



(LEMS 8050)

J.S. BACH

CANTATA NO. 10 & CANTATA NO. 47

THE LONDON BACH SOCIETY

AND THE ENGLISH CHAMBER ORCHESTRA (SECTION)

CONDUCTOR PAUL STEINITZ

SOLOISTS:

Sally Le Sage, soprano – Shirley Minty, alto – Nigel Rogers, tenor – Neil Howlett, bass.

INSTRUMENTALISTS: Emanuel Hurwitz and Ivor McMahon, Violins – Gwynne Edwards and Harold Harriott, Violas – Keith Harvey, cello – Philip Simms, contrabass – Edward Selwyn and Tess Miller, oboes – Howard Etherton, bassoon – Philip Jones, trumpet. Dr. William Cole, organ.

NOTES

Cantata #10 was written for the feast of the Visitation and first performed on the second of July 1724. These early Leipzig years were among the most favorable in Bach's cantata writing; his style was by then fully developed, and his initial ardor was not yet discouraged by petty-minded councilors and the general dilapidation of St. Thomas's School. This cantata is a setting of the Magnificat; it is – undeservedly – far less known than the longer, more Italianate work in D (BWV 243). The musical part writing is always interesting; as was his custom, Bach adapts his musical writing to suit the spirit, and often-particular phrases in the text. Through the work is not wholly based on the Chorale melody, this appears as a cantus firmus in the grand opening chorus, and in the duet (mvt 5).

In the opening chorus (1) joy and praise are evident throughout. “My soul magnifies the Lord...” Bright instrumental writing – in fast common time – is the basis, with the choral lines added at intervals. The cantus firmus is in the soprano; also tenor and bass adding to the general merriment with parts very similar to those of the instruments.

Four rising groups of semi-quavers at the outset of the soprano aria (2) give a feeling of spaciousness which is taken up by the soprano. Here is the omnipotence of God – “How wonderful are thy works!”

The animated bass aria (4) elaborates the theme hinted upon in the preceding recitative – the mighty shall be cast down into hell! The music and form illustrate this theme throughout; they are being “hurled DOWN into the Brimstone Pool”; where Bach makes the bass descent to almost uncomfortable depths of his vocal range...as the mighty disappears into his own hell, swallowed up into the turgid undulations of the basso continuo!

“But he remembers his mercy...” In this peaceful duet (5) confidence is again restored. This is one of the most beautiful movements in Bach’s cantata writing; he later rewrote it as a chorale prelude for organ (BWV 648) – on BOR 6). The chorale melody appears as a cantus firmus by the trumpet.

The text of the tenor recitative (6) set in normal recitative style, speaks of the vow God made “to our fathers in times of old”. The vow is then quoted, and at this point the music changes into soft smoothly flowing pairs of semi-quavers.

The chorale (7), which was heard in the opening chorus and in the tenor-alto duet, now appears, quiet and unadorned, to complete the work.

Cantata #47 was formerly supposed to have been written in 1720, the supreme mastery of structure which it reveals, especially in the opening chorus, being an early example of the flowering of Bach’s genius. However, it is now known to have been first produced on the 13th October 1726 (Trinity XVIII), that is, during one of the most productive of the Leipzig cantata years.

Certainly the chorus (1) is one of the most colossal and satisfying edifices in all the cantatas. It consists of two distinct ideas: an opening concerto-ritornello for orchestra, closely related thematically to the organ prelude in c minor, BWV 546, and a triple fugue for voices, later doubled with instruments, which most vividly portrays the ideas in the text. (Lionel Rogg plays BWV 546 on Bach Recordings BOR 12)..Musically, there is always a close association between instruments and voices, both performing parts of equal importance. Watch for the appearance of the theme, transposed into the Major key, played by the oboe.

The soprano aria, bass recitative and bass aria, which follow are all interesting musically, the music reflecting and illuminating the text. The cantata closes with a touchingly simple yet colorful chorale, the melody and words of which are said to date back to the time of Meistersingers.

