

Cantatas for the Twenty-second Sunday after Trinity

All Saints, Tooting

Bach's three cantatas for the Twenty-second Sunday after Trinity – BWV 89, 115 and 55 – all take their lead from the parable of the unjust steward as recounted in the Gospel of the day (Matthew 18:23-35). The earliest of the three, **BWV 89 Was soll ich aus dir machen, Ephraim?**, was first performed in Leipzig in 1723 and may possibly have been based on older material from Bach's Weimar years. God's anger – more wistful than explosive – is a major factor in the opening aria for bass, two oboes, strings and hunting horn ('Corne du Chaße'). The text here comes from Hosea 11:8, in which God's wrath is directed against Ephraim and his fellow worshippers of false gods in Israel. It is evoked in the turbulent semiquaver movement of the continuo, while above this the plaintive cries of God's chosen targets emerge in the parallel thirds of the oboes. In effect, God is weighing up whether Israel is *worth* preserving – perhaps for now, but in the future if they re-offend? Should they be destroyed like Admah and Zeboim, the wicked cities of the plain along with Sodom and Gomorrah? The violins convey this lingering question in the way their five-note upward arpeggio ends with a drooping downward fifth, ninth or seventh. The three instrumental motifs, so central to the overall mood-painting, combine, collide and swap over, but without resolution. Meanwhile the music comes to a temporary halt at the end of each anguished question posed by the bass singer, representing God's divided mind. His tone softens with the words 'Aber mein Herz ist anders Sinnes' (literally, 'my heart is of another mind'), though Bach cleverly leaves the outcome in doubt by persisting with his orchestral mutterings.

The theme now switches to the parable of the unjust steward, with both alto recitative and aria (Nos 2 and 3) characterised by fiery trills, dramatic gestures and a relentless denunciation of the sinning

creditor. It takes a soprano recitative (No.4) to remind us that we are duty bound to 'forgive them that trespass against us'. A shudder of guilt for past sins precedes a contrite turning back to Jesus in a slow arioso section. Given the seriousness of the text – a balance sheet of sins committed against the drops of Jesus' redeeming blood – the ensuing aria for soprano and oboe (6/8 in B flat) seems astonishingly secular in its gaiety and Scarlattian euphony. The concluding chorale sets the seventh stanza of Johann Heermann's Lenten hymn 'Wo soll ich fliehen hin' in G minor, remarkable for its soprano-dominated sonority doubled by horn, both oboes and violin I.

There are stronger grounds for supposing a Weimar origin for **BWV 55 Ich armer Mensch, ich Sündenknecht**, Bach's only extant cantata for solo tenor – or at least to its three concluding movements, which might have stemmed from a lost Passion cantata. The autograph score and the original parts suggest that only the first aria and its recitative sequel were newly composed in Leipzig in 1726. For this opening tableau Bach seems to have in mind the unjust steward ('a slave to sin') summoned before his master, approaching with faltering steps and a despairing heart. Voice and instruments (an unusual coalescence of flute, oboe d'amore, paired violins and basso continuo) rarely double each other, so that six-part writing is the norm. Only Bach could carry this off so naturally, with great intensity but no gratuitous show of erudition. Four ideas alternate: a four-bar woodwind passage in sixths, expressive of utter wretchedness, a derived waving figure for the violins in thirds, a slowly climbing phrase for the flute and oboe d'amore, and an expansion of the waving figure in thirds creeping up by semitones. It is Bach with pre-echoes of Schumann. The opening vocal phrase is weighed down with deep anguish. The twin statements ('Er ist gerecht, ich ungerecht' / 'He is just, unjust am I') are purposely contrasted: if one clause moves up the other moves down and vice versa, helping us to trace the process whereby the flint-hearted creditor

is transformed into a penitent.

The second aria is in D minor with an elaborate flute obbligato. It is one of Bach's striking 'Erbarme dich' / 'have mercy' pieces, and the same words recur in the ensuing accompanied recitative with a motif similar to the one Bach was to use in the alto recitative (No.51) in the *St Matthew Passion*. When we were rehearsing I found the two keyboard players, Howard Moody and Paul Nicholson, in intense discussion over the missing figuring of the aria's bass line: should it reinforce the flattened supertonic on the second quaver beat or leave it 'open' so that the flute E flat is left to clash with and contradict the bass D on its own? What other great composer could elicit such passionate debate on the lacunae of his musical notation, I wonder? Beautiful as are the two recitatives and this second aria, it is the closing chorale-harmonisation in B flat of the sixth strophe of Johann Rist's 'Werde munter, mein Gemüte' that draws the ear. Bach's harmonisation is so perfectly appropriate for its setting that no other would have done – not even the glorious one in A major from the *St Matthew Passion* (No.40) –, while at the same time managing to assure the listener that the penitent has at last found peace.

