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J. S. BACH
CANTATAS
34, 50, 147

Gillian Fisher
David James
Ian Partridge
Michael George

The Sixteen
The Symphony of Harmony and Invention
HARRY CHRISTOPHERS
This disc was the direct result of a BBC Proms appearance back in 1990. The controller of Radio 3, John Drummond, had asked me to perform some of Bach's cantatas in the Royal Albert Hall; he had felt that, over the years, Proms programming had neglected Bach and he wanted to address that. It was an inspirational idea and John invited us back the following season for more of the same. Although a very difficult venue for this type of music, performing in the Albert Hall was to prove a most rewarding experience, and it was even more of a delight to go into the rich acoustics of St Jude's, Hampstead Garden Suburb a week later to record the programme.

It is the only occasion on disc when I needed a guest leader, so I turned to my good friend, Roy Goodman, who has since forsaken the violin for a burgeoning conducting career. We were fortunate to capture his playing on disc and, quite frankly, one would be hard pushed to find in the recording catalogue a more exquisite rendering of the violin obbligato in the soprano aria Bereite dir from Cantata 147.

If you cast your eyes over the choir listing in this booklet, you will notice the names of two singers who are now enjoying wonderful and richly deserved solo careers. Both Mark Padmore and Christopher Purves sang with The Sixteen for many years after joining the group straight from university; The Sixteen has always been and indeed continues to be a source of great and exciting talent.

As Cantor of St. Thomas's School, and Leipzig's Director Musices Bach was in charge of music both for the four principal churches and that required for any special occasion such as, for example, the annual election of the town council. Between 1723 and 1729 he assembled three complete annual cycles for the church year, possibly four, while even a fifth may have been completed during the 1730s and 1740s. Cantatas - Bach himself seldom used the term in the context of sacred works of this kind preferring 'Concerto' or 'Stück' (piece) - formed an integral part of the Lutheran liturgy in Leipzig; their texts were usually related to the appointed Gospel and they were sung after the Gospel reading before the sermon.

Although most of Bach's cantatas date from the Leipzig years, mainly between 1723 and 1729, a significant number belong to the period between 1708 and 1717 when he was employed at the Weimar court first as Hoforganist then as Konzertmeister, too. Among the Weimar cantatas we find a rich variety of forms and techniques incorporating elements of motet, chorale, strophic aria and concerto. Their texts were mostly provided by the Weimar court poet and priest, Salomo Franck whose Pietistic inclinations emphasising subjectivity of thought, intimacy of sentiment and preoccupation with death as a longed for release from earthly suffering drew fervent musical responses from Bach.

Cantata No.50 Nun is das Heil und die Kraft: This exceptionally powerful choral movement is almost certainly a lone survivor from a lost cantata. Until fairly recently it had been assumed that the piece dated from the later Leipzig years, but it is probably unwise to assign to it a particular period of composition even though, stylistically, it appears to be a work of maturity. Since its text is taken from the appointed epistle for St. Michael's Day, it seems likely that Bach intended it for this festival, one that on three other occasions inspired music which contained pictorial imagery of an arresting kind. The epistle begins with the words, “There was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon fought and his angels; and prevailed not, neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the devil and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world; he was cast out into the earth, and his angel were cast out with him...” This colourful story seems to have stirred Bach deeply in much the same way as it had done Milton over half a century earlier. Here we have the only eight-part chorus in the entire range of his cantatas. The ceremonial orchestration consisting of three trumpets, timpani, three oboes, strings and continuo is identical with that Bach used for the Sanctus of the B minor Mass. The eight strand chorus is presented in a fugue of vast and complex architectural splendour. The subject is
announced initially by the basses of the first group and taken up by the tenor, altos and lastly the sopranos. As they complete the seven bar subject the four vocal strand of the second group enter together presenting the initial scheme in inversion whilst all the time the movement gains momentum from the growing profusion of quaver and semi-quaver motives, culminating in a glittering D major close.

**Cantata No.34 O ewiges Feuer, o Ursprung der Liebe.** Although this work belongs to Bach's last phase of activity as a sacred cantata composer all its music but that of the two unaccompanied recitatives goes back to the mid 1720s when it served as a wedding cantata. In its later "parody" version, dating from 1740 or perhaps a little after, Bach performed it at Leipzig on Whitsunday. The unidentified librettist, perhaps Bach himself may have been responsible for the words of the remaining sections of the cantata.

