern' Italianate arias (Nos 3 & 5) and *accompagnati* (Nos 4 & 7) that turns this into such a fascinating and pivotal work in Bach's *oeuvre*.

It opens with a *sinfonia* in C minor of miraculous poignancy, the oboe and first violins exchanging arabesques and coming to rest on no less than three pauses replete with gestural pathos. The end result is that even before the voices enter, the idea of 'Bekümmernis' ('affliction') is firmly established in the listener's mind, a mood that persists through all six movements of Part I, five of them set almost obsessively in C minor. Bach's cavalier way of ignoring poetic metre, and his propensity to allow instrumental textures to vie with, and even overwhelm, vocal melody, offered an easy target for the theorist Johann Mattheson. It was specifically his flouting of the accepted conventions of text-setting that provoked Mattheson's ire on this occasion and led him to go for Bach's jugular in a scathing attack on the repeated 'Ich's' which precede the fugal presentation of the opening chorus. It seems strange that he should not have grasped Bach's rhetorical purpose behind this repetition – to underline the sinner's culpability and the slough of despond from which only God's comfort can rescue him. This pertains still more to the version of the cantata that Mattheson might have heard

in Hamburg (shorn of its opening *sinfonia*): Bach's aim is to prepare the listener for the fugal working-out of the penitential text by emphasising the personal nature of the penitent's affliction – 'My heart was deeply troubled'.

Perhaps it was less the thrice repeated 'Ich's that irritated Mattheson than the gratuitous repetition of whole phrases both here and in Nos 3 and 8. Yet this is a deliberate and effective strategy: by presenting the voices in fugal succession, Bach builds up a composite portrayal of personal affliction shared out between the singers, the instrumentalists joining in only every three bars to coincide with the words 'in meinem Herzen' and to reinforce the mood of disquiet and heaviness of heart. The problem here lies not, as Laurence Dreyfus suggests, in the disproportion given by Bach to the first part of the psalm verse and its sequel 'in meinem Herzen', nor that he 'fails to set [it] with a convincing or audible declamation'. Only a bad performance will allow the instruments to overwhelm the voices or mask the audibility of the words at this point.

The music pauses on the word 'aber', in *adagio* – a bridge to an optimistic section marked *vivace*, in which God's consolations are welcomed as refreshment to the afflicted spirit ('erquicken meine Seele') in an extended three-and-a-half bar *melisma* for all voices and instruments. Lest the contrast be too glib or facile, Bach slows the tempo again to *andante* for a last presentation of 'deine Tröstungen' ('Thy comforting words') before an implied return to *vivace* for the 'erquicken' phrase with which this opening choral tableau concludes.

Next comes a soprano aria with oboe, still in C minor, 'Seufzer, Tränen, Kummer, Not', a tragic lament replicating the gestures of a slow dance in 12/8, in which everything seems to grow out of the rootstock of the oboe's seven-bar introduction. In its concision and emotional profundity it declares itself the not-so-distant ancestor of Pamina's 'Ach, ich fühl's' from *The Magic Flute*. Was this one of the scores Mozart

studied on his visit to Leipzig in 1789? It seems that at least for one performance Bach assigned the ensuing *accompagnato* (No.4) to the soprano (the 'soul'). The tenor aria (No.5) in F minor contains traps for the unwary: if you misread the phrase-structure and allow the melodic stresses to synchronise with the bass-supported harmonies you can end up inflecting an unimportant word like 'von' (now that *would* have been a red rag to Mattheson!) until you realise that Bach has shunted the violins and violas a quaver ahead of the vocal line to augment the Schubertian liquidity of those 'streams of salt tears'. There is a case for making the *adagio* which follows the stormy middle *allegro* section slightly slower than the initial *largo*, to give enhanced emphasis to the 'trübsalsvolle Meer' ('sorrow-laden sea'), before returning to tempo for the *da capo*.