The pick of these three cantatas, unquestionably, is **BWV 115 Mache dich, mein Geist, bereit** from Bach's second Leipzig cycle. Ten stanzas of Johann Burchard Freystein's hymn (1695) condensed into six numbers ensure that the cantata is fat-free ('no encumbrance of unnecessary or problematic matter', comments Whittaker). In the opening G major chorale fantasia the orchestra is four-part, comprising flute, oboe d'amore, unison violins and violas and basso continuo, with a cornetto notated in G added to double the detached hymn-tune given in long notes by the sopranos. The instrumental writing is subtle and needs very careful balancing, particularly as the unison violins and violas can easily overpower the flute and d'amore. The strings lead off with an octave leap, later associated with the injunction to 'prepare

yourself, my soul' presented by the three lower voices of the choir. There is a canon 4 in 2 at the seventh and fourth below between flute, oboe and the entwined violins and viola. This serves as a ritornello between the lines of the text, often broken mid-sentence, the thought carried over each of the gaps. Despite the implied warnings of the text this is an assured portrayal of the believer trusting and refusing to be blown off course by 'Satan's cunning' (conveyed by a vigorous semiquaver *bariolage* figure) or the sounding of the last trump.

Original and robust though this chorale fantasia undoubtedly is, the two da capo arias which follow are both long, immensely demanding and utterly spellbinding: one for alto, a slow *siciliano* in 3/8 in E minor with oboe d'amore and strings, the other in B minor, even slower (*molto adagio*), for soprano with flute and piccolo cello. In the first aria the barely pulsating quavers of repeated Es in the bass line depict the heavy sleep of the soul. Above this the oboe d'amore initially doubles the first violin then aspires to break free, weaving a rising and falling figure like the involuntary stretching motions of a dreamer. The singer seems to stand both for the slumbering soul and the admonishing observer, a poignant overlapping of roles which makes the command to 'rouse yourself' all the more effortful as it is sung as though from a deep sleep. This injunction spurs the basso continuo to leap up an octave five times 'as if the slothful one were being forcibly shaken' (Whittaker). After 109 bars the music shifts to allegro for twenty-two bars of spirited warnings of the price to be paid for lack of vigilance – this is nothing less than the prospect of everlasting oblivion, conveyed now back in *adagio* in tortuous and sombre harmonies, the alto climbing to a high D over a 7/5 chord on E sharp. The pathos, somnolence and inner struggle within this superb *siciliano* is hypnotising. But did it make its mark with Bach's Sunday congregation in Leipzig: did they listen in rapt attention (as did our audience in both Bath Abbey and Eton Chapel), as though signifying a shift from passivity to participation, or did it take the

brusque harangue of the bass soloist (No.3) to rouse them? ‘The whole world and all its members are naught but a false brotherhood,’ he declaims, ‘but your own flesh and blood seek naught but flattery from them.’

Still more beautiful is the soprano aria (No.4), in which the emphasis has shifted from the necessity for watchfulness to that for prayer. It would be hard to imagine a subtler and more exquisitely diversified palette of timbres than that of soprano, flute and piccolo cello: in combination they evoke the infinite yearning of the soul for divine mercy. The continuo does little except mark the beats, leaving the trio to float free. To me the way these three combined – Joanne Lunn in rapt stillness and with an angelic purity of tone on her repeated pleas of ‘Bete’ and ‘Bitte’, Rachel Beckett’s glorious yet fragile baroque flute, and David Watkin’s magical piccolo cello – was one of the high points of the pilgrimage so far: three fine musicians utterly caught up in the unfolding of their task, each with the requisite technical mastery and sensitivity to one another. The listening musicians and audience were visibly captivated. After this the final chorale seemed all the more effective on account of its dignified simplicity and the injunction perpetually to ‘watch, beseech, pray, for fear, distress and danger draw ever nearer.’

