Bach Cantata Series: Masaaki Suzuki & J.S. Bach

Saturday, 2 February
7:30pm
Conservatory Concert Hall
Free admission via Eventbrite

MASAAKI SUZUKI, conductor
RYO TERAKADO, violin
MASAMITSU SAN’NOMIYA, oboe
LILIKO MAEDA, flute
LU PEI-YUN, mezzo-soprano
LIM JING JIE, baritone
YST VOICE DEPARTMENT
CONSERVATORY ORCHESTRA
Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Keyboard Concerto No.1 in D minor, BWV1052
Allegro
Adagio
Allegro

Timing – 21:00

The Composer

Statue of Bach outside St Thomas’s Church, Leipzig

The Bach family was one of the greatest musical dynasties in history, active in the musical life of northern Germany during the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. The first recorded member of the family was Viet Bach who was born around 1510 in what is now Bratislava. He settled in the Thuringia region (now part of northern Germany) where he worked as a baker but also possessed certain musical gifts which he passed on to subsequent generations, resulting in a musical dynasty which survived 300 years, ending with the death in Berlin in 1845 of Wilhelm Friedrich Ernst Bach who had been Kapellmeister to Queen Friedrike of Prussia. In all no less than 73 members of the Bach family were musicians, 14 of them achieving considerable eminence in the profession. Of course, for our age the greatest Bach of all was Johann Sebastian. He was born on 21st March 1685 in the town of Eisenach in Germany and given basic tuition on the violin and harpsichord by his father. However, both his father
and mother had died before he was 10, so he was brought up by his eldest brother, Johann Christoph, in Ohrdruf, some 60kms to the south-east. He continued to make extraordinary progress as a musician and when his brother threw him out of the house for being a disruptive influence over his own young family, Johann Sebastian was given a choral scholarship at the great church in Lüneburg. In 1703 he was appointed organist at Arnstadt and a string of similar appointments – Mühlhausen (1707-1708), Weimar (1708-1717) and Leipzig (1723 until his death on 28th July 1750) – meant that he devoted most of his creative life to writing church and organ music. However, between 1718 and 1723 he served as Director of Music at the court of Prince Leopold at Cöthen, and it was during this time that the bulk of his secular music was written.

The Concerto

First use of the term concerto in published music

It seems likely that the word “Concerto” derives from the Latin concertare, which has, to our 21st century way of thinking, a somewhat contradictory double meaning - “to argue” and also “to agree” – but really implies a meeting of minds with a common objective. The first time we find the word applied to music comes in a document dated 1519 Rome, which mentions “un concerto di voci in musica” (“a group of voices singing”), while the first published music to be called “Concerto” appeared in 1587 and was a collection of vocal works by Andrea Gabrieli and his nephew Giovanni. Over the next century it
became more associated with purely instrumental music, and by 1700 the term had come to imply a three-movement ensemble piece in which solo instruments debated and agreed with a larger instrumental ensemble.

He may not have invented the genre, but the Venetian composer Antonio Vivaldi certainly perfected and popularised the concerto, and it was copies of his concertos which brought the genre to the attention of J S Bach. Prince Leopold was an avid music collector and on his travels picked up as much new music as he could find. He purchased a set of Vivaldi concertos published in Amsterdam by Etienne Roger, and on his return to Cöthen showed them to Bach, who transcribed some of them for keyboard before setting out to write over a dozen of his own for various solo instruments. Most of these, sadly, have long since been lost. While the Vivaldi concertos which Bach knew were for violin and other single-line instruments, so it seems that the idea of writing a concerto for keyboard instrument was very much his own – although around the same time Handel was experimenting with the concept of the organ concerto – and with his Brandenburg Concerto No.5 of 1720 he conceived what appears to be the first concerto with the harpsichord as the solo instrument.

