

BACH 766 - BWV 225-230 - J.S. BACH: The Six MOTETS

All of Bach's Six Motets were written between 1723 and 1727 for St Thomas' Church, Leipzig, where Bach was appointed as Director of Music in 1723. These were occasional compositions for special occasions; four of the six were written for funeral services of prominent Leipzig citizens. 'Der Geist hilft' BWV 226 might have induced mixed feelings for Bach as it was commissioned for the Funeral of Johann Ernesti, Rector of Bach's Thomas Schule, who had let things slide almost to a point of decrepitude - though his death subsequently prompted a thorough upgrading of the school building. Performance took place in St Paul's University Church, 20th October 1729. Likewise 'Jesu Meine Freude' BWV 227, the longest, most musically complex and the earliest of the six, was written in 1723 for the Funeral of Johanna Maria Käsin, the wife of Leipzig's Postmaster.

BWV 225 - Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied

1. Chor: *Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied! Die Gemeine der Heiligen sollen ihn loben, Israel freue sich des, der ihn gemacht hat. Die Kinder Zion sei'n fröhlich über ihrem Könige. Sie sollen loben seinen Namen im Reihen, mit Pauken und Harfen sollen sie ihm spielen. (Psalm 149:1-3)*

1. Chorus: Sing to the Lord a new song! The congregation of the Saints shall praise Him, Israel rejoices in Him, who has created it. Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King. Let them praise His name in dances, with drums and harps let them play to Him.

2. Aria (Chor I): *Gott, nimm dich ferner unser an! Denn ohne dich ist nichts getan mit allen unsern Sachen. Drum sei du unser Schirm und Licht, und trüget uns unsre Hoffnung nicht, so wirst du's ferner machen. Wohl dem, der sich nur steif und fest auf dich und deine Huld verläßt!*

2. Aria (Chorus I): God, take us to Thyself from now on! For without Thee we can accomplish nothing with all of our belongings. Therefore be our protection and light, and if our hope does not deceive us, Thou wilt bring it to pass in the future. Happy is the person who strictly and tightly abandons himself to Thee and Thy mercy!

Choral (Chor II): *Wie sich ein Vat'r erbarmet Üb'r seine junge Kindlein klein: So tut der Herr uns Armen, So wir ihn kindlich fürchten rein. Er kennt das arme Gemächte, Gott weiß, wir sind nur Staub. Gleichwie das Gras vom Rechen, Ein Blum und fallendes Laub, Der Wind nur drüber wehet, So ist es nimmer da: Also der Mensch vergehet, Sein End, das ist ihm nah.*

Chorale (Chorus II): As a father has mercy upon his young children: so the Lord does with us poor ones, when we fear Him with pure and childlike hearts. He knows His poor creatures, God knows we are but dust. Just as the grass that is mowed, a flower or a falling leaf, the wind only blows over it, and it is no longer there; So also man passes away, his end is near to him.

3. Chor: *Lobet den Herrn in seinen Taten, lobet ihn in seiner großen Herrlichkeit. Alles was Odem hat, lobe den Herrn, Halleluja! (Psalm 150:2, 6)*

3. Chorus: Praise the Lord in His works, praise Him in His Great Glory. Everything that has breath, praise the Lord, Hallelujah!

BWV 226 - Der Geist hilft unsrer Schwachheit auf

1. Chor; *Der Geist hilft unsrer Schwachheit auf. Denn wir wissen nicht, was wir beten sollen, wie sich's gebühret; sondern der Geist selbst vertritt uns aufs beste mit unaussprechlichem Seufzen. Der aber die Herzen forschet, der weiß, was des Geistes Sinn sei, denn er vertritt die Heiligen nach dem, das Gott gefällt. (Romans 8:26-27)*

1. Chorus: The Spirit sustains us our weakness. For we do not know for what we should pray, what is proper; but the Spirit itself intercedes for us in the best way with unutterable sighs. He, however, who examines hearts, He knows what the Spirit's intention is, since it intercedes for the Saints according to that which pleases God.

