

J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 166

Form: Aria (B) - Aria (T) - Chorale (S) - Recit (B) - Aria (A) - Chorale.

Introduction & updates at melvinunger.com

NBA I/12; BC A71

Cantate: 4. S. after Easter (BWV 166, 108)

*James 1:17-21 (All good gifts come from above; be doers of the Word)

*John 16:5-15 (Jesus' farewell: promise to send the Holy Spirit)

Librettist: Unknown; perhaps Christian Weiß the elder

FP: 7 May 1724 (Leipzig: St. Nicholas)

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

A chamber cantata that exhorts one to consider one's destiny.

Of the first movement, Konrad Küster writes, "The 'development of the movement results...from a complex interweaving of vocal melody and motives in the introductory ritornello. This is strikingly regular in structure, almost song-like ... But in contrast to movements from the late fall of 1723, which begin in a similar way, here the voice part does not adopt motives of the ritornello (following it closely) but rather the orchestra repeatedly intervenes in the process with fragments of the introduction, which are not only accompanied independently by the voice part, but cana also be continued independently." See Konrad Küster, ed., *Bach Handbuch* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1999), p. 233, translated from the German original.

J.S. Bach Cantata No. 166 Wo gehest du hin

•Vox Christi: Where goest thou? John 16:5 (166/1). In the day's Gospel reading, this question is part of a longer statement by Jesus to his disciples regarding his destiny: "But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?'" In the cantata, Jesus turns the question on the disciples, challenging them gently to think of their ultimate destiny.



Instrumentation:
Oboe
Vln I, II
Vla
SATB
Continuo, Organo

Through-composed

Aria.

166/1.

(Lento $\text{♩} = 44.$)
1. Ob + Vln I

Ritornello *mf*

B-flat major Continuo has a stepping figure. C7 F major

This 2-note motive is identified with "wo, wo?" or "wohin"? in mm. 36, 44-46, 52, 54, 59.

F major B-flat major E-flat major

The singer's line is built into the ritornello material ("Vokaleinbau").

Bach varies the scripture slightly to stress the destination.

14 Basso.

Wo ge_hest du hin, wo, wo ge_hest du hin, wo_hin, wo gehest du

hemiola *p*

The melisma on "gehest" becomes florid later on.

B-flat major B-flat major

Bach employs fragmented lines, tonal ambiguity, lack of symmetry, and chromaticism to underscore the question, "Where are you going?"

21

hin, wo_hin, wo ge_hest du hin? Wo gehest du

mf (tr)

C7 F major F major F major

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28

hin, wo ge-hest du hin, wo hin, wo

-Ob (tr)

Ob + Vln I (to end)...

p

D(7) G minor G minor A7 D minor

35

gehest du hin, wo, wo ge-hest du hin? Wo ge-

2-note motive

mf *p*

(G7) C minor B dim.7 C minor F7 B-flat major

Text painting: Florid melismas on "gehest" ("goest") illustrate the variability of one's chosen path.

42

- hest du hin, wo hin, wo hin, wo, wo ge-

2-note motive

B-flat major

48

hest du hin, wo hin, wo hin, wo, wo ge-hest du

B-flat major B-flat7 E-flat major B-flat major (C7) F major F major F7

54

hin, wo hin, wo ge-hest du hin, wohin,

B-flat major B-flat 7 E-flat major F7 B-flat major

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60

wo, wo, wo ge-hest du hin, wo hin, wo ge-hest du hin?

Ritornello

B-flat major B-flat major C7 F major F major F major

The singer does not end in the original key.

67

Da capo

F major E-flat major B-flat major F7 B-flat major B-flat major

hemiola

Scholars have suggested that a second obbligato part—probably a violin—has been lost from surviving parts, which constitute the only original source material. The Trio in G minor for organ (BWV 584) largely corresponds to the instrumental part of the aria. For this reason, a reconstruction was created in 1960 for the *Neue Bach Ausgabe*. However, BWV 584 has now been judged inauthentic—that it is actually an arrangement (not by Bach) of the aria. See 3rd. edition of BWV catalogue, pp. 437, 705.

Aria. Eternal destiny kept in mind at all times (166/2): The tenor answers the question of the preceding movement: "I reject the world and make heaven my destiny."