**Bach and the Harpsichord**

![Copy of a harpsichord made in Berlin ca.1710 by Michael Mietke](image)
The old idea that the harpsichord was ubiquitous in the music of Bach and his contemporaries is incorrect, and while we know that it was one of a range of instruments used to reinforce bass lines as part of the basso continuo group, what solo keyboard music Bach wrote had no specific instrument in mind; it could just as easily have been for clavichord, organ or piano, as for harpsichord. However, with the new, robust and full-toned harpsichords being manufactured in Berlin, notably by Michael Mietke, the instrument’s potential beyond a continuo role was quickly identified by Bach who, in 1719, visited Mietke to take possession a new double-manual harpsichord for Cöthen court. But while the Berlin instruments were strong in tone, as Robert James Galloway pointed out in his 1996 dissertation *The Changing Role of The Harpsichord in J. S. Bach’s Harpsichord Concertos*, it was only after his arrival in Leipzig that Bach found harpsichords which were specifically designed for solo rather than continuo use, and as a result had a somewhat wider compass of notes. On top of that his friend and business associate, the organ builder Gottfried Silbermann, had started making his own pianos, and presented one to the court in Dresden in 1732. According to Eva Badura-Skoda’s 2000 paper *“Did J S Bach Compose “Pianoforte Concertos?”*, it was a Silbermann piano referred to in the advertisement for the 1733 series of concerts given by the Leipzig Collegium Musicum; “It will begin with a fine concert [featuring] a new keyboard instrument, the like of which has never been heard in these parts before”. With these instruments and their huge soloistic potential at his disposal, Bach took a number of the concertos he had composed in Cöthen and rewrote them as keyboard concertos.

**The Concerto in D minor**

![The Leipzig Collegium Musicum in a local coffee shop](image)

These Concertos all date from the years 1737-1739 during which time Bach was on leave from his church post at Leipzig and serving as honorary Director of Music at the court in Dresden. He was also the conductor of an orchestra in Leipzig known as the Collegium Musicum, which Gawain Glenton has described as comprising “visiting virtuosi, home-grown instrumentalists and members of the Bach family who met on Wednesdays at four o'clock for
open-air performances if the weather was favourable. In more inclement weather they might meet instead in one of Leipzig’s coffee houses”. A total of seven concertos for solo harpsichord were produced for performance at either the Dresden court or the Leipzig coffee houses. The Concerto in D minor (BWV1052) was a reworking of a violin concerto Bach had composed during his years at Cöthen. Unfortunately, that violin concerto has long since been lost, but clearly it was a work of which Bach was inordinately fond; he also used material from it in two of his cantatas, numbers 146 and 188. He had originally asked another of his sons, Carl Philipp Emanuel, to transcribe the work as a keyboard concerto (which he did in 1734), but in 1738 J S Bach took CPE’s efforts and refined them into the work we hear today.

The 1st movement opens with a brisk, if austere unison passage for soloist and orchestra, before the soloist breaks out into a lively, highly decorative passage interspersed with statements of the opening unison theme. The movement is driven along, like all of Bach’s great Allegro movements, by a thrusting, almost machine-like rhythmic momentum, and it reaches a climax in a highly virtuoso solo cadenza. The 2nd movement is deeply expressive and pensive, the soloist leading the orchestra in a profoundly moving expression of grief. This ends in almost total silence to be followed by the 3rd movement, another sprightly Allegro, with cascading figures from the soloist sparkling above a serious and business-like orchestral backcloth. The general absence of contrapuntal writing and the focus on technical bravado would seem to indicate the strong influence of Vivaldi over Bach’s concerto writing.
Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Motet: Jesu, meine Freude, BWV 227

