

Bach – The Six Motets

Emerald Ensemble

Friday, November 11, 2016

Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied (1727?) Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

1. Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied
2. Gott, nimm dich ferner unser an
3. Lobet den Herrn in seinen Taten

Komm, Jesu, komm (1732?) J.S. Bach

1. Komm, Jesu, komm
2. Drum schließ ich mich in deine Hände

Fürchte dich nicht, ich bin bei dir (1713?) J.S. Bach

Der Geist hilft unser Schwachheit auf (1729) J.S. Bach

1. Der Geist hilft unser Schwachheit auf
2. Der aber die Herzen forschet
3. Du heilige Brunst, süßer Trost

intermission

Jesu, meine Freude (1735?) J.S. Bach

1. Jesu, meine Freude
2. Es ist nun nichts Verdammliches
3. Unter deinen Schirmen
4. Denn das Gesetz des Geistes
5. Trotz dem alten Drachen
6. Ihr aber seid nicht fleischlich
7. Weg mit allen Schätzen
8. So aber Christus in euch ist
9. Gute Nacht, o Wesen
10. So nun der Geist
11. Weicht, ihr Trauergeister

Lobet den Herrn, alle Heiden J.S. Bach

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

Ah, Bach.... Perhaps no name in the history of music from any culture is steeped in such hallowed grandeur. Yet to his contemporaries, the great Johann Sebastian Bach was not at all known outside his native Germany. Even his own countrymen perceived Bach mostly as an organist and educator in the commercial town of Leipzig. As a composer, he was considered second-rate, too entranced by chromatic harmony and complex counterpoint to be a major voice. How times have changed.

Over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the extended Bach family provided over seventy noted musicians throughout Saxony and Thuringia, the regions that now make up east-central Germany and where Sebastian (the “Johann” wasn’t commonly used) spent most of his life. Sebastian’s father was a violinist in the local court orchestra and Hausmann, or director of civic music, for the town of Eisenach. As a child, Sebastian attended the same local Lateinschule (Latin School) where Martin Luther had studied two centuries prior. Upon the death of his parents, nine-year-old Sebastian relocated first to nearby Ohrdruf to live with his eldest brother, then in 1700 to Lüneburg, just thirty miles southeast of the major port city of Hamburg. There he encountered the harmonically adventurous style of the north German school of organists, which made a lasting impact on his own compositional style. He learned composition mostly from copying the scores of past German masters and contemporary Italians.

In 1703 Bach returned to the region of his birth, first briefly for a minor post at the Weimar court, then to the position of organist at the main church in Arnstadt. In late 1705, he traveled, allegedly on foot, to the northern city of Lübeck, ostensibly to hear the great organist Dietrich Buxtehude, but perhaps also seeking a better job. Such a post didn’t materialize until 1707 at Mühlhausen, back in Saxony. He remained barely a year, soon finding himself back in Weimar, now with the illustrious title of court organist. There he wrote most of his extensive corpus of highly original works for organ. The duke liked Bach’s work so much that he promoted the composer to the newly created post of Konzertmeister in 1714. However, three years later an even more illustrious post came to Bach, that of Kappellmeister at the court in Cöthen, thirty miles from Berlin. His new boss was musically educated, and Bach was the second-highest-paid court official. From this period date some of his most beloved instrumental works, including the cello suites, the works for unaccompanied violin, the six Brandenburg Concertos and the first book of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. It was also at Cöthen that Bach met his second wife, the court singer Anna Magdalena Wilcke, sixteen years his junior.

Finally, Bach’s job-hopping ceased when he accepted a major post at Leipzig in 1723. His contract included three primary components. First, as cantor at the Thomasschule (St. Thomas School), he was responsible for the musical training of 50–60 boy choristers. As Director Musices Lipsiensis (Director of Music in Leipzig), he oversaw music-making for civic occasions and for the city’s four major Lutheran churches, including the prestigious Thomaskirche (St. Thomas Church). He also held a largely ceremonial role as director of music for the University of Leipzig, the most prestigious educational institution in Germany. During his first two years at Leipzig, Bach composed a new liturgical cantata for every Sunday and major feast day, in some cases revising works from Weimar. Over the years he composed over three hundred cantatas, of which about three-fifths survive today. For his first Christmas in Leipzig Bach composed a major *Magnificat*, and the following Good Friday saw the first presentation of his *St. John Passion*. The late 1720s saw his first publications (the keyboard partitas), and 1727 brought the *St. Matthew Passion*. As if all that didn’t keep him busy enough, he maintained a schedule of teaching private students and of touring as a concert organist to nearby cities such as Dresden and Kassel. The

civic authorities were quite justified when they complained in 1729 that Bach neglected his teaching duties at the Thomasschule and that he routinely traveled without leave.

