Gott ist mein König , BWV 71

Gott ist mein König (God is my King) , BWV 71 , is a cantata by Johann Sebastian Bach written in Mühlhausen when the composer was 23 years old . Unusually for an early cantata by Bach , the date of first performance is known : at the inauguration of a new town council on 4 February 1708 .

The text is compiled mainly from biblical sources , three different sections from Psalm 74 and several other verses . In addition , one stanza from Johann Heermann 's hymn " O Gott , du frommer Gott " is sung simultaneously with corresponding biblical text , and free poetry by an unknown poet of Bach 's time which relates to the political occasion . The cantata in seven movements is scored festively with a Baroque instrumental ensemble including trumpets and timpani , " four separate instrumental ' choirs ' , set against a vocal consort of four singers , an optional Capelle of ripienists and an organ " . Stylistically it shares features with Bach 's other early cantatas .

Bach , then organist in Mühlhausen 's church Divi Blasii , led the performance on 4 February 1708 in the town 's main church , the Marienkirche . Although the cantata was planned to be performed only twice , it was printed the same year , the first of his works to be printed and the only cantata extant in print that was printed in Bach 's lifetime .

History and words

From 1707 to 1708 , Bach was the organist at one of Mühlhausen 's principal churches , Divi Blasii , dedicated to St Blaise , where he composed some of his earliest surviving cantatas . One or two early cantatas , for example Nach dir , Herr , verlanget mich , BWV 150 , may have been written at Arnstadt , his previous residence , for a performance at Mühlhausen . He composed Gott ist mein König for a church service that was held annually to celebrate the inauguration of a new town council .

The librettist is unknown ; it has been speculated that the text was written by Georg Christian Eilmar , minister of Marienkirche , who had earlier prompted the composition of Bach 's cantata Aus der Tiefen rufe ich , Herr , zu dir , BWV 131 . It has also been thought that Bach himself may have assembled the text , although the suggestion is unlikely since Bach 's musical setting of the final part of the text departs from its bi @-@ strophic form . There is no evidence either way to indicate the authorship of the cantata 's text . Along with other early cantatas , Gott ist mein König is of a pre @-@ Neumeister character , not featuring the combination of recitative and arias found in later cantatas .

The service was held on 4 February 1708 in the Marienkirche , the town 's largest church . The score indicates that Bach deployed his musicians in different locations in the building . He composed another cantata for the occasion the following year , but it is lost .

Theme

The text centres on Psalm 74 , with additional material drawn from the 2 Samuel , Genesis , and Deuteronomy . Unusual for Bach 's early cantatas , some contemporary unknown poet added free text that makes reference to the " new regiment " of office bearers and the Holy Roman Emperor and King of Germany , Joseph I , as Mühlhausen was an Imperial free city , thus subject immediately to the emperor .

There are three quotations from Psalm 74 (Psalms 74) :

Verse 12 : " Gott ist mein König von Alters her , der alle Hülffe thut , so auf Erden geschicht . " (" God is my Sovereign since ancient days , who all salvation brings which on earth may be found . " ? ASV version : " Yet God is my King of old , Working salvation in the midst of the earth . ")

Verses 16 ? 17 : " Tag und Nacht ist dein . Du machest , daß beyde Sonn und Gestirn ihren gewissen Lauf haben . Du setzest einem jeglichen Lande seine Gräntze . " (" Day and night are Yours . You have seen to it that both sun and planets have their certain courses . You set borders to every land . " ? ASV : " The day is thine , the night also is thine : Thou hast prepared the light and

the sun . Thou hast set all the borders of the earth . ")

Verse 19 : " Du wollest dem Feinde nicht geben die Seele deiner Turteltauben . " (" You would not give the soul of Your turtledove to the enemy . " ? ASV : " Oh deliver not the soul of thy turtle @-@ dove unto the wild beast . ")

It has been suggested that these themes include a number of distinct allusions of relevance to the inhabitants of Mühlhausen . First , the reference to Psalm 74 in general , and the inclusion of verse 19 in the cantata may be making an oblique reference , accessible to contemporary audiences , to the fire of May 1707 which had destroyed parts of the city . The importance of " borders " may be an allusion to the threat to the city 's independence posed by the military campaigns of Charles XII .

Movement 2 combines three texts , two biblical verses and stanza 6 from Johann Heermann 's hymn " O Gott , du frommer Gott " , which all make reference to old age . An older view suggested this was likely a reference to the septuagenarian Conrad Meckbach , a member of the city council who was connected to Bach . More recent research lead to thinking that it likely refers to Adolf Strecker , the former mayor who had just left office aged 83 years , since " details of his public and private life match extremely well with the texts chosen for the cantata , and it seems likely that hearers would have recognized Strecker in them " .

