

## BWV 6 Bleib bei uns denn es will Abend werden

**1 Coro** (SATB, Oboe I/II, Oboe da caccia, Strings, Continuo)

Bleib bei uns,  
denn es will Abend werden,  
und der Tag hat sich geneiget.

**Aria** A Oboe da caccia, Continuo  
Hochgelobter Gottessohn,  
Laß es dir nicht sein entgegen,  
Dass wir itzt vor deinem Thron  
Eine Bitte niederlegen:

Bleib, ach bleibe unser Licht,  
Weil die Finsternis einbricht.

**Choral** S Violoncello piccolo, Continuo  
Ach bleib bei uns, Herr Jesu Christ,  
Weil es nun Abend worden ist,  
Dein göttlich Wort, das helle Licht,  
Laß ja bei uns auslöschen nicht.

In dieser letzt'n betrübten Zeit  
Verleih uns, Herr, Beständigkeit,  
Dass wir dein Wort und Sakrament  
Rein b'halten bis an unser End.

**Recitativo** B Continuo

Es hat die Dunkelheit  
An vielen Orten überhand genommen.  
Woher ist aber dieses kommen?  
Bloß daher, weil sowohl die Kleinen als die  
Großen Nicht in Gerechtigkeit Vor dir,  
o Gott, gewandelt Und wider ihre  
Christenpflicht gehandelt. Drum hast du  
auch den Leuchter umgestoßen.

**Aria** T Violino I/II, Viola, Continuo  
Jesu, lass uns auf dich sehen,  
Dass wir nicht  
Auf den Sündenwegen gehen.  
Laß das Licht  
Deines Worts uns heller scheinen  
Und dich jederzeit treu meinen.

**Choral** SATB, instruments *colla parte*  
Beweis dein Macht, Herr Jesu Christ,  
Der du Herr aller Herren bist;  
Beschirm dein arme Christenheit,  
Dass sie dich lob in Ewigkeit.

**Chorus**

Stay with us,  
for evening is coming  
and the day draws to an end.

**Aria**

Most praiseworthy Son of God,  
Let it not be against your will  
that we now before your throne  
lay down a request:  
Stay, ah stay as our light,  
for darkness is falling.

**Chorale**

Ah, stay with us, Lord Jesus Christ,  
for evening is coming.  
Your divine word, that bright light,  
Let it not be extinguished in us.

In these last, troubled times  
grant us, Lord, perserverance  
that we may kept your word & sacrament  
pure until our end comes.

**Recitative**

Darkness has spread  
over many places.  
How has this happened?  
Put simply: both the lowly and the great  
have not walked in righteousness  
before you, O God and have acted against  
their Christian duty. Therefore you also  
have removed their candlestick.

**Aria**

Jesus, let us look to you  
so that we may not  
walk along the way of sin.  
Let the light of your word  
shine more brightly upon us  
and may you at all times be truly (within  
us).\*

**Chorale**

Show your might, Lord Jesus Christ,  
you who are the Lord of lords;  
protect your poor Christian folk,  
so that they may praise you for ever.

*Luke 29:24* Abide  
with us: for it is  
toward evening,  
and the day is far  
spent. (KJV)

*John 1.5* The light  
shines in  
darkness...  
*John 1.9* ... the true  
light that  
enlightens  
everyone ...

v1 Philipp  
Melanchthon  
translation of  
*Vespera iam venit*,  
v2 Nikolaus  
Selnecker 1572

*Rev 2.5* ... repent ...  
else I will come  
unto thee and  
remove your  
candlesticks

*Psalm 119.105* Thy  
word is a lamp to  
my feet and a light  
to my path.

*V2 Erhalt uns, Herr,*  
*bei deinem Wort*  
Luther, 1542

\* See footnote next page.

### Conductor's Notes © 2013

**BWV 6 *Bleib bei uns, denn es will Abend werden*** was first performed on Easter Monday, April 2, 1725. Holy Week that year included performances of BWV 1 *Wie schon leuchtet der Morgenstern* for Palm Sunday, the second version of the *Saint John Passion* on Good Friday, and, on Easter Sunday, BWV 4 *Christ lag en Todesbanden* and the *Easter Oratorio*.

### Theological narrative

The gospel for the day is Luke 24.13–36, which picks up the resurrection narrative just after Jesus' tomb has been found empty. Two of the disciples are walking on the road to Emmaus when a stranger joins them. They beg him to spend the evening with them; at the meal, as the stranger breaks bread, they recognize him as Jesus, whereupon he vanishes.

Bach and his librettist focus on the key quotation of the journey to Emmaus story—"Stay with us, for evening is falling and the day is far spent"—and explore it as a metaphor for darkness and light in the world of faith. The chorus opens in a *sarabande* rhythm with the oboes sighing and the upper strings pulsing unison eighth notes. The chorus evokes the historical narrative—the actual darkness falling at the end of the day plus the grief and anxiety felt by the disciples—as well as the dark/light contrast that the 18<sup>th</sup> century Faithful experience as they struggle through a world of sin toward salvation. Bach emphasizes the plea, "Stay with us," with long drawn notes heard through the sighs and later piercing again and again the busy second and third subjects of the choral fugue of the B section.