Music for the Lutheran Church

The reach of the Lutheran Church in the 17th century

Martin Luther’s establishment of his Protestant church in the early 16th century, and in particular his translation of the Bible into German in 1534, effectively changed the whole course of sacred music which, up to that time, had remained the sole preserve of the Roman Catholic Church. Settings of Roman Catholic rites in Latin were not appropriate to the new protestant churches, and with Luther’s belief in the power of music to inspire and encourage (he was renowned for the purity of his own singing voice and for his gifts as a melodist), his church became the dominant market for new music throughout the 17th century. Perhaps the most important musical element introduced by Luther was that of the Chorale; straight-forward, eminently singable tunes (often based on popular folk melodies of the region) arranged in four-part harmony to match the four basic voice ranges (soprano, alto, tenor and bass) which became associated with specific texts. While these chorales were intended to be sung by the congregations, they became the basis for much larger, more complex works such as the Chorale Prelude (an organ-only reflection on the chorale melody and its
associated text), the Cantata (an extended, multi-movement work for soloists and chorus evolving from the texts of the chorales), and the shorter, more concise (and usually unaccompanied) Motet

**The Motet**

Detail from Tallis’s 40-part Motet, *Spem in Alium*
The Motet was one of the first vocal genres introduced into the Lutheran Church, derived from the well-established motets of the Roman church which had evolved into unaccompanied choral settings of sacred texts wrapped up in ever-increasingly complex polyphonic textures. The motet had long been held in the highest esteem among church composers throughout Christendom, and had even attracted official displeasure for their placing of musical complexity above religious expression; Palestrina famously fought the case for the Motet at the Council of Trent in 1545. As late as 1570 the English composer, Thomas Tallis, came up with the ultimate example of polyphonic complexity in his 40-part motet Spem in Alium, and from that point onwards, the motet went into decline.

The German (Lutheran) motets in the 17th century watered down some of the contrapuntal excesses by including elements of the chorale, and as Christoph Wolff suggests in his article in Grove’s Dictionary, it was this which “conflicted with the traditional motet form (whose irregular, sectionalized structure depended entirely on the phrases of the text) [and] clearly hastened the gradual decline of the motet genre”. It could be argued, however, that the growing opposition in the Roman Church to complex polyphony meant that Luther saw the adoption of the Motet for his own Protestant church as an act of musical defiance, and German motet writers employed stylized contrapuntal forms to such an extent that the derogatory description of it as baroque (“twisted, deformed”) has become the label by which this entire period of musical history is erroneously (but commonly) referred. But very quickly, the Cantata replaced the Motet in the affections of Lutheran church composers, and has long since overshadowed the Motet’s significance in the eyes of many musicologists.

As Erling Sandmo has so colourfully written, “Bach’s motets are wrapped in historical uncertainty. We know so little about them, about when and why they were composed, or how many of them may have been lost...It is as if we had found them washed up on the beach of history, after the waters of time had receded”. Today we know of the existence of just seven Motets by Bach, by far and away the longest and most complex of them being Jesu meine Freude.

Jesu, meine Freude
The chorale melody was written by Johann Crüger (1598-1662) and published in 1653. Crüger, like Luther, studied theology in Wittenberg in 1620 and music with Paulus Homberger, a former pupil of Giovanni Gabrieli, in Regensburg. George Buelow, writing in *Groves Dictionary*, says of Crüger that "his singular contribution to 17th-century German music lay in his revitalizing of the Protestant chorale", and he is known to have composed 71 chorale melodies, many of which were published in the collection *Praxis pietatis melica* of 1653. The text with which Crüger’s theme has become associated was written in 1650 by Johann Franck and concerns the joy the believer has in the unwavering support of Jesus. Its six stanzas deal with the love of Jesus and the desire of the faithful to be united with him (using the Biblical *Book of Revelations*’ description of Jesus as “the bridegroom”), the protection Jesus offers from the fears of Satan, Hell, Sin and Enemies (a paraphrase of Psalm 23) as well as from the perils of earthly existence (the reference to the “dragon” again referring to a passage in the *Book of Revelations*), the rejection of earthly treasures, the conscious departure from a life of pleasure (the dismissal of these as belonging to the night is based on the
Book of Genesis) and finally a complete abandoning of oneself into the care of Jesus following a passage from the Gospel of St. Luke.

