

BWV 134 - "Ein Herz, das seinen Jesum lebend weiß" Cantata for the Third Day of Easter

1. Rezitativ T A

Ein Herz, das seinen Jesum lebend weiß,
Empfindet Jesu neue Güte
Und dichtet nur auf seines Heilands Preis.
Wie freuet sich ein gläubiges Gemüte.

2. Arie T

Auf, Gläubige, singet die lieblichen Lieder,
Euch scheint ein herrlich verneuetes Licht.
Der lebende Heiland gibt selige Zeiten,
Auf, Seelen, ihr müsset ein Opfer bereiten,
Bezahlet dem Höchsten mit Danken die Pflicht.

3. Rezitativ (Dialog) T A

Wohl dir, Gott hat an dich gedacht,
O Gott geweihtes Eigentum;
Der Heiland lebt und siegt mit Macht
Zu deinem Heil, zu seinem Ruhm
Muß hier der Satan furchtsam zittern
Und sich die Hölle selbst erschüttern.
Es stirbt der Heiland dir zugut
Und fährt vor dich zu der Höllen,
Sogar vergießet er sein kostbar Blut,
Daß du in seinem Blute siegst,
Denn dieses kann die Feinde fällen,
Und wenn der Streit dir an die Seele dringt,
Daß du alsdann nicht überwunden liegst.
- Der Liebe Kraft ist vor mich ein Panier
Zum Heldenmut, zur Stärke in den Streiten:
Mir Seigeskronen zu bereiten,
Nahmst du die Dornenkrone dir,
Mein Herr, mein Gott, mein auferstandnes Heil,
So hat kein Feind an mir zum Schaden teil. -
Die Feinde zwar sind nicht zu zählen.
- Gott schützt die ihm getreuen Seelen. -
Der letzte Feind ist Grab und Tod.
- Gott macht auch den zum Ende unsrer Not. -

1. Recitative T A

A heart that knows its Jesus is living,
feels new goodness from Jesus,
and speaks only praise of its Savior.
How a faithful spirit rejoices!

2. Aria T

Up, believers, sing delightful songs,
a renewed and glorious light shines upon you.
The living Savior brings blessed times.
Up, souls, you must prepare an offering,
to fulfill your duty to the Highest with thanks.

3. Recitative (Dialog) T A

(T) Happiness to you, God has remembered you,
Oh, you sanctuary dedicated to God.
The Savior lives and conquers with power
for your salvation, to your praise.
Now Satan must fearfully tremble
and hell itself quake.
The Savior died for your sake
and journeyed to hell for you,
even shed His precious blood,
so that you might triumph through His blood,
since this is what defeats the enemy;
when the battle presses on you and your soul,
that you would not lie defeated.
(A) The power of love is a banner before me
for heroic courage, for strength in the battle.
To prepare a crown of victory for me,
You put on the crown of thorns,
my Lord, my God, my resurrected Salvation,
so that no enemy can harm a piece of me.
(T) The enemies, however, are innumerable.
(A) God protects the souls faithful to Him.
(T) The ultimate enemy is the grave and death.
(A) God made even these to end our suffering.

4. Arie (Duett) A T

Wir danken und preisen dein brünstiges Lieben
 Und bringen ein Opfer der Lippen vor dich.
 Der Sieger erwecket die freudigen Lieder,
 Der Heiland erscheinet und tröstet uns wieder
 Und stärket die streitende Kirche durch sich.

5. Rezitativ T A

Doch würke selbst den Dank in unserm Munde,
 In dem er allzu irdisch ist;
 Ja schaffe, daß zu keiner Stunde
 Dich und dein Werk kein menschlich Herz
 vergißt;
 Ja, laß in dir das Labsal unsrer Brust
 Und aller Herzen Trost und Lust,
 Die unter deiner Gnade trauen,
 Vollkommen und unendlich sein.
 Es schließe deine Hand uns ein,
 Daß wir die Wirkung kräftig schauen,
 Was uns dein Tod und Sieg erwirbt
 Und daß man nun nach deinem Auferstehen
 Nicht stirbt, wenn man gleich zeitlich stirbt,
 Und wir dadurch zu deiner Herrlichkeit eingehen.
 - Was in uns ist, erhebt dich, großer Gott,
 Und preiset deine Huld und Treu;
 Dein Auferstehen macht sie wieder neu,
 Dein großer Sieg macht uns von Feinden los
 Und bringet uns zum Leben;
 Drum sei dir Preis und Dank gegeben. -

6. Chorus

Erschallet, ihr Himmel, erfreuet dich, Erde,
 Lobsinge dem Höchsten, du glaubende Schar.
 Es schauet und schmecket ein kedes Gemüte
 Des lebenden Heilands unendliche Güte,
 Er tröstet und stellet als Sieger sich dar.

4. Aria (Duet) A T

We are thankful and we praise your fervent love
 and bring an offering from our lips to You.
 The Victor awakens joyful songs,
 the Savior appears and comforts us again
 and strengthens the struggling Church.

