= Komm , du süße Todesstunde , BWV 161 =

Komm , du süße Todesstunde (Come , o sweet hour of death) , BWV 161 , is a church cantata composed by Johann Sebastian Bach in Weimar for the 16th Sunday after Trinity .
Bach had taken up regular cantata composition two years before when he was promoted to concertmaster at the Weimar court , writing one cantata per month to be performed in the Schlosskirche , the court chapel in the ducal Schloss . The text of Komm , du süße Todesstunde , as of most other cantatas written in Weimar , was provided by court poet Salomon Franck . He based it on the prescribed gospel reading about the Young man from Nain . His text reflects on longing for death , seen as a transition to a life united with Jesus . The text includes as a closing chorale the fourth stanza of the hymn " Herzlich tut mich verlangen " by Christoph Knoll .
The cantata comprises six movements , which opens with a sequence of alternating arias and recitatives leading to a chorus and a concluding chorale . The chorale tune , known as " O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden " , appears already in the first movement , played by the organ , and musical motifs of the arias are derived from it , providing an overall formal unity to the composition . Bach scored the work for two vocal parts (alto and tenor) , a four @-@ part choir , and a Baroque chamber ensemble of recorders , strings and continuo . In the alto recitative (movement 4) , accompanied by all instruments , Bach creates the images of sleep , of waking up , and of funeral bells , the latter in the recorders and pizzicato of the strings .
While the libretto was published in a collection in 1715 , Bach possibly led the first performance only a year later on 27 September 1716 , due to a period of public mourning . Bach revived the cantata in Leipzig , but not during his cantata cycles when he composed three new works for the 16th Sunday after Trinity . With minor changes , he performed Komm , du süße Todesstunde between 1737 and 1746 . He also assigning it to the occasion of Purification , a feast with a similar topic .

= = Background = =

Bach established his reputation as an outstanding organist while in his teens . He moved to Weimar in 1708 to take up position as court organist to the co @-@ reigning dukes Wilhelm Ernst and Ernst August of Saxe @-@ Weimar . He had already begun to compose cantatas at his previous posts at Arnstadt and Mühlhausen , and his reasons for moving included disappointment with the standard of singing at the churches where he had worked . He was appointed concertmaster of the Weimar court capelle on 2 March 1714 . As concertmaster , he assumed principal responsibility for composing new works . Specifically he was tasked with providing cantatas for the Schlosskirche (palace church) on a monthly schedule , and a complete annual cycle within four years . While Bach had composed vocal music only for special occasions until his promotion , the regular chance to compose and perform a new work resulted in a program into which Bach " threw himself wholeheartedly " , as the Bach scholar Christoph Wolff notes .

= = = Cantatas in 1716 = = =

The cantatas probably first performed in 1716 were written on texts by the Weimar court poet Salomon Franck , published in his collections Evangelisches Andachts @-@ Opffer (1715) and Evangelische Sonn- und Festtages @-@ Andachten (1717) . Fewer cantatas survived than from the years before , which could be the result of less interest , but also loss of composed works .
Bach turned again to prolific writing with the beginning of a new liturgical year with the first Sunday in Advent . He composed works for three consecutive Sundays in Advent , prompted probably by the death of the Kapellmeister Johann Samuel Drese on 1 December 1716 . When Bach 's hope to become Drese 's successor was disappointed he ceased to compose cantatas for the Weimar court .
The following table of works performed by Bach as concertmaster in 1716 is based on Wolff and the Bach scholar Alfred Dürr .

= = Readings and text = =

Bach wrote Komm , du süße Todesstunde for the 16th Sunday after Trinity . The prescribed readings for the Sunday were from the Epistle to the Ephesians , dedicated to the strengthening of faith in the congregation of Ephesus (Ephesians 3 : 13 ? 21) , and from the Gospel of Luke , the raising from the dead of the Young man from Nain (Luke 7 : 11 ? 17) . In Bach 's time the story pointed at the resurrection of the dead , expressed in words of desire to die soon .

