

Eastman Bach Cantata Series

Yiran Zhao and Nathaniel Peets, *conductors*

Sunday, January 26, 2025

Hatch Recital Hall

3:30 PM



EASTMAN
SCHOOL OF MUSIC
UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER

~ PROGRAM ~

BWV 89: Was soll ich aus dir machen, Ephraim **Johann Sebastian Bach**
Cantata for the Twenty-Second Sunday after Trinity (1723) (1685-1750)
14'

- I. Was soll ich aus dir machen, Ephraim? (Bass Aria)
- II. Ja, freilich sollte Gott (Alto Recitative)
- III. Ein unbarmherziges Gerichte (Alto Aria)
- IV. Wohlan! mein Herze legt Zorn (Soprano Recitative)
- V. Gerechter Gott, ach, rechnest du? (Soprano Aria)
- *VI. Mir mangelt zwar sehr viel (Chorale)**

***The audience is invited to stand and sing**

Lora Bashmakian, soprano
Amanda Falls, mezzo-soprano
Peter Schoellkopf, bass

Liliana Mahave, Zi-hua Ma, violin I
Lydia Newton, Kellen Mikesell, violin II
Max Wang, Anna Denfeld, viola
Joëlla Becker, cello
Jiayan Yang, double bass
Torie Ramey, oboe I
Gus Smith, oboe II
Noah Eastman, bassoon
Morgan Chalmers, horn
Yiran Zhao, organ

~ BRIEF PAUSE ~

~ PROGRAM ~

BWV 69: Lobe den Herrn, meine Seele

Cantata for the Election of the Town Council (1748)

J. S. Bach

19'

- I. Lobe den Herrn, meine Seele (Chorus)
- II. Wie groß ist Gottes Güte doch! (Soprano Recitative)
- III. Meine Seele, auf! erzähle (Alto Aria)
- IV. Der Herr hat große Ding an uns getan (Tenor Recitative)
- V. Mein Erlöser und Erhalter (Bass Aria)
- *VI. Es danke, Gott, und lobe dich (Chorale)**

***The audience is invited to stand and sing**

Marlena St. Jean, soprano
Emily Skilling, mezzo-soprano
Zachary Thompson, tenor
Peter Schoellkopff, bass

Zi-hua Ma, violin I
Sedona Kmen, violin II
Anna Denfeld, viola
Audrey Cherwinski, cello
Samuel Suchta, oboe I/oboe d'amore
Gus Smith, oboe II
Torie Ramey, oboe III
Diego Turner, trumpet I
Derek Gong, trumpet II
Layne Sullivan, trumpet III
Ben Landon, timpani
James Jeffery, harpsichord

Nathaniel Peets, conductor

~ PROGRAM NOTES, TEXTS, AND TRANSLATIONS ~

BWV 89: Was soll ich aus dir machen, Ephraim

The cantata *Was soll ich aus dir machen, Ephraim* (O how can I surrender Ephraim) was composed for the 22nd Trinity Sunday, 24 October 1723, and belongs to the first annual cycle of cantatas which Bach began immediately after taking up the position as Kantor at St. Thomas's church in Leipzig, aiming to provide a sacred cantata for every Sunday and Feast Day of the church year. The text models for the new compositions were taken from various poets who, however, can only be identified in very few instances.

The cantata is scored like chamber music. Only the chorale is set for four parts; the alto voice sings of man's sin, the soprano of God's grace, and the bass is God's voice in the opening movement. Bach did not proceed methodically in setting the text models for the first annual cycle of cantatas. Instead, he opens the composition with a Bible quotation and concludes it, after a series of recitatives and arias, with a chorale movement. For this cantata, Bach opens with a bass aria instead of a chorus movement, probably based on the fact that the Bible text at the beginning of the cantata libretto is phrased in the direct speech of God, at the same time establishes a relationship to the gospel reading for the Sunday, which explores the interplay of guilt and forgiveness.

