

J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 81

Form: Aria (A) - Recit (T) - Aria (T) - Aria (B) - Recit (A) - Chorale.
 The cantata is in chiasmic form. 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). For Alfred Dürr's comments and Martin Petzoldt's outline, see note.

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A theatrical cantata closely related to the Gospel account of Jesus calming the storm, dominated by soloists.

J.S. Bach Cantata No. 81

Martin Petzoldt outlines the symmetrical form (*Bach Kommentar* 2:507):

4. B arioso. Small faith creates fear.
5. B aria. Storms fall silent at his word.
3. T aria. Storms weaken faith.
6. A recit. Jesus helps through his word.
2. T recit. Jesus remains silent despite the need.
7. Chorale. Jesus stands by me.
1. A aria. Jesus sleeps.

Jesus schläft, was soll ich hoffen

The operatic cantata relies almost entirely on solo movements. For John Eliot Gardiner's comments, see note.

NBA I/6; BC A39

4. S. after Epiphany (BWV 81, 14)

*Romans 13:8-10 (Love is the fulfilling of the law)

*Matthew 8:23-27 (Jesus calms the sea)

Librettist: Unknown

FP: 30 January 1724 (Leipzig: St. Thomas)

This cantata belongs to Bach's first cantata cycle in Leipzig (see note).

Instrumentation:

Flauto dolce I, II

Oboe d'amore I, II

Vln I, II

Vla

SATB

Continuo

The opening aria employs the typical resources of the time to depict the sleeping Jesus: strings in low register, doubled at the octave by recorders, throbbing pedal notes in the continuo, and low held notes sung by the alto (similar expressive means are employed by Bach in the aria 'Sanfte soll mein Todeskummer' from the Easter Oratorio, BWV 249). But the cantata aria is not only a lullaby: it is also a lament, as revealed by its numerous diminished intervals and augmented or chromatic seconds. And its text frames an anxious question, hence the singer's not coming to rest on the tonic but closing, with voice raised in pitch, on the second degree in a dominant context." (Dürr, *The Cantatas of J. S. Bach*, p. 216.

Aria. • Jesus sleeps in boat during storm; I am without hope (81/1).
 81/1. (Larghetto) $\text{♩} = 56$. Recorders are often used for contemplation of sleeping and/or death.

Alto is often the intimate voice of faith, here it represents one of the disciples in the boat.

Form (Rhyme: ABBA)
 Ritornello (mm. 1-9) Em
 Line 1 (9-15) Em-B7
 Lines 2-4 (15-22) E7-Am-E7
 Lines 2-4 (23-27) A7-Dm-A7
 Rit (27-31) A7-Dm-Am
 Line 1 (32-44) Am-B7
 Rit (45-53) Em

Lines 2-4 (follow without ritornello).

E minor E7 A minor (B7) B7 E minor 1

A vocal lift and a pause on the dominant seventh emphasizes the question and the lack of proper harmonic resolution before the next section of text represents uncertainty or unfulfilled hope.

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16.

nicht mit er-blasstem An-ge - sicht, mit er-blasstem An-ge - sicht schon des Todes Abgrund

The reference to "Abgrund" ("abyss") points to the threat of drowning in the Gospel reading.

A minor G7 C major A minor

19.

Long, low note for the "open abyss."

of - - - fen, des To - - - des Ab-grund of-fen?

Long descending scale depicts the descent into the abyss.

A minor A minor E major

23.

Lines 2-4.

Seh' ich nicht mit erblasstem Angesicht schon des To - des Abgrund of - - -

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

27.

fen? Ritornello

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

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31.

Line 1.

Stretched note for "hoffen" ("hope").

Je - sus schläft, was soll ich hof - - fen, Je - sus schläft, -

A minor B7 E minor E minor

35.

Strings imitate voice.

was soll ich, was soll ich hoffen? Je - sus schläft, Je - sus schläft, -

F major 7 B7 E minor E minor B7

39.

Recorders continue...

Recorders unison...

Strings tacet...

was soll ich hof - fen, was

E minor D# dim.7 E minor (E7)

42.

The question (with its "hoffen" motive) is repeated for emphasis against minimal accompaniment, "evoking a lonely and hopeless situation." (See Petzoldt 2:508.)

+ Strings

soll ich hof - fen, was soll ich hof - fen, was? was? was soll ich hoffen?