Nevertheless, in the same year of 1729, Bach began to direct the local collegium musicum, a volunteer collection of professional and student instrumentalists who presented weekly concerts at a coffee-house. This renewed his interest in instrumental composition inspired the orchestral suites, violin concertos, harpsichord concertos, and flute sonatas. He directed the collegium until 1741, with a brief hiatus in 1737–9. Meanwhile, keyboard works and occasional Sunday-morning cantatas continued to flow from his pen. The Goldberg Variations of 1741 demonstrated his developing interest in canons and fugues. In his final decade, Bach devoted great attention to compiling two large-scale masterpieces that were designed as the culmination of his life's work: first *The Art of Fugue*, a comprehensive demonstration of imitative compositional techniques; and second the Mass in B minor, which incorporated earlier works as his definitive statement on choral writing. By early 1749 his health was failing severely, with encroaching blindness probably brought on by untreatable diabetes.

Upon Bach's death in 1750, his manuscripts were divided among his widow and his sons. Unfortunately, only one of the sons—Carl Philipp Emanuel, who worked for King Frederick II of Prussia—tended his bequest caringly; hence a large part of Sebastian Bach's output is lost to us. While some connoisseurs, including Haydn and Mozart, were aware of his music, the broader European public didn't take note of Bach until Felix Mendelssohn conducted a revival of the *St. Matthew Passion* in 1829. Since then, Bach has been hailed as history's greatest master composer, with twin emphases on impeccable craftsmanship and extreme virtuosity. But these skills cannot alone explain Bach's modern popularity: this we must attribute to the deep passion that he imbues into every note. This partnership of passion and skill is nowhere more evident than in Bach's six surviving motets.

The Six Motets

A German musical dictionary from 1732 defines the word *motet* partly as “a composition largely ornamented with fugues and imitations.” The motets sung at the Thomaskirche during worship services were taken from a volume that included about 270 works by the great masters of Renaissance polyphony. Thus Bach’s motets were not written for these typical liturgies. Among his duties as director of music for the city of Leipzig was the composition of music for special civic occasions, such as the funerals of prominent citizens. Though modern musicologists have speculated which specific events inspired these motets, the fact remains that there is no documentary evidence to confirm such theories.

We do know that, on such special occasions, Bach had greater resources at his disposal than for a usual Sunday service. Hence his motets are mostly in eight parts, rather than the standard four parts of his cantatas. Bach divides the eight voices into two equal choirs. Much of these works’ interest lies in how he treats these two choirs: at turns they combine, separate, echo, contrast, or intertwine. Also, as he could apparently hire more expert musicians for the occasions, the vocal counterpoint is more complex than in his weekly cantatas. Continuo instruments were also available, typically a small positive organ and a contingent of string or wind instruments such as cello or bassoon.

The notion that there are six Bach motets comes from their first publication in 1803 by Breitkopf und Härtel. Breitkopf reinforced this perception in their complete Bach edition that began in the 1850s. Yet the number is misleading, or perhaps downright inaccurate. Take, for example, the case of *Ich lasse dich nicht*: it was attributed to Sebastian in 1803, then re-assigned to his older cousin Johann Christoph Bach, but has recently been assigned back to Sebastian on stylistic grounds. On the other hand, *Lobet den Herrn* is usually considered a motet but its independent continuo part leads some to believe that it may, in fact, stem from an otherwise lost cantata. For that matter, its attribution to Bach is questionable. Another work, *O Jesu Christ, mein Lebens Licht*, was categorized incorrectly by Breitkopf as a cantata fragment, though its manuscript clearly bears the label of motet. There is also *Sei Lob und Preis mit Ehren*, a motet version of a cantata movement. Yet somehow the idea of six Bach motets—and specifically the six heard at this concert—has stuck in the musical mind for well over a century. Regardless of the justification of their grouping, these works demonstrate perfectly the range, quality, and variety of Bach’s masterly vocal writing.

Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied, BWV 225 (by 1727)

The most impressive of Bach's motets, from a compositional perspective, is perhaps *Singet dem Herrn*. Analysis of Bach's handwriting indicates that the manuscript dates from 1726–7, but the paper he used was from his earlier Cöthen period, so the precise chronology is unclear. We do not know the exact circumstances for which Bach wrote *Singet dem Herrn*, though the second movement implies a funeral and scholars have suggested about a half-dozen worthy events around 1726.

