

BLOOMINGTON BACH CANTATA PROJECT

BLOOMINGTON, IN

“Es ist euch gut, dass ich hingehe” BWV 108
Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

IN-PERSON CONCERT
TUESDAY, MAY 24 | 8pm

TEXTS & TRANSLATIONS

- Es ist euch gut, dass ich hingehe; denn so ich nicht hingehe, so kömmt der Tröster nicht zu euch. So ich aber gehe, will ich ihn zu euch senden.*

It is good for you [disciples] that I [Jesus] should go there [to heaven]; for if I should not go there, then the Comforter [Holy Spirit] will not come to you. But if I should go, I will send him to you.
- Mich kann kein Zweifel stören,
Auf dein Wort, Herr, zu hören.
Ich glaube, gehst du fort,
So kann ich mich getrösten,
Dass ich zu den Erlösten
Komm an gewünschten Port.

No doubt can hinder me
In hearing your word, Lord [Jesus].
I believe that if you go away [to heaven],
Then I can comfort myself
That I will come to the wished-for haven,
To the [place of the] redeemed [of God],
- Dein Geist wird mich also regieren,
Dass ich auf rechter Bahne geh;
Durch deinen Hingang kommt er ja zu mir,
Ich frage sorgenvoll: Ach, ist er nicht schon hier?

Your [Holy] Spirit will thus govern me
That I may go on the right course;
Through your going there [to heaven] he [your Spirit]
indeed comes to me;
I ask, full of worrying: Ah, is he not here yet?
- Wenn aber jener, der Geist der Wahrheit, kommen wird, der wird euch in alle Wahrheit leiten. Denn er wird nicht von ihm selber reden, sondern was er hören wird, das wird er reden; und was zukünftig ist, wird er verkündigen.*

But when that one [the Comforter], the Spirit of Truth, will come, he will guide you into all truth. For he will not speak out of his own [authority]; rather, what he will hear, this will he speak; and what is in the future, [this] will he proclaim.
- Was mein Herz von dir begehrt,
Ach, das wird mir wohl gewährt.
Überschütte mich mit Segen,
Führe mich auf deinen Wegen,
Dass ich in der Ewigkeit
Schaue deine Herrlichkeit!

*What my heart desires from you [Jesus],
Ah, that will assuredly be granted to me.
Shower me with blessings;
Lead me on your paths,
So that in eternity
I may look upon your glory.*
- Dein Geist, den Gott vom Himmel gibt,
Der leitet alles, was ihn liebt,
Auf wohl gebähntem Wege.
Er setzt und richtet unsren Fuss,
Dass er nicht anders treten muss,
Als wo man findet den Segen.**
-- Christiane Mariane von Ziegler

**Your [Holy] Spirit, whom God gives from heaven,
He [the Spirit] guides everything that loves him
[God] On the well-cleared path [of the upright].
He places and directs our foot
So that it does not have to tread other
Than where one finds blessing.**
-- (transl. Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed)

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

The listeners to J. S. Bach's Leipzig liturgical cantatas were distinctly mixed in their gender: women made up at least half of church congregations, and probably more given the high value placed on female piety and its display. The performance of these works, though, was strictly a male domain, from the boys of the St. Thomas School and young men of the Leipzig University who sang and played for Bach, to the (male) town and tower musicians who also performed, to Bach himself and other leaders who directed—to say nothing of the clergy and other church leaders who read, chanted, and sermonized in the service that the cantata adorned. Religious strictures required that all the voices (and the instrumental “voices”) in the leadership of public worship be male.

This was mostly the case, too, in the creation of church cantatas, from their composers to the authors of their librettos (texts); the latter were typically members of the clergy or (male) court or civic poets, with a smattering of university professors. It is thus striking to encounter nine works for the Leipzig liturgy that Bach composed to texts by Christiane Mariane von Ziegler, including “Es ist euch gut, dass ich hingehe” BWV 108 heard on this evening's program.

Ziegler was from a prominent Leipzig family; her father was a lawyer with strong ties to the Dresden Electoral court whose ambition after his appointment as mayor at age 30 led to his arrest and imprisonment for the last 40 years of his life. His daughter Mariane was married and widowed twice by age 27; she re-settled in Leipzig and became involved in its literary scene, hosting a salon and publishing poetry, including many poems that dealt with the place of women in culture, letters, and society. She was the first woman admitted to the *Deutsche Gesellschaft*, a literary society, and in 1733 was crowned “Imperial Poet Laureate” by the faculty of the Wittenberg University.

The first public airing of her poetry appears to have come before she began publishing it: the nine church cantata librettos that J. S. Bach set to music and performed in the spring of 1725. These were works in the new and fashionable mold that included not only scriptural passages and hymn stanzas but also new poetry designed to be set as recitatives and arias, borrowings

(poetic and musical) from contemporary opera. Three years later Ziegler published these nine cantata librettos in her first poetry anthology, and a year after that published a second volume that included 64 additional church cantatas. Together with the first nine they make up a complete annual cycle for the liturgical year, but there is no evidence that they were set to music by Bach or anyone else.

The work heard here was the second of the nine cantatas from 1725, for the 4th Sunday after Easter. Its construction is fairly typical, with an opening scriptural dictum (here, first-person words of Jesus drawn from the day's assigned Gospel reading) and a concluding hymn stanza. Both are on the topic of the Holy Spirit, which Christian theology had long identified with the “comforter” mentioned in the Gospel text. The opening scriptural text is set as though it were an aria, with a solo bass in the long tradition of representing the voice of Jesus this way. The concluding chorale stanza invokes congregational singing (though does not call for it).

In between come an aria, a recitative, another scriptural passage from the day's liturgy, and a second aria. The Gospel passage is long and doctrinal, prompting a setting from Bach for four voices with strictly doubling instruments, recalling the kind of sacred music inherited from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with almost no emphasis on projecting the meaning of the text. The two arias, on the other hand, are meant to be heard as expressive, with a solo violin and ornate tenor line conveying emotional implications of the text of the first aria, perhaps even beyond what the poet writes directly. The second aria, for alto with the full string ensemble, presents a dance-inspired opening ritornello whose musical figures apparently focus on the sense of longing in the poem's first half, again representing an expressive intensification of the poet's words.

You can read more about Mariane von Ziegler in Mark Peters, *A Woman's Voice in Baroque Music: Mariane von Ziegler and J. S. Bach* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2006).

-- Daniel R. Melamed