On the basis that Bach’s motet intersperses each of the six stanzas in Franck’s text with verses taken from Luther’s translation of (St Paul’s) Epistle to the
Romans, and that those verses were read and reflected on during the funeral of the wife of the Leipzig postmaster Herr Keys in July 1723, shortly after Bach had assumed his duties as Kapellmeister, the early Bach scholar, Bernard Friedrich Richter, made the assumption that Bach’s motet was composed for that occasion. It was usual in Leipzig at that time for the men and boys of the choir to gather outside the home of the deceased and accompany the body to the church and on to its final interment while singing appropriate verses. (Subsequent researches have revealed an order of service book for the funeral, which makes no mention of Bach’s music, and a contemporary report which speaks of the burial having “taken place in silence”). Nevertheless, Richter’s claim has largely remained undisputed, and Bach’s motet, Jesu meine Freude (BWV227) is usually stated as having been written in 1723 for the Kees funeral.

Jennifer M Smith in a dissertation published in 2012 observes that Bach’s motet comprises 11 movements – six stanzas of the chorale and five extracts from Romans – which fall into four clear theological sections; Movements 1 and 2 (“Aspiration toward the spiritual state motivates earthly journey”), 3-6 (“Earthly struggle with sin; Jesus protects believer from sin and death”), 7-10 (“Change of focus from earthly present to heavenly future”), and the final movement (“Earthly journey incomplete; spiritual state is unattainable in this life”).

1. Chorale
Jesu, meine Freude, Jesu, my joy,
meines Herzens Weide, my heart's pasture,
Jesu, meine Zier! Jesu, my treasure!
Ach wie lang, ach lange, Oh how long, how long
ist dem Herzen bange has my heart suffered
und verlangt nach dir! as it longed for you!
Gottes Lamm, mein Bräutigam, God's lamb, my bridegroom,
auß der dir soll mir auf Erden besides you, nothing on earth
nichts sonst Liebers werden. shall be dearer to me.

2. Chorus
Es ist nun nichts Verdammliches an denen, die in Christo Jesu sind, die Now there is no condemnation to those
werden, die nicht nach dem Fleische wandeln, who are in Christ Jesus, who do not
sondern nach dem Geist. walk after the way of the flesh, but after
the way of the Spirit.

3. Chorale
Unter deinen Schirmen Under your protection
Bin ich für den Stürmen I am safe from the storms
Aller Feinde frei. of all enemies.
Laß den Satan wittern, Let Satan rage,
Laß den Feind erbittern, let the enemy fume,
Mir steht Jesus bei. Jesus stands with me.
Ob es itzt gleich kracht und blitzt, If thunder and lightning comes,
Ob gleich Sünd und Hölle schrecken,  
Jesus will mich decken.  

If sin and Hell frighten me,  
Jesus will protect me.

4. Trio  

Denn das Gesetz des Geistes, der da  
lebendig machet in Christo Jesu, hat  
mich frei gemacht von dem Gesetz der  
Sünde und des Todes.

For the law of the spirit, which gives life  
in Christ Jesus, has made me free from  
the law of sin and death.

5. Chorale  

Trotz dem alten Drachen,  
trotz des Todes Rachen,  
trotz der Furcht dazu!  
ich steh hier und singe  
in gar sicher Ruh!  
Gottes Macht hält mich in acht;  
Erd und Abgrund muß verstummen,  
ob sie noch so brumen.

Defy the old dragon,  
defy the jaws of death,  
defy fear as well!  
Rage, O world, and attack;  
I stand here and sing  
with an assured peace!  
God's strength looks after me;  
the earth and the abyss must fall silent,  
however much noise they make.

6. Fugue  

Ihr aber seid nicht fleischlich, sondern  
geistlich, so anders Gottes Geist in  
euch wohnet. Wer aber Christi Geist  
nicht hat, der ist nicht sein.

But you are not of the flesh, but of the  
Spirit, since the Spirit of God lives in  
you. Anyone, however, who does not  
have Christ's Spirit, is not His.

7. Chorale  

Weg mit allen Schätzen,  
du bist mein Ergötzen,  
Jesu, meine Lust!  
Weg, ihr eitlen Ehren,  
ich mag euch nicht hören,  
bleibt mir unbewußt!  
Elend, Not, Kreuz, Schmach und Tod  
soll mich, ob ich viel muß leiden,  
nicht von Jesu scheiden.