Bach now gives us a setting of words from Psalm 42, 'Was betrübst du dich, meine Seele', by the solo quartet that draws on the expressive penitential motet style of the preceding generation (Matthias Weckmann, Nicolaus Bruhns and Bach's older cousin Johann Christoph). This is taken up by the choir and orchestra before an animated fugal presentation of 'und bist so unruhig' (marked *spirituoso*), which only grounds itself with the words 'in mir' (*adagio*). 'Harre auf Gott' ('Hope thou in God') precedes four exquisite bars of sustained instrumental harmonies over a pedal B flat, allowing the oboe, the true voice of the unquiet spirit throughout this cantata, to tug on the heart-strings, before the voices re-enter affirmatively with 'denn ich werde ihm noch danken', given twice. This leads to a permutation fugue 'dass er meines Angesichtes Hilfe und mein Gott ist', first by the four *Concertisten*, then the oboe, then the upper strings one by one, before the whole ensemble joins in, culminating with a majestic *adagio* and an affirmative (but as we shall see, provisional) C major cadence.

Now follows the sermon and an implied lapse of time as the believer is left to contemplate the moment when God will reveal His

salvation. The second part of this astonishing cantata – which constitutes a music-drama all of its own in the way that it moves from earthly tribulation to a vision of eternity – opens in the relative major with a memorable example of Bach’s frequent dialogues between the ‘soul’ (soprano) and Jesus (bass): here as an *accompagnato* of an almost Mozartian range of vocal expression and harmonic opulence, and leading to a duet (with continuo) of thinly-disguised sexual imagery (No.8). ‘Komm, mein Jesu, und erquicke’, sings the soul; ‘Ja, ich komme und erquicke’, answers Jesus. Devotion and carnality mingle in electrifying conjunction. Only the thinnest of membranes separates this from the love duet between Diana and Endymion in the ‘Hunt’ cantata (BWV 208, No.12) composed in February 1713. There are instances of a feline type of chiding (‘Nein, ach nein, du hassst mich!’), moments of capitulation and a triple-rhythm dance of joy, before a truncated return to the opening music and a euphonious meeting of minds when the two voices move in parallel twelfths. A touching final phrase for the continuo confirms that the union or ‘refreshment’ has duly been concluded.

The mood of balm and serenity is prolonged in the extended movement in G minor (No.9), in which three of the four solo voices exchange the words ‘Sei nun wieder zufrieden’, this time from Psalm 116, in blissful fugal phrases against what was evidently one of Bach’s favourite chorales, Georg Neumark’s ‘Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten’, in the tenor line. It is only after a second strophe that the strings (supported in Leipzig by the *Ripienisten*, the oboe and four trombones) join in the chorale, which now passes to the sopranos, whose sentiment is more optimistic: ‘Die folgend Zeit verändert viel / und setzet jeglichem sein Ziel’ (‘the future will transform much / and set an end for all of us’). A jubilant tenor aria follows, in which the singer deliberately contradicts the continuo’s unequivocal *hemiola* expressing ‘sorrow’ and ‘pain’ with a downbeat accent on ‘verschwinde’ (‘vanish!’): Bachian humour at its most effective. The ‘B’ section contains a play on words: ‘verwandle

dich, Weinen, in lauterem Wein' – 'transform your whining into wine'.

This idea of 'transformation' – of sorrow into joy and of Bach's modest oboe-and-strings ensemble into a celestial band led by three trumpets and timpani – permeates the final tableau and lifts the believer out of his former gloom. It begins with the passage from Revelation (5:12-13), 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain', so familiar from Handel's *Messiah*. (One could well ask whether Handel, with his keen eye for what has been called 'transformative imitation', hadn't seized on it as a useful paradigm for his great closing chorus: there are the same imposing blocks of homophonic declamation and sense of mounting excitement drawing on the most elementary and compelling armaments in the eighteenth-century composer's locker.) This superlative chorus culminates in another permutation fugue which symbolically reverses the key, instrumentation and rhythmic character of the one that concludes Part I; even if it were added only at a later stage by Bach, it seems absolutely integral to his overall design and to the fulfilment of the structure as a whole. Unlike, say, the instantaneous switch from C minor to C major in the Finale of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, Bach insists that we experience the agonising delay in our release from the inescapable sorrows of worldly life and hear in this modulation how these will eventually be lifted as a result of God's *Trost* (comfort) and *Erquickung* (refreshment), leading to the time when we see him 'face to face'.