Singet dem Herrn is cast in three movements organized like a Baroque concerto: fast–slow–fast. The first movement is a prelude and fugue, which the conductor Sir John Eliot Gardiner has called “the most secular, dance-impregnated vocal music Bach ever wrote.” The choir divides into two groups: one presents instrumental filigree while the other proclaims repeatedly: “Singet!” (“Sing!”). There is much imitative writing in this first movement, as different melodic fragments appear in the various voices. The fugue begins with reference to the children of Zion (“Die Kinder Zion”). Bach praises “with dance” (“mit Reihen”) with twirls and pirouettes in a long melisma of many notes on one syllable. Mention of “Pauken” (in Bach's time and ours these are timpani, though to the ancient Israelites of the psalm text these would have been the more tambourine-like timbrel) brings steady arpeggios to depict the drums. The “Singet!” chords interrupt the fugue periodically, sometimes tossed back and forth between the two choirs.

The second movement pits the two choirs in opposition in a style brought to Germany from the Venetian polychoral masters a hundred years earlier. Bach has modernized the tradition by assigning the two choirs very different types of music. One group sings a gentle harmonization of a chorale telling of God's mercy to our weak human selves. Between each phrase of that text, the other singers interrupt with music that is more rhapsodic, lyrical, and instrumentally conceived, repeating pleas of: “God, continue to care for us.” This second component was termed by Bach an “aria,” a term with many meanings; in the Baroque era, it often meant a simple choral work in which the sopranos carried the melody, though even that definition seems hardly to apply. Bach's manuscript indicates that this second movement should be repeated, with the two choirs trading parts for a second verse, though this repeat is nowadays rarely honored.

Another prelude and fugue follow as the final movement. In the prelude, the choirs are again antiphonal, taking turns with the musical material. The basses often initiate each choir's takeover with their premature entrances of “lobet” (“praise”). The two choirs merge together for the final four-voice fugue, also begun by the basses. There are several episodes of stretto, wherein the fugue theme is heard in two different parts, offset by just one measure. The process continues until the sopranos arrive to a top B-flat, after which Bach promptly shuts down the motet with a peremptory cadence.

When Mozart visited Leipzig in 1789, he attended a service at the Thomaskirche. The choir began to sing this motet, and within a few bars, Mozart is alleged to have suddenly sat upright, asking aloud: “What is this?” After the fifteen minutes of music had passed, he proclaimed: “Now there is something one can learn from!”

Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied:
die Gemeinde der Heiligen sollen ihn loben.
Israel freue sich des, der ihn gemacht hat.
Die Kinder Zion sei'n fröhlich über ihrem Könige,
sie sollen loben seinen Namen im Reihem;
mit Pauken und mit Harfen sollen sie ihm spielen.

— Psalm 149:1–3

Sing to the Lord a new song:
the assembly of saints shall praise him.
May Israel rejoice in him who made them.
May the children of Zion be joyful in their king,
they shall praise his name with dance;
with drums and harp shall they play to him.

Choir 1 (Aria):

Gott, nimm dich ferner unser an,
denn ohne dich ist nichts getan
mit allen unsern Sachen.
Drum sei du unser Schirm und Licht,
und trügt uns unsre Hoffnung nicht,
so wirst du's ferner machen.
Wohl dem, der sich nur steif und fest
auf dich und deine Huld verläßt.

— Author unknown

God, continue to care for us,
for without you is nothing achieved
in all our matters.
Therefore, be our shield and light,
and deceive us not in our hope,
thus will you continue to do.
Blessed is he who rigidly and strongly
on you and on your grace relies.

Choir 2 (Chorale):

Wie sich ein Vater erbarmet
über seine junge Kinderlein,
so tut der Herr uns allen,
so wir ihn kindlich fürchten rein.
Er kennt das arm Gemächte,
Gott weiß, wir sind nur Staub,
gleichwie das Gras vom Rechen,
ein Blum und fallend Laub;
der Wind nur drüber wehet,
so ist es nicht mehr da,
also der Mensch vergehet,
sein End' das ist ihm nah'.

As a father pities
his young little child,
so too is the Lord to us all
as we, childlike, fear him purely.
He knows our weak powers,
God knows we are only dust,
like the grass to the rake,
a flower, and falling leaf;
the wind only blows over them,
and there is no more,
so man dies away;
his end, it is near to him.

