

J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 127

Form: Chorus/Fantasia - Recit (T) - Aria (S) - Recit/Aria (B) - Chorale.

Introduction and updates at melvinunger.com.

NBA I/8; BC A49

Estomihi (Quinquagesima); i.e., the Sunday before Lent (during which no cantatas were performed (BWV 23, 22, 127, 159)

*1 Corinthians 13:1-13 (In praise of love)

*Luke 18:31-43 (Jesus and the twelve go to Jerusalem, healing of a blind man)

Librettist: Unknown

FP: 11 February 1725 (St. Nicholas). This is the second-last chorale cantata in Bach's chorale cantata cycle project (see note). The underlying work is a funeral chorale.

Bach often used chiasmic (x-shaped/symmetrical) forms, in which center movements (where the mirror image begins) provide the crux of the matter. There antithetical elements meet or are paradoxically inverted (formal inversion reflects an aspect of reversal or turning in the text). Martin Petzoldt suggests that the original libretto was in 6 movements and that Bach decided to join 2 movements to create no. 4, leaving no. 3 as the central movement. See "Bach Kommentar" 2:626-27 and side note.

J.S. Bach

Cantata No. 127

Herr Jesu Christ, wahr' Mensch und Gott

Regarding Bach's use of the same section of a chorale melody as accompaniment throughout a chorale-based movement, see note.

Instrumentation:

Tromba
Recorder I, II
Ob I, II
Vln I, II
Vla
SATB
Continuo

The sweet parallel 3rds of the recorders suggest Jesus' calm demeanor as he approaches his divinely ordained death as referenced in the Gospel (see nos. 2 & 3).

Two instrumentally rendered chorale lines suggest the cry of the blind man in the Gospel reading, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" (See also comments by Petzoldt and Chafe).

Disposition of Instr. Chorale
Christe... (mm. 1-4, 9-12)
der du trägst... (38-41, 46-49)
Erbarm dich unser (71-73)

(Coro.) 127/1.

(Lento ♩ = 60.)

(Chorale Verse 1)

Prayer: Christ who suffered for me, have mercy! (127/1).

1. Herr Je - su Christ, wahr' Mensch und Gott, Lamm

mf Chris - te, du

Vln I (harmonized by Vln II, Vla)

Martin Petzoldt argues that combining a liturgical and more objective chorale (the German "Agnus Dei") with a subjective one ("Herr Jesu Christ"), Bach gives the movement a strong confessional character. See *Bach Kommentar* 2:623. Eric Chafe argues that in combining 2 chorales "Bach makes his most detailed statement regarding...the dual natures of Jesus as 'wahr'r Mensch und Gott.'" See *Analyzing Cantatas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 158.

F major
Regarding the significance of F major, see side note.

In this movement, the constant switching between major and minor modes suggests the dual natures of Christ. For Mattheson's comments on major vs. minor, see note.

3. Got tes, Ob I, II

B-flat major (C7) F major A7

5. Strings

D minor D7 G(7) C minor

Regarding the possible implied words for the tune in the continuo, see Chafe, *Analyzing Bach Cantatas*, 159 and side note for translations.

Herz - lich tut
Ach, Herr, mich
O Haupt, voll

7. Rec I, II

C minor

mich ver - lan - gen
ar - men Sün - der
Blut und Wun - den

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Rec I, II

9. Chris - te du Lamm

Ob I, II

C major

11. Got tes

Vln I

F major G7 C major D7

13. Strings

G major Ob I, II G7 C7 Possible chorale citation: Herz - lich F minor tut

15. mich ver - lang gen F minor

down 8va

17. Soprano. Choral text line 1. +Trp?

The chorale cantus firmus is prepared with chorale line in diminution, sung imitatively by the lower 3 voices.