With Easter occurring so late in 2000 we had a bit of a backlog of cantatas written for the end of the Trinity season, and here was an opportunity to include **BWV 60 O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort**, composed in 1723 for the Twenty-fourth Sunday after Trinity. Bach labels it a ‘dialogue between Fear and Hope’, a title which reflects its unusual concentration on just two solo voices (an alto and a tenor) exemplifying the divided soul, the one wracked by fear of death and shaken by the terrifying sound of eternity’s ‘word of thunder’, the other sustained by simple trust in God’s mercy – ‘the Saviour’s hand will protect me’. Such a rigid theological dichotomy couched in such bald allegorical terms

may at first glance fail to strike a chord with many listeners. Nowadays this tension might be expressed more conventionally as one between the breezy truisms of the natural optimist, and the pessimist attempting to fend off the chilly realities of life's disappointments by growing an extra layer of protective skin. Bach almost hints at such a more contemporary, nuanced interpretation. As so often in the cantatas the signs of what we might call 'progressiveness' show up in the complexity of his thought and a willingness (perhaps even a need) to combine the old with the new.

The opening chorale fantasia is arresting. The written-out semiquaver tremolo figures in the upper strings, plainly linked to the personification of Fear, seem to pick up where Monteverdi's *stile concitato* (agitated style) leaves off, and simultaneously to look forward to Beethoven (the jittery reiterations in the lower strings of the figure we associate with the opening of the Fifth Symphony). Imposing, too, is the extra shimmer the horn brings to the alto's delivery of the chorale melody. These two elements combine to create an atmosphere of intense fear at the outset. By contrast, and more *hope-ful*, is the cascading figuration introduced in canonic imitation by the two oboes d'amore. The tenor soloist responds with Jacob's deathbed oration: 'Lord, I wait for Thy salvation'. But this 'gripping dramatisation of existential angst' (as Stephen A. Crist puts it) leads nowhere: Hope alone cannot overcome Fear; only faith in Christ can lead man to salvation.

The two solo instruments in the duet (No.3) have clearly differentiated roles: Hope's ally, the violin, attempts through its gentle arabesques to soften the edges of the oboe d'amore locked in *fear-ful* rhythmic liaison with the continuo. Dürr points out that the alto and tenor parts, which at first glance seem thematically at opposite poles, are in fact related through variation. This is symptomatic of the way Bach engineers that the forward motion of the cantata and the intense

interaction between Fear and Hope are entwined. There are no verbal da capos; Hope always has the last word, and manages to resolve Fear's chromatic instability with soothing diatonic harmonies. The duet ends with synchronised parallel motion, Fear's scalar descent in the oboe dismissed as it were by the violin's upward gesture, like the wafting of a silk scarf.

In the penultimate recitative/arioso (No.4), Fear trudges on alone, death having almost dragged Hope into the depths ('reißet fast die Hoffnung ganz zu Boden'). A bass soloist now enters for the first time in the cantata as the *Vox Christi*, with the consoling words from Revelation 14:13, 'Selig sind die Toten' ('Blessed are the dead'). In the course of this new dialogue, extending to fifty-two bars, one can trace the way Bach mirrors the painful process by which the quaking soul is finally soothed (or converted) thanks to the quiet insistence of the bass's mysterious interventions. Initially both of Fear's utterances lead to an upward shift from one minor key to another: E minor to F sharp minor, then, still more intensely, F sharp minor climbing to G sharp minor (rare in Bach), symbolising extreme fear of hell and eternal damnation. Yet with each response of the *Vox Christi*, introducing the consolations of faith, there is a satisfying completion of the initial idea in the form of a move to the major key (D major in the first shift, E major in the second). Now comes a change of direction: resuming in E major, Fear moves from anticipation of everlasting damnation to the terrors of death itself (dominant of E minor). Re-entering for the last time the bass proclaims the full text from Revelation, culminating with the words 'von nun an' ('from henceforth'). Fear is able at last to grasp the implications of this momentous message. Hope is beckoned and restored and the soul can glance into eternity with 'confidence and peace' and even gain a foretaste of that life in the here-and-now through the agency of the Holy Spirit.

