

= Widerstehe doch der Sünde , BWV 54 =

Widerstehe doch der Sünde (Just resist sin) , BWV 54 , is a church cantata by Johann Sebastian Bach . He composed the solo cantata for alto in Weimar between 1711 and 1714 , and probably performed it on the seventh Sunday after Trinity , 15 July 1714 . It is Bach 's first extant church cantata for a solo voice .

The text of the short work was written by Georg Christian Lehms , for two arias and a connecting recitative . The topic is to resist sin , based on the Epistle of James . The text was published in a 1711 collection , dedicated to the Sunday Oculi . It is not known when Bach composed the work but is assumed that he performed it as part of his monthly cantata productions in 1714 on the seventh Sunday after Trinity , 15 July . The solo voice is accompanied by strings : two violin parts , two viola parts and continuo . The composition begins with a striking dissonant chord .

= = History and words = =

The history of the composition is not clear . The text was written by Georg Christian Lehms for Oculi , the third Sunday in Lent , and published in 1711 in *Gottgefälliges Kirchen @-@ Opffer* . It concentrates on avoiding sin , based on the Epistle of James . The first line of movement 3 quotes 1 John 3 : 8 . Bach may have composed the cantata already before taking up regular cantata compositions in Weimar . He was appointed concertmaster of the Weimar court capelle of the co @-@ reigning dukes Wilhelm Ernst and Ernst August of Saxe @-@ Weimar , on 2 March 1714 . As concertmaster , he assumed the principal responsibility for composing new works , specifically cantatas for the Schlosskirche (palace church) , on a monthly schedule .

The Bach scholar Alfred Dürr suggested that Bach performed the cantata for the Seventh Sunday after Trinity of 1714 . The prescribed readings for the Sunday are from the Epistle to the Romans , " the wages of sin is death ; but the gift of God is eternal life " (Romans 6 : 19 ? 23) , and from the Gospel of Mark , the feeding of the 4000 (Mark 8 : 1 ? 9) . The cantata text relates to the epistle of both Sundays , but shows no connection to either Gospel .

While Dürr assumes that Bach first performed the cantata on 15 July 1714 , other scholars arrive at different dates . John Eliot Gardiner and others assume Oculi that year which would make it the earliest cantata performed after the promotion . It is his first extant church cantata for a solo voice , followed by *Mein Herze schwimmt im Blut* , BWV 199 , for soprano . The cantata is the first of four written for a single alto soloist , the others , all composed in 1726 , being *Geist und Seele wird verwirret* , BWV 35 , *Vergnügte Ruh , beliebte Seelenlust* , BWV 170 , and *Gott soll allein mein Herze haben* , BWV 169 , two of which also have texts by Lehms .

There is some debate what sort of singer might have been the intended or actual first performer of *Widerstehe doch der Sünde* , especially given its low range and tessitura compared with other Alto solo writing by Bach such as *Geist und Seele wird verwirret* , BWV 35 or *Vergnügte Ruh , beliebte Seelenlust* , BWV 170 . If the cantata was written early in Bach 's (second) Weimar period , then perhaps the soloist could have been Adam Immanuel Weldig , the only falsettist in the Weimar court chapel in 1708 (the other five singers being a bass , two tenors and two teenage discantists) . However , Weldig 's designation as " falsettist " may indicate that he was a soprano and not an alto . Weldig left Weimar in 1713 so could not have sung if the first performance was as late as 1714 as suggested by Dürr . Nowadays the solo part in this cantata is usually taken by a contralto or countertenor .

= = Scoring and structure = =

The cantata , structured in three movements , is scored as chamber music for a solo alto voice , two violins (VI) , two violas (Va) , and basso continuo (Bc) . The duration is given as 14 minutes . The manuscript title page reads : " Cantata.à 2 Violini , 2 Viole , Alto , Solo , è Cont . : del J.S.B. " .

In the following table of the movements , the scoring follows the *Neue Bach @-@ Ausgabe* . The keys and time signatures are taken from Alfred Dürr , using the symbols for common time (4 / 4)

and alla breve (2 / 2) . The continuo , playing throughout , is not shown .

= = Music = =

= = = 1 = = =

The first movement , " Widerstehe doch der Sünde " (Just resist sin) is a da capo aria , which opens with a surprising dissonance and leaves its key of E @-@ flat major open until a cadence in measure 8 . Dürr describes it as a call to resistance and compares it to the beginning of the recitative " Siehe , ich stehe vor der Tür " , a call to be ready , in the cantata for Advent Nun komm , der Heiden Heiland , BWV 61 , composed in 1714 . Gardiner comments : " It is a deliberate shock tactic to rouse his listeners to the need to ' stand firm against all sinning , or its poison will possess you ' " . Bach used the first aria again in his St Mark Passion .

= = = 2 = = =

The recitative " Die Art verruchter Sünden " (The way of vile sins) is secco , accompanied by the continuo . The words " So zeigt sich nur ein leerer Schatten und übertünchtes Grab " (It shows itself as only an empty shadow and a whitewashed grave) are expressed in " pale " harmonies . The final lines are arioso and illustrate in " Sie ist als wie ein scharfes Schwert , das uns durch Leib und Seele fährt " (It is like a sharp sword , that pierces through body and soul) the movement of the sword by fast runs in the continuo .

= = = 3 = = =

The final aria " Wer Sünde tut , der ist vom Teufel " (He who sins is of the devil) is again a da capo aria , but shows elements of a four @-@ part fugue for the voice , the violins in unison , the violas in unison and the continuo . Gardiner describes the theme as " insinuating chromatic " and the " contorted counter @-@ subject to portray the wily shackles of the devil .

= = Selected recordings = =

The sortable listing is taken from the selection provided by Aryeh Oron on the Bach @-@ Cantatas website . The sortable table is based on the listing on the Bach Cantatas website . The type of orchestra is roughly shown as a large group by red background , and as an ensemble playing period instruments in historically informed performance by green background .