The cantata begins with a radiant, elaborately constructed chorus introduced by trumpet fanfares with bassoon, followed by strings whose divided violin parts are doubled by oboes. The vocal element, predominantly fugal, falls into two sections. In the first the four strands enter from the top downwards (S-A-T-B), but in the second Bach reverses the scheme, starting with the bass strand and working upwards. The chorus is masterly and a splendid example of Bach's consummate skill in sensitive and affective deployment of vocal instrument resources to create a unified ensemble.

The tenor recitative which follows the opening chorus is accompanied by the strings and is a tenderly expressive piece of writing in three movements with the preceding movement. This meditative, intimate quality is shared by the alto aria with its vacillating rhythmic pattern and warmly coloured oboe d'amore accompaniment - an early appearance of the instrument in Bach's music. The second recitative of the cantata is for bass but unlike the first is accompanied by basso continuo only. The piece has a marked arioso element and Bach's continuo writing no less than the vocal part illustrates images of the text. The soprano aria with violin obligato provides a lyrically expressive high point in the work. Here the vocal line suggests a beguiling innocence and almost child-like simplicity while the violin, the contours of whose melody can be found in several other of Bach's compositions provides an elaborate accompaniment, predominantly in triplets. The first part of the cantata concludes with a verse of a hymn by Martin Jahn, *Jesu, meinem*... (1661). Bach's celebrated setting, inspired by and ingeniously derived from the chorale melody requires no introduction.

Part Two begins with a declamatory tenor aria with a busy continuo accompaniment whose initial supplicatory four-note statement is taken up by the voice. Here the love of Christ is expressed with considerable intensity and economy of means. The alto recitative, whose vocal line is gently punctuated by two oboes da caccia, evokes the atmosphere of Bach's Passion recitatives and contains passages which engagingly colour the words of the text. The last of the arias, for bass with trumpet and strings with doubling oboes in the violin parts is a supple and robust piece proclaiming Christ's wonders. Bach ends the cantata with another verse of Jahn's hymn in a setting identical with that which concludes Part One.

Nicholas Anderson
JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685-1750)

CANTATA No.50: Nun ist das Heil und die Kraft 3.49
CHORALE PRELUDE: Vater unser im Himmelreich 1.24

CANTATA No.34: O ewiges Feuer, o Ursprung der Liebe 7.20
1 Chorus - O ewiges Feuer, o Ursprung der Liebe
2 Recit (Tenor) - Herr, unsre Herzen 0.48
3 Aria (Alto) - Wohl euch, ihr auserwählten Seelen 5.55
4 Recit (Bass) - Erwählt sich Gott 0.32
5 Chorus - Friede über Israel 2.08

CHORALE PRELUDE: Allein Gott in der Höh’ sei Ehr’ 2.32

CANTATA No.147: Herz und Mund und Tat und Leben 4.20
1 Chorus - Herz und Mund und Tat und Leben
2 Recit (Tenor) - Gebenedeiter Mund! 1.49
3 Aria (Alto) - Schäme dic, o Seele, nicht 3.46
4 Recit (Bass) - Verstockung kann Gewaltige verblenden 1.38
5 Aria (Soprano) - Bereite dir, Jesu, noch itzo die Bahn 5.25
6 Chorale - Wohl mir, daß ich Jesum habe 2.38
7 Aria (Tenor) - Hilf, Jesu, hilf 3.08
8 Recit (Alto) - Der höchsten Allmacht Wunderhand 2.34
9 Aria (Bass) - Ich will von Jesu Wundern singen 2.53
10 Chorale - Jesus bleibt meine Freude 2.47

Total playing time 56.01

SOLOISTS
SOPRANO Gillian Fisher
ALTO David James
TENOR Ian Partridge
BASS Michael George
ORGAN Paul Nicholson

THE SIXTEEN
SOPRANO Fiona Clarke, Ruth Dean, Sally Dunkley, Patricia Forbes, Nicola Jenkin, Carys Lane
ALTO Robin Barda, Michael Lees, Philip Newton, Christopher Royall
TENOR Peter Burrows, Philip Daggett, Duncan MacKenzie, Mark Padmore
BASS Simon Birchall, Roger Cleverdon, Christopher Purves, Laurence Whitehead

