

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

Johann Sebastian Bach

Cantata BWV 182, “Himmelskönig, sei willkommen” (“King of Heaven, be Thou welcome”) (1714)

Unlike the more well-known Bach cantatas from his years in Leipzig, *Cantata No. 182* dates from Bach's years at the Ducal Court at Weimar. By 1714, Bach was already court musician and organist; in March of 1714 he was appointed *Konzertmeister*. Part of his responsibilities was to provide a new choral work each month—the beginning of what eventually became five cycles of church cantatas.

“Himmelskönig, sei willkommen” is representative of a transitional genre of cantatas introduced by writer and theologian Erdmann Neumeister at the end of the 17th century. Neumeister's cantata texts consisted of Biblical verses, strophic arias and occasionally a chorale (the days of elaborate *da capo* arias and complex choruses were yet to come). Neumeister's Biblical texts were often set as *recitatives*, and several arias alternated with *recitatives* leading to a final chorale. Bach drew on this format to write *Cantata No. 182*, one of his earliest, for the beginning of the church cycle in March 1714. Although the exact authorship of the text is unknown, it is likely that Weimar court librarian and poet Salomon Franck adapted the Biblical texts and writings of 17th century writer Paul Stockmann. The text portrays the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, metaphorically interpreted as Christ's entry into the hearts of all faithful Christians. The premiere of this cantata was on March 25, 1714, likely at the court church of Weimar.

At the time Bach was embarking on cantata writing, he was also transcribing works of other composers for the organ and harpsichord. The French overture style of the opening “Sonata” is typical of orchestral music from this time period, and is marked by a dialogue between the solo violin and flute over *pizzicato* strings, with a dotted rhythm depicting the entry of Jesus into the city.

The second movement *da capo* chorus draws its text from Franck's telling of the Palm Sunday story. Canonic entries among all four voices move the music among the crowds awaiting Jesus' arrival, especially in the “B” section, in which the choral entries are only a beat apart. The short accompanied bass *recitative* which follows is a setting of verses from Psalm 40 (*Expectans expectavi*), over a moving continuo part. The first five-note scale of the bass solo is repeated ten times in the continuo, expressing the anticipatory feeling of the occasion. The bass continues in a straight-forward aria with *obbligato* violin. A *da capo* alto aria follows, accompanied by *obbligato* flute (originally a recorder), with a middle *andante* bracketed by two *Largo* sections—unusual in its lack of substantially contrasting sections. The subsequent tenor aria, with simple continuo accompaniment, completes the sequence of three arias with gradually diminishing orchestration, including moments when tenor and accompaniment stop simultaneously.

The cantata concludes with two choral movements, the first based on the 1633 chorale “Jesu Leiden, Pein und Tod” by Paul Stockmann and the second a return to the text adaptation of Franck. The soprano part of the first chorus conveys the chorale tune, against which the other voices enter fugally with music which captures the opening phrase of the chorale in diminutive rhythms. The *Schlusschor* (final chorus) is a “permutation” fugue, in which voices enter canonically, with the subjects and counter-subjects subsequently rearranged or transposed, creating a “permutation” of the original material. The permutation fugue was an invention of Bach, which he used in his keyboard works and also frequently in his early cantatas. The cantata closes in a joyous celebration of Christ's arrival into Jerusalem in a dance-like triple meter.

There are three documented performances of *Cantata No. 182*, each with a different orchestration. The original performing ensemble for *Cantata No. 182* was one of each stringed instrument, plus recorder and continuo. Bach re-used this work for Palm Sunday 1724 in Leipzig, changing the key and scoring, adding strings (including a solo violin) and more vocal parts. The strings played in their concert pitch of the time (a semitone lower than the premiere performance) and the organist was expected to transpose. Because the low *obbligato* notes of the alto aria could not be reached by the recorder, Bach composed a new flute part for this aria. A third documented performance of this cantata in 1728 gave the solo flute part to solo violin, and the previous solo violin part to an oboe. The performance tonight is the version for solo flute accompanied by strings.

