

J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 83

Form: Aria (A) - Aria/Chorale/Recit (B) - Aria (T) - Recit (A) - Chorale.
 The cantata explores the theological implications of Simeon's prayer in the Gospel reading (the Nunc Dimittis), personalizing it (with verbatim quotation as a frame at beginning and end) in no. 2 and closing with a chorale stanza of Martin Luther's paraphrase. See note by Alfred Dürr for more.

Introduction & updates at melvinunger.com.

NBA I/28; BC A167)

Mary's Purification (Candlemas) (BWV 83, 125, 82, 157, 158, [161], [200])

*Malachi 3:1-4 (The Lord will suddenly come to his temple and purify his people)

*Luke 2:22-32 (Mary presents Jesus at the temple; Nunc Dimittis)

Librettist: Unknown

FP: 2 February 1724 (Leipzig; St. Nicholas)

Instrumentation
 (expansive for a cantata that begins with a solo aria):
 Corno I, II
 Oboe I, II
 Violino concertato
 Vln I, II
 Vla
 SATB
 Continuo

Form (Rhyme: ABAB)
A. "Joyous New Age"
 Ritornello (mm. 1-16) FM
 Lines 1-2 (16-24) FM-CM
 Rit (25-30) CM
 Lines 1-2 (30-47) CM-FM
 Rit (48-63) FM [Fine]

B. "Last Hour of Death"
 Lines 3-4 (64-69) Dm-Gm
 Rit (69-75) Gm
 Lines 3-4 (76-85) Gm-Am
 Da capo

J.S. Bach

Cantata No. 83

Erfreute Zeit im neuen Bunde

In no. 1, "The textual antithesis 'glad time'/'last hour' influences the contrasting compositional structure of the outer and inner sections of this da capo form movement. The principal section is derived from thematic material stated in the introductory ritornello, with its threefold contrast [among] chordal tutti (head-motive), antiphonal motivic treatment, and virtuoso figuration for solo violin." Dürr, 656. See full score for clarity.

Da capo
Aria
 83/1. (Tempo ordinario ♩ = 72)
 Like a violin concerto...
 •Death welcomed by believers of new covenant, holding Jesus in faith (83/1).

Ritornello
 Solo Vln
 Corno I, II

F major For the significance of F major, see note.

Solo Vln
 Ob I, II
 Corno I, II
 Ob I, II
 Figura corta (see note)
 F major C7 F major (G7) C major

C major

C major C7 F major

F7 B-flat major C7 A-minor

Musical score for measures 13-14, piano accompaniment. The music is in G major and 3/4 time. The right hand features a complex, rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes, while the left hand provides a steady bass line with occasional rests.

Musical score for measures 15-16. The vocal line (Alto) begins with a yellow box containing a speech bubble icon. The piano accompaniment continues with similar rhythmic patterns. A red box highlights the text: "Bach's choice of alto rather than bass is striking. As the traditional 'voice of faith,' the alto here appropriates the Simeon event (as recounted in the Gospel reading) existentially. See Petzoldt, *Bach Kommentar* 3:20. More specifically, the alto may represent the prophetess Anna, who joins the holy family and Simeon (see note)." A red box also highlights the text "Head motive" above the vocal line. The lyrics "Er - freu - te" are written below the vocal line. A red box labeled "A" is above the vocal line, and "Lines 1-2." is written to the right. A trill symbol (tr) is above the final note of the vocal line.

Musical score for measures 17-19. The vocal line continues with the lyrics "Zeit, er - freu - te Zeit, er - freu -". The piano accompaniment features more complex rhythmic patterns. A red box labeled "F major" is above the vocal line, and "Text painting: Coloraturas for 'joyous.'" is written to the right. Trill symbols (tr) are above the vocal line in measures 17 and 18. A red box labeled "F major" is below the piano accompaniment in measure 17, and "F major", "F7", "B-flat major", and "F major" are labeled below the piano accompaniment in measures 18 and 19.