The textual juxtaposition of deserved punishment and Divine forgiveness is vividly rendered in Bach's music. At the beginning of the opening movement, a terrifying rumbling in the bass register illustrates Divine anger. The fermata chords with which Bach sets the three question marks in the text cause the music to falter repeatedly. An augmented fourth interval between the voice and the continuo (F-sharp and C) signals a reversal toward forgiveness; the reference to the rightfulness of punishment is followed by manifold repetitions of the declaration that God's heart is turned within.

A brief secco recitative transfers the parable of guilt and forgiveness to human sins. The threat of merciless judgment is the focus of the following continuo aria; its inevitability is illustrated by means of intermittent canonic passages between the solo contralto and the continuo. Then, the soprano recitative contains the narrative turning point: the certainty that the debt incurred by human sin is redeemed by the sacrifice of Christ's blood. Its concluding arioso leads into an aria with obbligato oboe which, with its lilting 6/8 meter and almost songlike melodic character, conveys a fundamentally optimistic attitude. This optimism is affirmed once more in the closing chorale, on the melody "Auf meinen lieben Gott."

Yiran Zhao

I. Bass Aria

Was soll ich aus dir machen, Ephraim?
Soll ich dich schützen, Israel?
Soll ich nicht billig ein Adama aus dir machen
Und dich wie Zeboim zurechten?
Aber mein Herz ist anders Sinnes,
Meine Barmherzigkeit ist zu brünstig.

*What shall I make of you, Ephraim?
Shall I protect you, Israel?
Should I not simply make an Adama out of you
And judge you like Zeboim?
But my heart is of another mind,
My mercy is too fervent.*

II. Alto Recitative

Ja, freilich sollte Gott
Ein Wort zum Urteil sprechen
Und seines Namens Spott
An seinen Feinden rächen.
Unzählbar ist die Rechnung deiner Sünden,
Und hätte Gott auch gleich Geduld,
Verwirft doch dein feindseliges Gemüte
Die angebotne Güte
Und drückt den Nächsten um die Schuld;
So muss die Rache sich entzünden.

*Indeed, God should freely
Speak a word in judgment
And revenge the mockery of his name
At the hands of his enemies.
The reckoning of your sins is uncountable,
And even if God has patience,
Yet your inimical will spurns
The offered goodness
And forces the guilt onto your neighbor;
Therefore vengeance must be ignited.*

III. Alto Aria

Ein unbarmherziges Gerichte
Wird über dich gewiss ergehn.
Die Rache fängt bei denen an,
Die nicht Barmherzigkeit getan,
Und machet sie wie Sodom ganz zunichte.

*A merciless judgment
Will certainly be pronounced over you.
Vengeance begins with those
Who do not show mercy,
And like Sodom, they are totally annihilated.*

IV. Sopran Recitative

Wohlan! mein Herze legt Zorn,
Zank und Zwietracht hin;
Es ist bereit, dem Nächsten zu vergeben.
Allein, wie schreckt mich
Mein sündenvolles Leben,
Daß ich vor Gott in Schulden bin!
Doch Jesu Blut
Macht diese Rechnung gut,
Wenn ich zu ihm, als des Gesetzes Ende,
Mich gläubig wende.

*Well then! My heart lays anger,
Quarreling and discord aside;
It is ready to forgive my neighbor.
However, how terrified is
My sinful life,
Since I am full of guilt before God!
Yet Jesus' blood
Accounts for the reckoning,
If I turn to him, as the source of the law,
In faith.*

V. Sopran Aria

Gerechter Gott, ach, rechnest du?
So werde ich zum Heil der Seelen
Die Tropfen Blut von Jesu zählen.
Ach! rechne mir die Summe zu!
Ja, weil sie niemand kann ergründen,
Bedeckt sie meine Schuld und Sünden.

*Righteous God, ah, do you judge?
Then for the salvation of my soul
I will count the drops of blood from Jesus.
Ah! Reckon the total to my account!
Indeed, since no one can fathom it,
It will conceal my guilt and sin.*

VI. Chorale

Mir mangelt zwar sehr viel,
Doch, was ich haben will,
Ist alles mir zugute
Erlangt mit deinem Blute,
Damit ich überwinde
Tod, Teufel, Höll und Sünde.