Expectations are set for a positive ending to the cantata's

‘arduous path to the final combat and struggle’, referred to at the outset by Fear. It duly comes in an upward shift of tonality, a fifth higher than it began, in the closing movement, but not before a rare old tussle and an almost Schoenbergian interlocking of the two chorales on which the cantata is based: Rist’s ‘O Ewigkeit’ (1642) and Franz Joachim Burmeister’s ‘Es ist genug’ (1662). The last four tones of the first phrase of the first chorale are re-used in a distorted form as the first four tones of the second, with the final D now changed into a D sharp. This was anticipated in the opening phrase of Fear’s first recitative, ‘O schwerer Gang’, the additional sharps (‘Kreuz’ in German) a punning device to mark the way of the cross. Eric Chafe devotes twelve pages to discussing the twenty bars of the final chorale, ‘Es ist genug’, analysing its tonal and modal aspects, its daring and mysterious harmonies. Bach retains the opening sequence of three whole tones (A-B-C sharp-D sharp) that form the forbidden tritone known as ‘Diabolus in musica’, and amplifies their qualities in ways that Vopelius and even Telemann modify or skirt around. Alban Berg was also fascinated by its whole-tone sequence (even though he seems to have consulted a faulty source for Bach’s harmonisation) and chose this chorale setting as the principal musical symbol for his violin concerto of 1935, a milestone in the history of Bach reception. At the second of our two concerts the composer Hugh Wood pointed out to me that the second line of the ‘Es ist genug’ chorale resembles line three of the opening chorale ‘O Ewigkeit’ in retrograde, so that besides the complementary nature of the two chorale texts there is a purely musical rationale for their pairing here by Bach. This bears out Chafe’s overall conclusion that ‘in developing and intensifying traditional, even archaic, ways of understanding music [...] Bach carried them far into the future, opening up questions for the analysis, interpretation, and composition of music that are very much with us and are probably timeless.’

These were two stirring, emotionally charged concerts, the first in

Bath Abbey, the second in Eton College Chapel, its superb acoustics periodically wrecked by passenger jets flying out of Heathrow directly overhead. For this reason it was fortunate that we decided for the only time this year to pre-record all four cantatas the preceding Friday in All Saints, Tooting, simulating concert conditions by long ‘takes’.

Cantatas for the Twenty-third Sunday after Trinity

Winchester Cathedral

For our last English concert of the pilgrimage year we headed for Winchester, second only to Canterbury as a place of pilgrimage in medieval England. As with the previous week three cantatas by Bach have survived for this particular Sunday; to these we added one for the Twenty-seventh Sunday after Trinity (BWV 140), which occurred only twice in Bach’s time in Leipzig (1731 and 1742) and not at all in 2000. The Gospel text for the Twenty-third Sunday after Trinity is from Matthew (22:15-22), in which the Pharisees question Jesus over the legitimacy of paying tribute to Caesar. For his first essay on this theme, **BWV 163 Nur jedem das Seine!**, Bach turned to a text by Salomo Franck, his habitual librettist from his Weimar days, who was also the Court numismatist and therefore in charge of the ducal coin collection. Franck seizes on the allegorical potential of his trade – contrasting devalued or counterfeit coinage with the irresistible gleam of pure gold – and gives a vivid portrayal of both, images that are eagerly taken up by the young Bach. So, already in the second number we have the sentence ‘The heart shall all alone, Lord, be Thy tribute money. Alas, but alas, is that not worthless money? Satan has disfigured on it Thine image; this counterfeit has lost its value.’ Bach provides apt dissonances for the ‘schlechtes Geld’ and the ‘falsche Münz’, and more memorably in the ensuing bass aria (No.3), scored uniquely for two

obligato cellos with continuo, he conjures up an irresistible picture of two coin-polishers at work, a sort of eighteenth-century sorcerer goading his apprentice ('come, work, melt and stamp it'), or perhaps two hobgoblins poring over their hoarded treasure. As the two cellos polish away in contrary motion with wide intervallic leaps, one is reminded of Bach's own interest in precious metals and coins. Was there a model to hand, a memory which fired his musical imagination here, perhaps a visit to the experimental porcelain factory in Meissen set up by Augustus the Strong, or rumours of its secret alchemical purpose, to turn base metal into gold? To what extent did Bach share his cousin Johann Gottfried Walther's lifelong fascination for what he called this 'supreme and most beautiful art' and its occultist links to learned counterpoint and the solving of canonic puzzles, of which Bach was a master?

