

## Keyboard Partitas, Jeremy Denk

*The program notes provided for this performance were written by Dr. Eric Bromberger for Mr. Denk's 2024 performance of the partitas at SOKA in California; they are reprinted here with his kind permission.*

*Please note: in addition to these program notes, you may wish to listen to the BACH101 episodes about Bach's suites, as well as the ChatJSB video conversation with Jeremy Denk. These can be found on the "Podcasts" dropdown menu at [www.thecompletebach.org](http://www.thecompletebach.org).*

When Bach moved to Leipzig in 1723, his musical duties changed. For his music-loving prince in Cöthen, Bach had written the great part of his secular instrumental music, but now—as Cantor of the Thomaskirche—he was charged with producing music for religious functions, and the music flowed out of him at a pace that would have exhausted even a Mozart: from the late 1720s came several hundred church cantatas and the *St. Matthew Passion*. But Bach did not altogether lose interest in instrumental music—he had written the first book of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* in Cöthen, and now in Leipzig he continued to compose for keyboard.

Bach's set of six partitas, originally written for harpsichord, was composed between 1726 and 1731 and published in the latter year as the first volume of his *Clavier-Übung* ("Keyboard Practice"). In a wonderful introductory note in the score, the composer described these works as having been "Composed for Music Lovers, to Refresh their Spirits, by Johann Sebastian Bach." Bach understood the partita to be a suite of dance movements—its name implies a set of "parts"—based on the traditional sequence of *allemande-courante-sarabande-gigue*. He adopted this tradition but made it his own by supplementing it with three of what he called "galanteries": extra movements, somewhat lighter in character and intended to make the work more attractive to listeners. These consisted of an introductory movement (in a different form in each of the six partitas) and two extra dance movements.

**Partita No. 1 in B-flat Major, BWV825** — The Partita No. 1 in B-flat Major dates from 1726, when Bach was 41. It opens with a flowing and stately *Praeludium*, whose progress is enlivened by constant turns. Each of the four traditional movements of the partita has a distinct national origin. The *Allemande* (that name suggests it German ancestry) is traditionally a slow dance of serious character, usually in 4/4 time and in binary form; the present *Allemande* moves along rather quickly. The *Courante* (French for "running") is a lively movement in triple time; this one dances along its steady triplet figurations. The *Sarabande*, of Latin American and Spanish heritage, is a stately dance in triple time, while the concluding *Gigue* (derived distantly from the Irish jig) rockets along at a blistering pace and requires some deft hand-crossings by the performer. The interpolated "galanteries" in this partita—they come between the *Sarabande* and *Gigue*—are a pair of minuets that are played without pause. The first dances nimbly along its hard-edged main theme, while the second—much shorter—is chordal and restrained.

**Partita No. 2 in C Minor, BWV 826** — The Partita No. 2 in C Minor comes from 1727, when Bach was also working on his *St. Matthew Passion*. It opens with an imposing *Sinfonia* in three parts: the opening *Grave* is built on steadily-dotted rhythms, the *Andante* moves easily above a walking bassline, and the concluding section is a spirited fugue. The partita's C-minor tonality gives the *Allemande*, *Courante*, and *Sarabande* a wistful, dark cast, and Bach keeps the tempo restrained in these movements as well. The interpolated movement here is a *Rondeaux* in 3/8, athletic

and poised, and then Bach springs a surprise: he drops the expected *Gigue* and in its place concludes with a brilliant *Capriccio* in binary form.

**Partita No. 3 in A Minor BWV 827** — The Partita No. 3 in A Minor opens with a *Fantasia* that dances gracefully along its 3/8 meter as the melodic line flows easily between the two hands. The ornate *Allemande* is enlivened by turns, mordants, and sharp interjections, while the energetic *Courante* contrasts a steady flow of sixteenth-notes in one hand with sharply-dotted rhythms in the other. The *Sarabande* is solemn and dignified—some scholars have noted that there is nothing distinctly *sarabande*-like about this music. Two interpolated movements follow. The *Burlesca* is sturdy and propulsive (though not self-consciously “funny”), while the *Scherzo* is distinctive if for no other reason than the fact that this is the only time Bach used that title. The partita concludes with an unusually powerful *Gigue*, full of contrapuntal complexity, that rushes relentlessly along its 12/8 meter.

