

= Aus der Tiefen rufe ich , Herr , zu dir , BWV 131 =

Aus der Tiefen rufe ich , Herr , zu dir (Out of the depths I call , Lord , to You) , BWV 131 , is a church cantata by the German composer Johann Sebastian Bach . It was composed in either 1707 or 1708 , which makes it one of Bach 's earliest cantatas . Some sources suggest that it could be his earliest surviving work in this form , but current thinking is that there are one or two earlier examples .

The cantata was commissioned by the minister of one of the churches in Mühlhausen , the city where Bach worked at the time . It was possibly written for a special occasion . The text is based on Luther 's German version of Psalm 130 and also incorporates the words of a chorale . Bach 's music integrates melodies from the chorale into larger structures . Bach also shows his interest in counterpoint , something which was characteristic of him throughout his career .

= = History and words = =

A note on the autograph score of the cantata indicates that the work was commissioned by Georg Christian Eilmar , minister of the Marienkirche (St Mary 's church) in Mühlhausen . This allows the work to be dated to 1707 ? 08 , which is the period when Bach was living in Mühlhausen . Bach was employed as organist at the city 's other main church , Divi Blasii , . He was also involved to some extent with performances at the Marienkirche , where civic ceremonies were held . One service there which Bach would have attended was that for the city council 's inauguration in 1708 during which his cantata Gott ist mein König , BWV 71 had its premiere . He may have had a closer personal relationship with Eilmar than with the minister of his own church . Eilmar was godfather to his daughter Catharina Dorothea (born 1708) .

Aus der Tiefen rufe ich , Herr , zu dir has been described as possibly Bach 's first surviving cantata . For it to be the first , it has to be assumed not only that it predates other cantatas written in Mühlhausen (we know that he wrote at least one other there) , but also that there is not a surviving cantata from his previous post at Arnstadt . It seems likely that Bach was composing choral music at Arnstadt . Although Bach was only 22 when he took up the appointment at Mühlhausen , the performance of a work of his own composition appears to have been part of the selection process . Recent scholarship suggests that another surviving cantata Nach dir , Herr , verlanget mich , BWV 150 could have been composed at Arnstadt .

The libretto is based on Psalm 130 , one of the penitential psalms . The incipit of the psalm , " Aus der Tiefen rufe ich , Herr , zu dir " , gives the cantata its name . Originally a Hebrew text , the incipit has variants in translation . While Psalms 130 : 1 ? 6 is rendered " Out of the depths ... " in the English King James version , a closer translation of the German text used by Bach would be " deep " rather than " depths " . The anonymous librettist , possibly Eilmar , includes in two of the movements verses from Herr Jesu Christ , du höchstes Gut , a Lutheran chorale by Bartholomäus Ringwaldt .

In his Bach Cantata Pilgrimage , Sir John Eliot Gardiner performed and recorded the work with cantatas for the Fifth Sunday after Trinity , but is not known for sure when in the liturgical year Bach performed it , and there has been speculation that it was written for a special occasion .

= = = Publication = = =

Bach 's ability as a composer was recognised by the city council of Mühlhausen who paid for the printing of the cantata Gott ist mein König , BWV 71 . They may also have arranged the publication of a later cantata now lost . None of the other cantatas was published in the composer 's lifetime . Aus der Tiefen rufe ich , Herr , zu dir was first published in 1881 as part of the Bach @-@ Gesellschaft @-@ Ausgabe , the first complete edition of Bach 's works . The editor was Wilhelm Rust , who edited many volumes for the Bach @-@ Gesellschaft . At the time of publication of this volume , he held the position of Thomaskantor in Leipzig .

= = Scoring and structure = =

= = = Singers = = =

Bach scored the work for tenor and bass soloists and a four @-@ part choir . Bach gives his soloists an arioso and an aria . As in other early cantatas , there are no recitatives . (Bach later came more under the influence of Italian music , combining recitatives and arias) .

Bach did not give a direct indication of how many singers he envisaged in the choir . The cantata can be performed with only four singers , as in the recording by Joshua Rifkin , who is well known in the world of Bach performance for his " one voice to a part " approach . However , most recordings feature a choir with multiple voices to a part . Another choice to be made is whether to use women singers : Bach 's original singers were probably all male . Most recordings of the cantata , however , feature mixed choirs : an exception is the version conducted by Nikolaus Harnoncourt , which deploys boys ' voices as the top lines of the choir .

= = = Instruments = = =

The singers are accompanied by an instrumental group consisting of oboe , bassoon , violin , two violas and basso continuo . As in the case of the singers , the question arises as to whether Bach used one or more players per part . The oboe and the violin are given some important solos , suggesting that there may well have been only one of each . Ton Koopman , for example , uses one oboist and one violinist in his recording . The role of the violas is more to provide accompaniment , filling in harmonies and sometimes doubling vocal lines . The bassoon sometimes supports the continuo section , doubling its bass line , and sometimes plays an independent line .

= = = Musical forms = = =

Bach used some musical forms which reappear in later cantatas . For example , two of the choral movements have a fugue , a style of composition in which Bach excelled . Also , the two movements for soloists are developed as a type of chorale fantasia with the soloist singing the psalm text and an upper voice singing the chorale in long notes as a cantus firmus . Craig Smith called the chorale settings " a window on the future " . However , he criticised the structure of the cantata , saying that it offers evidence that at this stage in his career the composer had difficulty with large forms . On the other hand , the musicologist Julian Mincham regards the piece as being different from later cantatas rather than inferior to them .

= = = Structure and scoring = = =

Bach structured the cantata in five movements , three choral movements interspersed by an arioso and an aria . In both solo movements , a chorale stanza sung simultaneously by the soprano intensifies the Psalm text . He scored it for two soloist (tenor and bass) , a four @-@ part choir , and a small Baroque instrumental ensemble of oboe (Ob) , bassoon (Fg) , violin (VI) , two violas (Va) , and basso continuo .

In the following table of the movements , the scoring follows the New Bach Edition (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 .

= = Selected recordings = =

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 . , also vocal ensembles with one voice per part (OVPP) .