— Psalm 103:13–16, as paraphrased by Johann Gramann (1487–1541),
from the chorale *Nun lob' mein Seel', den Herren* ("Now praise, my soul, the Lord", 1530)

Lobet den Herrn in seinen Taten,
lobet ihn in seiner großen Herrlichkeit!
Alles, was Odem hat, lobe den Herrn,
Halleluja!

— Psalm 150:1–3

Praise the Lord for his deeds;
praise him in his great grandeur.
All that has breath, praise the lord,
Alleluia!

Komm, Jesu, komm, BWV 229 (by 1731/2)

In 1684, Johann Schelle, cantor of the Thomasschule at Leipzig, composed a motet for the funeral of Jakob Thomasius, noted philosopher and rector of the Thomasschule. The text was an extended, eleven-verse poem by local academic Paul Thymich. Schelle's music is straightforwardly homophonic (all voices moving simultaneously), and, all in all, nothing extraordinary. However, some thirty-five years later, Schelle's eventual successor, Johann Sebastian Bach, embraced the first and final verses of Thymich's poem to create one of his most personal works.

While there is no evidence of the precise occasion for which Bach composed his setting of Thymich's *Komm, Jesu, komm*, the text and its history indicate that it was probably for a funeral service. This was Bach's only motet not based on a Biblical text or a traditional chorale. It survives to us today thanks to a single copy made by a student, Christopher Nichelmann, who left the Thomasschule in 1731 or 1732, thereby providing a latest possible date for the work's composition.

In the first verse of the text, Bach treats each line separately. After a hesitant stammer of "Komm" ("Come"), he immediately employs one of the unifying features of the entire motet: a series of interlocking suspensions, in which one voice sustains a pitch from the previous chord, only belatedly falling into a pitch that fits in the new chord. Bach could hardly have thought of a more apt way to depict how weary ("müde") life has become. The bitter path of life ("der saure Weg") is dramatically and dissonantly depicted in a sudden drop of a diminished seventh. For the final two lines of this stanza, the meter shifts to a lilting 6/8, a dancing depiction of the joy that Christ supplies as the right path ("der rechte Weg"). Suspensions abound as Bach tosses the music back and forth between the two choirs.

Bach's setting of the second stanza is more condensed, as the two choirs combine forces in what is essentially a chorale. It is titled "Aria", here referring to a contemporary alternate definition of that term as a strophic, homophonic choral work in which the sopranos maintain the melody. Bach generally concluded his larger-scale cantatas with chorales, but few are so harmonically and contrapuntally complex. Once again Bach embellishes the word "Weg" ("path"), extending the text's final line with a joyful yet subdued optimism in an eternal rest.

Komm, Jesu, komm, mein Leib ist müde,
die Kraft verschwind't je mehr und mehr,
ich sehne mich nach deinem Friede;
der saure Weg wird mir zu schwer!
Komm, komm, ich will mich dir ergeben,
du bist der rechte Weg,
die Wahrheit und das Leben.

Drum schließ ich mich in deine Hände
und sage, Welt, zu guter Nacht!
Eilt gleich mein Lebenslauf zu Ende,
ist doch der Geist wohl angebracht.
Er soll bei seinem Schöpfer schweben,
weil Jesus ist und bleibt
der wahre Weg zum Leben.

Come, Jesus, come; my body is weary,
my strength disappears more and more,
I yearn for your peace;
the bitter path is becoming, to me, too difficult!
Come, come, I want to submit myself to you,
you are the right path,
the truth and the life.

Thus I entrust myself into your hands
and say: World, good night!
Hurries now my life to its end,
yet is the soul well prepared.
It shall, with its creator, hover,
for Jesus is and remains
the true path to life.

— Paul Thymich (1656–1694), published in *Wagnerisches Gesangbuch* (1697), written 1684

Fürchte dich nicht, ich bin bei dir, BWV 228 (1713?)

Possibly the least well-known of Bach's traditional six motets, *Fürchte dich nicht* is stylistically unusual. Many scholars have argued that its method of construction is so different from his Leipzig choral writing that it probably dates from his period in Weimar, around the year 1713. Compared to the other five, this one fits more consistently with the traditions of motets found in central Germany in that period. Many hymn texts can be sung to different melodies, and the melody Bach adopts in the second half of *Fürchte dich nicht* is not the setting generally performed in Bach's Leipzig. No contemporary source survives to us today, and there are no records of it having been performed in Bach's lifetime. Any attempts to date it are purely conjectural.