+Vln I Herr Je - su

Alto. +Vln II Herr Je - su Christ, wahr'r Mensch und Gott, Herr

Tenore. +Vln II Herr Je - su Christ, wahr'r Mensch und Gott, Herr Je - su Christ, wahr'r Mensch und

Basso. +Vln II Herr Je - su Christ, wahr'r Mensch und

A

F major G7

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19.

Christ, wahr'r Mensch und Gott,

Je - su Christ, wahr'r Mensch und Gott, Herr Je - su Christ, wahr'r Mensch und

Gott, wahr'r Mensch, wahr'r Mensch und Gott, Herr Je - su Christ, wahr'r Mensch und

Gott, wahr'r Mensch und Gott, wahr'r Mensch und

Rec. I, II

C major F major

F7

[illegible]

23.

Strings

G7

Ob I, II

C major

C minor

F# dim.7

D(7)

3

25. **B**

der du litt'st
der du litt'st Marter, Angst und
der du litt'st Marter, Angst und
der du litt'st Mar-ter,

Rec I, II

B

Strings

27. G major A7 D minor E7

Mar-ter, Angst und Spott,
Spott, Mar-ter, Angst und Spott, der du litt'st Mar-ter, Angst und
Spott, Mar-ter, Angst und Spott,
Angst, der du litt'st Mar-ter, Angst und Spott, und Spott, der du litt'st

29. A minor C7 D minor

Spott, +Ob I, II und Spott, Angst und Spott.
der du litt'st Mar-ter, Angst und Spott,
Mar-ter, Angst und Spott, Angst und Spott. Rec I, II

mf

D minor

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31. **Ob I, II**

Rec I, II

D minor D7 G minor G7

33. **C** Chorale text line 3. The chorale cantus firmus is accompanied by the first chorale phrase in diminution, sung imitatively by the lower 3 voices.

für mich am

für mich am Kreuz auch end - lich

für mich am

+Vln II +Via

Ob I, II

C

p

C major C7 F major D7

35.

Kreuz auch end - lich starbst,

starbst, für mich am Kreuz, am Kreuz

Kreuz auch end - lich, end - lich starbst, für mich am Kreuz

für mich am Kreuz auch end - lich starbst,

Ob I, II

8va up

G(7) C minor C(7) F minor

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37.

auch end - lich starbst,

auch end - lich starbst,

für mich am Kreuz auch end - lich starbst,

Rec I, II

der du

Strings

B dim.7

39.

trägst die Sünd der

Ob I, II

C major

41.

Welt,

Rec I, II

C major

43.

Herz - lich tut mich ver - lan - - -

Ob I, II

Strings

A minor

E7

Possible chorale citation:

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45. **D** Chorale text line 4. The chorale cantus firmus is accompanied by the first chorale phrase in diminution, sung imitatively by the lower 3 voices.

und mir dein's
und mir dein's

47. **D** Rec I, II

gen A minor A minor C7

Va - - ters Huld er - - - warbst,
Va - ters Huld er - warbst, und mir dein's
und mir dein's Va - ters Huld er - warbst, und mir dein's
und mir dein's Va - ters Huld er - warbst, und mir dein's