**Partita No. 4 in D Major, BWV 828** — The Partita No. 4 in D Major dates from 1728, when Bach was 43. It opens with a lengthy *Ouverture* in the French style: a grand slow introduction, full of runs and dotted rhythms, gives way to a fast fugue in 9/8 that rushes along its staccato main idea; Bach does not return to the slow opening at the end of this movement. Like all the “standard” partita movements in this work, the *Allemande* is in binary form, and if both halves are repeated this stately movement is by far the longest in the whole work. The *Courante* is full of a jaunty, snappy energy, while the *Aria*—one of the “galanteries”—is not so much lyric or vocal in character as it is balanced and precise. The spare *Sarabande* moves slowly along its 3/4 meter, while the brief *Menuett* is energized by the showers of triplets in the pianist’s right hand. Bach rounds the partita off with a brilliant *Gigue*, contrapuntal in character, that rips along its 9/16 meter. This is a tour de force of keyboard writing (and of contrapuntal complexity), and it brings the work to an impressive close.

**Partita No. 5 in G Major BWV829** — The Partita No. 5 in G Major dates from 1730. The wonderful Preambulum has been likened to a concerto. It features brilliant exchanges between the hands, and all this dashing energy is interrupted by dignified chords that provide moments of repose before the music dashes off again. The *Allemande* is of a slow and serious character, while the *Courante* is lively. The *Sarabande*, in 3/4 meter, makes frequent use of dotted rhythms and grace notes. The concluding *Gigue* dances energetically and features polyphonic entrances and off-the-beat accents. The interpolated “galanteries” are first a *Tempo di Minuetto* that belongs mostly to the right hand; its athletic and angular character makes this quick music seem at far remove from the minuet of classical form. The second is a *Passepied* (“pass-foot” in French), a lively dance in triple time, said to be originally a sailors’ dance.

**Partita No. 6 in E Minor BWV 830** — The Partita No. 6 in E Minor is one of Bach’s most imposing—and serious works for keyboard. Its opening *Toccata*, by far the longest first movement of the six partitas, is in ternary form: its outer sections have an improvisatory character (carefully written out), and these frame a somber and expressive fugue, which is all the more effective for being so restrained. The *Allemande* is propelled along dotted rhythms made ornate by rhythmic swirls and rolled chords. The *Courante* requires quite different music from the pianist’s two hands: the left has the steady 3/8 meter, while the right breaks free with syncopations and racing 32nd-note runs. The energetic

Air, one of the interpolated movements, is brief, but the complex *Sarabande* returns to the somber mood of the opening fugue. Textures are complex here, with long runs, dotted rhythms, turns, and broken chords. The other interpolated movement, *Tempo di Gavotta*, nicely meshes triplets and dotted rhythms. Bach rounds the partita off with a *Gigue* that does not so much dance as drive this serious music to a firm close.

### **Secular Cantatas, Worcester Chorus**

**Bach's Secular Celebratory Cantatas** — We associate the choral music of Johann Sebastian Bach primarily with the Lutheran Church, the context in which he presented the vast majority of his cantatas. However, there is a small subset of these works that he wrote not for the church, but for the local nobility. One of the Electors of the Holy Roman Empire was based in Dresden, not far from Leipzig. As the center of political life in Saxony, it was an important court; and because that Elector was also the King of Poland, the court was Catholic rather than Lutheran. When members of the royal family visited Leipzig, it was Bach's job to compose celebratory music. Many of his secular cantatas were written for this reason, including the two on today's concert.

Augustus the Strong died in 1733, and the succession of a new monarch was always a time of vying for position within the court reshuffle. It was for this reason that Bach submitted the first half of the *B Minor Mass* to Augustus III, asking to be appointed court composer. Such a petition was quite normal, and several other composers submitted applications at the same time. These two celebratory cantatas for the new ruler's wife and son could be seen as part of the same general gesture—Bach wished to be recognized by the court, giving him more political power within his own milieu in Leipzig. (Bach was ultimately appointed Court Composer in 1736, giving him at least a little increased credibility with his recalcitrant bosses in Leipzig.)

**Parody: Secular Cantata - Christmas Oratorio** — Because the secular cantatas were written for special occasions, they were not performed multiple times in their original state, as the church cantatas were. Instead, Bach often mined these works to be reworked later as new compositions, in a process known as parody. BWV 213 and 214 are particularly wonderful examples of this; many of their movements were reused the following year when he composed his Christmas Oratorio.