James MacMillan

Seven Last Words from the Cross (1993-94)

James MacMillan studied composition at the University of Edinburgh and received his Ph. D. from Durham University. He is considered Scotland's pre-eminent composer. He has a long association as composer with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and his music has been performed frequently in Philadelphia, including the U.S. Premiere performance by The Philadelphia Singers with the Philadelphia Orchestra of *Quickening*. MacMillan's extensive sacred choral repertory is infused with both his Roman Catholic faith and his commitment to Scottish traditional music.

Seven Last Words from the Cross, a cantata for eight-part chorus and strings, was commissioned in 1993 by BBC Television and first broadcast in seven nightly episodes during Holy Week 1994. A concert premiere took place on March 27, 1994 at St. Aloysius Church in Glasgow, Scotland by the choral ensemble Cappella Nova, accompanied by the BT Scottish Ensemble. The text is based on seven sentences spoken by Christ from the cross interspersed with traditional Latin texts for Holy Week.

Movement 1 ("Father, forgive them for they know not what they do") begins with the sopranos singing Jesus' words in duet, with quiet accompaniment in a *largo* tempo. The sopranos are joined by the altos, who are also in canon, while the men's sections provide contrasting Latin verses ("Hosanna filio David"—the traditional Palm Sunday exclamation) in minimalistic repetitive rhythms. A third text is introduced by the sopranos—an English translation of the traditional Tenebrae response "Anima Meam Dilectam." The three texts continue simultaneously (perhaps representing the Trinity), and the lower voices close the movement with a return to the call for forgiveness.

The second movement is a full and commandingly homophonic declamation of the words spoken by Jesus to Mary Magdalene and the disciple at the scene of the Cross. The first phrase of the text (from Jesus to his mother) is repeated eleven times by the chorus, almost always chordally, over a great deal of movement in the orchestra. It is only at the end of the movement that MacMillan introduces the words spoken to the disciple: "Behold, thy Mother," set very simply and with orchestration and dynamics which gradually disappear.

The third movement, based on Christ's words to the two criminals crucified on either side of Him, begins with the basses in two parts presenting the Good Friday antiphon "Ecce lignum crucis" over rolling arpeggios in the accompaniment. Following a long instrumental passage in the middle of the movement, divided sopranos present Jesus' words as if singing from on high.

"Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" ("My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?") are some of the most significant words in the Good Friday liturgy. MacMillan begins this movement from the depths, with a low rising string part leading to the bass vocal entrance. The words are presented canonically, with the tenors following the basses. Voices move in pairs until all eight choral parts present the text with increasingly complex rhythms. The agitation of the words can be heard in the quick 16th note motives and disjunct ornamentation. This movement ends as it began—with the basses in the depths.

The last three movements of this cantata are considerably shorter than the earlier movements, depicting Jesus' life becoming shorter and shorter. "I thirst" appears in intervals of open fifths from the women's voices. The altos provide elaborating text from the Good Friday Reproaches. The intervals of fifths and seconds play significant roles with this text, providing sharp dissonances. The movement ends with the altos and tenors singing at the interval of a second apart, and the accompaniment ends the movement "like a violent shuddering" in a series of seconds.

A long, heavily accented orchestral introduction leads to the crucial text "It is finished" against verses from the Good Friday Responsories for Tenebrae. The soprano part expresses an individual in the crowd observing the crucifixion scene. Rhythms in the lower voices become longer as Jesus' life is "finished,"

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and the sopranos provide sorrowful commentary over a softer, less accented repetition of the orchestra's opening passages.

The final movement of MacMillan's *Seven Last Words* brings all eight voices of the chorus together over a single octave in the accompaniment. The text is only presented once, with no contrasting verses, and a long orchestral postlude brings the work to a close as the instrumentation gradually fades away.

-Nancy Plum