Ob I, II die Sünd vder

trägt

49. **F major** **G7** **C major** **C7**

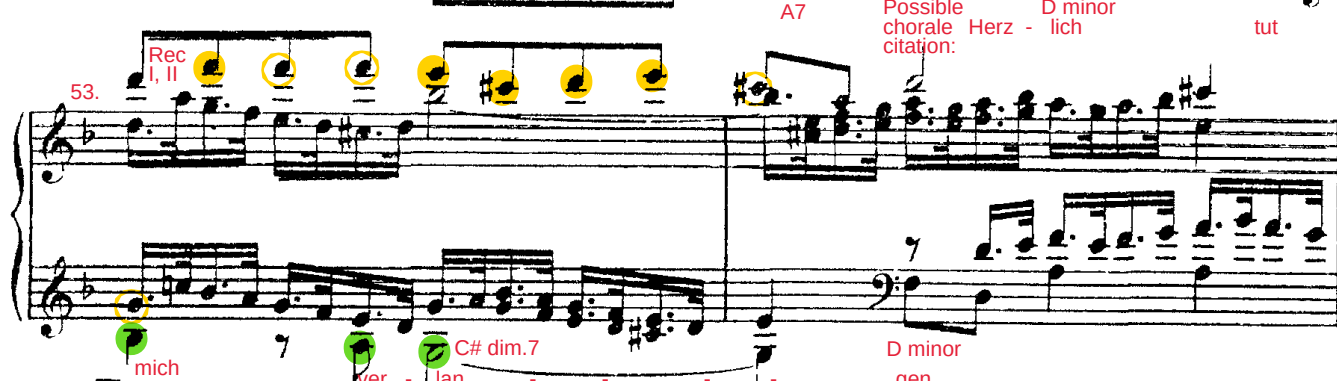
Va - ters Huld er - warbst,
Va - ters Huld er - warbst,
Va - ters Huld er - warbst,

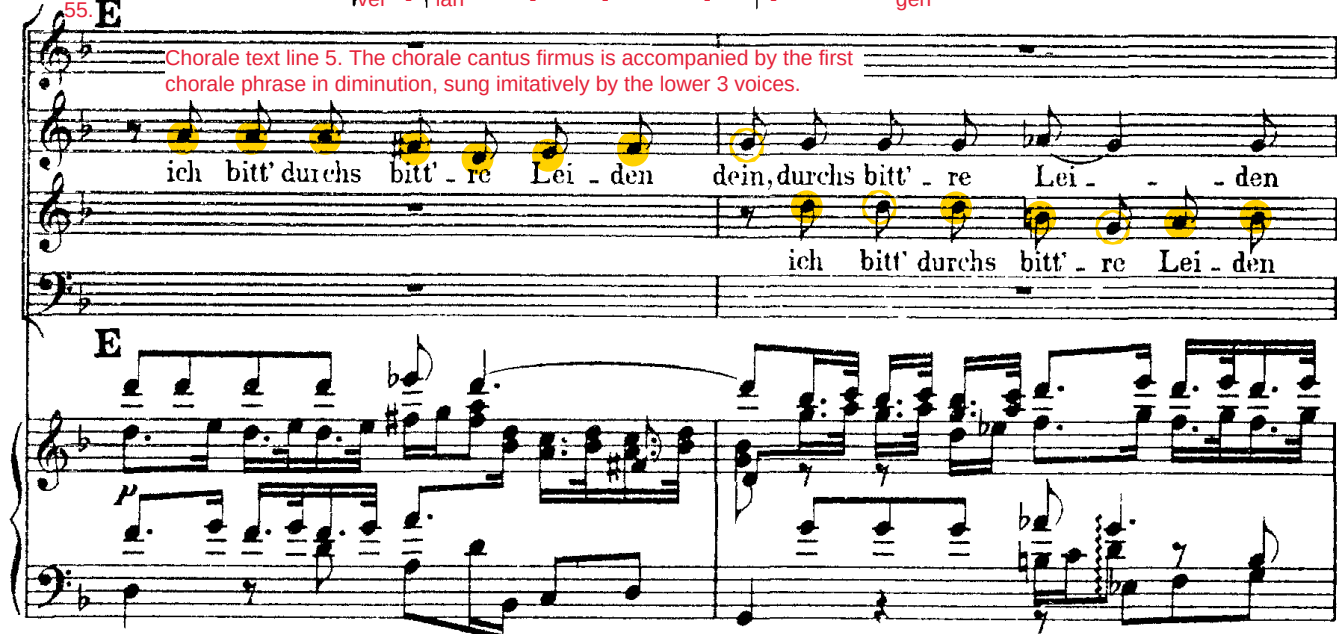
Welt, *mf* Strings

F major **F7** **B-flat major**

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51. 

53. 

55. 

57. 