The text for this cantata , as for many others of Bach 's Weimar period , was written by the court poet Salomon Franck , and published in his collection Evangelisches Andachts @-@ Opffer in 1715 . He included as the closing chorale the fourth stanza of the hymn " Herzlich tut mich verlangen " (1611) by Christoph Knoll . Franck wrote a libretto full of biblical references , such as a phrase in movement one , " feeding on honey from the lion 's mouth " , which is based on Judges 14 : 5 ? 9 . Alfred Dürr , an authority on Bach 's cantatas , summarizes that Franck wrote " a deeply felt , personal confession of longing for Jesus " . The Bach scholar Richard D. P. Jones notes that the cantata is " one of the most richly inspired of all Bach 's Weimar cantatas " , and sees the text as a part of the inspiration , with its " mystical longing for union with Christ .

= = Performances = =

Bach led the first performance , but the date has been debated . Dürr concluded initially (in the first edition of his book Die Kantaten von Johann Sebastian Bach of 1971) that the cantata was first performed on 6 October 1715 . However , as this date fell in a period of public mourning in Weimar , the first performance is now generally accepted as the same occasion the following year , 27 September 1716 , by the Bach scholar Christoph Wolff , the publisher Carus @-@ Verlag , and Dürr in the revised and translated edition of 2006 . Richard D. P. Jones notes in his book The Creative Development of Johann Sebastian Bach that " technical novelties " suggest that the cantata was also composed in 1716 , according to a recent study .

In his first year as Thomaskantor in Leipzig , Bach composed a new cantata for the 16th Sunday after Trinity , Christus , der ist mein Leben , BWV 95 . A year later he wrote a chorale cantata for his second cantata cycle , Liebster Gott , wenn werd ich sterben ? BWV 8 , and for his third cantata cycle there he composed Wer weiß , wie nahe mir mein Ende ? BWV 27 . He revived Komm , du süße Todesstunde in Leipzig , but only later , in a version dated some time between 1737 and 1746 , with minor changes to the scoring . He even performed it for a different liturgical occasion , the feast of the Purification of Mary on 2 February . The prescribed readings for the Purification included Simeon 's canticle Nunc dimittis (Luke 2 : 22 ? 32) , which with its line " now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace " has a similar topic .

= = Music = =

= = = Structure and scoring = = =

The cantata is structured in six movements : a series of alternating arias and recitatives leads to a chorus and a concluding chorale . As with several other cantatas on words by Franck , it is scored for a small ensemble : two vocal soloists (alto (A) and tenor (T)) , a four @-@ part choir and a Baroque chamber ensemble of two recorders (Fl) , two violins (Vl) , viola (Va) , organ (Org) and basso continuo (Bc) . The title page reads simply : " Auf den sechzenden Sontag nach Trintatis " (For the sixteenth Sunday after Trinity) . The duration is given as 19 minutes .

A structural element is the anticipation of the closing chorale in the first movement , where the chorale melody is used as a cantus firmus . Bach used this approach to unify a structure also in the cantatas Alles , was von Gott geboren , BWV 80a , and Barmherziges Herze der ewigen Liebe , BWV 185 , also composed at Weimar . He later used the juxtaposition of a chorale cantus firmus against vocal music later on a grand scale in his St Matthew Passion , in both the opening chorus

and the movement concluding Part I. The use of recorders in Komm , du süße Todesstundeis reminiscent of the early cantata Actus tragicus , Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit , BWV 106 .

In the Leipzig performances of the cantata , the first verse of the chorale was probably sung by a soprano , instead of an instrumental quotation of the chorale tune in the first aria . The cantata was transposed from C major to E @-@ flat major at Leipzig) . The recorders were then possibly replaced by transverse flutes .

In the following table of the movements , the scoring and keys are given for the version performed in Weimar in 1714 . The keys and time signatures are taken from 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 .

= = = Movements = = =

A Phrygian chorale melody , well @-@ known as the melody of " O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden " , provides the musical theme of the cantata , appearing in movement 1 in both its original form and the alto line derived from it . The themes of the two other arias are taken from the same melody , providing formal unity . The same melody appears five times in chorales of Bach 's St Matthew Passion .

= = = = 1 = = = =

The opening aria for alto , " Komm , du süße Todesstunde " (" Come , o sweet hour of death " or " Come , thou sweet hour of parting ") is accompanied by the recorders . They move in the ritornello in parallel thirds and sixths . The organ serves not only as a bass instrument but supplies the chorale melody . In Weimar , Bach seems to have expected the congregation to know the words of the first stanza of Knoll 's hymn .