The rest of the cantata expands on the theme of darkness into light. In the first aria, intertwining alto and English horn melodies over a pizzicato continuo create a personal plea from the individual believer who yearns for Jesus as light. The third movement recasts the Luke verse in the form of a 16<sup>th</sup> century chorale sung by the sopranos with a violoncello piccolo obbligato moving between bass and treble clef. The following bass recitative depicts the darkness on earth where sin often prevails.

The tenor aria opens with three motifs that I hear as elements of the journey of the Faithful on earth: angular duplets invoking the cross, cascades of joyful triplets, and a hesitant motif that suggests the uncertain plodding of pilgrims.



In the B section, the tenor picks up the joyful triplets on the "shine" of "Let your word shine on us," and then, just before the solo's end, an ascending *melisma* crosses the first violins' descent in triplets. Here surely Bach intended to show the Faithful aspiring toward the light as the divine joyfully descends to embrace them.\*



\* The melisma is on the word "meinen" within the phrase "und dich jederzeit treu meinen." Translations for this phrase are all over the place, from "may you at all times have faithful intentions" (Dürr) to "forever grant thy favor" (Ambrose). I think Whittaker's "Thee always truly signify" seems closest to Bach's purpose; that is, the light that shines brighter upon the Faithful should be at all times within as a signifier of God's love.

## Violincello piccolo

Bach called for the *violincello piccolo* in 8 cantatas composed between November 1724 and November 1725, 5 of them clustered during the 1726 Easter-to-Pentecost season. The instrument, smaller than a cello and larger than a viola, has five strings tuned in fifths from C (two octaves below middle C) to b' (B above middle C). Other terms include *viola da pomposa* and *viola da spalla* (shoulder viola). Scholars do not agree on whether the instrument was played upright, as shown in the 18<sup>th</sup> century drawing at left below, or across the chest, as shown at the right.



Bernard Picart, *Print of a Musician*, 1701 (detail)



Dmitir Badiarov demonstrates his performance posture.

Dmitri Badiarov's article in the *Galpin Society Journal* reviews the literature from Bach's time to the present and adds his own perspective as luthier and performer.

[http://badiarovviolins.com/PDF/GSJ60\\_121-145\\_Badiarov.pdf](http://badiarovviolins.com/PDF/GSJ60_121-145_Badiarov.pdf)

## Notes on Tonality

Although the cantata closes in G minor, the opening chorus is in C minor, a key that one early 18<sup>th</sup> century theoretician called "exceedingly lovely but at the same time sad." Bach wrote the key signature with 2 flats, just as he did for the C minor closing choruses of both the Saint John and Saint Matthew passions. The instability of the sixth step of the scale—sometimes A<sub>b</sub>, sometimes A<sub>7</sub>—creates an ambiguous tonality: the modern C minor scale (c-d-e<sub>b</sub>-f-g-a<sub>b</sub>-b<sub>b</sub> or b<sub>7</sub>-c) alongside the old-style Dorian mode (c-d-e<sub>b</sub>-f-g-a<sub>7</sub>-b<sub>b</sub>-c). This tonal ambiguity serves well as a metaphor for the uncertainty hovering around the grieving disciples—and around the Faithful striving to live a Christian life.

In the aria for alto, oboe, and continuo, Bach twice uses a harmonic progression that spectacularly symbolizes the movement from foreboding darkness into salvation's light. On "stay with us, for darkness is falling," the voice moves down stepwise over a progression from minor to major through dark, dark tonalities before turning upward into the cadence.

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c<sup>7</sup> F b<sub>7</sub> E<sub>7</sub> a<sub>7</sub> f<sup>7</sup> B<sub>7</sub> g f B<sub>7</sub> E<sub>7</sub>

Note that the scale for a b<sub>b</sub> minor chord has 5 flats, for the a<sub>b</sub> minor chord 7 flats, which makes the progression fit well into 17<sup>th</sup> century tonal allegory, wherein the deeper one goes into flats, the farther one is from the divine.

## Overall tonal structure

	1. c	2. E <sub>b</sub>	3. B <sub>b</sub>	4. A—>g	5. g	6. g
b <sub>b</sub>	chorus		chorale	recit	aria	chorale
b <sub>b</sub> b		aria				

## Gospel for the Day

### Luke 24:13-35 (KJV)

13 And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs.

14 And they talked together of all these things which had happened.

15 And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them.

16 But their eyes were holden that they should not know him.

17 And he said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad?

18 And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto him, Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days?

19 And he said unto them, What things? And they said unto him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people:

20 And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him.

21 But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done.

22 Yea, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulchre;

23 And when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive.

24 And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulchre, and found it even so as the women had said: but him they saw not.

25 Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken:

26 Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?

27 And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

28 And they drew nigh unto the village, whither they went: and he made as though he would have gone further.

29 But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And he went in to tarry with them.

30 And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them.

31 And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight.

32 And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?

33 And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them,

34 Saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon.

35 And they told what things were done in the way, and how he was known of them in breaking of bread.