Away with all treasures,  
you are my delight,  
Jesus, my joy!  
Away, you vain honours,  
I don't want to listen to you,  
remain unknown to me!  
Misery, Need, Pain, Shame and Death,  
although I must suffer much, shall  
ever part me from Jesus.

8. Trio  

So aber Christus in euch ist, so ist der  
Leib zwar tot um der Sünde willen; der  
Geist aber ist das Leben um der  
Gerechtigkeit willen.

So if Christ is in you, then the body is  
dead because of sin; but the spirit is life  
because of righteousness.

9. Chorale  

Gute Nacht, o Wesen,  

Good night, O life
Das die Welt erlesen!
Mir gefällst du nicht.
Gute Nacht, ihr Sünden,
Bleibet weit dahinten,
Kommt nicht mehr ans Licht!
Gute Nacht, du Stolz und Pracht!
Dir sei ganz, du Lasterleben,
Gute Nacht gegeben!

that the world has cherished!
You do not please me.
Good night, sins,
stay far away,
ever again come to light!
Good night, pride and glory!
To you entirely, life of corruption,
I say Good Night!

10. Chorus
So nun der Geist des, der Jesum von
den Toten auferwecket hat, in euch
wohnet, so wird auch derselbige, der
Christum von den Toten auferwecket
hat, eure sterblichen Leiber lebendig
machen, um des willen, daß sein Geist
in euch wohnet.

Since the Spirit of Him who raised
Jesus from the dead dwells in you, that
same who raised Christ from the dead
will make your mortal bodies living, for
the sake of His spirit that dwells in you.

11. Chorale
Weicht, ihr Trauergeister,
denn mein Freudenmeister,
Jesus, tritt herein.
Denen, die Gott lieben,
muß auch ihr Betrüben
lauter Zucker sein.
Duld' ich schon hier Spott und Hohn,
dennnoch bleibst du auch im Leide,
Jesu, meine Freude.

Depart, mournful spirits,
for the master of my joys,
Jesus, comes here.
For those who love God,
even sorrow must
turn to sweetness.
Though I endure mockery and shame,
you stay with me, even in my sorrow,
Jesu, my joy.
Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Concerto in D minor for Oboe and Violin, BWV1060
Allegro
Adagio
Allegro

The Cöthen Court Orchestra

Long before the nation we now know as Germany came into being, that area of northern Europe which it now occupies was made up of a large number of autonomous states mostly under the umbrella of the Holy Roman Empire, and generally sharing a common language. The Principality of Anhalt, which had been in existence since the end of the 12th century, was divided up in 1394 between two brothers who each took a parcel of territory to themselves. The younger brother, Prince Albert, settled in the town of Cöthen, which became the centre of the Principality of Anhalt-Cöthen. In 1603 the territories were divided up into even smaller units each ruled by different branches of the Ascanian family, and in 1671 the principality of Anhalt-Cöthen passed into the hands of Prince Emmanuel Lebrecht who died in 1704. His son, Leopold, was then aged just 10, and his mother, Gisela Agnes, acted as Regent (with the support of King Frederick of Prussia) until Leopold came of age in 1715. While waiting to assume full power over the Principality and its 10,000 inhabitants, Leopold busied himself in the study of music, travelling to England, France, the Netherlands and Italy to broaden his musical knowledge, and becoming a highly skilled performer on the viol da gamba. Having persuaded his mother to employ a number of full-time musicians at the court, when he eventually came of age in
1715, among his first actions were the establishment a strong court orchestra. Frederick had recently disbanded his excellent orchestra in Berlin, and Leopold eagerly snapped up some of the redundant musicians. He approached Johann Sebastian Bach, who was then employed at the Weimar court some 100kms to the south of Cöthen, and invited him to be the director of what Leopold himself described as his “Collegium Musicum”. Overcoming difficulties (mostly of his own making) in being released from his contract in Weimar, Bach arrived in Cöthen in December 1717, whether he was there in time to oversee the musical festivities associated with Leopold’s 23rd birthday on 10th December (as Malcolm Boyd suggests in his book), or just in time to celebrate the New Year (which is Christoph Wolff’s assertion in his book which, like Boyd’s, was published in 2000) is open to debate. But we do know that on arrival he found a highly capable orchestra of 18 players – four violinists, two flautists, two trumpeters, two viol da gamba players, and one player each of cello, organ, oboe, bassoon and timpani, as well as three “ripieno” players (less capable musicians who did not play solo parts) – eight of whom formed a solid core of top-flight chamber musicians.