The text, like those of the other motets, implies a funereal occasion but not necessarily a somber one. Bach's chosen texts—two verses from Isaiah and a mid-seventeenth-century chorale—share two main ideas: (1) that the worshipper need not fear, because (2) God is his. In the first half of the motet, it is the verbs which most captivate Bach. Mortals are directed neither to fear (“fürchte”) nor to yield (“weiche”), with roughly the same music. God then promises to undertake three actions, which Bach links in special ways: to strengthen (“stärke”) with one section anticipating the others in brief but elaborate turns, followed by strong homophonic chords; to help (“helfe”), a quick, jaunty afterthought; and to uphold (“erhalte”) with long steady notes followed by brief “stärke”-like turns that unify the sentence.

The second half is masterfully constructed. It is a three-voice fugue in which the main melody and the chromatically descending countermelody almost always appear together. Sometimes the countermelody is above, sometimes below. Sometimes it comes in one or even two beats early, sometimes one step lower or even a third lower, but the combination still works. The main melody may overlap itself, or the countermelody may. Entrances of the melodic duo may be two measures apart, or three. As if that weren't complex enough, the sopranos meanwhile float the chorale tune above the fugue. The phrase “du bist mein” (“you are mine”), prominent in both texts, frequently interrupts the fugal texture. The whole fugue repeats itself for the chorale's second verse. As the chorale text comes to its close, suddenly the motet's opening motive returns, and Bach links the two prominent texts together: “Fürchte dich nicht, du bist mein!”—“Fear not, you are mine!”. Bach has created not only a musical composition, but also a sermon rich with Lutheran theological implications intellectually interwoven both with words and with sound.

Fürchte dich nicht, ich bin bei dir;
weiche nicht, denn ich bin dein Gott!
Ich stärke dich, ich helfe dir auch,
ich erhalte dich durch die rechte Hand
meine Gerechtigkeit

— Isaiah 41:10

Fürchte dich nicht, denn ich habe dich erlöst,
ich habe dich bei deinem Namen gerufen,
du bist mein!

— Isaiah 43:1

Herr, mein Hirt, Brunn aller Freuden,
du bist mein,
ich bin dein:
niemand kann uns scheiden.
Ich bin dein, weil du dein Leben
und dein Blut,
mir zu gut
in den Tod gegeben.

Du bist mein, weil ich dich fasse,
und dich nicht,
o mein Licht,
aus dem Herzen lasse.
Laß mich, laß mich hingelangen,
wo du mich,
und ich dich
lieblich werd umfängen.

— Paul Gerhardt (1607–1676),
from the chorale *Warum sollt ich mich den grämen* ("Why should I grieve?", 1653)

Fear not; I am with you.
Yield not, for I am your God!
I strengthen you, I help you also,
I uphold you with the right hand
of my justice.

Fear not, for I have redeemed you.
I have called you by your name;
you are mine!

Lord, my shepherd, source of all joys:
you are mine;
I am yours.
No one can separate us.
I am yours, because you have given your life
and your blood
for my sake
in death.

You are mine, because I hold you,
and do not allow you,
O my light,
out of my heart.
Let me, let me reach the place
where you me,
and I you,
will lovingly embrace.

Der Geist hilft unser Schwachheit auf, BWV 226 (1729)

On 16 October 1729, the rector of the Thomasschule, Johann Heinrich Ernesti, died. He had achieved only mixed results at the school, as student discipline and building maintenance had diminished under his tenure. But Ernesti was also a venerated professor at the university, which commissioned a new funeral motet from his erstwhile colleague, Sebastian Bach. The result, *Der Geist hilft*, is, in fact, the only one of Bach's motets for which we definitively know its intended occasion, which is inscribed on the composer's manuscript. The memorial service was held on 20 October at the university chapel, which had fewer restrictions than the major churches in Leipzig. Hence a larger band of instruments was used: surviving performance materials indicate that the first choir was doubled by strings and the second choir by wind instruments.

The motet comprises three movements. The first begins in a lively triple meter. It is dominated by an extended melisma (many notes for one syllable) on the word "Geist" ("Spirit"), with figures akin to those of an organ toccata. The two choirs toss back and forth three-note declarations of "Der Geist hilft" ("The Spirit helps") to reinforce the core importance of the text. The second section is a brief fugue (at "sondern der Geist"). The word "Seufzen" ("sighing") is given prominence with syncopated falls, long lines, and two-note interjections.

Bach then moves to a four-part texture for one of his most elaborate choral fugues. The main subject begins with a leaping fourth or fifth ("Der aber..."). The second main section of text ("denn er vertritt...") brings a second theme with short, repeated notes, which would make this a standard double-fugue, which in and of itself isn't too rare. But the second theme's countermelody, with its easily identifiable fall of a fifth and return, is equally prominent as the fugue progresses. To try to identify every single time when each of these three motives pops up is like playing a game of musical whack-a-mole, or perhaps Pokémon. I challenge you to "catch 'em all"!