For this recording, a section of the English Chamber Orchestra, traditional partner to the LBS, provides one instrument to a part, and the choir is reduced from its normal 50 to 20. This is done not through any pedantic “historic” considerations; we are not trying to reproduce what Bach might have heard, merely a clear and satisfying performance in its own right. We feel that on a recording, a small orchestra and choir make for greater clarity and more interesting timbre.

TRACKS:

Cantata No. 10 Meine Seel erhebt den Herren

1. Chorus - 3:49
2. Aria (S) - 8:37
3. Recit. (T) - 1:36
4. Aria (B) - 3:56
5. Duetto (e Choral) - 2:18
6. Recitativo (T) - 2:30
7. Choral - 1:11

Cantata No. 47 Wer sich selbst erhhet der soll erniedriget sein

8. Chorus [Dictum] (SATB) - 6:01
 9. Aria (S) - 11:12
 10. Recit. (B) - 2:13
 11. Aria (B) - 4:53
 12. Chorale (SATB) - 0:53
- Total Running Time 49:10

A CONTEMPORARY OBSERVATION

The present recording, which took place in 1965, exemplifies the gradually emerging awareness of “historically informed” interpretations of J.S. Bach’s music. Here Paul Steinitz utilizes an instrumental group of, chiefly, one player to a part and a chorus of twenty singers, approximating the dimensions of Bach’s own ensembles. However, there is a certain ironical aspect to his “defense” of why he chose these “reduced” forces:

This is done not through any pedantic “historic” considerations; we are not trying to reproduce what Bach might have heard, merely a clear and satisfying performance in its own right. We feel that on a recording, a small orchestra and choir make for greater clarity and more interesting timbre.

Now, thirty-nine years later, with the revival of baroque performance practice at its zenith and anything but pedantic, it appears that Mr. Steinitz did the right thing, if unintentionally! Today, period-instrument orchestras of virtuoso quality abound. First-class harpsichordists, fortepianists and organists can be heard everywhere and singers who are specialists in eighteenth-century vocal styles have set the standards for baroque opera and oratorio performances.

Three of the singers heard here went on to become important artists in the early music revival. Sally LeSage was a member of the Deller Consort for many years, conferring a unique and expressive quality to the soprano parts, and Shirley Minty earned enthusiastic admiration for her interpretation of the alto roles in Handel's oratorios. The most significant of these three artists was Nigel Rogers who came to be preëminent in the restoration of the florid vocal technique required for seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Italian and English music. As a member of the Early Music Quartet of Zurich he, along with the late Andrea Von Ramm, mastered the forgotten method of throat articulation developed by Giulio Caccini (1545-1618) termed "ribattuta di gola," literally a "beating of the throat." This technique is indispensable for the successful performance of Monteverdi, especially, and the entire vast repertory of baroque vocal music. As an early music singer, I can affirm the significance of Rogers' influence on myself and most of my colleagues. I have taken the time to discuss these singers because of their very important contributions to the growing interest in stylistically inspired vocal interpretation.

The Steinitz recording is one of the early examples of historically informed performance practices which have led us to the happy situation in which we find ourselves today. This beautiful CD deserves to be heard by every early-music enthusiast.

-- Jeffrey Dooley, New York, 2004

Noted countertenor Jeffrey Dooley is a protege of Marc and Alfred Deller. He can be heard on Lyrichord, Nonesuch, Newport Classics, and other labels, and in his many recitals and concerts.

Cantata No. 10
Meine Seel' erhebt den Herren
Meine Seel erhebt den Herren

The Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (The Presentation of Christ in the Temple).
Poet unknown. Sixth Sunday after Trinity.

1. Paul Speratus, verse 1 of the hymn, 1524 (Wackernagel, III, #55); 2. based freely on verses 2, 3, and the beginning of 4; 4. based freely on verses 5-7; 5. based freely on verse 8; 6. based freely on verses 9 and 11; 7. verse 12 of the hymn.

1732-1735, Leipzig. BG 1; NBA I/17 BG 1; NBA I/28.

CREDITS

Produced by Nick Fritsch

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Originally recorded in 1965



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