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59.

bitt' - re Lei - den dein:
dein, durchs bitt' - re Lei - den dein,
dein, durchs bitt' - re Lei - den
dein, ich bitt' durchs bitt' - re Lei - den

D minor D7 G minor G7 C minor

61.

ich bitt' durchs bitt' - re Lei - den dein:
dein, ich bitt' durchs bitt' - re Lei - den dein:
dein, ich bitt' durchs bitt' - re Lei - den dein:

mf Strings

C minor C minor D7

63.

Rec I, II

D minor Continuo

G minor C# dim.7 A(7) D7

65.

Strings

Possible chorale citation: Herz - lich tut mich ver - lan - - -

G(7) C minor 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7

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67. Chorale text line 6. The chorale cantus firmus is accompanied by the first chorale phrase in diminution, sung imitatively by the lower 3 voices.

The final text phrase quotes from Jesus' parable in Luke 18:31: The tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" Similarly, the blind man in the day's Gospel reading cried, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" (Luke 18:38).

Du wollst mir Sün - der gnä - dig
Du wollst mir Sün - der gnä - dig
Du wollst mir

69. gen
Sün - der gnä - dig sein,
sein, mir Sün - der gnä - dig sein, du wollst mir Sün - der, mir Sünder gnä - dig
Sünder gnä - dig, gnä - dig sein, du wollst mir Sünder gnä - dig
Du wollst mir Sünder gnä - dig sein, du wollst mir Sünder gnä - dig

72. C7 F major
sein,
sein,
sein,
barm
dich
un -
ser.

Ob I, II
Ob I, II
Strings
er-

C minor C minor

down 8va

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Rec I, II

74. *mf*

Strings

G7 C major F7 B-flat major

76. **G**

Chorale text line 6 is repeated but without a recurrence of the textless "erbarm dich unser" and without a cantus firmus in the soprano. Instead, all 4 voices have the melody of the first chorale phrase in diminution, sung imitatively. Since the chorale "Herr Jesu Christ" begins in F but ends in C, Bach adds one more ritornello statement and choral statement, allowing him to end the movement in F major.

+Strings

du woll'st mir Sün - der gnä - dig

du woll'st mir Sün - der gnä - dig sein, du woll'st mir

G

p

G7 C7

Possible chorale citation: Herz - lich tut

F minor

+Ob I, II

78.

du woll'st mir Sün - der gnä - dig sein, mir gnä - - - dig sein!

sein, du woll'st mir Sün - der gnä - - - dig sein!

du woll'st mir Sün - der gnä - dig sein!

Sün - - - der gnä - - - dig, - - - gnä - dig sein!

down 8va.

mich ver - lan - - - gen

F major

Secco **Recitativo.** (Based on Chorale Vv. 2 & 3) • Jesus who suffered leads me through death to life (127/2).

127/2.

1. Tenore.

Chromatic saturation in the vocal part in 10 mm.

Wenn Al - les sich zur letz - ten Zeit ent - set - zet und wenn ein

B-flat major B-flat 7 B dim.7

3.

kal - ter To - desschweiss die schon er - starren Glieder netzet, wenn meine Zunge nichts als

G7 B dim.7 G7 C minor D7

6.

nur durch Seuf - zer spricht und die - ses Her - ze bricht: ge - nug, dass da der Glaube weiss, dass

G minor A major A7 D minor

NBA: genung

9.

Je - sus bei mir steht, der mit Ge - duld zu seinem Leiden geht und diesen schweren

B-flat major B-flat 7 A dim.7

The text establishes the relationship to the Gospel of the day (Luke 18:31–33): Taking the twelve, [Jesus] said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written of the Son of man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon; they will scourge him and kill him..."

12.

Weg auch mich ge - leitet und mir die Ru - he zu - be - reitet.

B-flat minor N6 C7 F minor F major

Arioso ending (extension on "Ruhe") depicts the anticipated rest after death.