It has been proposed, due to a lack of instrumental parts in the original source, that the concluding chorale was not part of the original motet, but was instead sung at the graveside after the service. Here Bach chose a chorale tune and text written by Martin Luther himself, though harmonized as no one but Bach could.

Der Geist hilft unser Schwachheit auf,
denn wir wissen nicht, was wir beten sollen,
wie sich's gebühret;
sondern der Geist selbst vertritt uns aufs beste
mit unaussprechlichem Seufzen.

Der aber die Herzen forschet,
der weiß, was des Geistes Sinn sei;
denn er vertritt die Heiligen
nach dem, das Gott gefällt.

— Romans 8:26–27

Du heilige Brunst, süßer Trost,
nun hilf uns fröhlich und getrost
in deinem Dienst beständig bleiben,
die Trübsal uns nicht abtreiben.

O Herr, durch dein' Kraft uns bereit'
und stärk des Fleisches Blödigkeit,
dass wir hier ritterlich ringen,
durch Tod und Leben zu dir dringen,
Halleluja! Halleluja!

— Martin Luther (1483–1546),
from the chorale *Komm, heiliger Geist, Herre Gott* ("Come, holy spirit, Lord God", 1524)

The Spirit helps our weakness,
for we know not what we should pray,
nor how is proper;
but the Spirit itself represents us at our best,
with inexpressible sighing.

But he searches our heart,
he knows what the spirit is thinking;
for he represents the saints,
for thus is God pleased.

You, holy fire, sweet comforter,
now help us, the happy and consoled,
in your service steadfast to remain,
for grief does not deflect us.

O Lord, with your power prepare us
and strengthen the flesh's reluctance,
that we here valiantly struggle,
through death and life, to reach you.
Alleluia! Alleluia!

Jesu, meine Freude, BWV 227 (by 1735)

The most recorded and probably most performed of Bach's motets, *Jesu, meine Freude* is almost doubtlessly also the most beloved. And yet its origins are among the haziest. The earliest source is a copy of the chorales made by a Thomasschule student in 1735. Throughout the twentieth century, musicologists tied the work to a funeral service for the wife of Leipzig's postmaster in 1723, based on the scriptural references of the sermon. But that claim was always highly circumstantial, and recent scholarship has revealed that *Jesu, meine Freude* was not listed in the printed order of service. So if you see this motet elsewhere ascribed firmly to 1723, please take that assertion with a hefty grain of salt.

Jesu, meine Freude is thoroughly different in form from Bach's other motets. It consists of eleven mostly short movements, some of which call for reduced forces that cry out for soloists. Scholars believe that *Jesu, meine Freude* may, in fact, be a pastiche or compilation, with some of its music even pre-dating Bach's arrival in Leipzig. This was not an unusual approach: Handel used it frequently, and it was the cornerstone of Bach's Mass in B minor. Such movements were called *contrafacta*, music newly appropriated from pre-existing sources, usually changing the text as well. What is remarkable is how—if this theory is true—Bach re-fashioned the older music to fit the new in such a seamless, unified manner.

The text falls into two groups. First is the eponymous Lutheran hymn, with each of six verses spread out into separate movements. The text for the other movements, interpolated between chorale verses, is taken from the eighth chapter of St. Paul's biblical letter to the Romans, which deals with the relationship of the human spirit to God. The first movement raises the curtain with one of Bach's most touching chorale harmonizations. The text sets the stage, as the speaker proclaims that with God at his side, nothing more is needed. Bach moves us away from the chorale gently by way of hymn-like homophonic music, in which the full ensemble sings the text simultaneously. But he sprinkles this second movement with crucial silences separating repetitions of "nichts" ("nothing"). Bach depicts walking ("wandeln") by long melismas (a series of notes sung to just one syllable) that proceed at a steady gait, sometimes imitative, with one voice repeating after another. Next is another chorale harmonization, slightly more adventuresome than the first.

