

= Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit , BWV 106 =

Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit (God 's time is the very best time) , BWV 106 , also known as Actus tragicus , is an early sacred cantata composed by Johann Sebastian Bach in Mühlhausen , intended for a funeral .

The earliest source for the composition is a copied manuscript dated 1768 , therefore the date of the composition is not certain . Research leads to a funeral of a former mayor of Mühlhausen on 16 September 1708 . The text is a carefully compiled juxtaposition of biblical texts , three quotations from the Old Testament and four from the New Testament , combined with funeral hymns , of which two are sung and one is quoted instrumentally , and some additions by an anonymous author . Bach scored the work for four vocal parts and a small ensemble of Baroque instruments , two recorders , two violas da gamba and continuo . The work is opened by an instrumental Sonatina , followed by through @-@ composed sections which have been assigned to three movements . The structure is symmetrical around a turning point , when the lower voices , who contemplate the Old Covenant , are overcome by a soprano calling for Jesus .

= = History = =

Although Bach 's manuscript is lost , the work is agreed to be one of the earliest Bach cantatas , probably composed during the year he spent in Mühlhausen 1707 / 1708 as organist of the Divi Blasii church , at the age of 22 . Various funerals known to have taken place at this time have been proposed as the occasion for the composition , for example that of his uncle Tobias Lämmerhirt from his mother 's family , who died in Erfurt on 10 August 1707 , and that of Adolph Strecker , a former mayor of Mühlhausen , whose funeral was 16 September 1708 .

The earliest surviving manuscript , in the hand of Christian Friedrich Penzel , was copied in 1768 after Bach 's death . It introduced the title Actus tragicus . The cantata was published in 1876 as part of the first complete edition of Bach 's works : the Bach @-@ Gesellschaft @-@ Ausgabe , edited by Wilhelm Rust .

= = Theme = =

The text consists of different Bible passages from the Old and New Testament , as well as individual verses of hymns by Martin Luther and Adam Reusner , which all together refer to finiteness , preparation for death and dying . There are two distinct parts to the cantata : the view of the Old Testament on death shown in the first part is confronted by that of the New Testament in the second part , leading to a symmetrical structure . The juxtaposition of texts from the Old and New Testament appeared before in the Christliche Betschule (Christian school of prayer) by Johann Olearius . Markus Rathey , professor at the Yale Institute of Sacred Music , argued in 2006 , that the sermon given at the funeral of Strecker is similar in ideas to the themes of the cantatas . It may be an indication that Bach composed the work for this occasion .

= = Structure and scoring = =

Bach scored the cantata for four vocal parts (soprano (S) , alto (A) , tenor (T) , and bass (B)) and a chamber ensemble of Baroque instruments : two alto recorders (Fl) , two violas da gamba (Vg) , basso continuo . The duration is given as 23 minutes .

The sections comprising the cantata are traditionally grouped into four movements . The musicologist Carol Traupman @-@ Carr notes : " Although movements are marked by tempo changes , occasionally key changes , meter changes , and double bar lines , Cantata 106 appears to be a continuous work . Bach helps create a more seamless effect by occasionally resolving the cadence of one section at the downbeat of another , thus blurring the beginnings and endings of traditional movements . " The keys and tempo markings are taken from the first publication . The keys in the Neue Bach @-@ Ausgabe and other more recent publications start in F major .

= = Music = =

= = = 1 = = =

In the opening sonatina , marked Molto adagio , two obbligato alto recorders mournfully echo each other over a sonorous background of viola da gambas and continuo .

= = = 2 = = =

The first vocal movement combines several aspects of getting ready to die , based mostly on texts from the Old Testament . Bach expresses their ideas in a variety of musical form and scoring . The movement opens (2a) on a text in free poetry , " Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit " (God 's time is the best of all times) . The chorus has no initial tempo marking , but has a fugal section marked Allegro , and the end is Adagio assai .

The thought from Psalm 90 (2b) , " Ach , Herr , lehre uns bedenken , daß wir sterben müssen " (Ah , Lord , teach us to consider that we must die) is rendered as an arioso of the tenor , marked Lento . The melodic line is broken by rests of reflection .

The warning to be prepared for death (2c) from Isaiah , " Bestelle dein Haus ; denn du wirst sterben " (Put your house in order ; for you will die) , is performed as an aria by the bass , marked Vivace . Arpeggios of the recorder accompany the voice which has been described as " evocative of the command of God " .

Marked Andante , the movement concludes (2d) with the central piece in the symmetrical composition . It presents a contrast : while the lower choral voices remind of the Old Covenant , " Es ist der alte Bund : Mensch , du mußt sterben ! " (It is the ancient law : human , you must die !) , based on Jesus Sirach , the solo soprano turns to accepting death as a union with Jesus , singing three times " Ja , komm , Herr Jesu , komm ! " (Yes , come , Lord Jesus !) . The personal decision is supported by the instrumental quotation in the recorders of Johann Leon 's hymn " Ich hab mein Sach Gott heimgestellt " (I have brought my affairs home to God) . The final call to Jesus closes the movement , leading to a long rest . The musicologist Wendy Heller writes :

Bach allows the confident soprano the final word , one that even silences the continuo ; the passage concludes with an ornamented cadential passage in semiquaver triplets that arrives with tentative optimism and a distinct lack of completion ...

= = = 3 = = =

The second vocal movement is a similar combination of ideas , now mostly from the New Testament . It quotes twice what Jesus said on the cross according to the Gospel of Luke . The first quotation (3a) , " In deine Hände befehl ich meinen Geist " (Into Your hands I commit my spirit) , with an added explanation " du hast mich erlöst , Herr , du getreuer Gott " (You have redeemed me , Lord , faithful God) , from Psalm 31 , is rendered as an alto aria .

The second quotation (3b) , " Heute wirst du mit mir im Paradies sein " (Today you will be with Me in Paradise) , is a bass arioso , supported by the Martin Luther 's hymn " Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin " (With peace and joy I depart) , after the Nunc dimittis (also following Luke) , sung by the alto as a cantus firmus .

= = = 4 = = =

The work concludes with the closing seventh stanza of Adam Reusner 's hymn " In dich hab ich gehoffet , Herr " , " Glorie , Lob , Ehr und Herrlichkeit " (Glory , praise , honor , and majesty) , as a choral movement , but not a simple four @-@ part setting . Introduced by an instrumental passage recalling motifs from the Sonatina , the first lines of the hymn are set for four parts . The movement

ends in a double fugue on Amen marked Allegro . The musicologist Julian notes that the fugal section became the " major focus of the piece " .

= = = Evaluation = = =

The cantata ranks among Bach 's most important works . The Bach scholar Alfred Dürr called the cantata " a work of genius such as even great masters seldom achieve ... The Actus tragicus belongs to the great musical literature of the world " .

= = Selected recordings = =

The cantata can be performed with only four singers , as in the recording by Joshua Rifkin , while other recordings feature a choir with multiple voices to a part . The following entries are taken from the listing by Aryeh Oron on the Bach @-@ Cantatas website . Choirs are roughly marked as large (by red background) or one voice per part (OVPP) (by green background) ; instrumental groups playing period instruments in historically informed performances are highlighted green under the header Instr ..