2. Choral: *Du heilige Brunst, süßer Trost, nun hilft uns fröhlich und getrost in dein'm Dienst beständig bleiben, die Trübsal uns nicht abtreiben! O Herr, durch dein Kraft uns bereit und stärk des Fleisches Blödigkeit, daß wir hier ritterlich ringen, durch Tod und Leben zu dir dringen. Halleluja, halleluja!*

2. Chorale: Thou Holy Fire, sweet comfort, now help us joyfully and confidently to remain constantly in Thy service, although trouble is not driven away from us! O Lord, through Thy strength prepare us and sharpen the dullness of the flesh, so that we might battle here nobly, pressing to Thee through death and life. Hallelujah, hallelujah!

BWV 227 - Jesu, meine Freude (see Inside Back Cover for further notes and diagram)

1. 4st Choral: *Jesu, meine Freude, meines Herzens Weide, Jesu, meine Zier! Ach wie lang, ach lange, ist dem Herzen bange und verlangt nach dir! Gottes Lamm, mein Bräutigam, außer dir soll mir auf Erden nichts sonst Liebbers werden. (Jesu, meine Freude, verse 1)*

1. 4pt Chorale: Jesus, my joy, my heart's pasture, Jesus, my treasure! Ah, how long, ah long has my heart suffered and longed for Thee! God's lamb, my bridegroom, besides Thee on Earth nothing shall be dearer to me.

2. 3st Motet: *Es ist nun nichts Verdammliches an denen, die in Christo Jesu sind, die nicht nach dem Fleische wandeln, sondern nach dem Geist. (Romans 8:1)*

2. 3pt Motet: Now there is nothing damnable in those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk after the way of the flesh, but after the way of the Spirit.

3. 5st Choral: *Unter deinen Schirmen Bin ich für den Stürmen Aller Feinde frei. Laß den Satan wüthen, Laß den Feind erbittern, Mir steht Jesus bei. Ob es itzt gleich kracht und blitzt, Ob gleich Sünd und Hölle schrecken, Jesus will mich decken. ("Jesu, meine Freude," verse 2)*

3. 5pt Chorale: Under Thy protection I am safe from the storms of all enemies. Let Satan rage, let the enemy fume, Jesus stands with me. Whether now it thunders and flashes, whether sin and Hell terrify, Jesus will protect me.

4. 3st Motet: *Dem das Gesetz des Geistes, der da lebendig machet in Christo Jesu, hat mich frei gemacht von dem Gesetz der Sünde und des Todes. (Romans 8:2)*

4. 3pt Motet: For the Law of the Spirit, which gives life in Christ Jesus, has made me free from the Law of sin and death.

5. 5st Choral: *Trotz dem alten Drachen, trotz des Todes Rachen, trotz der Furcht dazu! Tobe, Welt, und springe; ich steh hier und singe in gar sicherer Ruh! Gottes Macht hält mich in acht; Erd und Abgrund muß verstummen, ob sie noch so brummen. ("Jesu, meine Freude," verse 3)*

5. 5pt Chorale: Defiance to the old dragon, defiance to the vengeance of death, defiance to fear as well! Rage, world, and attack; I stand here and sing in entirely secure peace! God's strength holds me in watch; earth and abyss must fall silent, however much they might rumble.

6. 5st Fuga: *Ihr aber seid nicht fleischlich, sondern geistlich, so anders Gottes Geist in euch wohnet. Wer aber Christi Geist nicht hat, der ist nicht sein. (Romans 8:9)*

6. 5pt Fugue: You, however, are not of the flesh, but rather of the Spirit, since the Spirit of God lives otherwise in you. Anyone, however, who does not have Christ's Spirit, is not His.

7. 4st Choral: *Weg mit allen Schätzen, du bist mein Ergötzen, Jesu, meine Lust! Weg, ihr eitlen Ehren, ich mag euch nicht hören, bleibt mir unbewußt! Elend, Not, Kreuz, Schmach und Tod soll mich, ob ich viel muß leiden, nicht von Jesu scheiden. ("Jesu, meine Freude," verse 5)*

7. 4pt Chorale: Away with all treasures, Thou art my delight, Jesus, my joy! Away, you vain honours, I do not wish to hear you, remain unknown to me! Misery, want, torture, shame and death shall, although I must suffer much, never part me from Jesus.

