



*The Canberra Bach Ensemble will return
for its next performance in late August. . .*

Cantatas in the Cathedral



*St Christopher's Cathedral
26 June 1999*

introductory remarks

It is with great pleasure that we present tonight's inaugural performance of the Canberra Bach Ensemble, a recently established small scale group of choristers and instrumentalists who have a strong interest and devotion to the music of J.S. Bach. This concert is the first of a series that will be presented over the remainder of this year in preparation for the 250th anniversary of Bach's death next year. The ensemble is primarily dedicated to performing Bach's sacred repertory, namely cantatas, motets, masses and organ works, as well as compatible works by other composers.

The reason for choosing Bach's music to be the central performance repertory is because his compositional output demonstrates a sophisticated web of musical and liturgical relationships which is endlessly fascinating on many levels. It is a most satisfying experience to explore and identify the relationships between hundreds of sacred works across various genre, revealing the depth, breadth and intensity of Bach's creative craft. The goal of the Canberra Bach Ensemble is to put together performances which highlight various liturgical and musical themes, so that one can reflect on the transcendental ideas which Bach deals with in his music, whether it be through singing, playing or listening.

For our first concert, it seems appropriate that we are performing two of Bach's earliest cantatas, *Aus der Tiefe rufe ich, Herr, zu dir* BWV 131 and *Christ lag in Todes Banden* BWV 4. It is extraordinary to think that these cantatas were written by a man in his early twenties (about the same age as many of the singers and players tonight I might add) - with a sophistication inherent in these works anticipating what was to come later in his musical career. It should also be noted that the organ pieces chosen, namely the simple four-part chorales and chorale preludes, are closely related to their respective cantatas.

The Canberra Bach Ensemble intends to become an established feature of the Canberra music scene, filling a long neglected gap and providing quality performances of Bach's works in the spirit of recent developments in period performance practice. The performances promise to unlock the most enlightening aspects of the aesthetic, intellectual and spiritual qualities of Bach's finest gems.

Andrew Koll (Director)

program

Organ Chorale: *Herr Jesu Christ, du höchstes Gut* BWV 113/8

CANTATA: AUS DER TIEFE RUF E ICH, HERR, ZU DIR BWV 131

1. Sinfonia and Chorus "Aus der Tiefe rufe ich, Herr, zu dir"
2. Aria (Bass) with Chorale (Soprano) "So du willst, Herr, Sünde zurechnen"
[Chorale tune: *Herr Jesu Christ, du höchstes Gut*]
3. Chorus "Ich harre des Herrn"
4. Aria (Tenor) with Chorale (Alto) "Meine Seele wartet auf den Herrn"
[Chorale tune: *Herr Jesu Christ, du höchstes Gut*]
5. Chorus "Israel, hoffe auf den Herrn"

Organ Chorale: *Herr Jesu Christ, du höchstes Gut* BWV 113/8

interval

Organ Chorale: *Christ lag in Todes Banden* BWV 158/4 and BWV 278

CANTATA: CHRIST LAG IN TODES BANDEN BWV 4

1. Sinfonia
2. Chorus "Christ lag in Todes Banden"
3. Duet (Soprano, Alto) "Den Tod niemand zwingen kunnt"
4. Chorale (Tenor) "Jesus Christus, Gottes Sohn"
5. Chorus "Es war ein wunderlicher Krieg"

Organ Chorale Prelude: *Fantasia super Christ lag in Todes Banden*
[choralis in alto] BWV 695

6. Aria (Bass) "Hie ist das rechte Osterlamm"
7. Duet (Soprano, Tenor) "So feiern wir das hohe fest"
8. Chorale "Wir essen und leben wohl"

Organ Chorale Prelude: *Christ lag in Todes Banden* BWV 625

Mühlhausen cantatas

In their historical context, Bach's works can be seen as the development and perfection of a variety of musical forms: chorale, fugue, and passion, to name but three. But, more than any other form, it was the cantata into which Bach was to pour so much of his creative energies throughout his entire musical career.