Secular Music in Cöthen

In the early 18th century, Cöthen was a town of some 2000 inhabitants where religious conflict between the Lutheran and Calvinist churches was permanently simmering, and the Prince kept a lid on it by minimising the influence of the
various churches over his people. As a result, music was largely absent from Cöthen church services (there was not even a complete complement of singers available in the town), and Bach’s involvement with sacred music here was necessarily minimal. Wolff notes that there were two principal days in each year where Bach was required to write some vocal music - the Prince’s birthday and New Year’s Day - and has identified just 13 vocal compositions by Bach from this period. Such limited scope for writing vocal music clearly did not deter Bach, and he not only relished the opportunities afforded to him of writing purely orchestral music for the benefit of what he described as “a prince who both knew about music and loved it”, but of sharing the Prince’s passion for the latest developments in music as evidenced by the scores Leopold had brought back from his foreign travels. Indeed, so happy was Bach with this appointment that he later declared that he had hoped to remain there for the rest of his life; but the relationship with the Prince soured when Leopold married and his wife persuaded him to channel his enthusiasms into activities other than music. Wolff has identified over 130 individual works for solo instruments or ensembles which Bach wrote in Cöthen and which survive today, but many more have been lost, including a large number of concertos, among which was what we hear today as the Concerto for violin and oboe in C minor, BWV1060a.

A Concerto’s Reconstruction

A Portrait of Bach aged 35
The only surviving version of the Concerto we hear today was a Concerto in C minor for two harpsichords which Bach wrote in Leipzig, and which exists in a manuscript copy made (possibly around 1747) by Bach’s pupil and future son-in-law Johann Christoph Altnikol. The fact that virtually all the keyboard concertos Bach produced in Leipzig were actually transcriptions of earlier Concertos for other instruments, led scholars to assume this was the case with this Concerto, and the detective work into identifying the original solo instruments went on for many years. The specific figurations in the harpsichord parts implied that the original must have been for two different kinds of instruments; one was clearly a violin and the other some kind of wind instrument which, because of the expressive style of writing, was almost certainly an oboe. Using the Altnikol manuscript, the Concerto has been reconstructed for what is believed to be its original instrumentation, by the German Bach-scholar Franz Giegling (1921-2007).

The 1st movement opens with a forthright orchestral ritornello with the oboe and violin soon joining in and extending the material through a range of individual devices which seem entirely idiomatic to both solo instruments. The oboe sets things off in the 2nd movement with a plaintive theme with decorative and contemplative interventions from the violin. All this above a gently ticking orchestra accompaniment. The oboe closes the movement which is followed by a stern but sprightly fugal passage from the orchestra introducing the 3rd movement. Here the two solo instruments enter together but with different, if intertwining material.
Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Cantata No.125: “Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin”, BWV125