Musical score for measures 20-21. The vocal line continues with the lyrics "- te Zeit im neu - en Bun - de, - da un - ser Glau - be". The piano accompaniment continues with similar rhythmic patterns. A red box labeled "F major" is below the piano accompaniment in measure 20, and "F major", "(G7) C major", and "C major" are labeled below the piano accompaniment in measures 21 and 22.

Musical score for measures 22-23. The vocal line continues with the lyrics "Je - sum hält, da un - ser Glau - be Je - sum hält." The piano accompaniment continues with similar rhythmic patterns. A red box labeled "C major" is below the piano accompaniment in measure 22, and "C major" is labeled below the piano accompaniment in measure 23. A red box labeled "Text painting: Held note for 'holding Jesus in faith.'" is below the vocal line in measure 22.

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25 *Ritornello*
C major C7 F major

27 C major C major

30 **B** Lines 1-2 repeated.
Er - freu - - - - - te - Zeit,
C major C7 F major

32 er - freu - - - - - te - Zeit, er
F major F7 B-flat major

35 freu -
G minor 6 F major

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37

- te Zeit, er - freu - te Zeit, er - freu - te

F major F major F major

39

Zeit, er - freu - te Zeit im

F7 B-flat major F major F major

42

neu - en Bun - de, da un - ser Glau - be Je - sum hält, da un - ser

F major F major

44

Glau - be Je - sum hält, da unser Glau - be

F(7) B-flat major

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47 **C**

Je - - sum - hält.

Ritornello

F major F major

49

F7 B-flat major F major F major

52

(G7) C major C major

54

C major C7

57

F major F7 B-flat major (C7)

59

F major F major

Alfred Dürr writes, "Due to frequent use of vocal insertion, the instrumental music is clearly predominant in this bipartite principal section. The middle section, however, is organized differently. Here, the ritornello themes are heard only in a brief articulating episode [mm. 69–75] and in the following two-bar passage of vocal insertion [mm. 76–77]. Otherwise, largely new, text-engendered themes are developed. In addition, the solo violin has idiomatic bariolage figures, an alternation of stopped and open strings (first on a1, then on d1, and in the second half of the middle section twice in an enhanced form on e2), here without doubt intended as an imitation of tolling bells, indicating death... Both halves of the middle section end with expressive chromaticism. See *The Cantatas of J. S. Bach*, 656–657.

62. Lines 3–4.
 wie freu - - dig wird zur letz -
 Solo violin plays bariolage on A (bells tolling death)...

F major D minor

65. Sighing duples...
 -ten Stun - de die Ru - - he - statt, das Grab, be -
 Text painting: the grave, our resting place" is depicted with solo violin bariolage on D (bells tolling death), sighing alto & oboes, throbbing bass, and static harmony.

Obs

D major G minor D major

For more on funeral bells, see note.

67. stellt, die Ru - he - statt, das Grab be - - stellt!
 Text painting: Descending chromatic vocal line for "the resting place, the grave" with ascending chromatic bass line.

Ritornello

G minor G minor

70.

G7 C minor A7

72.

D7 G minor E-flat major

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75

E Lines 3-4 repeated. 2 mm. vocal insertion into ritornello material.

Wie freu - dig, wie

Solo Vln
Ob I, II
Strings

G minor F major D minor

78

freu - dig wird zur letzten Stun - de, wie freu - dig wird zur letz -

Solo violin plays bariolage on E (bells tolling death)...

E7 A minor

81

- ten Stun - de die Ru - he - statt, das Grab, be -

L.H. L.H. L.H.

Solo violin plays bariolage on E (bells tolling death)...

minor

83

stellt, die Ru - he - statt, das Grab, be - stellt!

Text painting: Descending chromatic vocal line for "the resting place, the grave" with ascending chromatic bass line.

A minor A minor A minor

Dal Segno

Commentators note that this movement is virtually unique in Bach's music.

Ars moriendi ("the art of dying") is a book genre that began after the Black Plague with the anonymous *Tractus* (or *Speculum*), *artis bene moriendi*. Written in the 15th century, it was widely disseminated and translated. A shorter version, which adapts the second chapter, includes eleven woodcuts illustrating 5 temptations of the dying Christian believer and their remedies.