What is so astonishing about the two cantatas presented this evening is the degree of mastery demonstrated in some of Bach's first experiments in the form. Both works were composed during his time in Mühlhausen (1707–8) and they share a number of features in common with other cantatas he wrote while he was there: unusual scoring (two viola parts), notational peculiarities, an overall structure which is strongly symmetrical, and 'choruses' in the style of the (Latin) motets of the period. Almost all of the Mühlhausen cantatas—including those performed tonight—have an opening sinfonia; in the case of *Aus der Tiefe* this has been merged with the opening chorus. Absent are the operatic additions (recitatives and *da capo* arias) that would become crucial elements of the Weimar and Leipzig cantatas, not to mention the passions! Rather, in these earlier cantatas Bach showed his indebtedness to his (musical) predecessors, including Dietrich Buxtehude (whom Bach visited in 1705), whose chorale cantatas would have left a strong impression; indeed, for Bach they were a point of departure.

The text of *Aus der Tiefe* is taken from Psalm 130 and two verses (printed below in italics) of Bartholomäus Ringwaldt's hymn 'Herr Jesu Christ, du höchstes Gut'. Both psalm and hymn were traditionally associated with penitential services, and it was suggested by Charles Terry (although there is no definitive proof) that the cantata was commissioned for a memorial service after the fire which burned through large areas of Mühlhausen in June 1707.

Of the five movements, the first, middle, and last are choruses, each of which bears some structural resemblance to the organ prelude and fugue; indeed, Bach's inexperience with the form shows through from time to time, as both vocal and instrumental parts contain fragments that are idiomatic for the organ. Nonetheless, we can see that at this early stage of his career Bach had already achieved considerable facility in the writing of fugues.

The second and fourth movements are duets; in each, a soloist sings a free setting of the psalm text, while one of the choir parts sings a strict setting of the hymn. The duets serve a number of purposes: as 'glue' to bind the cantata together and to provide a musical contrast to the choruses, and as an opportunity for the listener to meditate on the psalm and consider their personal response. As such, they function in a similar way to the corresponding movements of Bach's motets *Jesu, meine Freude* and *Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied*.

As part of the job application for the organist position at Mühlhausen, Bach was required to provide a vocal composition. Christoph Wolff has suggested that this work was probably *Christ lag in Todes Banden*.

Bach took all seven verses of Martin Luther's easter hymn, together with Luther's own tune (itself based on the medieval Easter carol *Christ ist erstanden*), and used them as the basis for a work that was to be 'the strictest chorale cantata Bach ever wrote' (John Eliot Gardiner). The chorale tune functions as a powerful unifying force; it is hinted at in the opening sinfonia, and can be heard clearly in each verse, as a *cantus firmus* that penetrates through dense figuration in the other voices (sopranos in verse one and altos in verse four), as a duet (verses two and six), as a solo (verses three and five) or as a plain chorale setting (verse seven). The musical settings are always sympathetic to the text, and each 'hallelujah' is interpreted according to the mood of the verse. The text itself is rich in imagery, linking the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ with the details of the first passover meal (detailed in Exodus 11–12), in which an unblemished lamb was roasted in fire, and its blood spread on the doorposts as a sign to God's 'destroyer' that he should not harm anyone inside. There is also a reference to the eating of unleavened bread at this time; 'the old leaven' refers to 1 Corinthians 5 : 6–8, in which Paul calls on his readers to 'celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth' (NASB).

As was the custom of the time, Bach revisited his compositions and made changes to suit particular performance conditions; the availability of performers was often a consideration. For this evening's performance of *Christ lag in Todes Banden* we have adopted the modifications Bach made for the 1724 Leipzig performance: the addition of a *cornett* (not to be confused with the modern *cornet*!) and trombones to double the vocal parts in verses one, two, and seven. We do not even have the original setting of verse seven: the chorale setting you will hear dates from the Leipzig revision and is typical of the way Bach ended his later cantatas. (It has been speculated that the final verse was instead sung to the music of the first, emphasizing the symmetry even further.) Throughout the concert you will hear a number of additional organ pieces. These have been chosen to highlight the chorale tunes Bach used as the basis for the cantatas.

Further reading and listening

John Butt (editor), *The Cambridge companion to Bach*, Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Alfred Dürr, *Die Kantaten von Johann Sebastian Bach*, sixth edition, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag and Bärenreiter Verlag, 1995. (In German)

Christoph Wolff (editor), *The world of the Bach cantatas: early sacred cantatas*, Norton, 1997.

Recordings by Sir John Eliot Gardiner, Philippe Herreweghe, Ton Koopman, Andrew Parrott, Joshua Rifkin, and the accompanying booklets.