Da capo **Aria.**

127/3. (Larghetto $\text{♩} = 46.$) (Based on Chorale Verse 4) •Death is welcome for my soul in his hands (127/3).

The staccato recorders suggest the calm ticking of a clock.

1. Rec I, II

Ritornello related to vocal line. *Mod. poco marcato.* harmonic clash

Pizz. C minor

3. C minor C7 F minor F minor F minor

5. B-flat 7 G7 C minor

7. **Soprano.**

Text painting: The image of the soul resting in the hands of Jesus is illustrated by enfolding the vocal line in the oboe line (a dialogue between oboe and voice). The text alludes to the Introit reading for the day, Psalm 31:5, which Jesus quoted on the cross: Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last. (Luke 23:46). Regarding the Introit for Estomihi, see above.

Die See-le

C minor C7 F minor B dim.7 C minor C minor

10.

Word painting:
Extended notes for "ruht" ("rests").

ruht

in Je - su Händen,

die See-le ruht

Oboe imitates voice.

Oboe

C minor

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Chromatic inflection for "when earth shall cover this body."

12.

in Je - su Hän - den, wenn Er - de die -

B-flat 7 E-flat major

15.

- sen Leib be - deckt, die See - le

E-flat major E-flat major

17.

ruht in Je - su Hän - den, die See - le ruht

Oboe C7 F minor D-flat major

20.

in Je - su Hän - den, die See - le ruht

Oboe G7 C minor C7 F minor

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22.

in Je - su Hän - den, wenn Er - de die - sen Leib be - deckt, wenn Er - de

F minor F minor B-flat 7 G7 C minor

24.

die - sen Leib be - deckt, die See - le ruht in Je - su

C minor C7 F minor B dim.7

26.

Hän - den, wenn Er - de die - sen Leib be - deckt.

C minor B dim.7 C minor C7 F minor

28.

B section.

Ach, ruft mich, ruft mich bald,

C minor D7 G major C minor F minor

30.

ach, ruft mich bald, ihr Ster-be - glock-ken, ich bin zum

Note: Upper strings play only 4.5 measures in the movement.

Pizzicato strings enter to depict the funeral bells.

B-flat minor E-flat 7 A-flat major
(The funeral bells are presented in a positive light.)

32.

Ster-ben, zum Ster-ben un-er-schrocken, ich bin zum

A-flat major

34.

Sterben, zum Sterben uner-schrocken, uner-schrocken

The pizzicato strings cease at the second statement of "I am not terrified of dying"; the singer ends abruptly and alone with a tritone leap up. The oboe then plays an upwardly flitting bridge that leads to the statement of the anticipated resurrection.

Tritone

A-flat major F# dim. 7

36.

weil mich mein Je - sus wie - der weckt, weil mich mein Je - sus wie - der weckt.

The oboe adopts the sighing motives but inverts them for the positive hope of the resurrection.

G minor G7 C minor F# dim. 7 G minor C# dim. 7 D7 Da Capo.
G major

A1 (mm. 1-13). Lines 1-10: C meter, tempestuous trumpet & strings. GM.

1 Basso

Chromatic saturation in the vocal part in 6 mm.

Wenn ein - stens die Po - sau - nen schal - len

Strings have stile concitato (see note).

und

Aria (Rhyme: ABBCCAAD)
 B1 (mm. 13-21). Line 1: C meter, Vox Christi, continuo alone. FM-CM
 A2 (21-32). Lines 2-3: 6/8 meter, tempestuous trumpet & strings. CM-Am
 B2 (32-44). Lines 4-7: C meter, Vox Christi, continuo alone. Am-Em
 A3 (44-54). Lines 8-9: 6/8 meter, tempestuous trumpet & strings. Em-CM
 B3 (54-59). Line 1: C meter, Vox Christi, continuo alone. CM-GM
 A4 (59-67). Lines 2-3: 6/8 meter, tempestuous trumpet & strings. GM-CM

Allusion to biblical passages such as 2 Peter 3:10–12:
The day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be kindled and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire!