*Indeed there is much lacking in me,
Yet, what I want
Has all, for my sake,
Been earned with your blood,
So that I might overcome
Death, devil, hell, and sin.*

BWV 69: Lobe den Herrn, meine Seele

Bach's *Lobe den Herrn, meine Seele* (BWV 69) is among his most grandiose cantatas. Originally, this work was composed in 1723 as an ecclesiastical cantata for the Twelfth Sunday after Trinity (BWV 69a). The liturgy for this particular Sunday included 2 Corinthians 3.4-11 as the epistle and Mark 7.31-7 as the gospel. The gospel passage—which recounts Jesus healing a deaf/mute man—likely inspired the vibrant and elaborate orchestration of the original version. The original orchestration featured all of the same instruments as BWV 69, but with an additional oboe da caccia and recorder parts (presumably to be played by the oboists) for the tenor aria “Meine Seele, auf! Erzähle”. In 1727, Bach replaced these parts with oboe and violin and transposed the aria for alto, though his reasons remain unclear. The revised version of the aria would later appear in BWV 69.

Late in his career, Bach was tasked with composing music for a Leipzig Town Council election as part of his duties as Kantor (Music Director) at St. Thomas' Church. For this occasion, he turned to his earlier work (BWV 69a) adapting it into a celebratory cantata suitable for this ceremonious civic event. While retaining much of the original music, Bach revised the recitatives and the final chorale to better suit the context of the council's inauguration, resulting in the first performance of BWV 69 on August 26, 1748.

The opening chorus, “Lobe den Herrn, meine Seele,” is based on Psalm 103:2: “Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits.” This movement is characterized by its majestic orchestration and intricate use of a double fugue. Together, these elements contribute to the grandeur of the piece, making it equally effective in liturgical and civic contexts. A secco soprano recitative follows, which introduces a reflective tone as it marvels at God's glory. The third movement is a jubilant alto aria that proclaims God's greatness. The oboe and violin obbligati add a lively interplay, echoing the alto's melody and enhancing the sense of joyous celebration. This movement connects thematically to the miraculous acts described in the gospel reading.

In contrast, the tenor recitative introduces a political subtext. It alludes to the necessity of God's wisdom in governance, referencing the epistle text from 2 Corinthians while potentially serving as a subtle rebuke to the Leipzig Town Council. At this point in his career, Bach had endured decades of tension with the council. The dramatic progression from secco recitative to arioso adds to the intensity of Bach's message. The bass aria offers a deeply personal plea for God's protection. Its lush orchestration, including oboe d'amore, violins, and viola, helps to create an intimate yet powerful expression of trust in God's might. Finally, the cantata concludes with the chorale, a setting of the third verse of Martin Luther's hymn *Es woll uns Gott genädig sein*. This familiar tune would have resonated deeply with Bach's 18th-century German audience. Today, we ask you all in the audience to sing along!

Nathaniel Peets

I. Chorus

Lobe den Herrn, meine Seele,
Und vergiß nicht, was er dir Gutes getan hat!

*Praise the Lord, my soul,
And do not forget the good he has done for you!*

II. Sopran Recitative

Wie groß ist Gottes Güte doch!
Er bracht uns an das Licht,
Und er erhält uns noch.
Wo findet man nur eine Kreatur,
Der es an Unterhalt gebricht?
Betrachte doch, mein Geist,
Der Allmacht unverdeckte Spur,
Die auch im kleinsten sich recht
Groß erweist.

*How great, indeed, is God's goodness!
He brought us to the light,
And sustains us still.
Where can one find even a single creature
That lacks for sustenance?
Only consider, my spirit,
The unconcealed trace of the Almighty,
Who even in the smallest things
Reveals Himself greatly.*

Hosea 11:8 (mov't. 1);

“Wo soll ich fliehen hin,” verse 7: Johann Heermann 1630 (mov't. 6)

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II. Soprano Recitative (continued)

Ach! möcht es mir, o Höchster, doch gelingen,
Ein würdig Danklied dir zu bringen!
Doch, sollt es mir hierbei an Kräften fehlen,
So will ich doch, Herr, deinen Ruhm erzählen.