Aus der Tiefe rufe ich, Herr, zu dir, BWV 131

Aus der Tiefe rufe ich, Herr, zu dir.
Herr, höre meine Stimme,
laß deine Ohren merken auf
die Stimme meines Flehens!

So du willst, Herr, Sünde zurechnen,
Herr, wer wird bestehen?
Denn bei dir ist die Vergebung,
daß man dich fürchte.

*Erbarm dich mein in solcher Last,
nimm sie aus meinem Herzen,
dieweil du sie gebüßet hast
am Holz mit Todesschmerzen,
auf daß ich nicht mit großem Weh
in meinen Sünden untergeh,
noch ewiglich verzage.*

Ich harre des Herrn,
meine Seele harret,
und ich hoffe auf sein Wort.

Meine Seele wartet auf den Herrn
von einer Morgenwache bis zu der andern.

*Und weil ich denn in meinem Sinn,
wie ich zuvor geklaget,
auch ein betrübter Sünder bin,
den sein Gewissen naget,
und wollte gern im Blute dein
von Sünden abgewaschen sein
wie David und Manasse.*

Israel hoffe auf den Herrn;
denn bei dem Herrn ist die Gnade
und viel Erlösung bei ihm.
Und er wird Israel erlösen
aus allen seinen Sünden.

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.
Lord, hear my voice,
let your ears attend to
my pleading voice.

If you, O Lord, will count sins,
Lord, who will stand?
But forgiveness is with you,
that you may be feared.

*Take pity on my burden,
remove it from my heart,
for you have atoned for it
on the wood with the pain of death,
so that I might not drown in
my sins in great despair,
nor eternally lose heart.*

I wait for the Lord,
my soul waits,
and I hope in his word.

My soul waits for the Lord
from one morning watch to the next.

*And since in my spirit,
as I have long lamented,
I am a distressed sinner,
gnawed by his conscience,
and would gladly be washed
in your blood from sins,
like David and Manasseh.*

O Israel, hope in the Lord;
for with the Lord there is loving kindness
and with him is abundant redemption.
And he will redeem Israel
from all his sins.

Christ lag in Todes Banden, BWV 4

Sinfonia

Versus 1: chorus

Christ lag in Todes Banden
für unsre Sünd gegeben,
er ist wieder erstanden
und hat uns bracht das Leben;
des wir sollen fröhlich sein,
Gott loben und ihm dankbar sein
und singen halleluja.
Halleluja.

Versus 2: duet (soprano, alto)

Den Tod niemand zwingen kunnt
bei allen Menschenkindern;
das macht alles unsre Sünd,
kein Unschuld war zu finden.
Davon kam der Tod so bald
und nahm über uns Gewalt,
hielt uns in seinem Reich gefangen.
Halleluja.

Christ lay in death's bonds
given for our sins,
he rose again
and brought us life;
so we should be joyful,
praise God and be thankful to him,
and sing hallelujah.
Hallelujah.

Death could no one –
of all humankind – overpower;
our sin was responsible,
no innocence could be found.
Thus death came quickly
and took power over us,
took us captive into its kingdom.
Hallelujah.

Christ lag in Todes Banden, BWV 4 continued...

Versus 3: solo (tenor)

Jesus Christus, Gottes Sohn,
an unser Statt ist kommen
und hat die Sünde weggetan,
damit dem Tod genommen
all sein Recht und sein Gewalt;
da bleibet nichts denn Tods Gestalt,
den Stachel hat er verloren.
Halleluja.

Versus 4: chorus

Es war ein wunderlicher Krieg,
da Tod und Leben rungen,
da Leben [da] behielt den Sieg,
es hat den Tod verschlungen.
Die Schrift hat verkündigt das,
wie ein Tod den andern fraß,
ein Spott aus dem Tod ist worden.
Halleluja.

Interlude: chorale prelude

Versus 5: solo (bass)

Hie ist das rechte Osterlamm,
davon Gott hat geboten,
das ist hoch an des Kreuzes Stamm
in heißer Lieb gebraten,
das Blut zeichnet unser Tür,
das hält der Glaub dem Tode für,
der Würger kann uns nicht mehr schaden.
Halleluja.