Form
(See side note for details).
A. Nunc Dimittis v. 1: canon + psalm-tone VIII (bass)
B. Recitative (C meter) - canon - recit - canon - recit
A'. Nunc Dimittis vv. 2 + 3: canon + psalm-tone VIII (bass)

83/2. Intonazione (Nunc dimittis) e Recitativo (Evangelium St. Lucae, Cap. 2, V. 29-31) (Chorale) and Recit.

•Voice of Simeon (Nunc Dimittis: Luke 2:29-31) and "ars moriendi" (83/2).

1. (Andante $\text{♩} = 126$)

Free canon between unison strings and bass.

Strings

B-flat major

B-flat major

Free canon between unison strings and bass.



The use of canon suggests inevitability, underscoring the certainty of God's promise in death, as reflected in Simeon's recollection of God's promise that he would not die before he had seen the Savior.

5 Basso
Text painting: The canon theme rises for 6 notes (Mixolydian hexachord), then bounces on a long trilled note before stepping back down, perhaps depicting Simeon's act of taking the baby Jesus up in his arms as well as his heaven-directed prayer of release to death (with a "shiver" at the trill)—the "Nunc Dimittis."

Luke 2:29a (Bass on psalm tone 8) + canon

Herr, nun läs - sest du dei - - nen

The ascending diatonic fourth is particularly significant in Bach (e.g., the "Glorias" and "Dona nobis" movements in the B-minor Mass, based on BWV 29/2. See note for more..

B-flat major



Die - - ner in Frie - den fah - - - ren,

B-flat major

C7 FM

F7

G7

C minor

C minor

F# dim.7

D7

19 A Luke 2:29b + canons

wie du ge - - sa - - get hast.

G minor

F7

E-flat major

G minor

C7

F major

B-flat major

24

B-flat major

28

Recitativo

B-flat F D B C

Chromatic saturation in the vocal part in 10 mm.; in 8 mm. of recitativo.

Was uns als Menschen schrecklich

Secco

B-flat major G7

A sermon-like recitative intervenes (the bass is often the voice of authority). It is a sermon-like exegesis of the Nunc Dimittis: Just as Simeon could welcome death after having seen the Savior, so the Christian believer can now face death confidently (see the note by Alfred Dürr at no. 1).

31

G A

a tempo

scheint, ist uns ein Eingang zu dem Leben.

The rising canon theme follows right after the words "Eingang zum Leben" ("entrance to life").

mf

C minor B-flat major

35 B Recit.

Secco

Es ist der Tod ein Ende dieser Zeit und Noth, ein Pfand, das uns der Herr gegeben zum

Continuo is up one 8va (see full score).

E dim. C# dim.7 A7 D7 D-flat G major

Text painting: Singer goes below continuo for "Tod" ("death").

38

A-flat E-flat

Zeichen, dass er's herzlich meint und uns will nach vollbrachtem Ringen zum Frieden bringen.

that he-it cordially means and us will after completed struggling to peace bring.

E-flat 7 A-flat major B-flat 7

B dim.7 C minor

This phrase may be the key to understanding why Bach lets the chant "sink" (see later note).

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a tempo

Recit.

41

- - gen. Upper voice begins the canon.

Und weil der Heiland uns der

mf *Secco* *p*

E-flat major E-flat major E-flat 7 C7

45

Augen Trest, der Herzen Lab_sal_ ist, was Wunder? dass ein Herz der To_ _desfurcht ver.

Chromatic inflection for "fear of death."

mf *p*

F minor F7 B-flat major B-flat 7 G7 C minor

48

gisst! Es kann erfreut den Ausspruch thun: Denn mei - ne Au_ _

The chant moved down to A-flat.

mf *p*

G major C minor A-flat major

52

gen

mf

F major F7 B-flat minor D-flat major D-flat major C major C7

57

Luke 2:30b + canon ha - -ben dei - -nen Hei - land ge - se - - - - -hen.

mf

F minor E-flat major E-flat major E-flat major

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62

E-flat major

66

Note: The "sinking" of the chant from B-flat to A-flat to E-flat perhaps signifies the relaxation into peace that death brings (compare text at mm. 39-41: "And after the struggle is over, bring us to peace").

