Bach Choruses for Feasts and Seasons

EASTER

Halt im Gedächtnis Jesum Christ
(from S. 67)

Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685 - 1750)

Arranged for
SATB chorus and organ
by Gary Harney

Original Key (A Major)

Text and Translation

Halt im Gedächtnis Jesum Christ, der auferstanden ist von den Toten.
Keep in memory Jesus Christ who has risen from the dead.

Text from II Timothy 2:8
Translation by Francis Browne. Used by permission

Presented by Bach on a Budget
http://www.immanuelbachconsort.org
“Halt im Gedächtnis Jesum Christ” (from S. 67)

The Cantata

Halt im Gedächtnis Jesum Christ (Keep in memory Jesus Christ) was written for the First Sunday after Easter, and first performed on 16 April 1724. It is a splendid work (as is Bach’s other cantata for this Sunday, S. 42). Commentator Craig Smith says it “…is one of the most extraordinary examples of Bach’s ability to make a dramatic statement that is at the same time interior and profound.”

That the work will be distinctive is clear from the opening note of the chorus (discussed below), and follows through arias for tenor and alto, as well as a dialogue between the bass and the upper three voices. In addition, Bach brings in two different chorales - Erschienen ist der herrlich Tag (movement 4) and Du Friedefürst, Herr Jesu Christ (movement 7). From start to finish, S. 67 justifies Alfred Dürr’s comment that it is “…one of [Bach’s] greatest and most original cantatas.”

The Chorus

The text for “Halt im Gedächtnis Jesum Christ” is a paraphrase of II Timothy 2:8 (“Keep in memory Jesus Christ, who is risen from the dead”), by an unknown librettist. Bach uses this brief text to its fullest. The long-held opening note (repeated often throughout the movement) symbolizes holding an idea in memory, just as the rising eighth note figure musically depicts the Resurrection. It is also likely no coincidence that the opening, triadic theme bears a strong resemblance to “O Lamm Gottes, unschuldig,” calling to mind that it was the Lamb of God that died and raised from the dead. From beginning to end, the chorus exudes the energy and excitement one would expect of an Easter chorus.

Due to the range of the tenor part (and to a lesser degree, the bass part), an alternate version of this chorus has also been created, transposed down a step.

The Accompaniment

This chorus was originally scored for corno di tirasi, flute, 2 oboes d’amore, strings, and continuo - a rich scoring indeed. Prominent is the horn, which in this edition is presented on a solo manual. Use of a suitable trumpet stop is successful for this voice, but equally effective is the use of a large-scale principal stop. This voice is presented as it appears in the original, without modification or simplification.

The bass line for much of the movement is surprisingly idiomatic as a pedal part (albeit with some octave transposition). It also utilizes the active “Resurrection theme” mentioned above only between choral passages, when the horn is not in play. By having the pedal drop out for these sections, the lowest voice can still be retained almost intact (except for occasional octave transposition).

As is often the case in these editions, the voices between the top and bottom take on a generally harmonic role. In the case of this movement, what is lost is that in the original the eighth note motion continues throughout. It is hoped that the appearance of this motive in the solo voice, the chorus, and in the lowest line when played on the secondary manual will be sufficient to convey the essence of the piece.
Halt in Gedächtnis Jesum Christ
(from S. 67)

Text: II Timothy 2:8

Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685-1750)

Created for performance by the Immanuel Bach Consort,
and dedicated to Dr. Gerre Hancock (1934-2012)

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Halt, halt, halt, halt im Gedächtnis
Je - sum Christ, halt, halt, halt, halt im Gedächtnis
halt im Ge-dächt-nis Je-sum Christ,

halt im Ge-dächt-nis Je-sum Christ,

halt im Ge-dächt-nis Je-sum Christ,

halt im Ge-dächt-nis Je-sum Christ,

der auf-er-
dächt-nis Je-sum Christ,

halt im Ge-dächt-nis Je-sum Christ, der auf-
stan-
den ist von den To-
ten,
halt, halt im Gedächtnis

stan- den, au- terstan- 

den ist von den

der au- erstan-

den ist von den

Je- sum Christ, der au- erstan- 

den, au- erstan-

ten, der au- erstan-

den ist, der

halt,
Christ, halt im Gedächtnis Jesum Christ, der auferstanden ist von den Toten,
halt, halt, halt, halt im Gedächtnis Jesum

Je - sum Christ, der auf - er - stan - den, auf - er - stan -

To - ten, der auf - er - stan -

To - ten, der auf - er - stan - den ist, der auf - er - stan -

halt,
Man. II

Christ, halt, halt im Gedächtnis Jesum, hast den ist von den Toten, halt im Gedächtnis Jesum Christ, im Ge-