The fourth movement, a brief trio for women's voices, is a turn to gentleness that comes to an abrupt halt with the initial dissonant chord of the fifth. This bold pronouncement is another single-syllable word surrounded by silences: "Trotz" ("Defiance"). Though the text is from the chorale, Bach provides his own music with frequent juxtapositions of the voices: high v. low, two sopranos v. altos and tenors, even basses v. everyone else. It has the effect of a prelude to the sixth movement's fugue. The main fugue theme begins with short, repeated notes, followed by a stepwise rise; this pattern subtly links it to the imitative writing way back in the second movement. Bach draws distinction between things of the flesh ("fleischlich"), which sustain notes dissonantly across the barline in a yearning gesture, and those of the spirit ("geistlich"), which have many quickly moving pitches that reinforce the harmony solidly. The second phrase of text ("so anders Gottes Geist...") brings a new tune, beginning with the leap of a fourth and a descending scale, thus contrasting with the first melody. Soon the two intermingle to create a double fugue, sometimes with simultaneous entrances. The movement closes with a return to homophony. The following chorale harmonization doesn't cool the temperature, with its repeated cries of "Weg!" ("Away"), shooing away the vain treasures of life in favor of Jesus' comforts.

Matters temper somewhat for the next trio, scored for the three lower voices. Here the death of the body comes in a lilting 12/8 time, but life through God's spirit is a steadily running, seemingly eternal melisma. The ninth movement is an oasis in time, like a quiet evening stroll. There are three elements of the texture: a duet of sopranos, a steady walking tenor line, and the alto's chorale-like interruptions. The singers repeatedly lullaby a soothing farewell ("Gute Nacht", i.e., "Good night") to worldly life, sin, pride, and glory. The tenth movement begins identically to the second, and shares two crucial characteristics of both the second and fifth movements: occasional, prominent silences and a fugal melody that begins with quick, repeated notes. Bach is bringing the whole motet full circle. The curtain falls on the same words with which it raised, and indeed with the same chorale harmonization. These words emphasize the relationship between the speaker and God, which has been at the core of every verse, whether chorale or biblical: *Jesu, meine Freude*—"Jesus, my joy."

Jesu, meine Freude,
meines Herzens Weide,
Jesu, meine Zier,
ach, wie lang, wie lange
ist dem Herzen bange
und verlangt nach dir!
Gottes Lamm, mein Bräutigam,
außer dir soll mir auf Erden
nichts sonst liebers werden.

— Johann Franck (1618–1677),
from the chorale *Jesu, meine Freude* (“Jesus, my joy”, 1650), verse 1

Es ist nun nichts Verdammliches an denen,
die in Christo Jesu sind,
die nicht nach dem Fleische wandeln,
sondern nach dem Geist.

— Romans 8:1, 4

Unter deinen Schirmen
bin ich vor den Stürmen
aller Feinde frei.
Laß den Satan wittern,
laß den Feind erbittern,
mir steht Jesus bei.
Ob es jetzt gleich kracht und blitzt,
ob gleich Sünd und Hölle schrecken:
Jesus will mich decken.

— Johann Franck, verse 2

Denn das Gesetz des Geistes,
der da lebendig machet in Christo Jesu,
hat mich frei gemacht von dem Gesetz
der Sünder und des Todes.

— Romans 8:2

Jesus, my joy,
my heart’s pasture,
Jesus, my adornment,
ah, how long, how long
is my heart frightened
and longing for you!
God’s lamb, my bridegroom,
besides you, on this earth
nothing shall to me become dearer.

There is now nothing damnable in them
who are in Christ Jesus,
who walk not according to the flesh,
but according to the spirit.

Under your protection
am I free from the storms
and all enemies.
Let Satan curse,
let the enemy embitter—
by me stands Jesus.
If suddenly thunder crashes and lightning flashes,
if suddenly sin and hell frighten,
Jesus wants to protect me.

For the law of the spirit,
which gives life in Christ Jesus,
has made me free from the law
of sin and death.

Trotz dem alten Drachen,
Trotz des Todesrachen,
Trotz der Furcht darzu,
tobe, Welt, und springe,
ich steh hier und singe
in gar sichrer Ruh.
Gottes Macht halt mich in acht;
Erd und Abgrund muß verstummen,
ob sie noch so brummen.

— Johann Franck, verse 3

Ihr aber seid nicht fleischlich, sondern geistlich,
so anders Gottes Geist in euch wohnt.
Wer aber Christi Geist nicht hat, der ist nicht sein.

— Romans 8:9

Weg mit allen Schätzen!
Du bist mein Ergötzen,
Jesu, meine Lust!
Weg ihr eitlen Ehren,
ich mag euch nicht hören,
bleibt mir unbewußt!
Elend, Not, Kreuz, Schmach und Tod
soll mich, ob ich viel muß leiden,
nicht von Jesu scheiden.

— Johann Franck, verse 4

So aber Christus in euch ist,
so ist der Leib zwar tot
um der Sünde willen;
der Geist aber ist das Leben
um der Gerechtigkeit willen.