Bach’s Leipzig Duties

On 22nd May 1723 Bach arrived in Leipzig to take up his new position as Cantor at the St Thomas School. His arrival was a matter of some public interest and the local newspaper reported; “Last Saturday at noon four wagons arrived here from Cöthen laden with the household effects of the former Kapellmeister at the court of the prince of that place who has now been invited to become Cantor in Leipzig. At two o’clock he himself arrived with his family in two coaches”. Bach regarded this new appointment with a certain amount of trepidation - as he wrote to a friend, “At first I regarded myself quite unsuitable to change from being a Kapellmeister to being a Cantor and so I considered my decision for a quarter of a year” – but he was to remain as Cantor of Leipzig until his death and it was in that city that he wrote some of his greatest music. As Cantor, Bach was responsible for the music in the principal church of Leipzig, (which at that time was the Nikolaikirche rather than the Thomaskirche which was adjacent to the school in which he taught), and although his duties were to grow in importance during his quarter century in Leipzig (and went on to include working at the city’s historic University and organising the Collegium Musicum) his early years were taken up with teaching and in building up a repertory of cantatas to be performed on every Sunday and holy day of the year. His aim was to produce five annual cycles of cantatas, to be performed on a rotational basis. The
Cantata we hear in today’s concert was included in the second cycle and was designated for performance on the Feast of the Purification (Candlemas) which falls on February 2nd. Based on the chorale *Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin*, Cantata 125 was first presented on 2nd February 1725.

**The Cantata**

The basic definition of a Cantata is “a work for one or more voices with instrumental accompaniment”, and it originated in Italy around 1620. It differed from other vocal works in that it had instrumental accompaniment, and while the first cantatas were for solo voice, it soon evolved into a work for several voices, and by the start of the 18th century had turned into a work comprising several independent movements. Similarly, while the early cantatas were secular, the potential of the genre to suit the Lutheran musical ethic with its emphasis on congregational chorales, made it very quickly the standard and most popular vocal work amongst Lutheran church composers. The practice of writing cantatas for each Sunday and Holy Day of the church’s year grew up, and many Lutheran composers produced huge numbers – Telemann, for example, is believed to have written at least 2007. Although, so far as we know, Bach abandoned his plan to produce five complete cantata cycles, somewhere around 233 (both sacred and secular) have survived in whole or part, and there is current evidence to support the claim that there are 47 the music of which has been lost.

**The Chorales**

The score of *Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin* 4-part setting by Johann Walter (1524)
In the words of Anselm Hartinger; “The compelling indication of Bach’s devotion to the chorale and the tradition of congregational singing is reflected by his decision to devote his entire second Leipzig cantata cycle to the interpretation of the chorale. Over the course of the cycle, an underlying form took shape in which an opening concertante chorale chorus, richly orchestrated and with the melody supported by intricate accompanying voices, and a simple closing chorale form the framework for three to five internal movements that freely paraphrase the remaining chorale verses”. The chorale on which Cantata 125 is based was composed by Martin Luther, who wrote the melody to accompany his own translation and paraphrase of the Song of Simeon. It was first published in Johann Walter’s Geystliches gesangk Buchleyn (sometimes referred to as the Wittenberg Hymnal) in 1524, and Bach made use of it in six different works.

The Feast of the Purification (Candlemas)

In today’s climate of division between the various denominations of the Christian church, it may seem surprising that Martin Luther regarded the celebration of those festivals associated with the Blessed Virgin Mary (today largely regarded as uniquely part of the Roman Catholic faith) as of sufficient importance to warrant being held as major festivals within the church’s year. Yet Luther had been brought up and ordained into the Roman Catholic faith and retained his love for the Blessed Virgin Mary even after his excommunication from Rome. Thus it was that the Feast of the Purification of the Virgin on 2 February was included in each of Bach’s cantata cycles. By tradition, mothers who had given birth underwent a 40-day period of isolation, following which they presented themselves in the temple for a purification ritual; the Feast of the Purification falls the statutory 40 days after Christmas Day. The feast day also marks the occasion on which the child Jesus was first presented at the temple; the Bible tells of how the infant Jesus on being presented at the temple was picked up by the ancient Simeon who held him aloft and declared him to
common name for it as Candlemas), and then prepared for his own death in fulfilment of a prophecy he had earlier received that he would not be able to die until he had held in his arms the new-born saviour of the world. In Bach’s Cantata, the focus is on Simeon and his dual sense of joy and ultimate peace.