*Ah! If only I could be successful, O Highest,
In bringing You a worthy song of gratitude!
Yet, should the skill be lacking in me in this,
I will still tell, Lord, of Your glory.*

III. Alto Aria

Meine Seele, auf! erzähle,
Was dir Gott erwiesen hat!
Rühme seine Wundertat,
Lass ein Gott gefällig Singen
Durch die frohen Lippen dringen!

*My soul, arise! tell
What God has revealed to you!
Speak of his wondrous deeds,
Let a song, pleasing to God,
Emerge from happy lips!*

IV. Tenor Recitative

Der Herr hat große Ding an uns getan.
Denn er versorget und erhält,
Beschützt und regiert die Welt.
Er tut mehr, als man sagen kann.
Jedoch, nur eines zu gedenken:
Was könnt uns Gott wohl Beßres schenken,
Als daß er unsrer Obrigkeit
Den Geist der Weisheit gibet,
Die denn zu jeder Zeit
Das Böse straft, das Gute liebet?
Ja, die bei Tag und Nacht
Vor unsre Wohlfahrt wacht?
Laßt uns dafür den Höchsten preisen;
Auf! ruft ihn an,
Daß er sich auch noch fernerhin
So gnädig woll erweisen.
Was unserm Lande schaden kann,
Wirst du, o Höchster, von uns wenden
Und uns erwünschte Hilfe senden.
Ja, ja, du wirst in Kreuz und Nöten
Uns züchtigen, jedoch nicht töten.

*The Lord has done great things for us.
Since He cares for and sustains,
Protects and guides the world.
He does more than can be put in words.
However, consider only one thing:
What better gift could God give us,
Than that to our government
He would give the spirit of wisdom,
Which at all times
Punishes evil, and loves goodness?
Indeed, which by day and night
Watches over our welfare?
Let us therefore praise the Highest;
Arise! call to Him,
So that henceforth He will
Reveal Himself graciously.
What might be harmful to our land,
You will turn aside from us, o Highest,
And send us wished-for aid.
Yes, yes, with suffering and troubles
You will punish us, but not kill us.*

V. Bass Aria

Mein Erlöser und Erhalter,
Nimm mich stets in Hut und Wacht!
Steh mir bei in Kreuz und Leiden,
Alsdenn singt mein Mund mit Freuden:
Gott hat alles wohlgemacht.

*My Redeemer and Sustainer,
Take me always under your protection and watch!
Stand by me in suffering and sorrow,
Then my mouth will sing with joy:
God has made all things well.*

VI. Chorale

Es danke, Gott, und lobe dich
Das Volk in guten Taten.
Das Land bringt Frucht und bessert sich,
Dein Wort ist wohl geraten.
Uns segne Vater und der Sohn,
Uns segne Gott, der Heilige Geist,
Dem alle Welt die Ehre tut,
Für ihm sich fürchten allermeist,
Und spricht von Herzen: Amen!

*May You, God, be thanked and praised
By people in good works;
The earth brings forth fruit and improves itself,
Your word is flourishing.
May the Father and the Son bless us,
May God, the Holy Spirit, bless us,
To Whom all the world gives honor,
And Who is held in the greatest awe
And let us heartily say: Amen!*

“Christum wir sollen loben schon,” Martin Luther 1524
(verses 1 and 8, mov’ts. 1 and 6; source for the other movements)
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Upcoming Choral Concerts

Events are free unless otherwise noted.

Sunday, February 2, 2025

Bach Cantata Series

BWV 90 & BWV 151

Andrew Perricone and Xintong Li, conductors
Hatch Recital Hall • 3:30pm

Sunday, February 16, 2025

Greater Rochester Choral Consortium: Prism Concert: A Taste of Song

featuring 15 ensembles from the GRCC
Kodak Hall at Eastman Theatre • 3:30pm

Sunday, February 23, 2025

UR/ESM Treble Chorus, Nazareth Treble Choir, and Eastman Repertory Singers

music by Lauridsen, Hagenberg, Makaraoff, Haydn, and Brahms
Brenda Nitsch, Colin Mann, Jonathan Thomas Madden,
and William Weinert, conductors
Kilbourn Hall • 3:30pm



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