BWV 67 Halt’ im Gedächtnis Jesum Christ, cantata for the first Sunday after Easter

1. CORO
Halt’ im Gedächtnis Jesum Christ der auferstanden ist von den Toten
Hold in memory Jesus Christ who is risen from the dead.

2. ARIA TENORE
Mein Jesus ist erstanden, allein, was schreckt mich noch?
Mein Glaube kennt des Heilands Sieg
doch fühlt mein Herze Streit und Krieg,
mein Heil, erscheine doch!
My Jesus is risen, then why am I still afraid?
My faith recognizes the savior’s victory, yet my heart sees only battle and war.
My savior, please appear!

3. RECITATIVO ALTO
Mein Jesu, heißest du des Todes Gift und eine Pestilenz der Hölle; nach, daß mich noch Gefahr und Schrecken trifft!
You yourself place upon our tongues a song of praise, which we sing:

4. CORALE
Erschienen ist der herrlich Tag,
dran sich niemand gnuß freuen mag:
The glorious day has appeared in which no one can rejoice enough:
Christ, unser Herr, heut triumphiert all sein Feind er gefangen führt
Christ, our Lord, triumphs today all his foes he leads captive.
Alleluja!

5. RECITATIVO ALTO
Doch scheinet fast, daß mich der Feinde Rest,
den ich zu groß und allzu schrecklich finde
nicht ruhig bleiben läßt
So, though you have won the victory for me, you still have to contend with me, with your child.

6. ARIA BASSO E CORO
Vox Christi: Friede sei mit euch!
Faithful: Wohl uns!
Jesus hilft uns kämpfen
und die Wut der Feinde dämpfen.
Hölle, Satam, weich!
Vox Christi: Friede sei mit euch
Faithful: Jesus helps us fight
and stifles the raging of our foes.
Helle and Satan, yield!
Vox Christi: Friede sei mit euch
Faithful: Jesus delivers us unto peace
and comforts us, the weary,
in spirit and body.
Vox Christi: Friede sei mit euch
Faithful: O Herr, hilf und lass gelingen,
durch den Tod hindurchzudringen
in dein Ehrenreich!
Vox Christi: Friede sei mit euch!
Vox Christi: Peace be with you!
Faithful: Blessed are we!
Jesus helps us fight
and stifles the raging of our foes.
Hell and Satan, yield!
Vox Christi: Peace be with you!
Faithful: Jesus delivers us unto peace
and comforts us, the weary,
in spirit and body.
Vox Christi: Peace be with you!
Faithful: O Lord, help us, let us prosper
and press forward through death
to your kingdom of glory!
Vox Christi: Peace be with you!

2 Tim 2.8 Remember Jesus Christ risen from the dead

Faith and doubt

Nicholas Hermann, Erschienen ist der herrlich Tag, v1 (1560)

1 John 5.4-5 …this is the victory that overcomes the world: our faith.

Turning point of cantata

John 20.19-21 On the evening of that day…the doors being shut where the disciples were…Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’
7. CORALE
Du Friedefürst, Herr Jesu Christ,
wahr' Mensch und wahrer Gott
ein starker Nothelfer du bist
im Leben und im Tod:
drum wir allein
im Namen dein
zu deinem Vater schreien

You, prince of peace, Lord Jesus Christ,
true human and true God,
you are a mighty helper in need
in life and in death.
Thus we alone,
in your name,
cry unto the Father.

Conductor’s Notes © 2013 Ellen Frye
BWV 67 Halt’ im Gedächtnis Jesum Christ was first performed on April 16, 1724.

Theological Narrative

BWV 67 looks at the same biblical event as BWV 6: the appearance of Jesus to the disciples after the resurrection. Luke, the gospel for BWV 6, places the narrative on the road to Emmaus. John, the gospel for BWV 67, has Jesus appearing in the locked upper room where ten of the disciples are gathered. The absent Thomas is disbelieving until he himself sees Jesus and thus has been dubbed Doubting Thomas through the ages. In BWV 6, Bach uses the metaphor of evening falling to explore darkness and light; in BWV 67, he takes story of Thomas’ doubt to depict the journey from doubt to faith.

The opening chorus begins with the cornos’ long-held note emphasizing the “hold” of the text (“Hold in memory that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead”—2 Timothy 2.8). The note segues into the opening motif of the chorale O Lamm Gottes Unschuldig, the German Agnus Dei, which embodies the meaning of Christ’s death and resurrection.

Bach would have expected his congregation to hear these words each time the motif sounded: 

O innocent Lamb of God

and to be reminded of the message that follows those words:

You have borne all sins, otherwise we would have to despair.

In the second movement, Bach introduces the faith/doubt theme through two motifs, one steady, one jittery and off-balance:

faith motif      doubt motif
“My Jesus is risen;   why am I still afraid?”

By using variations of both motifs in the B section as the tenor calls for Jesus to appear, Bach is clearly pointing to how strong doubt might be in the life of the Faithful.