A minor D# dim.7 B7 E minor B7

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Ritornello (with strings)

45. *mf* *mf* *p*

E minor E minor E7 A minor (B7) E minor E minor

49. *mf*

G# dim.7 A minor A# dim.7 B7 E minor E minor E minor

81/2. **Secco** • Prayer: Why dost thou stand far off in my peril? (81/2).

Recitativo.

1. Tenor

F Text painting: Vocal leap of a 9th for "so far off."

Herr! War um bleibest du so fer-nd? War um verbirgst du dich zur Zeit der
 Lord! Why (standest) thou so far-off? Why hidest thou thyself in-a time of

NBA: trittst Diminished 7th chords emphasize the anguish of the questions.

E major G# dim.7 E7 A7

Each question ends with a rhetorically inflected lift.

3. B-flat G E-flat F# C

Noth, da Alles mir ein kläg-lich En-de droht? Ach, wird dein Au-ge nicht durch meine Noth be-
 need, when everything me (with) a deplorable end threatens? Ah, (is) thine eye not by my need moved,

Phrygian cadence often used for questions.

C# dim.7 A7 F# dim.7 D major (D7) B7 D# dim.7

NBA: so 7. NBA: vordem den

we-get, das sonstn nie zu schlummern pflaget? Du wie-sest ja mit ei-nem Ster-ne vor-
 which otherwise never to slumber is-wont? Thou didst-show indeed with a star in-former-times

E7 C#7 F# minor B7 E minor

The text combines an allusion to Psalm 121:3-4 (He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep) with allusions to the account of the wise men being guided by a star (a reference to the recent Feast of Epiphany) and biblical passages about God's promise to lead. See note.

9.

mals die neu bekehrten Weisen, den rechten Weg zu rei-sen. Ach, lei-te mich durch

the newly-converted wise-men, the right way to journey. Ah, lead-me by

A7 D major D major F#(7)

Downward scale for "leite" might suggest danger.

12.

dei-ner Au-gen Licht, weil die-ser Weg nichts als Ge-fahr ver-spricht.

thine eyes' light because this course nothing but danger promises.

A# dim.7 B minor D7 C# dim.7 G minor G major G major

Aria. Bravura storm aria (extremely difficult).
 81/3. **Allegro.** (Allegro moderato $\text{♩} = 112$.) • Storm waves of Belial assail the Christian (81/3).

Strings depict the storm, reminiscent of the day's Gospel reading. Violin I plays furious waves of 32nd notes, while the continuo and lower strings play stile concitato figures (see note).

1.

Ritornello Strings

G major

5.

G major D7

9.

G major

13.

G major

Belial (i.e., the devil) is seen as the storm, and harmonic clashes (which contrast highly with the underlying G major tonality) are used to depict "Belials Bächen" ("Belial's waters"). The word is set higher each time (increased urgency).

Cross relations for "Belial" (see NBA).

16. **Tenore.**

Die schäu-men-den Wel-len von Be-li-al's Bä-chen,

Text painting: Vln I depicts the "schäumenden Wellen" ("foaming waves").

G major G major F# dim.7 G major

21.

This type of aria is called a "Devisenarie" (a term coined by Hugo Riemann) or "motto aria." After the ritornello, the singer presents the first phrase of the aria as a kind of 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.

die

C major A minor B minor G major G major

25.

schäu-men-den Wel-len von Be-li-al's Bä-chen-ver-

NBA: G#

B major, B pedal

G major G7 G# dim.7 A minor A7

29.

dop-peln die Wuth, ver-

The singer adopts the "wave figure" while the instruments hammer in stile concitato.

A# dim.7 B minor B minor

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33.

dop - peln die Wuth; die schäu - men - den - Wel - len - von

E7 A major A7

37.

Be - li - al's Bä - chen ver - dop -

G# dim.7 A major D major

Chromaticism for "Belial's Bächen" ("Belial's waters").

The singer doubles the Vln I briefly in unison (see also m. 105).

40.

- peln die Wuth, ver - dop - peln die Wuth.

A major D major

Ritornello

44.

D major D major

47.

Adagio. (♩ = so.) Allegro.

NBA has "corrected" the original (see note).

Ein Christ soll zwar wie Wellen stehn,

p mf

D7 B7 E minor G(7)

Text painting: Sudden adagio at reference to a Christian standing like a rock against the storm.

Word painting: The storm resumes but the singer stands firm ("stehn" = "stand").