BWV125
1. **Chorus (Chorale v.1) - Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin**

*Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin*  
in Gottes Willen;  
getrost ist mir mein Herz und Sinn,  
sanft und stille;  
wie Gott mir verheissen hat,  
der Tod ist mein Schlaf geworden.  

*In peace and joy do I depart,*  
as God doth will it;  
consoled am I in mind and heart,*  
calm and quiet;  
as God had promised me,*  
I now sleep in death.  

2. **Aria (alto) - Ich will auch mit gebrochenen Augen**

*Ich will auch mit gebrochenen Augen*  
nach dir, mein treuer Heiland, seh'n  
Wenn gleich der Leibes Bau zerbricht,  
doch fällt mein Herz und Hoffen nicht  
Mein Jesus sieht auf mich im Sterben  
und lässet mir kein Leid geschehn  

*I would even with my broken vision*  
Look to thee, my faithful Saviour.  
When my body’s form shall break,  
yet shall my heart and hope not fall.  
My Jesus cares for me in dying  
and lets no harm befall me.

3. **Recitative and Chorale v.2 (bass) - O wunder, daß ein herz**

*O Wunder, daẞ ein Herz*  
vor der dem Fleisch verhaẞten Gruft  
und gar des Todes Schmerz  
sich nicht entsetzet!  
Das macht Christus, wahr’ Gottes  
Sohn,  
der treue Heiland,  
Da in erfülter Zeit ein Glaubensarm  
Das Heil des Herrn umfinge:  
Und machst bekannt  
Von dem erhobnen Gott, dem Schöpfer  
der treue Heiland,  
Der auf dem Sterbebette schon  
mit Himmelfüẞigkeit den Geist ergötzet,  
Den du mich, Herr, hast sehen lahn,  
Da in erfülter Zeit ein Glaubensarm  
und jedes glaubige Gemüte  
Im Tod und auch im Sterben.  

*O wonder, that one’s heart*  
before the flesh’s hated tomb  
and even death’s distress  
is not alarmed!  
This Christ hath done, God’s own true  
son,  
the faithful Saviour.  
He who stands before my deathbed  
Delights me with heaven’s sweetness.  
Whom thou, Lord, hast let me see  
When in the fullness of time, my arm  
embraced the Lord’s Salvation.  
And dost make known to me  
Concerning the high God, the creator of all  
things.  
That he salvation is and life,  
Mankind’s consolation and portion,  
Their Saviour from Destruction.  
In death as well as in dying.

4. **Duet (Tenor & Bass) – Ein unbegreiflich Licht erfüllt**

*Ein unbegreiflich Licht erfüllt*  
den ganzen Kreis der Erden  
Es schallet kräftig fort und fort  
ein höchst erwünscht Verheißungswort:  
Wer glaubt, soll selig werden  

*A great light now fills*  
the whole circle of the earth.  
It shines mightily on and on  
a word of promise most desired:  
Those with faith shall all be saved.

5. **Recitative (alto) – O unterschöpfer Schatz der Güte**

*O unerschöpfter Schatz der Güte,*  
so sich uns Menschen aufgetan:  
es wird der Welt,  
so Zorn und Fluch auf sich geladen,  
ein Stuhl der Gnaden  
und Siegeszeichen aufgestellt,  
und jedes gläubige Gemüte  
wird in sein Gnadenreich geladen  

*O unexhausted store of kindness,*  
which to us mortals is revealed:  
one day the world,  
which curse on itself hath summoned,  
a throne of mercy  
and sign of triumph shall receive,  
and every faithful heart and spirit  
shall to his realm of grace be summoned.
6. **Chorus (Chorale vs.4) – Er ist das Heil und selig Licht**

Er ist das Heil und selig Licht
für die Heiden,
zu erleuchten, die dich kennen nicht,
und zu weiden.
Er ist deins Volks Israel
der Preis, Ehr, Freud und Wonne.

He is that grace and blessed light,
which the nations
shall illumine, all who know thee not,
and shall nurture;
to Israel, thy people,
the praise, laud, joy and gladness.