It's not entirely fair to discuss these two secular cantatas only in terms of their ultimate transformation through the process of parody in the Christmas Oratorio. But let's be honest: these two libretti by Bach's collaborator Picander, given their origin as texts in honor of royalty, are vapid at best and cringingly obsequious at worst. The references to classical Gods seem arcane to our modern ears, and in our democratic age, texts that exist solely to venerate royalty (think "God Save the King") simply no longer resonate. But it is certainly fascinating to see how Bach maintains the original musical Affekt from these "congratulatory" secular cantata movements in their transmogrification into new pieces that reflect upon the birth of another king—the baby Jesus.

Rather than addressing those reinventions here, please see the Unlocking Bach episode in which we examine the parodied movements side-by-side. You can find those podcast episodes on the dropdown menu of the TCB website.

**The Libretti: 18th Century Lutheran Classical Education** — Given the centrality of the German language to Luther’s Reformation, it might be surprising just how important Latin and Greek remained in the gymnasium-based school system in Germany for centuries after his death. In this sense, the educational system was as much rooted in Renaissance humanism as it was in Lutheran theology. Classes were taught principally in Latin, and Greek was often taught as well.

Although devout Lutherans were wary of what they saw as the pagan philosophy of the great classical writers, they nonetheless taught such Roman authors as Horace, Virgil and Cicero, as well as Homer, Sophocles, and Demosthenes in Greek. For this reason, it is not surprising to encounter such arcane classical references in today’s two celebratory cantatas. The cantata written for the new Crown Prince was based on the life of Hercules, whereas the cantata for the Electress referred to several different goddesses as exemplars of Maria Josepha’s virtues.

Such classical references seem very far from our own literary tradition today, making secular cantatas like these often feel distant and opaque. But for the educated Lutheran elite (including Bach, whose own schooling was first-rate), these references would have been instantly recognizable.

**Tönet, ihr Pauken! Erschallet, Trompeten!, BWV 214** — BWV 214 was composed for the birthday of Electress Maria Josepha of Saxony, performed on December 8, 1733. The text of this cantata was written by Bach’s frequent collaborator in Leipzig, Picander (Christian Friedrich Henrici), who is perhaps most famous as the librettist of the *St Matthew Passion*. Typical of these celebratory cantatas, the libretto was crafted to extol the virtues of the ruling family. The second cantata on this program is a more complex allegory, but this first one, written in celebration of the new Electress, Maria Josepha of Saxony, is a much less subtle work of praise for the princess. The work is structured as a celebratory homage to the Electress, through the use of three goddesses: Bellona (war); Pallas (wisdom); and Fama (fame), representing the Maria Josepha’s different attributes.

One of Bach’s greatest choral movements, the opening chorus is an exciting and thrilling song of celebration, featuring what may be the only time Bach begins a piece with a timpani solo. The text is overtly musical, referring to drums, trumpets, and strings. The middle section is explicitly a song of praise, with the text “Long live the Queen.”

The three arias, each sung by a different goddess, explore different aspects of the Electress’s qualities as a ruler. The first, sung by the goddess of war, is somewhat unexpected for that subject. The soprano is accompanied by two flutes, with the low strings playing pizzicato. In this sense, the flutes act more like fifes in battle, creating a song of rejoicing rather than aggression. The central alto aria, sung by the goddess of wisdom, is an intimate duet between the singer and the oboe d’amore, with the alto exhorting the listener to celebrate and rejoice. Although the third narrator is the goddess of fame, Bach assigns the role to a bass voice. This movement features a trumpet solo with the strings,

capturing the regal power of the royal family. The cantata finishes with yet another song of praise, wishing the queen a long life. It is set in a dance-like 3/8 meter, featuring the entire orchestra as well as short solo vocal lines.

Incidentally, it is not known whether or not the princess attended the performance of BWV214 in her honor at Zimmerman's Coffeehouse in Leipzig. Regardless, such compositions, which were part of Bach's role as civic musician and conductor of the Collegium Musicum in Leipzig, were designed to demonstrate loyalty to the local ruling family in Dresden.

**Laßt uns sorgen, laßt uns wachen, BWV213** — Written for Crown Prince Friedrich Christian's eleventh birthday, Picander's text is an allegory about choosing personal virtue over worldly vice. The libretto uses Hercules as its avatar; the subtitle of this work is Hercules at the Crossroads, and through the five solo/duet movements, the work explores the choices Hercules must make.