This cantata opens unusually with a da capo aria for tenor and strings in textures of dense imitation. It paraphrases Jesus' reply to the Pharisees, 'To each only his due' / 'Nur jedem das Seine!', an aphorism that finds an uncomfortable parallel with the superscription on the gates of Buchenwald concentration camp – 'Jedem das Seine' (literally 'to each his own', but figuratively 'everyone gets what he deserves') – just a few kilometres to the north of where Bach's cantata was first heard. The mesmeric bass aria is followed by two unusual duets for soprano and alto, the first a recitative in arioso style, in two contrasted speeds, the second a triple-time 'aria' constructed as a chorale fantasia with an instrumental *cantus firmus* played in unison by violins and viola (Johann Heermann's chorale 'Meinen Jesum lass ich nicht'). According to the libretto, the last verse of a different chorale by Heermann ('Wo soll ich fliehen hin'), to a tune by Christian Friedrich Witt, followed at this point. Marked '*Chorale in semplice stylo*', all we have is the bass line. Andreas Glöckner discovered that this fits exactly to a version of the tune that appears in Witt's hymnal.

Lost, too, is the autograph score of **BWV 139 Wohl dem, der sich auf seinen Gott** with which we began our concert. An incomplete set of parts survives, used at the cantata's first performance in November 1724. Thankfully these can be augmented by Bach's own transposed figured continuo part of the last two movements made for a revival in 1732/5, by the obligato violin part written out by his future son-in-law JC Altnickol in 1744/7 for the bass aria (No.4), and by the convincing reconstruction Robert Levin made for us of the missing second violin part of the tenor aria (No.2). Such gaps in the source material of these occasional, ephemeral pieces are, alas, all too common. Fortunately we have all the necessary parts for the opening chorus, a craftily constructed chorale fantasia in E major. Grounding his material on the three segments of the chorale's form (AAB), equal in length, Bach subtly varies the distribution of the melodic material shared between the three lower voices and the instruments (strings with two oboes d'amore) locked in vigorous *concertante* discourse. Yet what shines through is how strong Bach's music is in invention throughout. The pastoral lyricism that characterises the first segment portraying the child-like trust of the true believer gives way to a defiant evocation of 'all the devils [who] hate him' in the second, while for the concluding ('B') segment ('he nonetheless remains at peace') Bach equalises the structural proportions between the vocal and instrumental episodes to achieve a satisfying resolution.

He continues with a powerful tenor aria with two obligato violins, in which the reiterated confidence-building claims that 'God is my friend' are belied by the tempestuous music for the enemy's raging, envy and hatred. It must be one of the few examples in baroque literature where facetiousness is attempted in music: 'Continue to speak the truth but sparingly. Be ever false – what is that to me? You who mock are no danger to me.' You sense Bach using all his resourcefulness in adapting an Italianate trio sonata style to the demands of this defiant

text and to underpinning the tenor's dilemma. Still more arresting is the bass aria (No.4) for concertante violin set against two unison oboes d'amore and continuo, in which Bach switches from a gritty double-dotted texture – loud and fast – to the most nonchalant texture imaginable in 6/8 for the words 'But a helping hand suddenly appears'. This is achieved seamlessly (three times), almost like a cinematic fade or dissolve, conjuring up God's outstretched hand as painted by Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel. Not for long: this is a mere prelude to the return of the gritty rhythms of 'misfortune' and to two passages when the tempo slows, the concertante instruments drop out, an arioso describing 'the light of comfort [that] shines on me from afar.'

BWV 52 Falsche Welt, dir trau ich nicht! is a cantata for solo soprano first performed on 24 November 1726. Its opening sinfonia comprises an early version of the first movement of Brandenburg Concerto No.1, but without the piccolo violin. One could speculate endlessly on Bach's motive for recycling this splendid piece (was it just too good to ignore, perhaps?), even to the point of seeing in that outrageous writing for two whooping hunting horns a symbol of the 'false world' of the cantata's title, where the soul must 'dwell among scorpions and false serpents'. Clearly, whatever else is implied here, it is not conceivable that Bach is casting theological aspersions on his own (secular) music. No. At most he is seizing on the symbolic occupational functions and worldly associations of these *cors de chasse* as a launch pad for his solo soprano's opening tirade. The first of her two arias is in D minor with a continuo of bassoon and organ over which a pair of violins play now in unison, now in thirds, designed to highlight the contrast between 'Feind' (foe) and 'Freund' (friend). The second is a genial movement scored for three oboes, a rich texture which in Bach's hands sound like a primitive saxophone trio, smooth and euphonious in their parallel glidings and symbols of God's companionability – 'Gott mit mir, und ich mit Gott' / 'God is with me and I with God'. Bach brings

back all the instruments of the opening sinfonia for his concluding four-voiced chorale, the first strophe of Adam Reusner's 'In dich hab ich gehoffet, Herr' (1533), familiar from its inclusion in the *Christmas Oratorio*.