= = Structure and scoring = =

Bach structured the cantata in seven movements . He scored the vocal parts for four soloists : soprano , alto , tenor and bass . The choral writing is in four parts , and the work can be sung with just four singers , the so @-@ called OVPP approach . Some performances deploy more singers in the choral sections . The use of a larger choir is partly a question of balance with the relatively large instrumental forces , but there is also supporting evidence for the use of more than four singers in the score , where a marking implies that Bach envisaged the option of a vocal ensemble that is separate from the four soloists .

This was Bach 's first cantata for festive orchestra , including trumpets and timpani . The instruments are divided into four spatially separated " choirs " , placing the work in the polychoral tradition associated with composers such as Heinrich Schütz . The instruments required for the Baroque instrumental ensemble are three trumpets (Tr) , timpani (Ti) , two recorders (Fl) , two oboes (Ob) , bassoon (Fg) , organ obbligato (Org) , two violins (Vl) , viola (Va) , viola da gamba (Vg) and basso continuo .

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 symbol for common time (4 / 4) . The continuo , playing throughout , is not shown .

= = Music = =

With short movements that flow into each other , the cantata shows typical characteristics of traditional 17th @-@ century cantatas . Unlike other early cantatas , it has no instrumental introduction . John Eliot Gardiner , who conducted the Bach Cantata Pilgrimage in 2000 and performed this cantata in the Mühlhausen church where Bach was organist , notes :

No other work of his is laid out on such a grand scale in terms of its deployment of four separate instrumental ' choirs ' , set against a vocal consort of four singers , an optional Capelle of ripienists and an organ .

A model for such " theatrical splendour " were oratorios by Dieterich Buxtehude , performed in Bach 's presence at the Lübeck in 1705 .

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The opening chorus , Gott ist mein König von altersher (God is my King from long ago) , is based on Psalm 74 : 12 . It begins with a chord in C major from the instruments . The first line is repeated separationg sections and as a summary at the end , accompanied always by a trumpet fanfare .

An aria for tenor , Ich bin nun achtzig Jahr , warum soll dein Knecht sich mehr beschweren ? (I am now eighty years old , why shall Your servant burden himself any more ?) is complimented by a hymn , sung simultaneously by the soprano , Soll ich auf dieser Welt mein Leben höher bringen (Should I upon this earth carry my life farther) . All texts deal with old age . The section begins with the image of a descending continuo line . The tenor melody expresses sadness about the condition of old age . The chorale tune , sung with embellishments is not the most usual one for the hymn , possibly chosen to match the theme .

Another choral movement , Dein Alter sei wie deine Jugend , und Gott ist mit dir in allem , das du tust (May your old age be like your youth , and God is with you in everything that you do) sets more biblical passages , assuring that God is with people both old and young . It is set as a permutation fuge .

A bass arioso sets two more verses from the psalm , Tag und Nacht ist dein (Day and night are Yours) . In ternary form , the outer sections are a sarabande , dealing with day and night , while the middle section describes light and sun , with joyful motif in the continuo and word @-@ painting in the voice .

An alto aria , Durch mächtige Kraft erhältst du unsre Grenzen (Through powerful strength You maintain our borders) is based on contemporary poetry . Set in C major with the trumpets and timpani as the only obbligato instruments , it is in two sections : the first in triple time marked Vivace corresponds to God 's power and glory , while the second in common time is a prayer for peace on Earth .

Another psalm verse is again set as a chorus , Du wollest dem Feinde nicht geben die Seele deiner Turteltauben (You would not give the soul of Your turtledove to the enemy) . The voices are set in homophony on a cello in ondulating motion . Gardiner notes that it is very personal setting , " is a movement of extraordinary reticence , delicacy and the utmost tonal subtlety " . He notes an upward semitone as a feature to express both yearningand the sound of the turtledove . The instruments are grouped to achieve in subtle colour : recorders and cello , reeds , and strings .

The last chorus Das neue Regiment (The new regime) expresses wishes for peace and well @-@ being under the new council .

Gott ist mein König is a significant early work of Bach . It differs from the other extant cantatas from Bach 's time in Mühlhausen by its elaborate instrumentation . It was so positively received that it was the first of Bach 's works to be printed (paid for by the city council) ; it is the only cantata to have been printed in his lifetime , at least in a version which has survived to this day . The printing is all

the more remarkable as Gott ist mein König appears to have been intended for not more than one repeat performance , and a new piece was commissioned the following year . Bach was commissioned to compose another cantata for the following year 's council inauguration ; there is evidence that the piece was composed and even printed , but no copies are known to survive .

= = Selected recordings = =

The selection is taken from the listing by Aryeh Oron on the Bach @-@ Cantatas website . Choirs and orchestras are roughly marked as large by red background ; green background indicates vocalists with one voice per part (OVPP) and instrumental groups playing period instruments in historically informed performances .