166/2. Adagio. (♩ = 64.)

1. Ob

Adagio marking is in original continuo parts. Presumed entry of lost part.

Ritornello

G minor G minor

The movement is a melancholic song of farewell.

Ritornello (mm. 1-7) G minor
Lines 1-2 (2x: 7-11) Gm-Dm
Rit (12-13) Gm-Dm
Lines 1-2 (1x: 13-17) Dm
Rit (17-19) Dm-B M
Lines 1-2 (3x: 19-28) B M-Gm
Rit (28-30) Gm [Fine]
Lines 3-5 (2x: 31-48) B M-E M
Da capo

4.

F7 B-flat major D7 G minor (F7)

Circulo mezzo for "heaven" (see note).

Tenore.

Ich will... zu den Him... mel

F# dim.7 E-flat major D major

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Text painting: Leap up to "heaven."

8

denken und der Welt mein Herz nicht schenken, ich will an den Himmel den - ken

D7 G minor D7 G minor A7 D minor C7

10¹¹

und der Welt mein Herz nicht schen - ken .

F major 7 (C7) A7 D minor G minor A7 D minor

mf Ritornello

13

Ich will an den Him - mel denken und der Welt mein Herz nicht

C# dim.7 A7 D minor C7 F major 7 D minor

p

Expressive melismas on "[der Welt mein Herz nicht] schenken" ([not] "give" the world my heart) suggest that the decision is an emotional one.

15¹¹

schen - ken .

A7 D minor A7 D minor D minor

mf

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The opening lines are reminiscent of 1 John 2:15-17: Do not love the world or the things in the world. If any one loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides for ever. (Also James 4:4.)

18

Ich will an den Him_mel

G7 C minor C7 F major 7 B-flat major F# dim.7

20^{II}

denken und der Welt mein Herz nicht schenken, an den Himmel will ich denken und der

G minor B dim.7

23

Welt mein Herz nicht schenken, ich will an den Himmel denken und der

C minor D7 G minor

Expressive melisma on "schenken" ("give").

25^{II}

Welt mein Herz nicht schen

N6 D7 G minor G minor

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B Section.

28

ken. NBA: Denn Wenn ich

G minor (F7) F# dim.7 G minor G minor

Word painting: Rising scales for "gehe" ("go"); sustained notes for "stehe" ("stand"/"stop/rest").

31

gehe o der ste he, wenn ich gehe o der ste

B-flat major B-flat major G major

The text is reminiscent of Psalm 139:1-2: O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me! Thou knowest when I sit down and when I rise up; thou discernest my thoughts from afar.

34

he, so liegt mir die Frag' im Sinn, die Frag' im Sinn, so liegt

C minor C minor F minor B-flat 7 E-flat major (G7)

Rhetorical declamation on the call: "Man, ah, man!"

56

mir die Frag' im Sinn: Mensch, ach Mensch! wo gehst du

C minor G7 C minor

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39

hin, wo gehst du hin? Wenn ich ge - he o - der ste

B dim.7 B dim.7 C minor D major

Ending on a diminished 7th chord suggests a rhetorical question rather than a conclusion (see note).

41

he, wenn ich ge - he o - der ste

G minor G minor C major F major

Second statement is very dramatic...

44

he, so liegt mir die Frag' im Sinn: Mensch, ach Mensch! wo gehst du

Declamatory...

C# dim.7 D minor N6 (F7)

Exclamatio

After the anguish, the B section ends sweetly.

46

hin. Mensch, ach Mensch! wo gehst, du hin, wo - gehst du hin?

F# dim.7 D7 G minor G7 C minor E-flat major E-flat major

Da Capo.

Choral. (Mel.: Herr Jesu Christ, du höchstes Gut.)

166/3. (Moderato. ♩ = 80.) • Prayer to keep resolve firm until I reach heaven (166/3).



Figura corta, here a repeated figure of emphatic resolve (see note for more).

Canonic bass line is likewise a figure of resolve.

A purposeful headmotive, imitated by the continuo, which then continues with tredding 8th notes, underscores the steadfast and consistent resolve of the text.

7 **Soprano.** The word change more immediately identifies the speaker with the previous movement.