The opening movement sets the stage, with the choir singing the role of the gods, pledging to watch over the young prince on earth. The beautiful soprano lullaby represents Vice tempting Hercules, beginning a debate throughout the cantata between Vice and Virtue. In the echo aria by the alto, Hercules pledges not to be flattered by the Vice that is tempting him. In the exciting and florid tenor aria, which features a duet between oboe and violin, Virtue promises Hercules that he will be raised on the wings of virtue to perfection. In the Passetied-like alto aria, Hercules pledges not to listen to Vice, saying that he has long since crushed the snakes that tried to kill him in the cradle. The final duet is a love song between Virtue and Hercules, pledging themselves to one another, before the cantata closes with a hymn of praise to the young prince. The god Mercury appears in this finale, telling Frederick that the time of his glory is ready to appear, reminding us that these secular cantatas for the royal house of Saxony were above all else works in praise of Leipzig's rulers.

### **Concerti for Two Harpsichords, Handel + Haydn Society**

*The program notes provided for this performance were written by Michael Goetjen. Mr. Goetjen is a musicologist, harpsichordist, and organist whose research focuses on eighteenth-century opera and the music of Mozart. He teaches as a lecturer in music at MIT and BU.*

This evening's concert features members of the Handel & Haydn Society in small scale performances of concertos by Johann Sebastian Bach and Antonio Vivaldi. In paring down the instrumentation of the strings to one musician per part, H&H demonstrates the versatility of this genre in the Baroque to be adapted for a variety of performance contexts. The soloists in each concerto will only stand out more in this stripped down instrumentation. Because of this, we can imagine these works functioning more as aristocratic entertainment than concert music in the modern sense. Indeed, the domestic nature of some of these works is most evident in the double harpsichord concertos, discussed below. Yet, H&H also shows the continuing relevance of Vivaldi's and Bach's contributions to this genre with a recent work by a living composer, Caroline Shaw, whose *Concerto for Harpsichord and Strings* provides a fresh take on the Baroque style of these composers.

In opening the program, Vivaldi's *Sinfonia in G Major, RV 149* will fulfill its intended function as introductory piece. Composed in 1740, this work for strings and continuo originated as part of the festivities surrounding the visit of the Crown Prince of Saxony and Poland, Friedrich Christian, to the Ospedale della Pietà, the orphanage and school for girls in Venice where Vivaldi spent decades teaching and composing. During the prince's visit on March 21st, Vivaldi supervised the performance—most likely by girls from the school—of three concertos (RV 540, 552, 558) and this *sinfonia*, all of which he composed for the occasion. While the concertos could stand alone, Vivaldi's *Sinfonia* served as introduction to a vocal work, a cantata by Gennaro d'Alessandro, who had replaced Vivaldi as *maestro di coro* at the Pietà in 1739. D'Alessandro's cantata, titled *Il coro delle muse* ("The chorus of the muses") has given Vivaldi's associated *Sinfonia* its nickname. Musically, Vivaldi's *Sinfonia* is fairly typical in the faster outer movements, but the exceptional slow movement is noteworthy in its division of the strings into arco and pizzicato. This creates an unusual texture where the same parts are simultaneously heard plucked and bowed by different players.

Out of his more than 500 concertos, Vivaldi's compositions for solo cello in that genre are quite common; the only instruments with more solo concertos in his output are violin and bassoon. So, in some ways, the *Cello Concerto in D Minor, RV 407* is just one of many, but as a representative of his writing for the solo cello, it is particularly appealing. While there is no specific information about its origin or intended performance, this piece is more striking in its musical features than interesting for its historical context, in particular the second movement. This section is cast in typical Vivaldi fashion as a *Sarabande*—a slow Baroque dance in a triple meter—with a continuously repeated ground bass played in octaves by the orchestra. The solo cello then has a quite lyrical but very ornate melody over top of this sparse texture. What is striking about this is not the evocation of dance or use of a repeated ground bass, but rather the allusion to opera—a genre in which Vivaldi also composed. The descending ground bass—in this case moving chromatically by half step in a minor key—combined with the vocalicity of the cello's part suggests an operatic lament. Indeed, the particular ground bass here is quite similar to the well known "Dido's Lament" from Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*—in the same key of G Minor no less. While there is no evidence for a direct connection between this concerto and that opera, the use of a common operatic convention of a lament bass is clear. In fact, many eighteenth century commentators likened instrumental concertos to opera arias (and vice versa).