The three center movements may be heard as a whole. The first recitative, a reminder that the church provides the structure to support faith, leads directly into the Easter chorale Erschienen ist der herrlich Tag (Brightly shines the glorious day). The second recitative continues the focus on doubt until four bars before the end: at the words, “Yet see: it is only through faith...” Bach quietly transforms a c# minor chord into C# major and follows with a progression of descending fifths. That subtle change is the exact turning point of the cantata, the point at which doubt is transformed into faith.
Even with faith ascendant, there is much to be learned. In the aria for bass solo and soprano-alto-tenor chorus, Bach presents a dramatic interpretation of Jesus’ message—to the disciples and to the Faithful. *Fried emit euch* (“peace be with you”), a translation of *shalom aleichem*, encompasses a number of meanings in both the Old and New Testaments. In addition to being a commonplace term of greeting and farewell, *shalom* implies quietude and rest, a sense of wholeness and well-being, and a transcendence through grace into the peace of the Holy Spirit. I think that Bach incorporates all these interpretations by alternating sections that feature, on the one hand, a bass solo—the *vox Christi*—singing this phrase with sections that feature SAT choruses—the Faithful—responding to it. The aria opens with the strings playing the music of the Faithful: vigorous (even tumultuous) 16th note phrases in 4/4 meter. This fades into the music associated with Jesus—a halo of woodwinds playing parallel thirds and sixths in triplets and in 3/4 meter. Jesus sings his line. Fade back into the string music where the Faithful interpret the phrase as peace after a victorious battle. In the same kind of fade-in/fade-out (John Elliot Gardiner likens this technique to a movie dissolve), Jesus appears a second time. The Faithful read that peace as the refreshing of their spirits; after the third appearance of Jesus, they finally understand “peace” as true well being through grace. The aria ends with the Jesus music but with the violins joining the woodwinds and bass for the final “Peace be with you,” a farewell.

**Tonality and Structure**

Bach structures this cantata in a way that emphasizes both the solid framework the church provides for the Faithful and the journey from doubt to faith itself.

The opening chorus is a rondo. The opening ritornello, a sinfonia, returns in the middle and at the end to accompany the free polyphony of the chorus. The tonality moves from 3 #s to 5 and back to 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ritornello</th>
<th>Prelude &amp; fugue</th>
<th>Ritornello</th>
<th>Prelude &amp; Fugue</th>
<th>Ritornello</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orchestra</td>
<td>Orchestra Chorus</td>
<td>Orchestra Chorus</td>
<td>Orchestra Chorus</td>
<td>Orchestra Chorus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alone</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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| Implicit keys | A (3 #s) | A→B (5 #s) | E (4 #s) | E→B (5 #s) | A (3 #s) |

In the middle three movements—recitative–chorale–recitative—Bach explores the farther reaches of sharp keys before returning to the home key of A. In the well-tempered tuning of the day, notes like b♯ and f♯ (f double-♯) would not be equivalents of c and g as in our equal-tempered tuning; they would, in fact, sound pretty harsh. I think that Bach may well have meant that harshness as a metaphor for the difficulty of the journey.

| Implicit keys | c#—F# (4 #s→6 #s) | F# (6 #s) | G#—A (7 #s→3 #s) |

The second aria, like the opening movement, is a rondo, albeit an extended one. A and B sections are distinguished by meter (4/4 vs 3/4) and orchestration (strings with SAT vs woodwinds with B). There is little movement away from the home key of A and its relative minor f♯—Bach perhaps intended this to emphasize the steady message of Christ to the Faithful. The aria ends with the B section instead of the A, a wrinkle on the rondo form that I suspect Bach used to point to the journey from doubt to faith bringing the Faithful to a new level of understanding.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orchestration</th>
<th>Strings alone</th>
<th>Woodwinds &amp; vox Christi</th>
<th>Strings &amp; Faithful</th>
<th>Woodwinds &amp; vox Christi</th>
<th>Strings &amp; vox Christi</th>
<th>Woodwinds, vox Christi &amp; Faithful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>Peace</td>
<td>Victory after battle</td>
<td>Peace</td>
<td>Refreshing the spirit</td>
<td>Peace</td>
<td>Peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implicit keys</td>
<td>A (3#s)</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>f# (3#s)</td>
<td>D (2 #s)</td>
<td>f# (3 #s)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Taken as a whole, the structure of the cantata forms a remarkable symmetry. The opening chorus and first aria balance the second aria and closing choral; they stand as pillars on either side of the middle three movements where faith overtakes doubt.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chorus</th>
<th>Aria</th>
<th>Recit</th>
<th>Chorale</th>
<th>Recit</th>
<th>Aria</th>
<th>Chorale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key signatures</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>c#</td>
<td>F#</td>
<td>G#</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Gospel for the Day**

*John 20:19-31 (21st Century King James Version)*

19 Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in their midst and said unto them, “Peace be unto you.”

20 And when He had so said, He showed unto them His hands and His side. Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.

21 Then said Jesus to them again, “Peace be unto you. As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you.”

22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said unto them, “Receive ye the Holy Ghost.

23 Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.”

24 But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.

25 The other disciples therefore said unto him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said unto them, “Unless I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe.”

26 And after eight days the disciples were again within, and Thomas was with them. Then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in their midst and said, “Peace be unto you.”

27 Then said He to Thomas, “Reach hither thy finger and behold My hands, and reach hither thy hand and thrust it into My side: and be not faithless, but believing.”

28 And Thomas answered and said unto Him, “My Lord and my God!”

29 Jesus said unto him, “Thomas, because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed. Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed.”

30 And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book.

31 But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, ye might have life through His name.