

Bach Cantata, *Ihr werdet weinen und heulen*, BWV 103

Ihr werdet weinen und heulen, BWV 103, was composed for *Jubilate* (the third Sunday after Easter), 1725. For nearly a year, Bach had been occupied with the great series of chorale cantatas, which began with *O Ewigkeit du Donnerwort*, BWV 20, for the first Sunday after Trinity the previous year (11th June, 1724). It is not known why Bach should suddenly have interrupted this project at Easter 1725¹, but, instead of setting chorale-based texts, after re-using some earlier works, Bach turned to libretti by the Leipzig poet, Christiane Mariane von Ziegler.² Ziegler was championed by J. C. Gottsched, one of the leading progressive intellectuals based at Leipzig University. His circle was particularly supportive of the ideals of what would become known as the Enlightenment – the humanitarian and rationalist outlook emanating from Paris. Given Bach’s apparently more orthodox theological views and Gottsched’s own avowed dislike of lyric poetry, there may be a certain irony in this association.³ Nevertheless, Ziegler’s powerful imagery inspired Bach to compose a series of particularly inventive cantatas, through April and May 1725. As ever, the sheer industry of Bach’s output is astonishing; for example, he wrote cantatas for three successive days in May (20th, 21st and 22nd – Whit Sunday, Whit Monday and Whit Tuesday).

The text focuses on grief for the loss of Christ (opening chorus), the search for salvation (alto aria) and the promise of His return (tenor aria). Ziegler’s text for the opening chorus draws on St John’s gospel (Ch. 16 v. 20): “Ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice; ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned to joy”. The antithesis between weeping and rejoicing – with the additional implied contrast between worldly celebration and heavenly joy – is reflected in the strikingly contrasted musical motives of the opening chorus.⁴ The movement is in B minor, a key often associated in Bach’s music with his darkest and loftiest ideas. Bach’s instrumentation of the ‘Ziegler’ cantatas was particularly varied. Rather unusually, Bach has incorporated a flauto piccolo (sopranino recorder) into the vigorous and energetic ritornello theme; the sustained notes and the bubbling arpeggio motives of this shrill instrument clearly depict the superficial rejoicing of the world.

Example 1

The image shows a musical score for a vocal line in G major, 3/4 time. The lyrics are "ihr wer - det wei - - - - - nen und heu - - - - - len,". Above the staff, a bracket labeled "hemiola rhythm" spans the first two measures of the second phrase, which contains the notes G4, A4, B4, A4, G4. The notes are marked with "a2" and "7". The first measure of the first phrase has a sharp sign above the staff, and the second measure of the second phrase has a sharp sign above the staff, both marked with "a4".

By contrast, the voices intone an austere ‘permutation’ fugue. This is a special type of fugue in which the voices enter periodically and follow through with a series of

¹ For further discussion see notes to *Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern* BWV 1, especially footnote 4.

² There is a facsimile of the original poem, published in *Versuch in gebundener Schreib-Art*, Teil I, Leipzig 1728, in W. Neumann (editor), *Sämtliche von Johann Sebastian Bach vertonte Texte*, Leipzig 1974, p 359. The ‘Ziegler’ texts are for the following Cantatas (in chronological order): BWV 103, 108, 87, 128, 183, 74, 68, 175 and 176.

³ For an illuminating account of Bach in the early years of the Enlightenment see Gaines, James, *An Evening at the Palace of Reason* (London: Harper, 2005).

⁴ For an interesting comparison of a work with similar contrasting textual ideas, see the third movement of Telemann’s cantata, *Lauter Wonne, lauter Freude* (No. 68 from *Harmonischer Gottes-Dienst*).

regular countersubjects, somewhat in the manner of a round. The greater independence of parts possible when writing for voices means that this type of fugue is more commonly found in vocal than keyboard music. Though the fugue subject comprises only four bars, it is very sharply characterised, both rhythmically and melodically, illustrating the ‘weeping and wailing’ described in the text. The melody incorporates the hemiola rhythm, in which two bars of triple time are accented as though three bars of duple time (see Example 1). The melodic contour is distorted through an upward leap of a seventh and two augmented intervals; the first countersubject is also strongly chromatic.

After the fugal exposition, the material of the opening ritornello recurs, this time with words: “but the world rejoices”. There are notable melismas on the word “freuen” (rejoices). The fugue begins again and the ‘rejoicing material’ is superimposed on the opening ritornello theme (b. 75, now in F sharp minor).