In addition to a multitude of solo concertos, Vivaldi also composed concertos for orchestra without soloists, where the orchestra as an ensemble is featured as opposed to singling out particular constituents. An excellent example is his *Concerto for Strings in G Major, RV 151*, often called the *Concerto alla rustica*. Composed in the late 1720s, around the same time as his beloved *Four Seasons* concertos, the *Concerto alla rustica* may have been intended for the court of Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni in Rome, where the Arcadian movement favored depictions of pastoral and rustic imagery in art and music. This possibility is supported by the inclusion of oboes in two movements—although this work can be performed without them—instruments often associated with the pastoral in the eighteenth century. Furthermore, the third movement of the concerto features hints of folk music by using the Lydian mode, a similar technique used by Telemann in his Polish style instrumental music.

During his nearly three decades working as director of church music in Leipzig, JS Bach also participated in many secular music-making activities in that city. In 1729, he assumed the directorship of the Collegium Musicum, an ensemble founded by a young Telemann in 1702 during his time as a university student at Leipzig University. The Collegium gave weekly performances, often at the *Zimmermannsches Kaffeehaus*, also known as Café Zimmermann. This popular meeting place for socializing and concertizing saw performances of many of Bach's secular cantatas—including the famous *Coffee Cantata BWV 211*—as well as instrumental music including orchestral suites and concertos. Having gained this position, Bach found an impetus for composing his concertos for harpsichord. The solo harpsichord concertos likely would have featured Bach himself as soloist at Zimmermann's. But, the concertos for two or more harpsichords probably have a somewhat different genesis. While not certain, it's likely that they could have originated in domestic family performances in the Bach household. In the early 1730s, Bach's sons Wilhelm Friedemann and Carl Philip Emanuel still lived with their parents, although by 1735 both had left for work or school.

Of these, the *Concerto for 2 Harpsichords in C Major, BWV 1061*, actually exists in two versions, one for just two harpsichords without orchestra (sometimes referred to as BWV 1061a), in a similar vein to Bach's *Italian Concerto BWV 971* for solo harpsichord, where the harpsichord plays the role of both soloist and orchestra. In the version of BWV 1061 that includes strings, the second movement remains without orchestra and the outer movements feature only minimal parts for the strings. Rather it is the interplay of the two harpsichords, trading roles of soloist and accompaniment, that provides the interest in this piece.

Many of Bach's harpsichord concertos are actually arrangements of previous works. While BWV 1061 is an exception, its pair on this program, the *Concerto for 2 Harpsichords in C Minor, BWV 1060*, is not. While the original source has not been identified, Bach scholars posit that BWV 1060 is an arrangement of a lost double concerto for violin and oboe possibly from Bach's time in Köthen (1717-1723). There exist multiple modern reconstructed versions of this lost precursor, sometimes identified as BWV 1060R, which itself has become a frequently performed work. This practice of self-borrowing and arrangement was quite common among eighteenth century composers like Bach; although Handel is perhaps the more notorious self-borrower. While such a practice of reusing or recycling sections of music or even whole works might be seen today as a result of mere expediency or lack of effort, a closer examination of the borrowings of Bach and Handel among others shows that they did not merely reuse but rather expressively reinterpreted the preexisting material. In doing so, the newer version of each borrowing presents itself as a different work of art on its own. Despite aural similarities, these connections can delight us when we recognize them in a new context rather than disappoint us for expecting something entirely new.

Nestled among these well-loved works is a much more recent composition, Caroline Shaw's *Concerto for Harpsichord and Strings*. It was commissioned by A Sound Salon, an early music group formerly known as Byron Schenkman & Friends, with harpsichordist Byron Schenkman as the soloist. A Sound Salon premiered the work in 2023 during their 10th anniversary concert. The youngest ever winner of the Pulitzer Prize in Music, Shaw's work has been quite diverse in style but this is not her first foray into

using Baroque forms and conventions in new ways. The piece that won her the Pulitzer in 2013 was her *Partita for 8 Voices*, an a cappella work that features a mélange of different vocal styles and techniques but is organized like a Baroque suite. In addition, her 2015 multimedia composition *Ritornello* brings together a string orchestra and vocal ensemble as well as a film component. The title references the Baroque form most common in concertos, where a section of music for orchestra returns throughout the movement in alternation with the solo sections. While she takes the idea of return from ritornello form, the rest of the work is not stylistically very Baroque. Her *Concerto for Harpsichord and Strings* hews perhaps more closely to a Baroque musical language but still finds room to surprise or even perplex us. In an interview with *The Nation*, Shaw said of this piece: “It sounds like if Jane Austen took mushrooms and had a little tryst.” She also told *The Seattle Times* that she used the “familiar grammar” of Bach but twisted it to create a surrealist, alternative reality version of a Baroque concerto.