Trp (up 8va)

Regarding the "Intrada" trumpet theme, see note.

3.

wenn der Bau der Welt nebst denen Himmels - fe - sten zerschmettert wird zer-

A7

D minor

G# dim. 7

5.

fallen,

so den - ke mein, mein Gott, im Be - sten:

Allusion to Nehemiah 13:31: "Remember me, O my God, for good (Luther 1545: Gedenke meiner, mein Gott, im Besten!).

A minor

D major

G minor

8.

Wenn sich dein Knecht einst vors Gericht - te stellt, da die Gedanken sich ver-

G7

C minor

Allusion to Romans 2:15–16: [Men's] conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

10. kla - gen, so wollest du al - lein, o Je - su, mein Fürsprecher sein und

F# dim.7 C# dim.7 A7

13. me_i-ner See-le tröst-lich sa-gen: Für - wahr, für - wahr, euch sa - - ge

Vox Christi (John 5:24: see below). Chorale stanza 6, line 1 verbatim, based on chorale tune. B1 (mm. 13-21). Line 1: C meter, Vox Christi, continuo alone. FM-CM.

Tempo giusto. (♩ = 86.) Rhyme: ABBCCAADD

Aria

Continuo alone...

D7 G minor G major C7 F(7) B-flat major

15. ich, euch sa - ge ich, fürwahr, euch sa - ge ich, fürwahr, fürwahr, euch

B-flat major C7 F major F major

18. sa - - ge ich, euch sa - ge ich, fürwahr, fürwahr, euch sa - - ge

F major G7 C major

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(♩ = 112.)

Text painting: The apocalyptic destruction of heaven and earth (already described in the foregoing recitative) is depicted again, now with agitated, operatic writing that includes stile concitato and strings tumbling downward in triadic 32nd notes. The poetic meter changes from iambic to dactylic (accommodated by 6/8 meter) and the key changes from F major to C major.

21.

A2 (21-32). Lines 2-3: 6/8 meter, tempestuous trumpet & strings. CM-Am.

ich:

Allusion to Matthew 24:35: [Jesus]: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away." (Also Mark 13:31, Luke 21:33). Allusion to John 5:24 [Jesus]: "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life."

Strings

Trp up 8va.

C major

23.

Wenn Himmel und Er - de im Feu - er ver - ge - hen,

Strings

Continuo alone, playing "threatening" figure in ascending sequence, modulating to G major (right hand is editorial).

Trp up 8va.

C major

D7

G major

26.

wenn Himmel und Er - de im Feu - er ver -

Trp & Strings

mf

For the repetition of the text, the trumpets and strings play punctuating 8ths.

G major

28.

ge - hen, so soll doch ein Gläu - bi - ger e - wig be -

G major

G7

C major

(D7)

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Word painting: Extended note for "ewig bestehen" ("last forever").

30.

ste - - - - - hen.

G major C major

(♩ = 66.)

B2 (32-44). Lines 4-7: C meter, Vox Christi, continuo alone. Am-Em.

32.

Er wird nicht kommen ins Ge-richt und den Tod e - - wig, und den Tod e - -

Chorale stanza 6, lines 3 & 4 verbatim.

Continuo alone (right hand is editorial).

E7 A minor D7 G major C7

35.

- wig, den Tod e - - - - - wig schmecken nicht, nur

F major A7 D minor E7 A minor E7

38.

hal - - - te dich, nur hal - - te dich, mein Kind, an mich, nur hal - -

Text painting: Extended notes for "halte" ("hold" or "cleave").

A7 D minor E7 A minor B7

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40.

te dich, mein Kind, an mich, nur halte dich, mein Kind. an mich, nur halte

E minor A minor D major G major G7 C major D7

A3 (44-54). Lines 8-9: 6/8 meter, tempestuous trumpet & strings. Em-CM.

