

BWV 124 Meinen Jesum laß ich nicht, Cantata for the First Sunday after Epiphany

1. Chorale

Meinen Jesum laß ich nicht,
Weil er sich für mich gegeben,
So erfordert meine Pflicht,
Klettenweis am ihm zu kleben.
Er ist meines Lebens Licht,
Meinen Jesum laß ich nicht.

2. Rezitativ T

Solange sich ein Tropfen Blut
In Herz und Adern reget,
Soll Jesus nur allein
Mein Leben und mein alles sein.
Mein Jesus, der an mir so große Dinge tut:
Ich kann ja nichts als meinen Leib und Leben
Ihm zum Geschenke geben.

3. Arie T

Und wenn der harte Todesschlage
Die Sinnen schwächt, die Glieder rühret,
Wenn der dem Fleisch verhaßte Tage
Nur Furcht und Schrecken mit sich führet,
Doch tröstet sich die Zuversicht:
Ich lasse meinen Jesum nicht.

4. Rezitativ B

Doch ach!
Welch schweres Ungemach
Empfindet noch allhier die Seele?
Wird nicht die hart gekränkte Brust
Zu einer Wüstenei und Marterhöhle
Bei Jesu schmerzlichstem Verlust?
Allein mein Geist sieht gläubig auf
Und an den Ort, wo Glaub und Hoffnung prangen,
Allwo ich nach vollbrachtem Lauf
Dich, Jesu, ewig soll umfängen.

5. Arie (Duett) SA

Entziehe dich eilends, mein Herze, der Welt,
Du findest im Himmel dein whares Vergnügen.
Wenn künftig dein Auge dein Heiland erblickt,
So wird erst dein sehnedes Herze erquickt,
So wird es in Jesu zufriedengestellt.

6. Choral

Jesum laß ich nicht von mir,
Geh ihm ewig an der Seiten;
Christus läßt mich für und für
Zu den Lebensbächlein leiten.
Selig, wer mit mir so spricht:
Meinen Jesum laß ich nicht.

1. Chorale

I will not let go of my Jesus.
Just as He has given Himself for me,
So my duty demands
that I cling to him like a vine.
He is the light of my life,
I will not let go of my Jesus.

2. Recitative T

So long as a drop of blood
stirs in heart and vein,
so shall Jesus alone
be my life and my everything.
My Jesus, who does such great things for me:
I can offer nothing other than my body and life
as a gift to Him.

3. Aria T

And when the harsh blow of death
weakens my senses and stirs my limbs,
when those days—so abhorred by the flesh
and carrying with them such fear and terror—
still this certainty comforts me:
I will not let go of my Jesus.

4. Recitative B

Yet alas!
What heavy hardship
does the soul still endure here?
Will not my sorely plagued breast
become a wilderness and pit of torture
with Jesus' most painful loss?
Yet my spirit looks up in faith
and to the place where faith and hope shine,
where I, after my completed course,
shall eternally embrace You, Jesus.

5. Aria (Duet) SA

Withdraw in haste, my heart, from the world,
in heaven you will find your true delight.
When one day your eye beholds your Savior,
then at last your longing heart shall be restored,
then it shall come to rest in Jesus.

6. Chorale

I will not let go of my Jesus,
I will walk with Him forever;
Christ guides me forever and ever
to the streams of life.
Blessed, whoever says with me:
I will not let go of my Jesus.

Chorale v 1

Chorale v 6

Conductor's (very brief) notes © 2014 Ellen Frye

Occasion: First Sunday after Epiphany

First performance: January 7, 1725

Chorale: text by Christian Keymann, melody by Andreas Hammerschmitt, first published in 1658; also used in three other cantatas (BWV 70, 154, and 157) plus the earliest version of the Saint Matthew Passion (BWV 244). See NBA II-5, p. 119

#1 Opening chorus. John Elliot Gardiner says of this movement:

The cantata's opening chorale fantasia is in E major in the style of a minuet.... Bach gives a prominent and highly virtuosic concertante role to an oboe d'amore. The way its rapid semiquaver figures seem to curl in on themselves suggests an attempt to convey what every country walker knows, the extraordinary snag-like persistence of burrs (the text tells of the Christian's duty to 'cling to Him like a burr') – that and the way the three lower voices hang on to a unison B for three bars on the word 'kleben' ('to cling').

#3 Aria for tenor, oboe d'amore, and continuo: Compare the main motif of this aria with the motif of the soprano aria in BWV 114 *Ach, lieben Christen, seid getrost*, a Trinity cantata first performed on November 9, 1724 (a couple of months prior to BWV 124).

BWV 124 #3, oboe d'amore



BWV 114 #2, flute



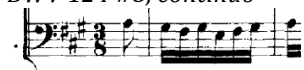
Again, Gardiner:

[Bach] unleashes a torrent of dramatic effects to portray the 'fear and terror' that accompanies 'the cruel stroke of death': a pulsating staccato bass line, a persistent four-note drumming in the upper strings, a strongly dotted rhythmic outline to the vocal part, and in total contrast, a wide-arching melody for the oboe d'amore, an avowal that, come what may, the believer 'shall not forsake my Jesus'.

I would also point to the wonderful turn Bach makes from the fear and terror of "the cruel stroke of death" to the relaxed parallel harmonies between tenor and oboe for the end of each repetition of the verse, "still this certainty comforts me: I will not let go of my Jesus."

#5 Duet for soprano, alto, and continuo: Compare the beginning of the main motif with the opening notes of the chorale *Von Himmel Hoch*.

BWV 124 #5, continuo



Von Himmel Hoch



Again, Gardiner:

[The] A major duet for soprano and alto with continuo is constructed as a gigue with a joyful abandon (all those leaps of a tenth in the continuo) that celebrates release from all things worldly ('Withdraw swiftly from the world, O heart').