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THE FESTIVAL BACH 1976

MAY 16, 1976

Grace Episcopal Church

WEST CHURCH AND DAVIS STREETS

ELMIRA, NEW YORK

MUSIC FOR THE CHURCH of J. S. BACH

PROGRAM

Organ Prelude

Komm, Gott, Schoepfer, heiliger Geist

Processional No. 181

Innsbruck

MOTET I

Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied

MOTET V

Komm, Jesu, komm

Offertory Hymn No. 283

Hanover

Organ Offertory

Diess sind die heil 'gen sohn Gebot'

KANTATE 106 "Actus Tragicus"

Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit

Dorothy Hoos, *soprano*

Gloria Kirk, *contralto*

Edmund Dana, *tenor*

Jack Hill, *bass*

MOTET VI

Lobet den Herrn, alle Heiden

Recessional No. 351

Vachet, auf

SOLI DEO GLORIA

22
THE CANTATA SINGERS
William O. Payne, III, Musical Director

SOPRANO

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Jean Brown

Leslie Constanzer

Jacqueline Decker

Darlene Gunshaw

Bonnie Hollenbeck

Linda Harrison

Dorothy Hoos

Carol King

Theresa Mittelstadt

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Judith Feitner

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Cora Range

Lou Sand

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Helen Vincent

TENOR

Thomas Barker

Robert Badertscher

Edmund Dana

Paul Holland

Norman L. Hollenbeck

Bernard Schreiber

Richard Sheasley

Richard Wack

BASS

Richard Bauer

Stuart Finch

Lyle Greenfield

David Hauser

Jack Hill

Geoffrey Kelafant

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Thomas Strain

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Eleanor Brown

Gary Chollet

VIOLA

Kathleen Dyck

CELLO

Lee Copenhaver

FLUTE

Margaret Biery Payne

Sallie Matteson

CONTINUO

Organ, Elizabeth Bacon

Bass, Ed Liberatore

REHEARSAL ACCOMPANIST

Judith Feitner

NOTES

MOTETS I, V, AND VI

The motet (from the French "mot" or "word"), of venerable medieval antecedents, was polytextual and polyphonic and usually the embroidering of a borrowed theme of words and music with other sets of words and music. The modern derivation is the church anthem. For Bach, the motet is akin to his cantatas except that there are no solo passages and no individual accompaniment (at least extant accompaniment, except for Motet VI). In his day, the motet had a peculiar place in the Leipzig liturgy at the beginning of the principal morning service or at the beginning of vespers after the organ prelude. Bach rarely either conducted or composed the motet, explaining the fact that we have only six motets from his memorial services in honor of distinguished personalities, and in this category falls No. V (though the specific occasion is unknown). Paradoxically, the motet scores, so difficult to interpret, are the only items among Bach's vocal music that never ceased to be performed during the eclipse of his work between 1750 and 1830.

Motet II, SINGET DEM HERRN, is an extraordinary "explosion of joy." Mozart, passing through Leipzig in 1789, became so enthusiastic during a performance that "his entire soul seemed to be in his ears." The composition has traditionally been assigned to January 1, 1746, to celebrate the peace of Dresden, signed a week earlier and bringing to an end the second Silesian war, but the work is perhaps considerably older and occasioned by the 1729 birthday of the Elector Friedrich August of Saxony. The first three of its four episodes are written for the double chorus. Two passages from Psalms 149 and 150 frame a stanza of a chorale, "Nun lob', mein Seel, den Herren" (sung by the second chorus), combined with interludes on still another text, of unknown authorship (sung by the first chorus). The work concludes with a combined chorus as a fugue of praise, also based on Psalm 150. To render the joy of the Psalm texts, Bach's inspiration becomes almost violent in its ecstasy. The first episode, *andante moderato*, following the pattern of the organ prelude and fugue, is characterized by antiphonal effects. Walter Buszin describes the section noting that "the saints of God, as an assembly or community. . . praise God in chorus while individual sons of Zion, though they too are members of the assembly, employ a rollicking fugue to praise and extol God with nthe dance, the timbrel, and the harp." The second episode, *andante sostenuto*, with its two complementary texts, contrast with the first in offering more deliberate and comforting music, appropriate to the more meditative lyrics. The third, *poco allegro*, again becomes antiphonal. Buszin characterizes it as "responsive singing in which the Church Militant on earth below echoes the singing of the Church Triumphant in heaven above." Both groups combine on the *allegro vivace* fugue closing the motet. Albert Schweitzer's comment on this motet deserves repetition: "And truly when this music rings out we lose sight of the world with all its unrest, its care and sorrow. We are alone with Bach, who soothes our souls with the wonderful peace of his own heart and lifts us above all that is, was, and shall be. When the tones have died away we feel that we must sit still with folded hands, and thank the master for his legacy to mankind."