Bach's only other cantata for this Sunday, BWV 135 **Ach Herr, mich armen Sünder**, was composed and presumably rehearsed in June 1724, before he travelled to Gera to test the organ there, which means that he never actually supervised or performed it himself. This short, pithy, penitential cantata is the fourth in his second Leipzig cycle, part of an impressive sequence that begins with BWV 7, with its violin concerto-like opening fantasia and the *cantus firmus* in the tenor, and continues with BWV 20, with its French overture beginning and *cantus*

*firmus* in the soprano, and last week's BWV 2, opening in old motet style, with the *cantus firmus* in the alto. Together they make a fascinating and contrasted portfolio of choral fantasia openings.

In the opening tableau Bach intertwines two oboes over a plain unison presentation of the Passion chorale tune in the upper strings (no bass line as yet!) before they too get caught up in the oboe's tracery. Then the basses enter with the theme in diminution, played by cello, bass, bassoon and bass trombone. It all adds up to a slow, ritualistic portrayal of a penitential sinner seeking reprieve and is deeply affecting, especially at the point where Bach piles on the agony with a succession of self-incriminating first inversions: 'Mein Sünd, mein Sünd, mein Sünd...'.

The mood continues in the tenor recitative (No.2), imploring the 'physician of souls' to heal the sick and weak sinner. Balm is offered in the tenor aria with two oboes, with its description of how everything in death is silence ('alles stille... stille... stille'). An alto recitative begins *adagio*, like an aria, 'I am weary with sighing', and goes on: 'my spirit has neither strength nor power, for all night long... I lie bathed in sweat and tears. I almost die with worry, and sorrow has aged me', words that struck me as being painfully appropriate to our current funding dilemma. And I could identify with the magnificently defiant bass aria, with the first violins behaving like virtuoso storm petrels – 'Weicht, all ihr Übeltäter!' ('Begone, all you evildoers!'). This is superb angry music, with Bach fuming at the delinquent malefactors (he met enough of them in his professional life). He concludes with a rousing 'Glory to God', to the same Passion chorale by Cyriakus Schneegaß (1597).

With only two extant cantatas for this Sunday we found room to include Bach's so-called Triple Concerto, BWV 1044, a work that despite its superficial similarity (at least in scoring) to Brandenburg Concerto No.5 seems to inhabit a different stylistic milieu to that of Bach's other concerti – one much closer, in fact, to that of his eldest

sons. The Bach scholar Peter Wollny has come to the rescue, showing how the extant sources (copies made by two of Bach's pupils, Agricola and Müthel), the role of the concertino flute and violin in mediating between the solo harpsichord and the string ripieni, and the unprecedented use of multiple stopping and pizzicati assigned to the tutti strings, all point to one conclusion: that this was Bach's attempt to emulate the Berlin orchestral style of the 1740s. Wollny concludes that the skilful adaptations of the Prelude and Fugue in A minor for solo harpsichord, BWV 894, for the outer movements, and of the organ sonata in D minor, BWV 527, for the middle movement, were most likely made in connection with one of Bach's visits to the Berlin court (where his middle son Carl Philipp Emanuel was employed) in either 1740 or 1747. Doubts as to whether Bach himself made (or simply oversaw) the transcription of this concerto can hardly extend to the central movement: in the way it is expanded for four voices we have a prime example of the pleasure Bach took in converting trios 'on the spur of the moment' (according to CPE Bach) into complete quartets with far greater complexity of texture. Before it passes to the flute the fourth voice is assigned to the violin – an accompanying pizzicato figure designed to emulate the plucked tones of the harpsichord.

The 'Evangelisch-Reformierte' *Fraumünster* in Zürich dates from 1250 and must be one of the most ecumenical of all churches, having existed as a Benedictine convent for aristocratic southern German ladies until the last abbess converted to Protestantism in 1524, then used variously as a place of worship by Veltliner and Huguenot refugees, by the Russian Orthodox Church and once more by the Catholics. Despite his enthusiasm and talent for music, Ulrich Zwingli, who led the Reformation in Zürich, banned all music in church because of its ability to seduce the senses. Calvin's disdain for 'dissolute chansons' similarly restricted singing in church to the monophonic Geneva Psalter (1543), considering all the rest to be 'the instrument of

lasciviousness or of any shamefulness... for there's hardly anything in the world with more power to turn or bend... the morals of men... [having] a secret and almost incredible power to move our hearts in one way or another'. Ironically and unintentionally, this is one of the most perceptive and positive observations about music made at the time.

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