With a switch from dactylic meter to iambic, the text turns from a paraphrase of the Gospel account to interpretation. Because iambic meter is typical for recitatives,

51. **Adagio.** **Allegro.**

wenn Trübsalswinde um ihn geh'n,

A second lull in the storm is brief, but the singer stands firm against the storm.

C major C# dim.7 D minor G minor F(7)

55. **Adagio.** **Allegro.**

... ein Christ soll zwar wie ~~Weil~~er steh'n, wenn Trübsalswinde um ihn geh'n,

A third lull in the storm is longer but still relatively brief.

B-flat major A7 D minor E7 A minor

58. Konrad Küster writes, "For the re-entry into the dactyl sequence in the fifth line, Bach again achieves the 'consistently aria-like' music of the opening section—regardless of the fact that he is still in the middle section of a da capo aria. Bach thus uses the emotional charge of the music in the A section for the last two lines of the B section: mm. 57–75)." See Konrad Küster, ed., *Bach Handbuch* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1999), p. 227), translated from the German original.

doch su - chet die stür - men - de

E7 A minor

62. Fluth, die stür - men - de Fluth die

D minor G7 C major

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66.

Musical score for measures 66-69. The vocal line begins with the lyrics "Kräfte des Glaubens zu schwächen, die Kräfte des Glaubens zu schwächen." The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes in the right hand and quarter notes in the left hand. Chord changes are indicated below the piano part: C major, C7, and F major.

70.

Musical score for measures 70-73. The vocal line continues with the lyrics "Die schäumen den zu schwächen." The piano accompaniment continues with the same rhythmic pattern. Chord changes are indicated below the piano part: G major and C major.

74.

Musical score for measures 74-78. The vocal line continues with the lyrics "Die schäumen den zu schwächen." The piano accompaniment features a *Ritornello* section with a *mf* dynamic. The section ends with a *p* dynamic. Chord changes are indicated below the piano part: C major and C major.

A Section returns, modified with greater intensity.

79.

Musical score for measures 79-82. The vocal line begins with the lyrics "Wellen von Belials Bächen,". The piano accompaniment features a chromatic ascent in the right hand. Chord changes are indicated below the piano part: C7, A7, and D minor.

The statements rise chromatically as tension increases...

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83. die schäu - men - den Wel - len von Be - li - als

p

D minor D7 B7

87. Bä - chen, die schäu - men - den

mf *p*

E minor E minor

91. Wel - len von Be - li - als Bä - chen ver - dop -

G7 G# dim.7 G7 A minor G7

95. - peln die Wuth, ver -

C major D7 G major

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99. 11

dop - peln die Wuth, die schäu - men - den - Wel - len - von -

A7 D7 G major

103. The singer doubles the Vln I briefly in unison.

Be - li - al's Bä - chen ver - dop -

C# dim.7 D major G major

106.

- peln - die Wuth, ver - dop - peln die Wuth.

G major G major

110.

G7 C major G major

113.

G major G major

No. 4 is the central (pivot) movement in the cantata's chiasmic form, where antithetical elements meet or are paradoxically inverted (formal inversion reflects an

aspect of reversal or turning in the text). Here Jesus' counter-question encourages faith that he is active instead of fear that he is absent. It "employs dramatic material of such homogeneity that it virtually turns into a two-part fugue or invention; in fact, the biblical text could easily be added to the continuo part too. What emerges is a 'speech' movement of the most compelling effectiveness." See Alfred Dürr, *The Cantatas of J. S. Bach*, p. 217.

ARIOSO. (Evangelium St. Matthäi, Cap. 8, V. 26.)

81/4. (♩ = 50.) •Vox Christi: O ye of little faith, why fear? Matthew 8:26 (81/4).

Emphasis on "ihr."

1. **Basso.**

The bass (in the tradition role of vox Christi) sings Jesus' reaction to the disciples' fear in face of the storm.

Ihr Klein - gläu - bi - gen, war - um seid ihr so furcht - sam?
Ye of-little-faith, why are ye so fearful?

Continuo alone...
p R.H.

B minor

4.

Jesus repeated question, "why?" is asked 12 times, as if directed individually to each of the 12 disciples.

Ihr Klein - gläu - bi - gen, war - um seid ihr so furcht - sam?

mf R.H.

B minor B minor A7 D major

7.

warum seid ihr so furcht - sam, ihr Klein - gläu - bi - gen, warum seid ihr so

B minor G# dim. F# minor C# major F# minor F# minor E7

10.

furcht - sam, seid ihr so furcht - sam, war - um? war - um seid ihr so

Rhetorical lifts for "why?"