### Cantatathon, Worcester Bach Collective

**BWV 133: Ich freue mich in dir** — Bach composed at least three annual cycles of cantatas, each of which is known as a *Jahrgang*, although Bach’s obituary suggests that he may have composed as many as five. The cantatas of the second cycle, composed in 1724, are based more often than not on a single chorale tune. These cantatas close with a standard 4-part setting of the chorale, and the first movement uses the same chorale melody, but with a stile concertato instrumental accompaniment. The other movements are arias and recitatives based on other stanzas of the chorale, or responses to the bible readings of the day—usually two recitatives and two arias. *Ich freue mich in dir*, composed for 27 December 1724, fits this mold perfectly. The cantata is based on the chorale of the same name, written by Caspar Ziegler in 1697. The unidentified librettist paraphrases the two remaining stanzas of the hymn in the two recitatives and two arias.

The opening chorus is particularly vibrant, with the soloistic first violin part acting almost as a violin concerto. The instrumental fireworks capture perfectly the mood of rejoicing, a song of welcome to *Jesulein*, the little baby Jesus. Although the choral parts are straightforward 4-part settings of the chorale melody, Bach expands them for two of the hymn’s ideas: the “sweet sound” and the “great Son of God.” The rejoicing continues for the triumphant alto aria, with the clarion call of the opening “Take heart!” with its dotted anacrusis and repeating motto serving to stir the faithful. Although the text deals with the mystery of the Incarnation, this is not one of Bach’s introspective arias, but remains buoyant, with a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the continuo throughout the movement.

The two recitatives in this cantata stand out from others in Bach’s output because each contains short *arioso* sections, in which the speechlike recitative writing becomes more fluid and melodic. In these sections, the librettist quotes the two stanzas of the chorale not otherwise set by Bach.

As we saw in the opening chorus, the first violin again comes to the fore in the soprano aria. This reflection on the sweetness of the words “My Jesus is born” echoes Bach’s emphasis on the “sweet sound” in the first movement, where he had expanded the choral setting. Here, it is the filigree of the first violin that represents the message—the violin



escapes from the texture on a number of occasions in colourful melismas. Throughout the A section, there are a number of terraced dynamic echo effects, illustrating the echo of the words themselves. In a radical departure from the cut common time A section, Bach shifts to a 12/8 siciliano (typical of Nativity music) for the B section. In this section, the soprano laments that those who do not understand the infant's message must be "hard as a rock." Bach removes the continuo, leaving the viola and second violin playing in unison, to act as the bass of the ensemble. Bach often uses this technique, called *bassetto*, to represent the absence of God. He does not leave us there, however; we return to the beginning to complete the *da capo* form before the final recitative and chorale.

**BWV 36: Schwingt freudig euch empor** — Bach must have thought very highly of the material in this cantata, because he reworked it no fewer than five times over a decade. It began life as a secular cantata in 1725, offering a birthday tribute to a Leipzig university professor. In the late 1720s, Bach re-set the music to a text by an unidentified librettist, transforming the cantata for Advent. The version presented today, dating from 1731, expands the first sacred cantata parody from five to eight movements, most notably including the interpolation of several settings of the chorale *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland*, which explore several different Advent themes.

The opening chorus retains the joy and thrill of the original celebratory secular cantata, while at the same time taking on new meanings for Advent. We see the same mixture of upward and downward themes, with the delicacy of the violin figuration rising like incense, while the descending oboe d'amore (an instrument which often represents God's love for man) represents God's descent in the Incarnation.

Bach added the three settings of the chorale *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland* in this second version of the sacred cantata in order to place the text more squarely in the season of Advent. The soprano and alto sing the text of the first verse, forming a trio with the continuo, with the double bass representing the descent of God to earth. Again, Bach takes great care in handling the text carefully, setting it phrase by phrase. Beautiful little touches abound, such as the rocking of the continuo cradle against the words "der Jungfrauen Kind" and the more active setting again for the words "des sich wundert alle Welt."