8. 3st Motet: *So aber Christus in euch ist, so ist der Leib zwar tot um der Sünde willen; der Geist aber ist das Leben um der Gerechtigkeit willen. (Romans 8:10)*

8. 3pt Motet: However if Christ is in you, then the body is dead indeed for the sake of sin; but the Spirit is life for the sake of righteousness.

9. 4st Choral: *Gute Nacht, o Wesen, Das die Welt erlesen! Mir gefällt du nicht. Gute Nacht, ihr Sünden, Bleibet weit dahinten, Kommt nicht mehr ans Licht! Gute Nacht, du Stolz und Pracht! Dir sei ganz, du Lasterleben, Gute Nacht gegeben! ("Jesu, meine Freude," verse 6)*

9. 4pt Chorale: Good night, existence that cherishes the World! You do not please me. Good night, sins, stay far away, never again come to light! Good night, pride and glory! To you utterly, life of corruption, be good night given!

10. 5st Motet: *So nun der Geist des, der Jesum von den Toten auferwecket hat, in euch wohnet, so wird auch derselbige, der Christum von den Toten auferwecket hat, eure sterblichen Leiber lebendig machen, um des willen, daß sein Geist in euch wohnet. (Romans 8:11)*

10. 5pt Motet: Therefore now since the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, that same who raised Christ from the dead will make your mortal bodies living, for the sake of His Spirit that dwells in you.

11. 4st Choral: *Weicht, ihr Trauergeister, denn mein Freudenmeister, Jesus, tritt herein. Denen, die Gott lieben, muß auch ihr Betrüben lauter Zucker sein. Duld' ich schon hier Spott und Hohn, dennoch bleibst du auch im Leide, Jesu, meine Freude. ("Jesu, meine Freude," verse 7)*

11. 4pt Chorale: Hence, you Spirits of sadness, for my Master of joy, Jesus, comes here. For those who love God, even their troubles must be pure sweetness. Though I endure mockery and shame here already, nevertheless you stay with me even in sorrow, Jesus, my joy.

BWV 228 - Fürchte dich nicht

1. Chor: *Fürchte dich nicht, ich bin bei dir; weiche nicht, denn ich bin dein Gott; ich stärke dich, ich helfe dir auch, ich erhalte dich durch die rechte Hand meiner Gerechtigkeit. (Isaiah 41:10)*

1. Chorus: Do not fear, I am with you; do not recoil, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, and help you as well, I sustain you with the right hand of my righteousness.

2. Chor: *(interspersed with Chorale below) Fürchte dich nicht, denn ich habe dich erlöset; ich habe dich bei deinem Namen gerufen, du bist mein. (Isaiah 43:1) Fürchte dich nicht, du bist mein.*

2. Chorus: *(interspersed with Chorale below) Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name, you are Mine. Fear not, you are Mine.*

Chorale: *Herr, mein Hirt, Brunn aller Freuden! Du bist mein, ich bin dein, niemand kann uns scheiden. Ich bin dein, weil du dein Leben und dein Blut, mir zu gut, in den Tod gegeben. Du bist mein, weil ich dich fasse und dich nicht, o mein Licht, aus dem Herzen lasse! Laß mich, laß mich hingelangen, wo du mich und ich dich lieblich werd umfassen.*

Chorale: Lord, my Shepherd, fount of all joy! Thou art mine, I am Thine, no one can part us. I am Thine, since Thy life and Thy blood, for my sake, Thou hast given to death. Thou art mine, since I seize Thee and do not, O my light, let The out of my heart! Let me, let me arrive there, where Thou and I will lovingly embrace each other.

BWV 229 - Komm, Jesu, komm!

1. Choral: *Komm, Jesu, komm, mein Leib ist müde, die Kraft verschwindt je mehr und mehr, ich sehne mich nach deinem Frieden; der saure Weg wird mir zu schwer! Komm, komm, ich will mich dir ergeben, du bist der rechte Weg, die Wahrheit und das Leben.*

1. Chorus: Come, Jesus, come, my body is weary, my strength wanes more and more, I long for Thy peace; the bitter path becomes too difficult for me! Come, come, I will yield myself to Thee, Thou art the true path, truth and life.