A major F# minor F# minor E7 C# minor B minor E# dim.7 F# minor

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The overlapping entry of continuo and singer suggests tightness: fear clamping the heart. (See Petzoldt, *Bach Kommentar* 2:512.)

13.

furcht - sam, ihr Klein - gläu - bi - gen, war - um seid ihr so furcht - sam,
On the final note of the cadence, the continuo re-introduces the theme; the singer answer in stretto.

mf

F# minor C#7 F# major B minor B minor D7

16.

seid ihr so furcht - sam, war - um? warum seid ihr so furcht - sam, war - um?

p

A7 B7 E minor F#7 B minor B minor E minor B7

19.

um? warum? ihr Klein - gläu - bi - gen, war - um seid ihr so furchtsam?

mf *p*

E major E minor F#7 G major E minor E minor iv6 V Phrygian cadence, often used for questions. B major

81/5. **Aria.**

Another bravura storm aria.

1. **Allegro.** (♩ = 96.)

•Christ's rebuke to raging sea: Be still! (81/5).

Oboes d'amore play the "Schweig, schweig" motive.

The bass continues with Jesus' command in the Gospel account: Matthew 8:26: Then [Jesus] rose and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.

Ritornello (Strings and continuo in unison)

f *mf*

E minor E minor G major

Form (Rhyme: ABCBC)
Ritornello (mm. 1-9) Em
A. Line 1 (10-19) Em-CM
Line 2 (20-24) GM
Rit (24-28) GM-Em
Line 1 (28-37) Em (opening orchestral material returns in 35)
Line 2 (38-43) Em
Rit (43-51) Em [Fine]
B. Lines 3-5 (51-60) Em-Am
Lines 3-5 (61-72) Am-Bm da capo

4.

The rising bass figure is later associated with "aufgetürmtes Meer" ("towered up sea").

p

G major B7 E minor

While the strings continue to portray the raging storm, the oboes d'amore repeat the "schweig" ("be still") command of Jesus.

6.

mf *p* *cresc.*

E minor

9. **Basso.** A Section. Line 1.

In the A section, Jesus authoritatively and aggressively commands the storm to stop (cited in the parallel Gospel account in Mark 4:39).

Schweig' schweig', aufgethürmtes Meer!

Ob d'am I & II

Strings

E minor

Fast rising scales depict "aufgethürmtes Meer" ("towered up sea").

E minor

12.

Schweig' schweig', aufgethürmtes

mf

E minor

14.

Meer, aufgethürm

17.

tes Meer, schweig' schweig'! aufgethürmtes

Vln I

E minor E7 A minor A7 D major E minor

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19. Line 2.

Meer, schweig', schweig'!

Ver-stumme!

ver -

Vln I (up 8va)

C major G major G major

22. Rhetorical pause after the command to be silent.

stum-me, Sturm und Wind, Sturm und Wind, Sturm und Wind, verstumme, ver -

Bass and continuo in parallel 3rds.

Strings

G major D7

24.

stumme, Sturm und Wind!

Ob d'am I

mf Ritornello

Vln I

Ob'am II

G major G major

27. Line 1.

Schweig', schweig', auf-ge-thürm-tes

Vln I

G major E minor

29.

Meer! Schweig, schweig;

E minor

32.

aufgethürmtes Meer,

E minor

34.

aufge - thürm - - - tes Meer, schweig, schweig'! aufge - thürm -

Bass and continuo in parallel 3rds with opening material.

Ob d'am I Ob d'am II

Vln I

E minor G major

37.

tes Meer, schweig, schweig'! Verstumme!

Vln I

B7 E minor

Line 2.

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39.

verstumme, Sturm und Wind, Sturm und Wind, Sturm und Wind, ver -

Bass and continuo in parallel 3rds.

E minor

Rhetorical pause after the command to be silent.

42.

stumme, verstumme, Sturm und Wind, Sturm und Wind!

B7 E minor E minor

Ritornello

44. Ob d'am I

mf Vln I (up 8va) Ob d'am II Vln I (up 8va)

E minor G major

47.

B7 E minor

49.

In the B section, the idea that God keeps the waters within limits becomes a metaphor for God protecting the "elect," stilling the storm. The language is reminiscent of passages such as Job 26:10 (Luther 1545: Er hat um das Wasser ein Ziel gesetzt = He has set a boundary for the waters). See also Psalm 65:7, 89:9, 107:29, Jeremiah 5:22.