D Luke 2:31a + canon

wel - - chen du be - - rei - - - tet

Chant moved down to E-flat.

E-flat major

71

hast

E-flat major

C major C7

F minor

D-flat major

A-flat major

G(7)

C minor

76

NBA: für VGR Luke 2:31b + canon

al - - len Völ - - - kern.

C minor

B-flat major

B-flat 7

C minor

F7

B-flat 7

E-flat major

81

E-flat major

B-flat major

B-flat major

B-flat major

B-flat major

B-flat major

Alfred Dürr writes, "The tenor aria...with its constantly running triplets, is stamped by the image of 'hastening' drawn from the text....The movement is to a large extent pervaded by vocal insertion within the return of extracts of the ritornello played by the instrumental ensemble." See *The Cantatas of J. S. Bach*, 657.

Da capo **Aria** • Self-exhortation to pray fervently in care-filled times: paraphrase of Hebrews 4:16. See note. (83/3).

Hebrews 4:14-16. Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

83/3. (Vivace) $\text{♩} = 120$
 1. Solo Vln
 Embellishes Vln I
 Ritornello *mf* Like a violin concerto...
 F major (Staccato...) G7 C major

C major C7 F major

A7 D minor F7 B-flat major C7 F major

Text painting: Triplets capture the essence of the word "eile" ("hasten"), appearing here as a motto, as well as the joy mentioned at the end.

9 **A Tenore.**
 Lines 1-2. Ei - - - le,
 This type of aria is called a "Devisenarie" (a term coined by Hugo Riemann) or "motto aria." After the ritornello, the singer presents the motto. This is followed by a short instrumental bridge before the aria proper begins. The motto sets the tone (and the literary perspective) for the movement.
 ei - - -
 F major F major

11
 - le. Herz, voll Freu - - - dig - keit vor den Gna - - - denstuhl zu
 (G major) C major

Text painting: A long coloratura with intermittent sustained notes on the word "treten" ("to step") followed by descending sequences captures the idea of joy mixed with hesitancy as implied by the text "let us approach the throne of grace with joyfulness" (a paraphrase of Hebrews 4:16—see above).

13

tre -

C major

15

-ten, vor den Gna-den - stuhl zu tre -

Descending sequences illustrate the humble bowing implied by the words "to step before his throne of grace."

17

C major C7 F major G7 C major

19 **B**

ten! Ei -

Ritornello

C major F major C7 F major F major F major

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21

- le, ei - - - le,

F major F7 B-flat major G minor

23

ei - - - le, **voller** Freu - - - dig -
correct (different)

G minor G7 C7 F major

25

keit vor den Gna - den - stuhl zu - - - tre -

F major

27

- - ten, vor den Gna - denstuhl zu tre -

F major N6 B-flat major B-flat major B-flat major

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29

ten, vor den

C7 F major

31

Gna - den - stuhl zu tre -

F7 B-flat major C7 F major

33

- ten!

Ritornello

D minor F7 B-flat major C7 F major

35

F major G major C major

37

C major C7 F major

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39

41

C(7) D Lines 3-6. A7

Du sollst dei - nen Trost em -

D minor F7 B-flat major C7 F major F major G7 C major

43

pfan - gen und Barmher - zigkeit er - lan -

C major C7 A7 D minor.

45

- gen,

D minor D7

47

E

ja, bei kum - mer - vol - ler

Text painting: Descending chromatic fourth in the bass, traditional symbol of lament, depicts "kummer-voller Zeit" ("sorrowful time").

G minor A7 D minor N6 G minor A7 D minor G# dim.7 A minor 7 iv6 Phrygian cadence

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Word painting: Triplets animate the word "stark" ("strong").