2. Arie: *Drum schließ ich mich in deine Hände und sage, Welt, zu guter Nacht! Eilt gleich mein Lebenslauf zu Ende, ist doch der Geist wohl angebracht. Er soll bei seinem Schöpfer schweben, weil Jesus ist und bleibt der wahre Weg zum Leben.*

2. Aria: Therefore I enclose myself in Thy Hands and say, World, Goodnight! Even though my lifetime rushes to its end, my spirit is nevertheless prepared. It shall float with its Saviour, since Jesus is and remains the true path to life.

BWV 230 - Lobet den Herrn

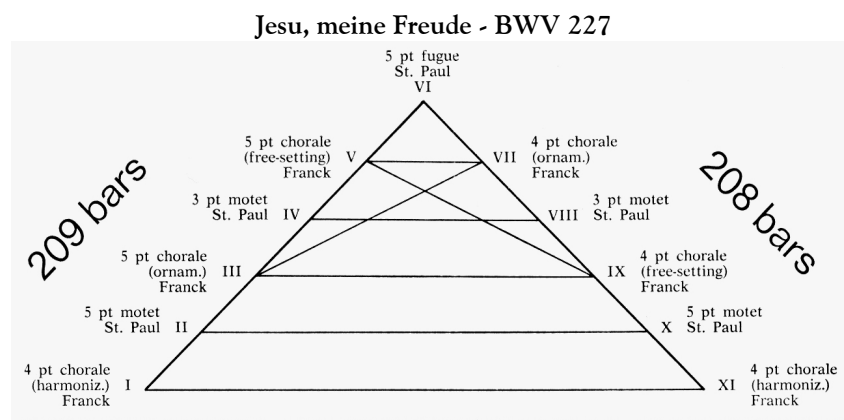
1. Chor: *Lobet den Herrn, alle Heiden, und preiset ihn, alle Völker! Denn seine Gnade und Wahrheit waltet über uns in Ewigkeit. Alleluja! (Psalm 117)*

1. Chorus: Praise the Lord, all heathens, and praise Him, all peoples! For His grace and truth rules over us for eternity.

The Motet is the oldest compositional genre in European polyphonic art music. Its history can be traced back without interruption from its beginning in the 12th century and it was always regarded as representative of the highest musical artistry. Prior to Bach, examples may be found in the in the works of Heinrich Schütz who wrote many Motets in a series of publications called *Symphoniae Sacrae*, some in Latin and some in German. Indeed, Bach's Motets, with their short-inter-connected sections, owe much to Buxtehude. By the time of Bach however, the Motet was becoming a little old fashioned, being regarded rather in the style of Plainsong, though it was nonetheless considered appropriate for funeral services. Bach as usual elevated the form with his usual skill into masterpieces by any standard. These are works of great depth and place immense demands on vocal virtuosity, especially in their contrapuntal complexity.

Jesu, meine Freude - BWV 227 is the longest and most structured of Bach's Motets. It is scored for 5-part choir. Bach's plan of this Motet required that the various sections should be closely linked and arranged symmetrically. Through the eleven sections of this Motet, Bach alternates stanzas of Johann Franck's devout but sugary Hymn of 1653 with St. Paul's tersely argued contrast between Earthly death and Heavenly Eternity through Christ.

At the apex of the work Bach, for whom music and theology were virtually inseparable, sets the central text, "But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit" as a five-voiced fugue - an established expression of balanced order which proves serenely expressive in his hands. Each vocal line, while making perfect independent sense, contains fertile harmonic implications which gives tremendous internal energy to the whole. There could be no more perfect musical parallel for the theological theme, namely that out of human experience, the joys and sufferings of the flesh, there may flow a lyrical affirmation of the spirit.



Cover photos: 11th century Cathedral now the Parish Church of St. Mary the Virgin, in the walled former Venetian town of Rab, on the Island of Rab, Croatia, by Lawrence Meacock