B Section.

cresc. Dir sei dein Ziel ge -

E minor G major

52.

set - zet, da - mit mein aus - er - wähl - tes Kind, mein aus - er - wähl - - -

Ob d'am I *mf* Vln I

Ob d'am II

E7 A minor A minor C major

55.

- - - tes Kind, mein aus - er - wähl - tes Kind kein Un - fall -

Vln I (up 8va)

E7 A minor

57.

je ver - let - - - zet, kein Un - fall je ver - let - - - zet, je ver - -

N6 E7 A minor

60.

let - - - zet. Lines 3-5. Dir sei dein Ziel ge -

Ob d'am II Ob d'am I

A minor A minor D7 G major

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62. set - zet, da - mit mein aus - er - wähl - tes Kind, mein aus - er - wähl - - -

G major F#7 B minor

65. - - - tes Kind, mein aus - er - wähl - tes Kind kein Un - fall -

D major B minor

67. je ver - let - - - - zet, kein Un - fall je ver - let - - - zet, je ver -

N6 F#7 B minor

70. let - - - zet, **Descending chromatic 4th, traditional symbol of lament.** kein Un - fall je ver - let - - - zet.

B minor F#7 G major E major B major E minor B minor F# major B minor

Ob d'am II Ob d'am I

Strings tacet.

Da Capo.

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81/6. **Recitativo.** •Relief that Christ speaks a word and calms the storm (81/6).
 Secco

1. **Alto.** Blest (am-I); my Jesus speaks a word, my helper is awakened, Thus

Wohl mir! mein Je_sus spricht ein Wort, mein Hel_fer ist er_wacht: so

Alto is often the voice of faith.

D major G major

4. must the waves' storm - misfortune's night, and all sorrow (be) gone.

muss der Wel-len Sturm, des Un-glücks Nacht und al-ler Kum-mer fort.

enharmonic change

C7 C# dim.7 A# dim.7 Bm E minor F#7 B major

81/7. **Choral.** (Mel: „Jesu, meine Freude.“) This is the 2nd stanza of 6 in the 1650 chorale "Jesu, meine Freude" by Johann Franck (1618-1677).

+Ob d'amore I, II
Vln I

+Vln II

+Vla

Soprano. 1/7. NBA: für

Un-ter dei-nen Schir-men bin ich vor den Stür-men al-ler Feinde frei. |
 Lass den Sa-tan wit-tern, lass den Feind er-bit-tern, mir steht Je-sus bei. |

Alto. 1/7.

Tenore. 1/7.

Basso. NBA: wütern

Un-ter dei-nen Schir-men bin ich vor den Stür-men al-ler Feinde frei. |
 Lass den Sa-tan wit-tern, lass den Feind er-bit-tern, mir steht Je-sus bei. |

Un-ter dei-nen Schir-men bin ich vor den Stür-men al-ler Feinde frei. |
 Lass den Sa-tan wit-tern, lass den Feind er-bit-tern, mir steht Je-sus bei. |

Active, descending bass line (cf. BWV 64/8, 87/7).

Em Em A7 DM Em BM Em Em

Poetic cues making the chorale stanza a suitable choice for the final movement include references to storms, foes, crashes and lightning, sin and hell—with "Stürmen" serving as the linking keyword. For biblical allusions, see note.



This motive is featured in the cantata, starting in no. 1.

13. NBA: itzt

Ob es jetzt gleich kracht und blitzt; ob gleich Sünd'und Hölle schrek-ken: Je-sus will mich dek-ken.

Ob es jetzt gleich kracht und blitzt; ob gleich Sünd'und Hölle schrek-ken: Je-sus will mich dek-ken.

Ob es jetzt gleich kracht und blitzt; ob gleich Sünd'und Hölle schrek-ken: Je-sus will mich dek-ken.

Ob es jetzt gleich kracht und blitzt; ob gleich Sünd'und Hölle schrek-ken: Je-sus will mich dek-ken.

Em GM Gm Bm Bm BM Em F#7 BM EM

Martin Petzoldt notes that in Bach's other settings of this chorale, he sets the final phrase very similarly to the opening one. Here it is different, the bass floating gently downward to a restful landing, "making invulnerability and protection audible." See *Bach Kommentar* 2:515.