Versus 6: duet (soprano, tenor)

So feiern wir das hohe Fest
mit Herzensfreud und Wonne,
das uns der Herr erscheinen läßt.
Er ist selber die Sonne,
der durch seiner Gnaden Glanz
erleuchtet unsre Herzen ganz,
der Sünden Nacht ist verschwunden.
Halleluja.

Versus 7: chorale

Wir essen und leben wohl
in rechten Osterfladen,
der alte Sauerteig nicht soll
sein bei dem Wort der Gnaden,
Christus will die Koste sein
und speisen die Seel allein,
der Glaub will keins andern leben.
Halleluja.

Jesus Christ, God's Son,
came in our place
and did away with sin,
and thus took from death
all of its might and power;
there remains nothing but death's form;
it has lost its sting.
Hallelujah.

It was a wondrous war,
when death and life wrestled;
life came through victorious,
it engulfed death.
The scriptures had announced it:
as one death gobbled up the other,
death was made a mockery.
Hallelujah.

Here is the true passover lamb
that God has offered,
high on the cross's trunk,
roasted in burning love;
the blood marks our door;
faith holds it up against death;
the destroyer can no longer harm us.
Hallelujah.

So we celebrate the high feast
with joy and delight in our hearts,
that the Lord presented to us.
He himself is the sun,
who through his glorious grace
enlightens our hearts to the full;
the night of sins has disappeared.
Hallelujah.

We eat and live happily
on the true passover bread;
the old leaven shall have no place
among the word of grace;
Christ will be our food
and he alone will feed our soul;
faith can survive no other way.
Hallelujah.

biographies

Richard Anderson (bass soloist)

Richard began his musical training at Sydney's St. Andrew's Cathedral, singing treble and then bass in the cathedral choir. He then moved to Canberra and continued his studies at the Canberra School of Music. Since returning to Sydney in 1996, Richard has become a sought after participant in a variety of projects especially in Renaissance, Baroque and 20th century performances. He has appeared at the Barossa Festival and the Burwood Early Music Festival, and in concert and recordings with the Song Company, the Contemporary Singers and the Sydney Alpha Ensemble et al. Richard is currently engaged with Opera Australia and is the organist of St. John the Evangelist, Balmain.

Peter Campbell (tenor soloist)

Having graduated from ANU with degrees in economics, art history and musicology Peter is now completing a Ph.D in Australian music history at the University of Melbourne. He has sung in choirs since the age of eight and was treasurer of the Canberra Choral Society for thirteen years. He now sings with the early music group Ensemble Gombert, conducted by John O'Donnell, and has participated in several freelance recording projects and concerts.

Nicolas Chen (organ soloist)

Nicolas Chen, a 17 year-old student in his final year in Sydney Grammar School, has been learning pipe organ from Robert Wagner for six years, and last year received his diploma in his study (A Mus A.). This year he is taking a more relaxed year in music due to his studies but occasionally performs.

Andrew Koll (director)

Having completed his honours degree in musicology last year at the Canberra School of Music, Andrew is currently doing a masters in conducting at the Sydney Conservatorium with Henryk Pisarek and Mats Nilsson. Andrew recently concluded a successful three year association with the Canberra Community Orchestra, performing a wide range of works from the classical, nineteenth and twentieth century repertory, as well a number of new works by Neylon and Elizondo. Last year Andrew attended a masterclass on Bach's motets with Stuttgart conductor Frieder Bernius in Namur, Belgium and, not surprisingly, Andrew's main research area has been centred on Bach's music and the evolution of its performance over the last half century.

choristers and instrumentalists

choristers

Soprano
Lucie Alexander
Kate Atkinson
Helen Thomson

Tenor
Marco Agostini
Cameron Neylon
Richard Walker

Alto
Peter Campbell
Alison Cone
Jaki Kane
Kate Moore

Bass
David Cassat
Alex Rose
David Woodgate

instrumentalists

Violin
Frances Davies
Glen Hart
Valerie Jackson
David Le Guen
John Ma
Imogen Perley

Oboe
Ann Blackburn

Bassoon
Lisa Goldberg

Cornett
Angela Vivian Bolt

Viola
Craig McHugh
Ruth Riach
Jeremy Tatchell
Catherine Turnbull

Trombone
Felicity Boxall
Jack Machin
Tim Owner

'Cello
Rowena Higgs
Gillian Pratten

Keyboard continuo
Peter Young

Double Bass
Chris Gilbert

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