5. Recitative T A

(T) Yet gratitude chokes us in our mouths—
 it is all too perishable;
 Yes, make it so that at no time
 You and your works may be forgotten by the
 human heart
 Yes, let the refreshment of our breasts
 and the comfort and delight of every heart,
 which are loyal to your grace,
 be complete and eternal.
 May your Hand enclose us,
 so that we behold your powerful works,
 which your death and victory has brought about,
 and now that, through your Resurrection,
 no one dies (even though one dies temporarily)
 and thereby we enter into Your glory.
 (A) Whatever is in us exalts You, great God,
 and praises your grace and faithfulness;
 your Resurrection renews them,
 your great victory frees us of enemies
 and brings us to life.
 Therefore let thanks and praise be given to You.

6. Chorus

Resound, you heavens, rejoice, earth,
 sing praise to the Highest, you faithful flock.
 Each and every being sees and tastes
 the eternal goodness of the living Savior
 who comforts and reveals Himself as Conqueror.

Composite translation

Conductor's Notes © 2012

BWV 134 *Ein hertz das seinem Jesus leben weiss*, a cantata for Easter Tuesday, was first performed in Leipzig on April 11, 1724. It is a parody of a secular cantata (BWV 134a *Die Zeit die Tag und Jahre mach*) composed for New Year's Day, 1719, in Cöthen.

When Bach became *capellmeister* for the principality of Anhalt-Cöthen (December 1717), he found himself amidst musicians of the highest caliber. The 16-member court ensemble counted 8 virtuosi; Prince Leopold himself was an able musician. The outpouring of Bach compositions from this period, including the Brandenburg Concertos, point to the creative fervor likely sparked by these associations.

BWV 134a is part of this instrumental zeal; one could even say that its three concerted movements have the feel of a concerto with virtuoso singers added for color and texture.

When Bach revived the cantata for Easter 1724, he was approaching the end of his first year in Leipzig—the year in which he composed 41 new cantatas and revived 22 sacred and four secular ones. That year also marked the first versions of the *Magnificat* and the *St. John Passion*. Very likely Bach’s primary focus that spring was the *St. John Passion*, performed on Good Friday. Easter Sunday he presented new versions of BWV 4 and BWV 31, and Easter Monday and Tuesday two secular parodies. The contrast between the theological intensity of the *St. John Passion* and BWV 134, barely changed from the original secular version, could not be greater.

However theologically light, BWV 134 seems to have been a cantata that Bach liked; he revived it in 1731 with new recitatives, and again in 1735 or so, with further revisions. It may have been that Bach liked to pull this one out to show off local or visiting vocal virtuosos. The arias, #2 (tenor solo) and #4 (alto-tenor duet), both have elaborate and technically challenging vocal lines. Even the #6 chorus is basically an alto-tenor duet with the outer voices joining in for rousing cadential passages and, in the B section, a wonderful *fughetta*.

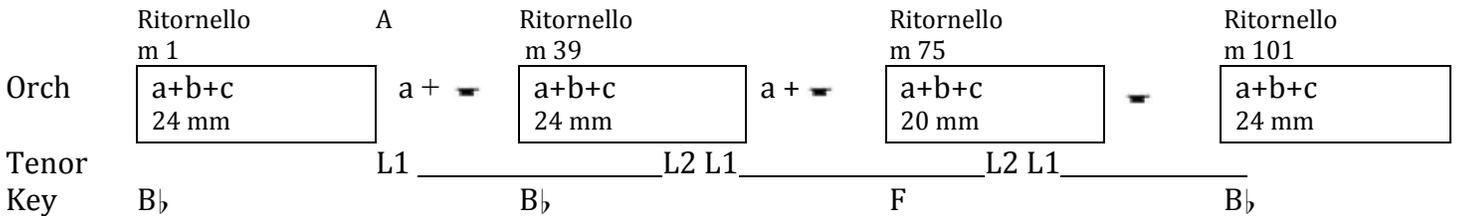
The late Craig Smith notes that the three concerted movements of this cantata are all very long with full *da capos* and that the “musical material, while fitting the mood of the words, doesn’t seem to be generated by them”; indeed, he points out, the *ritornellos* seem almost capable of standing alone. I think he put his finger on a key to this cantata.

Movement 2, tenor aria. Consider the second movement for tenor, oboe, and strings. The main motif in the vocal line is drawn from the ritornello, much as you would expect:



From this and other motifs, also as you would expect, Bach generates an endless and splendid vocal line. But the way the vocal line fits in with the instruments seems unusual.

Twenty-four measures long, the *ritornello* has 3 equal phrases of 8 bars each; between the opening (mm 1–24) and closing *ritornellos* (mm 101–124), two full or nearly full repetitions occur but without either of them coinciding with the phrasing of the tenor line. In the following diagram of the A section, a, b, and c represent the 3 eight-bar phrases of the *ritornello*; L1 and L2 are the textual lines of the tenor solo:



Notice how each time the *ritornello* reappears, the tenor is already singing and he continues singing long after the ritornello ends. In the B section of this aria, Bach treats the material quite differently. A second motif from the ritornello (introduced at m 22),



, is integrated completely among the upper strings and the tenor voice. When the *ritornello* appears (b and c phrases in C minor), it forms an interlude between the first iteration of the tenor text (mm 127–159) and the second (mm 157–204), much like the standard Baroque function of ritornellos.