For all the jaw-dropping surprises and discoveries of this year's survey of Bach's surviving church cantatas it was in a way a relief to have confirmation of just how good is the most famous and enduring of them all, **BWV 140 Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme**, first performed in Leipzig on 25 November 1731. For Whittaker it represents the 'glorious ripeness of [Bach's] maturity... it is a cantata without weakness, without a dull bar, technically, emotionally and spiritually of the highest order'. Once again the autograph score is missing, though thankfully a full set of Bach's manuscript performing parts has survived. Judging by the number of manuscript copies of the score made in the half century after Bach's death, this cantata bucked the trend and held its place in the repertoire, as well as being among the first to appear in print, in 1847. The festive, expectant mood that he creates in his opening chorus is probably stronger and more palpable than anything else we have encountered this year. It is based on exploiting the inherent textural antiphony between his two 'choirs' of strings (two violins and viola) and double-reeds (two oboes, *taille* and a separate bassoon part), and on extrapolating the full majesty of the French overture style, double-dotted in triple rhythm. From this a rising syncopated figure emerges, taken up later on by the altos as they lead off with their funky 'alleluia' figure and adopted by all the other singers. If anyone in the posh world of classical music ever doubted that JS Bach could also be considered the father of jazz, here is the proof. With its Gregorian origins, Philipp Nicolai's popular tune and poem (1599) form the bedrock of Bach's invention. The way that Bach hoists the whole tessitura of his forces in the second phrase is thrilling, an optimistic gesture guaranteed, you would think, to lift the faint-hearted out of their mid-winter blues. As in a number of

other cantatas you sense that several time-frames are here being telescoped: an ageless appeal for watchfulness as ‘the Bridegroom comes’, an evocation of the historic Jerusalem, with the night-watchmen doing their rounds, and the contemporary framework of Bach’s Leipzig, a buzzing commercial metropolis, as it prepares for Advent and the Christmas festive season.

The mood returns in the other two chorale settings, the tenors’ ‘Zion hört die Wächter singen’ (No.4), with its beguiling violin/viola obbligato (with hints of the watchman’s joy and a constant toying with one’s expectations of downbeat/ half-bar emphasis) and the plain but gorgeously satisfying final chorale, ‘Gloria sei dir gesungen’. The burnished sound of the horn doubling the sopranos in the flanking choruses is one of the most exhilarating features of these movements, as is the violins’ octave doubling of the hymn tune in the final chorale in glorious technicolour imitation of a two-foot stop on the organ. Flanked by these public, pillar-like outbursts are two fine recitatives, one *secco* for tenor, the other an *accompagnato* for bass, and two intimate duets for soprano and baritone drawing heavily on references to *The Song of Solomon*. The first of these is a slow *siciliano* in which the flickering of lamps ‘lit with burning oil’ finds perfect illustration in the arabesques of the violino piccolo. A rich tradition of similarly sensual musical allegories, including fine examples by Bach’s own cousin, Johann Christoph, stands behind this ravishing number. The second duet (No.6), with its oboe obbligato, has a jauntier air. To reflect the union of bride and bridegroom Bach has no compunction in stealing the clothes of contemporary operatic love-duets in his use of chains of suspensions and parallel thirds and sixths.

At this crucial turning point in the Church year, the switch from this last Sunday in the Trinity season to Advent, there seem to be vestiges of pagan mythology lying behind these mid-winter celebrations, of which Bach shows that he was aware. This is the darkest time of the

year when the autumn-sown cereals lie dormant in an appropriate state of what plant pathologists call 'vernalisation'.

Winchester Cathedral is a challenging venue in which to achieve carefully layered sound, let alone counterpoint of Bach's complexity. Cold and miserable though the weather was, we were made to feel welcome by the bishop and encouraged by the director of music and by the presence of some 1300 listeners seated in the candlelit nave and side aisles. What an impressively *solid*-feeling building this is! In fact the cathedral is built on a peat bog, and its thirteenth-century builders formed their foundations on a timber raft, which, by the twentieth century, was threatening to collapse. Between 1906 and 1911 an intrepid diver, William Walker, working alone and in virtual darkness, handled an estimated 25,800 bags of concrete and 114,900 concrete blocks to shore the foundations up. He saved the building, and above ground the impression remains one of indestructible grandeur – yet plain at the same time, as a result of the solid nave walls and those tall shafts bowed to it that Pevsner describes as 'massive, like enormous tree-trunks'.

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