— Romans 8:10

Defiant against the old dragon,
defiant against death's jaws,
defiant against fear also,
may the world rage and burst,
I stand here and sing
in such secure peace.
God's might holds me in awe;
earth and the abyss must be silent,
though they now so growl.

You, however, are not of flesh, but of the spirit,
if indeed God's spirit lives in you.
But whoever has not Christ's spirit, he is not his.

Away with all treasures!
You are my delight,
Jesus, my pleasure!
Away, you vain honors,
I want not to hear you;
remain to me unknown!
Misery, need, cross, shame, and death
shall not, though I must suffer,
separate me from Jesus.

If, however, Christ is in you,
so is the body indeed dead
because of sin;
the spirit, however, is life
because of righteousness.

Gute Nacht, o Wesen,
das die Welt erlesen,
mir gefällst du nicht.

Gute Nacht, ihr Sünden,
bleibet weit dahinten,

kommt nicht mehr ans Licht!

Gute Nacht, du Stolz und Pracht!

Dir sei ganz, du Lasterleben,
gute Nacht gegeben.

– Johann Franck, verse 5

So nun der Geist des,
der Jesum von den Toten auferwecket hat,
in euch wohnt,
so wird auch derselbige,
der Christum von den Toten auferwecket hat,
eure sterbliche Leiber lebendig machen
um des willen, daß sein Geist in euch wohnt.

– Romans 8:11

Weicht, ihr Trauergeister,
den mein Freudenmeister,
Jesus, tritt herein.

Denen, die Gott lieben,
muß auch ihr Betrüben
lauter Zucker sein.

Duld ich schon hier Spott und Hohn,
dennoch bleibst du auch im Leide,
Jesu, meine Freude.

— Johann Franck, verse 6

Good night, O existence
that the world has chosen;
you please me not.

Good night, you sins,
stay far behind;

come not more into light!

Good night, you pride and glory!

To you absolutely, you unvirtuous life,
good night be given.

If now the spirit of him
who raised Jesus from the dead
lives in you,
so will also the same
who raised Christ from the dead
make your mortal bodies alive
because his spirit lives in you.

Go away, you spirits of grief,
for my master of joy,
Jesus, enters here in me.

To those who love God
must even their afflictions
nothing but sugar become.

I endure even here mockery and derision;
still you remain, even in suffering,
Jesus, my joy.

Lobet den Herrn, alle Heiden, BWV 230

Lobet den Herrn is unique among Bach's motets in at least three important respects. First, it is the only one cast entirely in four parts. It is possible that the occasion for which it was performed—about which, like most of the other motets, we have no information at all—simply had a smaller budget, and thus fewer singers were available. Along similar lines, it is the only one with a truly independent continuo line. Usually the continuo's bass line simply doubles the lowest sung pitches. But here, the continuo moves on its own at several key locations, including the very first chord, as well as any occasion when the vocal bass line is silent. And finally, it is the only Bach motet that includes no reference to a chorale or anything like it, either in melody or text. Some have taken these three exceptional characteristics as evidence that Bach did not even compose this work. In fact, its documentation is somewhat questionable: its earliest source is a score, published by Breitkopf und Härtel in 1821, that claims to be based on the composer's autograph manuscript, which is now lost. Even that manuscript only bore an attribution to "Signor Bach," and there are plenty of other Bachs who were worthy composers. And there are some oddities in the source regarding text underlay, in that several instances of the opening line seem to have the incorrect text. This is inconsistent with the usual high quality of Sebastian Bach's manuscript copies.

These questions, of course, do not negate the wonder of the music itself. In structure it is a double fugue. The initial subject ("Lobet den Herrn") begins with a chain of thirds, eventually rising an octave and a half, whereas the second theme ("und preiset ihn") features two descending turns. These very different melodic ideas ensure that the fugue never resorts to dullness. "Mercy and truth" ("Gnade und Wahrheit") bring an restful moment of homophony, as all voices move together. The final "Alleluia" fugue lilts along in triple time, with features that include a second exposition at the dominant (i.e., the fugue essentially begins again, but in G major rather than C major) and moments when Bach inverts the theme by flipping it upside down.

Lobet den Herrn, alle Heiden,
und preiset ihn, alle Völker!
Denn seine Gnade und Wahrheit
waltet über uns in Ewigkeit.
Alleluja.

Praise the Lord, all you heathens,
and praise him all you people!
For his mercy and truth
reign over us in eternity.
Alleluia.

— Psalm 117:1–2