THE SYMPHONY OF HARMONY AND INVENTION
VIOLIN Roy Goodman (Guest Leader), Theresa Caudle, Marc Ashley Cooper, James Ellis, Fiona Huggett, Stephen Jones, Jean Paterson, Pauline Smith
VIOLA Jane Compton, David Brooker
CELLO Jane Coo, Helen Verney
BASS Tim Lyons
THEORBO, LUTE Robin Jeffrey
ORGAN Paul Nicholson
FLUTE Rachel Beckett, Utako Ikeda
OBOE, OBOE DA CACCIA, OBOE D’AMORE Sophia McKenna, Cherry Forbes, Matthew Dixon
BASSOON Sally Jackson, Julia Cunynghame
TRUMPET Crispian Steele-Perkins, David Blackadder, Michael Harrison
TIMPANI Janos Keszei
CANTATA No.50

Chorus

Nun ist das Heil und die Kraft und das Reich
und die Macht unsers Gottes seines Christus
worden, weil der verworfen ist, der sie
verklagete Tag und Nacht vor Gott.

Now is come salvation, and strength, and the
kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ:
for the accuser of our brethren is cast down,
which accused them before our God day and night.

Revelation 12:10

CANTATA No.34

1. Chorus

O ewiges Feuer, o Ursprung der Liebe,
Entzünde die Herzen und weihe sie ein.
Laß himmlische Flammen
durchdringen und wallen,
Wir wünschen, o Höchster,
dein Tempel zu sein,
Ach, laß dir die Seelen
im Glauben gefallen.

O fire everlasting, O fountain of loving,
Enkindle our hearts now and consecrate them.
Let heavenly flames
now envelop and flood them,
We wish now, O Highest,
yth temple to be,
Ah, let thee our spirits
in faith ever please thee.

2. Recitative (Tenor)

Herr, unsre Herzen halten dir
Dein Wort der Wahrheit für:
Du willst bei Menschen gerne sein,
Drum sei das Herze dein;

Lord, these our hearts hold out to thee
Thy word of truth to see:
Thou wouldst midst mankind gladly be,
Thus let my heart be thine;

3. Aria (Alto)

Wohl euch, ihr ausserwählten Seelen,
Die Gott zur Wohnung ausersehn.
Wer kann ein größer Heil erwählen?
Wer kann des Segens Menge zählen?
Und dieses ist vom Herrn geschehn.

Rejoice, all ye, the chosen spirits,
Whom God his dwelling did elect.
Who can a greater bliss be wanting?
Who can his blessings; number reckon?
And this is by the lord fulfilled.

4. Recitative (Bass)

Erwählt sich Gott die heilgen Hütten,
Die er mit Heil bewohnt,
So muß er auch den Segen auf sie schütten,
So wird der Sitz des Heiligtums belohnt.
Der Herr ruft über sein geweihtes Haus
Das Wort des Segens aus:

If God doth choose the holy shelters
Where he with health doth dwell,
Then must he, too, his blessing pour upon them,
And thus the holy temples seat reward.
The Lord proclaims above his hallowed house
His word of blessing now:

5. Chorus

Friede über Israel.
Dankt den höchsten Wunderhänden,
Dankt, Gott hat an euch gedacht.
Ja, sein Segen wirkt mit Macht,
Friede über Israel,
Friede über euch zu senden.

Peace be over Israel.
Thank the lofty hands of wonder,
Thank, God hath you in his heart.
Yea, his blessing works with might,
Peace be over Israel,
Peace upon you all he sendeth.
1. Chorus

Herz und Mund und Tat und Leben
Muß von Christo Zeugnis geben
Ohne Furcht und Heuchelei,
Daß er Gott und Heiland sei.

2. Recitative (Tenor)

Gebenedeiter Mund!
Maria macht ihr Innerstes der Seelen
Durch Dank und Rühmen kund;
Sie fänget bei sich an,
Des Heilands Wunder zu erzählen,
Was er an ihr als seiner Magd getan.

O menschliches Geschlecht,
Des Satans und der Sünden Knecht,
Du bist befreit
Durch Christi tröstendes Erscheinen
Von dieser Last und Dienstbarkeit!

Jedoch dein Mund und dein verstockt Gemüte
Verschweigt, verleugnet solche Güte;
Doch wisse, daß dich nach der Schrift
Ein allzuscharfes Urteil trifft!

