

= Erforsche mich , Gott , und erfahre mein Herz , BWV 136 =

Erforsche mich , Gott , und erfahre mein Herz (Examine me , God , and know my heart) , BWV 136 , is a church cantata by Johann Sebastian Bach . Bach composed the cantata in 1723 in Leipzig to be used for the eighth Sunday after Trinity . He led the first performance on 18 July 1723 .

The work is part of Bach 's first annual cycle of cantatas . He began to compose cantatas for all occasions of the liturgical year when he took up office as Thomaskantor in May 1723 . The cantata is structured in six movements : two choral movements at the beginning and end frame a sequence of alternating recitatives and arias . The opening movement is based on a verse from Psalm 139 ; the closing chorale on a stanza from Johann Heermann 's hymn " Wo soll ich fliehen hin " . The cantata is scored for three vocal soloists (alto , tenor and bass) , a four @-@ part choir , corno , two oboes , strings and basso continuo .

= = History and words = =

When Bach took up office as Thomaskantor (director of church music) in Leipzig in May 1723 on the first Sunday after Trinity , he began to compose cantatas for all occasions of the liturgical year . He wrote Erforsche mich , Gott , und erfahre mein Herz for the eighth Sunday after Trinity . The prescribed readings for the Sunday are from the Epistle to the Romans , " For as many as are led by the Spirit of God , they are the sons of God " (Romans 8 : 12 ? 17) , and from the Gospel of Matthew , the warning of false prophets from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7 : 15 ? 23) . An unknown librettist wrote the text , closely related to the prescribed gospel . His text is the first in a group of ten cantatas following the same structure of biblical text ? recitative ? aria ? recitative ? aria ? chorale . The ten cantatas were dedicated to the 8th to 14th and 21st to 22nd Sunday after Trinity and the second Sunday after Easter .

The opening chorus is based on Psalms 139 : 23 , focused on the examination of the believer 's heart by God . The closing chorale is stanza 9 of Johann Heermann 's hymn " Wo soll ich fliehen hin " (1630) on the melody of " Auf meinen lieben Gott " , which Bach used again in 1724 as the base for his chorale cantata Wo soll ich fliehen hin , BWV 5 .

The Bach scholar Alfred Dürr concludes from the autograph that only the middle section of movement 3 and the chorale were composed in 1723 with certainty . The other parts may rely on a former unknown secular or church cantata , according to the conductor John Eliot Gardiner and the musicologist Tadeshi Isoyama .

= = Scoring and structure = =

The cantata in six movements is scored for three vocal soloists (alto (A) , tenor (T) and bass (B)) , a four @-@ part choir (SATB) , corno (horn , Co) , two oboes (Ob) , two violins (VI) , viola (Va) and basso continuo (Bc) . One oboe is marked " d'amore " (Oa) in the autograph kept by the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin . Some scholars , including Dürr and Gardiner , believe that the second oboe part in the choral movements 1 and 6 should also be played by oboe d'amore . The title on the original parts reads : " Domin : 8 post Trinit : / Erforsche mich Gott , und erfahre mein ect . / â / 4 Voci / Corno / 2 Hautbois / 2 Violini / Viola / e / Continuo / di Sign : / J.S.Bach " .

In the following table of the movements , the scoring and keys and time signatures are taken from Alfred Dürr , using the symbol for common time (4 / 4) . The instruments are shown separately for winds and strings , while the continuo , playing throughout , is not shown .

= = Music = =

= = = 1 = = =

The opening chorus expands on a psalm verse , " Erforsche mich , Gott , und erfahre mein Herz " (

Examine me , God , and discover my heart) . The music in the style of a Gigue expresses confidence facing the examination . In 1739 it was characterized by Johann Mattheson 1739 as " somewhat like the rapid arrow of a stream " (" etwa wie der glattfortschiessende Strom @-@ Pfeil eines Bachs ") . The movement is structure in two parts (A and A ') , with choral fugues on the same themes , both presenting the complete text . An extended instrumental ritornello , dominated by the horn , is heard before , between and after the choral sections . The first fugue is preceded by a choral Devise (statement) . Throughout the movement the two oboes never play independently but double the violins in the ritornelli and the soprano in the vocal sections . The virtuoso horn parts may have been intended for the exceptional Gottfried Reiche .

Bach used the same material as in this movement later in the " Cum Sancto Spiritu " of his Missa in A major .

=== 2 ===

A secco recitative , " Ach , daß der Fluch , so dort die Erde schlägt " (Alas , that the curse , which strikes the earth there) , renders a contrasting change of mood . Bach interprets the curse of sin , and the hopeless situation of the humans and the threat of the Last Judgment in music full of dissonances .

=== 3 ===

The alto aria , " Es kömmt ein Tag " (A day will come) , is accompanied by an oboe , an oboe d'amore according to Alfred Dürr and John Eliot Gardiner . The middle section , " Denn seines Eifers Grimm vernichtet " (For the wrath of His vengeance will annihilate) , is certainly composed in 1723 . The middle section is marked Adagio and in common time , contrasting to the first section , marked with Presto and with a 12 / 8 time signature .

=== 4 ===

A secco recitative , " Die Himmel selber sind nicht rein " (The heavens themselves are not pure) , tends to an arioso in the last measures .

=== 5 ===

The violins in unison accompany the duet of tenor and bass , " Uns treffen zwar der Sünden Flecken " (Indeed the stains of sin cling to us) . The voices sing sometimes in imitation , sometimes in homophony , in the style of duets Bach wrote at Köthen earlier in his career .

=== 6 ===

The chorale , " Dein Blut , der edle Saft " (Your blood , the noble juice) , is expanded to five parts with a combination of the four @-@ part chorus and an accompanying violin part , similar to the chorale of Erschallet , ihr Lieder , erklinget , ihr Saiten ! BWV 172 , written earlier by Bach for Pentecost 1714 in Weimar .

= = Selected recordings = =

The sortable listing is taken from the selection provided by Aryeh Oron on the Bach @-@ Cantatas website . Choirs and instrumental ensembles are roughly marked as large by red background , such as boys ' choirs and the Bach orchestras of the 1950s , while instrumental groups playing period instruments in historically informed performances are highlighted green under the header Instr ..