

J. S. Bach

Cantata 223

Meine Seele soll Gott loben

The cantata BWV 223 is known to us only from a report from Philipp Spitta (1841–1894): "That Bach was known [in Langula] is plain from a church cantata of his composition that I myself discovered in the "Cantorei" (the cantor's house), and which is recognisable as an early work, apparently belonging to his Mühlhausen time. [Footnote: Everything of value in the way of old music that had belonged to the Count Sachs of Langula came into my hands in 1868. But I only acquired a copy made by him of Bach's cantata, and not the original MS. The first chorus had meanwhile been lost.] It is incomplete and is adorned with other apparent additions by later cantors at Langula; still it offers some genuine matter for the consideration of the historian. The first piece, a duet for soprano and bass, in F Major, beginning with the words "Meine Seele soll Gott loben," &c., is still treated, as regards the bass part, quite in the style of the older church cantatas, and greatly resembles them in the melodic treatment; it is, however, already cast in the form of the Italian aria, and has a few interesting passages. The concluding fugue in B Flat Major, "Alles was Odem hat," &c., is a splendid piece, full of fire, of which the bold and soaring theme may be given as a specimen [see above]." See Philipp Spitta, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, translated by Clara Bell and J. A. Fuller-Maitland, 3 volumes bound as 2 (New York: Dover, 1951), vol. 1, pp. 343–345.

Martin Petzoldt suggests a possible reconstruction of the cantata based on a sermon disposition for this feast day by Christian Eilmar (1665–1715) in his *Neue Kirchen=Redner* (Frankfurt and Leipzig 1706), pp. 276–277. Petzoldt writes,

"The reason for this is both Bach's friendly relationship with Eilmar, known from a little later period, and above all the fact that the existing text fragments suggest a cantata structure similar to that of other Mühlhausen cantatas, one of which—"Aus der Tiefen rufe ich, Herr, zu dir", BWV 131—can even be traced back to this archdeacon of the Marienkirche.... What is immediately significant about this sermon disposition in relation to the text fragment of the cantata is its beginning with Psalm 103:1 and the conclusion with a hymn stanza by Ludwig Helmbold (1532–1598), Von Gott will ich nicht lassen (1563), stanza 5, which calls for praise of God. This call—in Eilmar's sermon disposition preceded shortly before with biblical references to Colossians 3:16 and Psalm 150—is rebiblicized in the cantata text to Psalm 150, verse 6. If the beginning of movement 2, "Meine Seele soll Gott loben," with its allusion to Psalm 103:1 and Luke 1:46, is interpreted as a keyword connection to the textually untransmitted opening movement, it is not difficult—especially in comparison to the final movement—to assume an opening movement with the text of Psalm 103:1: Lobe den Herrn, meine Seele, und vergiß nicht, was er dir Gutes getan hat.

...

Movement 2, a duet in F major for soprano and bass (see BC II, p. 788), is composed on a text—as already noted—with an excellent keyword connection to the presumed opening movement, followed [in Eilmar's sermon disposition] by the familiar idea of discipleship ["Nachfolge"].... It looks as if the text had a continuation, but this remains unclear.

Similarly, there is no knowledge of the following movements 3 and 4, the content of which could have referred to elements that can be found in Eilmar's disposition under the headings of *Didactica paedagogica* and *Objectum*. Thus, movement 3 would contain content on the various people who praise God, the causes and the nature of their praise, while the next movement would have been reserved for the more critical attitude towards the praise of God by unborn children and the impious.

The conclusion of the cantata, movement 5, was formed by an apparently fugal setting of Psalm 150:6, "Alles, was Odem hat, lobe den Herrn [Halleluja]." The musical theme, which begins in the soprano, is well-known (BC II, p. 796); the text takes up the entire range of themes of the cantata in an extended form with the use of Psalm 150:6 in the best manner. In [Johann] Olearius's interpretation, we encounter the corresponding circle of biblical thoughts, including the reference to Psalm 103; it could easily have functioned as an ideal model for the understanding of Eilmar's sermon disposition and thus of the entire cantata text."

See Martin Petzoldt, *Bach Kommentar* 3:75–79, translated from the German.

Christoph Wolff questions "whether there was really sufficient time for communicating with Eilmar, moving from Arnstadt to Mühlhausen, and preparing a performance." See *Johann Sebastian Bach. The Learned Musician* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000), p. 101n62. He suggests an opening Sinfonia-Chorus (see p. 101).

No. 1. Chorus
Text Unknown

No. 2. Soprano & Bass Duet: "Meine Seele soll Gott loben"

No. 3. ?
Text Unknown

No. 4. ?
Text Unknown

No. 5. Chorus. Alles was Odem hat: Psalm 150:5
Fugue Theme

Voice

Al - les was O - dem hat lo - be den Herrn, lo - be, lo - be, lo - be den Herrn
All that breath has praise the Lord...