3. Aria (Alto)

Be not ashamed, O soul,
to acknowledge your Saviour,

4. Recitative (Bass)

Obduracy may blind the powerful
till unseated by the arm of the Almighty;
yet this arm,
though the world tremble before it,
exalts the wretched,
whom he redeems.

O most blessed Christians,
arise, make ready;
now is the fortunate time,
now is the day of salvation;
the Saviour bids
you array body and soul
with offerings of faith;
arise, call to him in fervent longing,
that you may receive him in faith!

5. Aria (Soprano)

Prepare your way even now, Jesus
appoint, my Saviour,
the faithful soul
and look on me with eyes of mercy!
6. Chorale

Wohl mir, daß ich Jesum habe, 
O wie feste halt ich ihn, 
Daß er mir mein Herze labe, 
Wenn ich krank und traurig bin. 
Jesum hab ich, der mich liebet 
Und sich mir zu eigen gibet; 
Ach drum laß ich Jesum nicht, 
Wenn mir gleich mein Herze bricht.

Help me, Jesus, help me, that I too may acknowledge you in well-being and misfortune, in joy and suffering, that I may call you my Saviour in faith and serenity, that my heart will ever burn with your love. Help me, Jesus, help me!

He moves, he leaps and skips as Elizabeth gives voice to the miracle, as Mary's voice delivers her words' offering. When you, believers, know the weakness of the flesh, when your heart is aflame with love and yet your voice acknowledges the Saviour not, it is God who strengthens us; he shall rouse in you the power of the spirit, lay thanks and praise upon your tongue.

7. Aria (Tenor)

Hilf, Jesu, hilf, daß ich auch dich bekenne 
In Wohl und Weh, in Freud und Leid, 
Daß ich dich meinen Heiland nenne 
Im Glauben und Gelassenheit, 
Daß stets mein Herz von deiner Liebe brenne. 
Hilf, Jesu, hilf!

Help me, Jesus, help me, that I too may acknowledge you in well-being and misfortune, in joy and suffering, that I may call you my Saviour in faith and serenity, that my heart will ever burn with your love. Help me, Jesus, help me!

I will sing of the wonders of Jesus and bring him my words' offering; he will impose his love on my weak flesh, my mortal voice, by his holy fire.

8. Recitative (Alto)

Der höchsten Allmacht Wunderhand 
Würkt im Verborgenen der Erden. 
Johannes muß mit Geist erfüllet werden, 
ihn zieht der Liebe Band 
Bereits in seiner Mutter Leibe, 
Daß er den Heiland kennt 
Ob er ihn gleich noch nicht 
Mit seinem Munde nennt,

The wondrous hand of the Almighty is at work in the hidden mysteries of the earth. John the Baptist must be filled with the spirit, the bond of love draws him even in his mother's womb, that he may know the Saviour, though he may not yet name him.

I will be moved, as Elizabeth gives voice to the miracle, as Mary's voice delivers her words' offering. When you, believers, know the weakness of the flesh, when your heart is aflame with love and yet your voice acknowledges the Saviour not, it is God who strengthens us; he shall rouse in you the power of the spirit, lay thanks and praise upon your tongue.

9. Aria (Bass)

Ich will von Jesu Wundern singen 
Und ihm der Lippen Opfer bringen, 
Er wird nach seiner Liebe Bund 
Das schwache Fleisch, den irdschen Mund 
Durch heilges Feuer kräftig zwingen.

I will sing of the wonders of Jesus and bring him my words' offering; he will impose his love on my weak flesh, my mortal voice, by his holy fire.

10. Chorale

Jesus bleibt meine Freude, 
Meines Herzens Trost und Saft, 
Jesus wehret allem Leide, 
Er ist meines Lebens Kraft, 
Meiner Augen Lust und Sonne, 
Meiner Seele Schatz und Wonne; 
Darum laß ich Jesum nicht 
Aus dem Herzen und Gesicht.

Jesus remains my joy, the solace and nurture of my heart; Jesus forfends all suffering; he is the strength of my life, the pleasure and sun of my eyes, the prize and joy of my soul; thus I'll not let Jesus from my heart and sight.

Text adapted from Salomo Franck (1659–1725)
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The Sixteen is an Associate Artist of London’s South Bank Centre and also well known as the “The Voices of Classic FM”. The Sixteen’s own CD label CORO releases the group’s recordings.

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