**BWV 28: Gottlob! nun geht das Jahr zu Ende** — This cantata dates from Bach's third cantata cycle in Leipzig, receiving its premiere performance on 30 December 1725. As the date would suggest, it is a cantata that offers thanks for the old year and prayers for the coming one. The libretto was written by Erdmann Neumeister in 1714. Neumeister created the form of the cantata so favoured by Bach, but this is actually one of only two examples of a Neumeister libretto dating from his Leipzig years.

In a departure from the bulk of Bach's Leipzig cantatas, this opens with a soprano solo instead of a choral movement. The orchestral ritornello is quite Italian, with elements of a *concerto grosso* interplay between the winds and strings. Bach immediately juxtaposes this "modern" style with a look back to the *stile antico*, with a choral movement reflecting the tradition of Palestrina, whose music Bach regularly used in the Leipzig services. The use of the ancient

polyphonic style, coupled with a text based on Psalm 103, is an allegory for the old year as the new one approaches. As a *cantus firmus*, Bach uses the 1530 chorale tune *Nun lob, mein Seel, den Herren*.

Reflecting the text's depiction of a loving, gift-giving God, the middle three movements are quite intimate. Just as the chorale-prelude represented the old year with a psalm-derived text, the bass arioso is a prophecy of God's blessing from Jeremiah. As so often is the case, Bach uses the bass as the voice of the prophet. The tenor then sings a beautiful accompanied recitative extolling the characteristics of God as provider.

The alto-tenor duet that follows is scored for continuo only, in three non-repeating sections. It is a song of praise to God, thanking him for the blessings of the year. The cantata ends with the sixth verse of the Paul Eber chorale, "Helft mir Gotts Güte preisen". The first half is a song of praise, but the mood shifts in the third phrase, with the choir asking for a peaceful year marked by God's kindness.

Bach illustrates the character of Christus Victor in the tenor chorale with the oboe duet. The tenor sings the chorale tune in long notes against the oboes, who fight in counterpoint, reminiscent of a similar oboe duet representing chains in the alto aria *Von dem Stricken* from the *St John Passion*. The third appearance of the Advent chorale in BWV 36 is a straightforward homophonic setting of the final doxology from *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland*.

The text of the other tenor and bass arias, which existed in the first version of this sacred cantata, reflect the preparation for the Incarnation, the core meaning of Advent. The image of the church as bride and Jesus as bridegroom was very popular during this period of Lutheran poetry. In this tenor aria, the steps of the bridegroom are represented by the scalar movement of the continuo. The gracious bass aria, in which the church's preparation becomes the individual's preparation, revisits the quick triplets of the violin part from the opening movement. Bach uses a verse from Nicolai's hymn *Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern* in this cantata, again placing it squarely in Advent. This chorale verse, full of music and dance imagery, features a particularly buoyant bass part.

**BWV 64: Sehet, welch eine Liebe hat uns der Vater erzeiget**— Like BWV 133, this cantata was composed for the third day of Christmas, but this time for 1723, Bach's first *Jahrgang*, and his first Christmas season in Leipzig. Two days previously, the Thomanerchor had sung BWV 63, *Christen, äztet diesen Tag*, which famously features four trumpets rather than the standard three. Two cantatas could hardly be more different: where BWV 63 was exuberantly festive, BWV 64 is more introspective. This cantata reflects on the nature of God's love implicit in the Incarnation, and calls the faithful believer to leave behind the meaningless treasures of the world in favour of a higher treasure.

Such introspection is evident from the outset of the opening chorus. As we saw in BWV28, Bach uses the Renaissance-based *stile antico* rather than the brilliant *stile concertato* to set the text from John's first epistle. There are two ideas that Bach explores musically: "behold", which returns almost as an imploring challenge for the listener; and the running melisma of "has shown". The main theme reflects the archaic nature of the form, sounding almost modal.

In this motet style, the instruments double the voice (as they would have done in Renaissance polyphony) rather than providing an independent accompaniment. The archaic setting of this chorus is a wonderful counterpart to the Gospel reading for the day from the opening of John's Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word." Bach chooses an ancient form to represent the connection between the Old and New Testaments implicit in John 1.

The librettist for BWV 64 and BWV 40 are unknown, but it is possible that the libretti were penned by the same author, given the extensive use of chorales in both cantatas. Each cantata features three chorales, though in neither case is the opening chorus based on a chorale tune. In BWV 64, the chorales frame the theological progression from a meditation on God's love to the need for the believer to leave behind things of the world. This progression is echoed in the recitatives as well, with first the alto and then the bass contrasting the transient things of the world with the everlasting love of God.