Original chorale words: *Ich bit - te dich, Herr Je - su*
So bitt ich dich. I ask of-thee, Lord Jesus

11 **Christ, Christ,** halt' hold

Flights of notes in the string obbligato possibly represents the bird leaving its nest, as referenced in the chorale text.

14 *mich bei den Ge - dan -*
me to these thoughts

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17

ken

C minor C major F minor G7 C minor

19^{II}

und lass mich ja zu
and let me indeed at

C minor C minor C minor C minor

The text is reminiscent of biblical passages such as
Hebrews 10:23. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering (Luther 1545: wanken), for he who promised is faithful.
Hebrews 3:14. We share in Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end.
Matthew 24:13. But the one who stands firm to the end will be saved (German 1545: Wer aber beharret bis ans Ende, der wird selig).

23

kei - ner Frist
no time

C minor C minor B-flat 7 E-flat major C major

26^{II}

von die - ser Mei - nung
from this intention

F minor G7 C minor

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29

wan - - - ken,
waver,

mf

C minor C(7)

33

~~(dass~~
son
rather

p

F minor B-flat 7 E-flat 7 A-flat major B-flat 7 E-flat major E-flat major

38

ich da bei be ste
dern da in-it bei ver persist har

(G7) C minor C minor

38||

hen bleib,)
ren fest,
firmly,

C minor F minor F7

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41

bis until dass - die (my)

B-flat major B-flat 7 E-flat major B-flat major D7 G minor

44

Seel' soul aus out-of ih - its rem Nest nest

~~(Leib)~~

G minor G minor

47

wird will

G minor F7 B-flat major G major

50

in into den Him - heaven mel

C minor F minor C minor G7 C minor

Changing the text from "go to heaven" to "come to heaven" has the effect of emphasizing arrival.

53

kom - - - - - men.

come.

G7 C minor B-flat 7 E-flat major

Original chorale words:
fahren

56

C major F minor G7 C minor C minor

Secco

Recitativo.

•Worldly pleasures & life itself can vanish quickly (166/4).

166/4. 1. Basso. D A B-flat C G F# E

Bass is often the voice of authority.

Gleich.wie die Re-gen - was - ser bald ver - fließen und manche

Just-as the rain-waters soon subside and (many)

Text painting: Quick descending scale for the rainwaters subsiding.

D major D7 G minor B

Chromatic saturation in the vocal part in 11 mm.

The text is reminiscent of various biblical passages (see note).



3

Far-ben leicht verschies-sen, so geht es auch der Freu - de in der

colors easily fade, so is it too (with the joy (of the

Text painting: Quick rising melisma for "Freude" leading to a dissonant chord depicts the unstable foundation of earthly joy.

B-flat major B dim.7 G7 C minor F# dim.7

511

Welt, auf wel-che man-cher Mensch so vie-le Stü-cken hält; denn ob man

world, of which many-a person so (high-an-opinion) holds; for though one

D7 G minor G minor

8 [Arioso]

gleich zu wei len sieht, dass sein ge wünschtes Glück ke blüht, so kann doch
occasionally sees, that his wished-for fortune blooms, yet can nevertheless

B-flat major C7 F major

10 [Arioso]

wohl in be sten Ta gen ganz unvermuth die letz te Stunde schlagen.
indeed in (the) best-of days quite unexpectedly the final hour strike.

Text painting: Bass creeps up chromatically to an unexpected C# dim.7 chord.

F7 D7 G minor C# dim.7 D minor N6 G minor D minor D minor

Sudden rhythmic regularity and movement to unfamiliar tonal areas underscore the suddenness and inexorability of the fixed hour of death.

Alfred Dürr writes, "The aria, whose dance character is unmistakable, [Meredith and Little do not list it] doubtless portrays in its shaking figures the laughter of good fortune, which is also to be heard in the long coloraturas and trills of the voice. With the typical indifference of the baroque musician, Bach here takes advantage of all possibilities for pictorial representation of the 'affects,' even though they are contradicted or dismissed by the text. A broad contrast is thereby achieved between the opening movements and the second half of the work: their opposing affects correspond with the textual opposition between heaven and earth." See The Cantatas of J. S. Bach, translated by Richard Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 317.