Example 2

[instruments omitted]

Basso
freu-en. Ihr a-ber wer-det trau - rig sein, ihr wer-det trau - rig sein, ihr a-ber wer-det trau - rig

Bc.
sein, ihr wer-det trau - rig sein, ihr a - ber wer - det trau - - - - - rig sein.

iv6 Fr6 V

The frenetic activity of the chorus is interrupted by a brief Adagio (bb. 101—108), an accompanied arioso for the bass soloist. Both the structure and visionary harmony of this short section are well worth investigating in detail. The melodic near-sequence implied by the text disguises further sequences contained within the larger units (Example 2). (Note the diminished seventh/augmented second leaps, which outline a very sharp circle of fifths: D#, A#, E#, B# and lead to a diminished seventh pattern in the solo voice on C#.) These sequential steps are punctuated by a poignant motif on the recorder, which incorporates two characteristically Baroque expressive intervals: a diminished third and a diminished fourth. Starting from F# minor, Bach reaches C# minor at the sixth bar of the Adagio. In the following bar, the C# minor chord is transformed into a diminished seventh on A#, which, by the end of the bar, has been converted to its enharmonic equivalent, B flat. In the final bar of the Adagio, this diminished seventh resolves onto a D minor chord (first inversion, and with a B flat suspension). The D minor chord forms part of a ‘chromaticised’ Phrygian cadence in A minor (a iv⁶-V progression incorporating a chromatic passing note). The D sharp completes a French sixth, a relatively rare type of augmented sixth in the early eighteenth century. Simultaneously, the bass soloist decorates the third of the augmented sixth with a lower mordent (G sharp). Students of chromatic harmony will recognise the resultant half-diminished seventh (b. 108 second beat: F – G sharp

– B – D sharp) as the so-called ‘Tristan-chord’ from Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*; certainly the enharmonic modulation and chromatic chording of this Adagio seem to point the way towards nineteenth-century tonality.

When the fugal exposition returns, the voices and instruments are even more closely integrated, with the recorder adding its own piercing voice as a fifth fugal entry. The chorus is integrated into the ritornello theme to conclude the movement.

The expressive tenor recitative concludes with a particularly angular melisma on the word ‘Schmerzen’ (sufferings) which introduces further diminished and augmented intervals.

The plaintive beauty of the alto aria reflects the search for mercy in a forlorn world. The obbligato solo is usually performed by the sopranino recorder, though for a later version Bach substituted violin or flute. The theme begins with strangely unsettled melodic and rhythmic motives and then moves towards more flowing and ordered material (bb. 9–11). This dichotomy is more strongly demarcated in the central section of the aria, where the ‘unsettled’ motives are developed through a strikingly dissonant passage, which modulates dramatically from C sharp minor (b. 35) almost as far as C major (b. 40) before returning to B minor (b. 41). An extended melisma on the word ‘sterben’ ([I must] die) explains both the underlying harmonic anguish and melodic angularity. By contrast, the hope for mercy (erbarme dich!) elicits an almost static harmonic progression and more flowing melodic line (bb. 42–46) comprise mainly sustained dominant seventh chords in F sharp minor).

The text of the alto recitative illustrates how Ziegler’s original poems were modified (probably by Bach himself) for the cantata:

Ziegler (<i>Jubilate</i>)	Bach (BWV 103/iv)
I trust the word of promise, That, after fear and anxiety, my sadness Shall, in a twinkling, Be transformed into joy.	I trust the word of promise, That my sadness, Shall be transformed into joy.

This movement looks ahead to Christ’s return, when sadness will be transformed to joy (Freude), a word characteristically set to an extended melisma.

The following aria is one of the most remarkable composed by Bach. The librettist’s exhortation to joyfulness (‘Arise troubled voices’) has prompted Bach to write an extraordinarily vivacious movement in which trumpet and strings accompany an extremely virtuosic tenor solo. Apart from the leaping arpeggio figuration, the soloist must negotiate an extended melisma, again on the word ‘Freude’, running over six bars, mostly in semiquavers and even incorporating some demisemiquavers (bb. 47–53).⁵ Although many of Bach’s contemporaries – including Handel and Telemann –

⁵ There is a particularly fine performance of this movement by Peter Schreier, in which the singer apparently executes this lengthy melisma in a single breath; *J.S. Bach: Tenor Arias from the Cantatas*, Peter Schreier, Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, cond. Erhard Mauersberger, Decca ECS-R 737 (P 1970).

wrote taxing tenor solos, nothing quite compares with this movement for sheer exuberance and vitality.

The concluding chorale is a setting of the well-known tune *Was mein Gott will, das g'scheh allzeit* with appropriately comforting words, 'your brief suffering will be transformed to joy'.