49

Zeit, stark am Gei - ste, stark, ja stark am Gei - ste,

v A minor G7 C major 7 E7

51

kräf - tig be - - - - - ten, stark am Gei - ste,

A minor N6 E7 A minor

Text painting: Neapolitan chord, then vigorous leaps leading to a fermata depict the phrase "kräftig beten" ("vigorously/fervently pray").

53

kräf - - - - - tig be - - - - - ten.

G# dim.7 A minor A minor Da Capo

Text painting: Triplets animate the words "kräftig beten" ("vigorously pray").

Recitativo • Darkness of death & doubt turned to light by Christ (83/4).

83/4. 1. Alto A E F G B-flat Tritone C# B

Secco

Alto as voice of faith: Ja, merkt dein Glau-be noch viel Fin-ster - nis, dein Hei-land kann der

Yes perceives thy faith yet much darkness, thy Savior can

The text appropriates the end of the Gospel reading's reference to light. Luke 2:30-32 (Nunc Dimittis): Mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel.

A major A7 A7

Chromatic saturation in the vocal part in 7 mm.

Chromaticism and large and/or awkward leaps color the description of approaching death, while more relaxed harmonies depict the comfort of the Savior.

3

Zweifel Schatten trennen, ja, wenn des Grabes Nacht die letzte Stunde schrecklich macht, so

doubt's shadows dissolve, yes, when the grave's night the final hour frightful makes, then

Descending vocal line with tritone for "Grabes Nacht" ("grave's night").

D minor D7 Tritone F# dim.7 G minor

The theme of light was central to the festival of Mary's Purification (called Candlemas because of the custom of celebrating it with lighted candles. (Mary's Purification, Mary's Presentation) on February 2. The name Candlemas originated by the custom, established early in the history of the Christian Church, of celebrating the festival (with its reading of the Nunc Dimittis) with lighted candles.

Text painting: Ascending vocal line for "seeing the Savior's light" as death approaches with a descending chromatic bass for the descent to the grave.

6

wirst du doch gewiss sein helles Licht im To - de - selbst er - kennen.
 shalt thou still assuredly his bright light in death itself recognize.

Text painting: Descending chromatic bass for the descent to the grave.

E dim. A7 D major G# dim.7 A minor A minor

The word "Licht" ("light") acts as a keyword linking the recitative to the final choral stanza. This light is extended to all nations.

(See also 125/6.) •Christ is light for the Gentiles & glory of Israel (83/5). This is the final stanza of 4 in "Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin," the 1524 chorale paraphrase of the Nunc Dimittis by Martin Luther (1483-1546).

Choral
Soprano 1.

+Corno I
Ob I
Solo Vln
Vln I

+Ob II
Vln II

+Vla

Er ist das Heil und se - lig Licht für - die Hei - - den, zu erleuchten, die dich ken - nen
 He is the salvation and blessed light for the Gentiles, to enlighten, those thee know who

Tenore

Basso

Er ist das Heil und se - lig Licht für - die Hei - - den, zu erleuchten, die dich ken - nen

Er ist das Heil und se - lig Licht für - die Hei - - den, zu erleuchten, die dich ken - nen

D minor A minor C major E(7) B dim. C major C major

Ascending bass lines are reminiscent of no. 2.

7

nicht, und zu wei - den. Er ist dein's Volks I - sra - el der Preis, Ehr, Freud' und Won - - ne.
 not and to pasture (them). He is (for) thy people Israel the glory, honor, joy and bliss.

nicht, und zu wei - - den. Er ist dein's Volks I - sra - el der Preis, Ehr, Freud' und Won - - ne.

nicht, und zu wei - - den. Er ist dein's Volks I - sra - el der Preis, Ehr, Freud' und Won - - ne.

nicht, und zu wei - - den. Er ist dein's Volks I - sra - el der Preis, Ehr, Freud' und Won - - ne.

See full score.

G major A(7) D minor D minor F major D minor F major A major C major iv6 v A major D major Phrygian cadence