

THE MUSIC OF JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

TELECAST: MARCH 31, 1957

Chorus and orchestra:

Adagio

Men-te cor - dis su - i, men-te cor - dis su - i,

CHORUS



Leonard Bernstein:

BACH!

A colossal syllable, one which makes composers tremble, brings performers to their knees, beatifies the Bach-lover, and apparently bores the daylight out of everyone else. How can this be? How can vibrant, thrilling music like that bore anyone? Still, it's true; many of you find Bach dull. No—don't deny it; there's nothing to be ashamed of, because the boredom comes only from the fact that it's not very easy music to know, and you must know it to love it. Maybe the trouble is that you don't get a chance to know it; you don't hear much Bach. After all, to hear Bach you have to go to certain churches faithfully, or to certain very special little concerts.

How many of you have experienced the simple strength of a

* from: *Magnificat* (end of No. 7—“Fecit potentiam”)

Bach chorale? How many of you know the power and majesty of his organ music? Have you heard the charm and delicacy of his flute music? Have you experienced the singing warmth of Bach's melodies? How often have you shared Bach's joyful celebration of God, as in the *Magnificat*?

Chorus:

Allegro *Ma - gnus - fi - cat*

Ma - gnus - fi - cat

Ma - gnus - fi - cat

gnus - fi - cat

What drive, what life! And you've probably never heard it. But the real trouble is that even if you *have* heard it, it's still difficult music to know.

And knowing Bach doesn't mean knowing that he died in Leipzig in 1750 and that he had two wives and twenty-one children. It means knowing the *music*, and that's the tough job we've set ourselves tonight. And that's also the challenge, because once you do get to know Bach well enough to love him, you will love him more than any other composer. I know this because I went through the same process myself.

For me, Bach meant very little until I was seventeen or so and began to study the *Saint Matthew Passion*. Before that, Bach had meant only some pretty monotonous stuff I sometimes heard at concerts and on the radio, plus some piano pieces I was given to

practice. There were exceptions, of course. A piece like the *Chromatic Fantasy* used to excite me greatly, because of its quality of improvisation and its virtuoso impact:

L. B. at piano:

Allegro molto

And I can remember being deeply moved by the slow movement of the *Italian Concerto*, with its long, mournful line of pure Italian melody:

Piano:

Andante

etc.

Why did these pieces touch me, when most of Bach's music didn't? It was because of their immediacy. They were instantly comprehensible to me as expressions of joy, or grief, or power, whereas the mainstream of Bach's work seemed to be nothing but endless pages of sixteenth-notes, chugging along like a train:

Piano:

FUGUE IN A-MINOR

Allegro

and any emotion contained in it was hardly discernible to me; it seemed more like motion than emotion.

I remember trying to find ways of playing such music that would make it more exciting—like giving it rhythmic distortions, which I thought was giving it warmth:

Piano:

Or I would try to turn it into a whirlwind of virtuosity and lightness:

Prestissimo
 ppppp staccatissimo

Or I would try to make it sound like a great dynamic eruption:

Agitato
 p molto cresc. molto dim.

All these ways were, of course, dead wrong, because they were only artificially covering up what seemed a basic dullness. But I was soon to learn that there are great beauties hidden in this music; only they are not so immediate as we expect them to be. They lie beneath the surface. But because they do, they don't rub off so easily; they last and last.

Why is Bach's music less immediate than, say, that of Brahms or Chaikovsky? Perhaps the main reason is that his music is not obviously dramatic. We have been so spoiled by music written since Bach's time, which is essentially dramatic in nature, that we have come to expect drama of one sort or another in music, and we're disappointed and bored when we don't see it.

Now, what makes music dramatic anyway? Contrast—and I mean contrast as a principle of composition, the principle of duality, of two themes, two contrasting ideas or emotions within a single movement.

It is in the music written since Bach that the dualistic principle has flourished. Think of almost any Beethoven symphony—say, the *Eroica*. The first theme is masculine in quality:

I., B. at piano:

Allegro

the second theme is feminine:

p dolce

Or take Rachmaninoff's *Second Piano Concerto*. The first theme is aggressive and agitated:

Con passione

Musical score for the first theme of Rachmaninoff's *Second Piano Concerto*, marked *Con passione*. The score is written for piano and features a complex, agitated melody with many accidentals and a driving rhythm.

while the second is lyrical and reposeful.

Musical score for the second theme of Rachmaninoff's *Second Piano Concerto*, marked *p dolce*. The score is written for piano and features a more lyrical and reposeful melody with fewer accidentals and a slower, more flowing rhythm.

And there is always the further contrast of tonalities; the first theme of the Rachmaninoff, for example, is in C-minor and the second in E-flat major.

Contrast makes drama—black against white, good against evil, day and night, grief and joy. Bach represented the last stand *against* the dualistic concept. Any single movement is always concerned with one single idea. Bach clung to the older concept of one thing at a time—grief *or* joy, day *or* night—which is certainly as valid a concept as the other. Only we've been spoiled; and so, to enjoy Bach, we must reorient ourselves and learn to expect music that is always about one thing at a time. Once the theme is stated at the beginning, the main event is over. The rest of the movement will be a constant elaboration, reiteration, and discussion of that main event, just as the architecture of a bridge grows inevitably out of one initial arch.

When you listen to the opening bars of the *Fifth Brandenburg Concerto*, I think you'll see what I mean:

Chamber orchestra:

Musical score for the opening bars of the *Fifth Brandenburg Concerto*, marked *Allegro*. The score is written for chamber orchestra and features a rhythmic, arch-like structure.

This is the arch; the rest of the bridge follows logically and inevitably.