43.

dich, mein Kind, an mich; ich breche mit

(E minor) E minor E major

(♩) = 112. 6/8

Singer has fanfare-like arpeggios, strings play descending arpeggios, and trumpet has concitato figures for "I will break death's bonds."

This melody appears as the fugue subject in "Sind Blitze, sind Donner" of the St. Matthew Passion (no. 27b).

Trp up 8va.

45.

star - ker und hel - fen - der Hand des To - des ge -

A minor

Allusion to 2 passages such as Acts 2:24: God raised [Christ] up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. Timothy 1:10: Christ...abolished death and brought life and immortality to light... (Also 1 Corinthians 15:25-26.)

47.

wal - tig ge - schlos - se - nes Band, ich breche mit

A(7) D major

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49.

star - ker und hel - fen - der Hand des To - des ge -

G major

51.

wal - tig ge - schlos - se - nes Band.

C major

53.

Fürwahr, fürwahr, euch

(♩ = 66.)

B3 (54-59). Line 1: C meter, Vox Christi, continuo alone. CM-GM.

Continuo alone (right hand is editorial).

C major

C major

55.

sa - ge ich, euch sa - ge ich, fürwahr, euch sa - ge ich, fürwahr, für -

(tr.)

D7

G major

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58. (tr) $(\text{♩}) = 112.$

wahr, euch sa - - ge ich:

A4 (59-67). Lines 2-3: 6/8 meter, tempestuous trumpet & strings. GM-CM.

Strings

Trp up 8va.

G major

60.

Wenn Himmel und Er - de im

C major

63.

Feu - er ver - - ge - hen, so soll doch ein Gläu - - bi - ger e - - wig be -

Continuo alone (right hand is editorial).

C major

65. Word painting: Extended note for "ewig bestehen" ("last forever").

ste - - - - - hen.

Strings

Trp up 8va.

C major

C major

127/5. **Choral.** (Mel: „Herr Jesu Christ, wahr'r Mensch und Gott.“) (Verse 8) •Prayer: Forgive, keep us steadfast till death (127/5).

+Tromba?
Recorder I, II
(8va)
Ob I, II
Vln I

+Vln II

+Vla

Soprano. 1.
Ach Herr, vergieb all' uns - re Schuld, hilf, dass wir war - ten mit Ge - duld, bis

Alto.
Ach Herr, vergieb all' uns - re Schuld, hilf, dass wir war - ten mit Ge - duld, bis

Tenore.
Ach Herr, vergieb all' uns - re Schuld, hilf, dass wir war - ten mit Ge - duld, bis

Basso.
Ach Herr, vergieb all' uns - re Schuld, hilf, dass wir war - ten mit Ge - duld, bis

F major

F major

D minor

A major D minor

5.

un - ser Stünd - lein kommt her - bei, auch un - ser Glaub' stets wak - ker sei, dein'm

un - ser Stünd - lein kommt her - bei, auch un - ser Glaub' stets wak - ker sei, dein'm

un - ser Stünd - lein kommt her - bei, auch un - ser Glaub' stets wak - ker sei, dein'm

un - ser Stünd - lein kommt her - bei, auch un - ser Glaub' stets wak - ker sei, dein'm

Word painting:
Energetic
tenor & bass
lines for the
idea of
"wacker
Glaube"
("valiant faith").

F major

C major

E7 A minor

9. C major

Wort zu trau - en fe - stig - lich, bis wir ein - schla - fen se - lig - lich.

Wort zu trau - en fe - stig - lich, bis wir ein - schla - fen se - lig - lich.

Wort zu trau - en fe - stig - lich, bis wir ein - schla - fen se - lig - lich.

Wort zu trau - en fe - stig - lich, bis wir ein - schla - fen se - lig - lich.

Text painting: Chromaticism for "fall blessedly asleep."

F major

C major

F# dim.7

D7

G7 C minor

B dim.7

C minor

C major