Aria.
166/5. (Allegro moderato ♩ = 80.) •Worldly good fortune can change before nightfall (166/5).

Ob/Vln I

mf Ritornello Faux bourdon for sweetness. L. H.

B-flat major

In a dance-like lilt in triple meter, Bach depicts the (frivolous?) laughter of the world's joys with "giggling" 16ths in both ritornello and singer's melismas.

5.

C7 F major

The singer combines a kind of patter diction with giggling melismas.

The continuo's bass transitional line transition becomes the alto's laugh figure in m. 12.

9 **Alto.**

(Mensch, nimm dich wohl in Acht,) Man neh-me sich in Acht, wenn das Ge-lük-ke (schon das Glück dir) wenn das Ge-lük-ke (good) fortune
(Let) everyone heed, when (good) fortune

p sempre L. H.

B-flat major B-flat major

12

lacht,
laughs,

Giggling melismas (caricature of worldly laughter).

C7

15

(schon das Glück dir) wenn das Ge - lük - ke lacht, (Mensch, nimm dich wohl in man neh - me sich in

F major F(7) B-flat major

18

Acht,) (schon das Glück dir) wenn das Ge - lük - ke lacht, Acht.

A-flat major E-flat major C minor (F7)

21

(Mensch, nimm dich wohl in Acht,) man neh - me sich in Acht,

B-flat major B-flat 7

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24

(Mensch, nimm dich wohl in Acht,) (schon das Glück dir)
man neh - me sich in Acht, wenn das Ge - lük - ke

E-flat major C7 F major

27

lacht,

B-flat major B-flat major

30

C7 All instruments join the singer's laughter in unison. F major

33

(schon das Glück dir)
wenn das Ge - lük - ke lacht.

Up 8va mf Ritornello

Continuo continues unison with singer. B-flat major B-flat major

36

L. H.

B-flat major

39

42

B Section.

The B section alludes to Sirach (Apocrypha) 18:26: From morning to evening conditions change, and all things move swiftly before the Lord (see note for more). Bach illustrates this idea with unexpected harmonic progressions.

Each warning is met with laughter by the instruments.

Denn es kann leicht auf Er den
For (things) can easily on earth den

Continuo plays laughter figure as transition.

B-flat major G minor G minor F7 B-flat major

45

vor A bend anders wer den, denn es kann leicht auf
before evening (quite) different become, den, denn es kann leicht auf

G major C minor C minor

48

Oboe tacet

Er den vor A bend anders wer den,

The oboe drops out for only these 4 measures (otherwise it doubles Vln I). Its silence weakens the laughter of the instruments.

D7 G minor (A major) D minor A7

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51

als man am Morgen nicht ge-dacht, als man am Mor-gen nicht ge-
 than one in-the-morning - had-thought.

(sich) (sich)

B-flat major G minor D minor E7 A minor

54

dacht, denn es kann leicht auf
 +Oboe

The repetition is more intense, with surprising harmonic progressions.

A minor G7 A7 D minor

57

Er - den vor A-bend an - ders wer - den, als man am

D minor F# dim.7 D7 G minor G minor

60

Mor-gen nicht ge-dacht, als man am Mor-gen nicht ge-dacht.

(sich) (sich)

Harmony goes in an unexpected direction.

F major C7 F minor (G7) C minor C minor Da Capo.

This is the first stanza of 12 in the 1686 chorale by Amalie Juliane, Countess of Schwarzburg-Rudolstadt (1637–1706), see note. Alfred Dürr writes, "After [the] dance-like aria, the solemnity of the concluding chorale, with its prayer 'Just make my end be good' is all the more striking." See *The Cantatas of J. S. Bach*, translated by Richard Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 317. Bach sets the chorale very simply. The tune was one of Bach's favorites (see note).

Choral. (Mel.: „Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten“.)

(6) **Soprano.** (See also 27/1.) • Death comes at any time, only God knows how soon (166/6).

+Ob
+Vln I

+Vln II

+Vla

Basso.

G minor

D minor
D major

F7

B-flat major

D major

G minor

11

F major
G minor B-flat major

B-flat major

(D7) G minor

G major

Bach sets the text in utmost simplicity. For example, there are almost no passing tones until the tenor moves to the major mode at the final cadence.