Motet V, KOMM, JESU, KOMM, the only motet in which Bach uses no Biblical passages, is based on a poem by Paul Thymich, a teacher at St. Thomas' who died in 1694. It is not a chorale but a free religious poem contrasting in two stanzas tiredness of life and faith in Christ. Bach exalts an intense longing for death (a theme frequently found in his works and perhaps reflecting the frequent deaths in his own family), but he does not succumb to despair. Rather there is a firm conviction of things to come after death. In the treatment of the first stanza, Bach uses each of the lines of verse as the basis of a section (as done in the chorale fantasia), dividing in turn into three episodes. The last episode, the most extended, is particularly notable

for the repeated florid passages characterizing antiphonal interest. At one point (measure 44, the words "der saure Weg"), Bach employs a fugal movement in which all eight voices have a share. The second stanza, designated *aria*, is a short and simple four-part chorus, harmonized as a chorale but of Bach's invention. It repeats a frequent Bach motif, that of "good night," this time as a confident farewell to the world.

MOTET VI, LOBET DEN HERRN, is unique among the six in including no chorale, using four voices only, and possessing a continuo part supplied by Bach different from the *bass* of the choir. The vigorous, bold fugal writing, based on Psalm 117 and expressive of great joy, emphasizes the text "preiset" ("praise") and "alle" ("all"). The first two lines of the text are separate fugues, then combined in a double fugue. The text at "Denn seine Gnade" inaugurates a short homophonic section, which then introduces a third fugue, answered by still another in the repeated "alleluias." This motet is perhaps a fragment of a lost cantata.

CANTATA 106

Cantata 106. GOTTES ZEIT IST DIE ALLERBESTE ZEIT, called also an *actus tragicus*, given its character as mourning music, displays the maturity of Bach even at age twenty. The work, one of his few cantatas in the older style of the form (that is, employing only Biblical verses and chorale melodies as texts without added poetry), corresponds to the year 1707 during the Mühlhausen period. The impulse for the composition of the tragedy is unknown, though perhaps there is reference (especially in the paraphrase of Simeon's death song) to the death of an uncle, Tobias Lännerheit, who had contributed generously to Bach's support.

The music finds its inspiration in a contrast between the spirit of the Old and New Testaments -- between the wrath of an avenging God and the atoning love of Christ. Acts 17, Revelation 22, and Luke 23 are juxtaposed with Psalms 90 and 31, Isaiah 38, and Sirach 14 (this last from the Apocrypha). To these are added a stanza of a Luther chorale (1524) and one by Adam Reusner (1533). A tender, flowing sonata for flutes, violas, and continuo, in minor key, forms the introduction and anticipates certain phrases of the middle movement. The deliberately restricted instrumentation imparts a muffled and somber effect to the whole. There follows a choral motet with solo episodes, expressing the old covenant of death as the inescapable destiny of man. After a few bars of slow movement on the words "God's time is ever best," a lively fugue develops to portray, on the second sentence, the agitations of earthly life, leading then to a final choral sentence returning to thoughts of death. The tenor emphasizes this common lot of mankind, with a repeated, mournful motif played by the flutes. Following, the gloomy tones of the bass offer the words spoken by Isaiah to King Hezekiah: "Give your last instructions to your household." The closing section of this motet is a remarkable three-part fugue over a walking bass on the words "The ancient law stands," concluding with the soprano line on the words "Come, Lord Jesus" (with accompaniment of a melody from the chorale "Ich hab' mein' Sach' Gott heimgestellt" ("I have left all my cares with God"), an old death hymn.

After this musical and ideological crisis, the new covenant of salvation in Christ is represented by a dialogue between the departed soul (alto) and the Savior (bass). The alto begins in an Italianate-style *aria*. After the bass's reply, "Today you shall be with me in Paradise" (the words of Christ on the cross), the alto sings the Luther chorale "In peace and joy I now depart" (a paraphrase of the Biblical Simeon's death hymn), while the bass continues with his *aria*, with counter-fugues in the accompaniment. The final chorus is an orchestral elaboration of the Seth Colvisius melody (1581) for the Reusner chorale, with the last phrases expanded into a double fugue on a text praising the Trinity. Salvation and hope have triumphed over the old order of inflexibility and despair.

Sources: Harry Holbreich, Walter E. Buszin,
Philipp Spitta, Claude V. Palisca,
Albert Schweitzer, Alfred Dürr

--Leonard R. Criminale