Jones points out that the cantus firmus of the organ seems " objective " , in contrast to the subjective " display of personal feeling " of the voice and the complexity of the other parts .

In a later performance in Leipzig , a soprano sang the stanza with the organ .

= = = = 2 = = = =

The tenor recitative , " Welt , deine Lust ist Last " (World , your pleasure is a burden) , begins as a secco recitative , but ends in an arioso as the words paraphrase a biblical verse from Philippians 1 : 23 , " Ich habe Lust abzuscheiden und bei Christo zu sein " to " Ich habe Lust , bei Christo bald zu weiden . Ich habe Lust , von dieser Welt zu scheiden " (I desire to pasture soon with Christ . I desire to depart from this world) . Dürr notes that the development from secco to arioso is frequent in Bach 's early cantatas , and is here especially motivated to highlight the biblical paraphrase .

= = = = 3 = = = =

The aria for tenor , " Mein Verlangen ist , den Heiland zu umfangen " (My longing is , to embrace my Savior) , is the first movement with the strings , expressing a deep sense of longing . It returns to the hope for union with Jesus of the first movement , expressed in in an agitated way , with syncopies for " longing " and flowing motifs for " embracing " . The middle section is mostly accompanied by the continuo only , but at times interjected by the strings playing the " longing " -motifs .

= = = = 4 = = = =

The alto recitative , " Der Schluß ist schon gemacht " (The end has already come) , is accompanied by all instruments , creating the images of sleep (in a downward movement , ending in long notes) , the waking up (in fast movement upwards) , and funeral bells in the recorders and

pizzicato of the strings . The musicologist Tadashi Isoyama notes : " In this movement the anticipation of death appears to be fulfilled , and the alto 's declamation , welcoming death and the ringing of the funeral bells , is filled with a pathos amounting almost to obsession . "

= = = = 5 = = = =

The first choral movement 5 , " Wenn es meines Gottes Wille " (If it is my God 's will) , is marked aria by Franck . Bach set it for four parts , using song @-@ like homophony . Wolff compares the style to Thuringian motets of around 1700 . The first part is not repeated da capo , in keeping with the last words " Dieses sei mein letztes Wort " (May this be my last word) . While a textual da capo is impossible , Bach composed a musical da capo , giving the movement a structure of ABB 'A ' . Dürr notes that " Arnold Schering has drawn attention to the increasing rapture " .

= = = = 6 = = = =

The closing chorale , " Der Leib zwar in der Erden " (The body , indeed , in the earth) , is illuminated by a fifth part of the two recorders playing a lively counterpoint in unison .
The " soaring descant " of the recorders has been interpreted as " creating the image of the flesh transfigured " .

= = = Summary = = =

Wolff summarizes : " Cantata 161 is one of the most delicate and jewel @-@ like products of Bach 's years in Weimar . The writing in up to ten parts is extraordinarily subtle . ... The recorders additionally contribute in no small way to the spiritualised emotion and positive feelings associated with the ' sweet hour of death ' " . Jones writes : " Bach 's arrival at full maturity by about the middle of his Weimar period (1713 ? 17) is attested by the stylistic and technical assurance , and the consistently high standard , of his writing at that time . " He counts the cantata as one of several that reached a level of mastery unsurpassed in later years , along with the Orgelbüchlein and the cantata Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis , BWV 21 , among others .

= = Publication = =

The cantata was edited for the Bach Gesellschaft Ausgabe , the first complete edition of Bach 's works , by Franz Wüllner . The volume in question was published in 1887 . The New Bach Edition (Neue Bach @-@ Ausgabe , NBA) published the score of both the Weimar and the Leipzig version in 1982 , edited by Helmuth Osthoff , with the critical commentary following in 1984 .

= = Later performances = =

John Eliot Gardiner performed the cantata twice in the Bach year 2000 , both on Bach 's day of death , 28 July , at Iona Abbey , and on the 16th Sunday after Trinity at the church of the Convent of San Domingos de Bonaval of Santiago de Compostela as part of the Bach Cantata Pilgrimage with the Monteverdi Choir .

= = Selected recordings = =

The table entries are excerpted from the selection on the Bach @-@ Cantatas website . Choirs are roughly marked as large by red background , orchestras from large (red) to vocal ensembles with one voice per part (OVPP) and ensembles playing on period instruments in historically informed performances (green) .