The soprano aria articulates this dichotomy beautifully. Accompanied by strings, this aria is set in the form of a gavotte, a classically proportioned French dance that has pastoral associations appropriate to the Christmas season. In this text, the soprano likens the world's treasures to smoke that fades away, represented here by the violin arabesques. This aria is similar in form to the soprano aria from BWV 133: it, too, is a *da capo* aria in which the B section (at least for a time) uses the *bassetto* technique. Through the use of long notes on the words "lasts forever", Bach contrasts the cheap temporal delights with everlasting treasure.

The alto pronounces that they will ask nothing of the world, sure in the inheritance of heaven. Bach uses the spare instrumentation of a single oboe d'amore—which often represents God's love—and basso continuo to craft a delicate lace of counterpoint. Textually, Bach juxtaposes the *nicht, nicht*—"nothing, nothing" of the A sections with the *alles, alles*—"all, all" of the contrasting B section, as the believer turns from the world toward heaven.

The final chorale is the last verse of *Jesu, meine Freude*, the hymn that Bach set in its entirety as one of his funeral motets. On the face of it, this is an odd choice for the festive Christmas season, but for the Lutheran of the 18th century, death and life were theologically inseparable.

**BWV 40: Dazu ist erschienen der Sohn Gottes** — Bach began his work in Leipzig in the spring of 1723, and it is clear from the extraordinary level of the music during his first Christmas season that he wished to make a good impression on the congregants of St Thomas and St Nicholas. From this vantage point, the Bach lover is continually amazed that the town fathers seemed to have had no idea of their great good fortune, even in the face of the remarkable music that Bach composed for Christmas 1723: BWV 61 on 28 November, the *Magnificat* and BWV 63 on Christmas Day, BWV 40 on 26 December and BWV 64 on 27 December.

Sandwiched in between the festive BWV 63 and the reflective BWV 64, BWV 40 shares elements with both. Like *Christen, äztet diesen Tag*, BWV 63, this cantata is ultimately one of rejoicing. But like *Sehet, Welch eine Liebe hat uns der Vater erzeiget*, BWV 64, BWV 40 reflects on the meaning of the Incarnation for the believer. Specifically, this

cantata celebrates the trampling of Satan through the birth of Jesus—and just as death was never far from life in BWV 64, in this cantata, Satan is never far from the believer, hoping to snatch back his salvation.

The opening chorus shuttles seamlessly between these two ideas. The use of horns announces the appearance of the Son of God in an echo of royal pomp and ceremony. Even the opening choral motto is annunciatory and regal, but this is quickly contrasted by one of the great Bach tongue-twisters, *dass er die Werke des Teufels zerstöre*. Rather than giving us confidence that Satan is destroyed, Bach gives the impression that Satan is still hammering at the gate, even though the victory has been won. This is only reinforced in the central fugue, in which the confident, beautiful fugal exposition is marred by the hammering of Satan outside the fortress. The chorus finishes with a repeat of the A section.

The tenor recitative reflects on the miracle of the Incarnation, that the king becomes a servant. The following chorale declares that God is with us in our need. In a return to the cantata's main theme of the vanquishing of Satan, the bass aria explores the idea from Genesis that man (in this case Jesus) crushes the serpent under his foot. Bach uses a form from opera of the period known as a "rage aria" (an excellent example of which is "Why do the nations so furiously rage" from Handel's *Messiah*) to depict the enmity between God and Satan. The harshness of the heavy theme represents the stamping out of the serpent.

In the second *recit-choral-aria* section, Bach again explores the power of God over the powers of darkness. The alto recitative extrapolates on the idea of the serpent, declaring that the Savior's arrival removes all of its poison. The congregational hymn acclaims that the serpent is truly crushed. This triumph is asserted again in the tenor aria, one of the most vocally challenging ever composed by Bach. The soloist is accompanied by pairs of oboes and horns, in a *gigue*-like song of rejoicing over God's triumph. The threat of Satan remains, however, particularly in the middle section, where Bach depicts the rage and fury of Hell. But the *da capo* form asserts God's final victory.

The final chorale is the fourth verse of *Freuet euch, ihr Christen alle*, a particularly beautiful 1646 melody by Christian Keymann. Carrying on from the image in the tenor aria of God taking care of His chicks, from the story of St Stephen's martyrdom (26 December is St Stephen's Day), the congregational hymn asks for God's blessing for a new year.