On and on it goes, in the same way, spinning out those wonderful long lines. But if you're expecting any change in mood, a sudden slowing down or a yielding to sentimental lyricism—contrast, in other words—you're not going to get it. Contrast is there all

right, but it's restricted to loud and soft, or key changes, or different instrumental groupings, but the *dramatic* contrast of themes is *not* there.

We have here music based on *one* chain of related themes, which are treated, developed, and investigated to the hilt. This is known as the argumentative technique, the technique of taking one subject and discussing it fully, which sounds, offhand, rather intellectual—and I suppose it is. But whoever said that music had to be easy to be beautiful? Let's just admit it's complex, pull in our belts, take a deep breath and get to know Bach on his own terms.

The first term we already know: the argumentative or non-dramatic technique. Now for the second term, that frightening bugaboo, counterpoint.

Why are people so scared of this word? When "counterpoint" is mentioned, or, even worse, when its adjectival cousin "contrapuntal" is mentioned, people throw up their hands. "Don't bother me with all that counterpoint stuff. I don't get it. Give me a good simple melody." Well, there's nothing to be scared of. Counterpoint is melody, only accompanied by one or more additional melodies, running along at the same time.

You may recall that on another *Omnibus* program* I played "The Star-Spangled Banner" with my left hand and "America" with my right, with resulting dissonant clashes. Out of this consideration arises the very fine art of counterpoint, the art which fixes rules for making two or more melodic lines go well together. As you saw, by changing a few notes in one of the lines I made those two tunes fit together. Of course it meant that "America" was no longer quite the same tune, but it made good counterpoint.

But why counterpoint anyway? Why complicate matters? The theory is that two melodies at once must be twice as interesting as one. By the same token, I suppose, six melodies going on at once are six times as interesting, and six times harder to write. And, I admit, six times harder to listen to.

But again, it's only a question of our having been spoiled by the music we hear most of the time, music which emphasizes hor-

mony instead of counterpoint. In other words, we are used to hearing a melody on top, with chords supporting it underneath like pillars—melody and harmony, a tune and its accompaniment:

Orchestra:

Franck, *SYMPHONY IN D-MINOR*

The image shows two systems of musical notation for an orchestra. The first system is marked 'Allegretto' and 'p cantabile'. It features two staves: a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The music consists of various notes, rests, and dynamic markings. The second system continues the notation with similar staff arrangements and musical symbols.

That's our basic idea of music, only because in the last two hundred years or so music has grown in that direction.

But before that, people used to listen to music differently. The ear was conditioned to hear *lines*, simultaneous melodic lines, rather than chords. That was the natural way of music, strange though it seems to us. Counterpoint came before harmony, which is a comparatively recent phenomenon. Actually, all primitive music, like Oriental folk music today, is made of *lines*, just as present-day jazz is also primarily involved with line. That's why jazzmen idolize Bach. For them, he is the great model for the continuously running melody, and this is natural, because Bach and the jazz player both feel music in terms of line—that is, horizontally.

* See "Introduction to Modern Music," page 180.

Melody is a horizontal idea of music, flowing along through time in a linear way:

L., B. at piano:

ART OF THE FUGUE (Contrapunctus II)



and so is counterpoint, which is an abundance of horizontal melodies flowing at once, as in this Bach fugue:

String quartet:

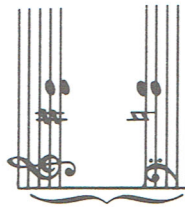


Here are four melodic lines at once. But there's another way of looking at it. At any given moment, we can suddenly stop the music:



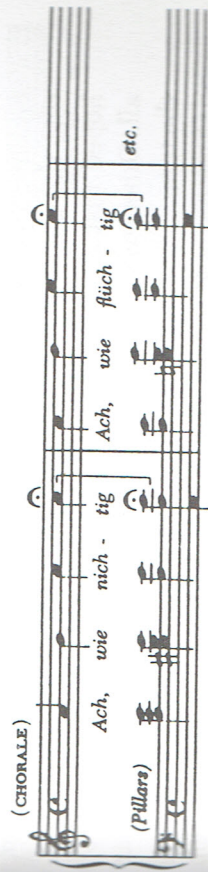
And what do we have? Four different notes sounding simultaneously, giving us a chord, a vertical sound. This vertical sound is harmony:

L., B. at piano:



— the concept of chords, those pillars that hold up a melody, as in the Bach chorale *Ach, wie nichtig! Ach, wie flüchtig!*:

Chorus:



This is vertical music. But even here there is something horizontal going on. The melody in the soprano is, naturally, horizontal to begin with. But any of the three accompanying voices—alto, tenor or bass—is also singing a linear melody of its own. Here, for instance, is the horizontal line that the bass sings:

Basses:

Ach, wie nich - tig Ach, wie flüch - tig

What I hope you're beginning to see is that harmony and counterpoint are interactive, and that there is something of each involved in the other. I have been warned that this is too subtle a point for the nonmusician to grasp, but I don't believe it. And this point is most exciting, because it is the key to Bach's style. Bach fuses the vertical and the horizontal in so marvelous a way that you can never say of any piece of his, "This is only counterpoint," or "This is only harmony." He fashions a kind of sublime crossword puzzle in which the notes of the across "words" and the down "words" are interdependent, where everything checks and all the answers are right.

Now let's apply what we know of Bach's technique to some of his music and begin to solve the crossword puzzle. Starting with his simplest music, the chorale, or Lutheran hymn, we find a familiar, measured melody, easy enough for a whole congregation to remember and be able to sing in church, with harmony supporting it. Bach harmonized hundreds of these chorales, for soprano, alto, tenor and bass, like the one we just saw. On the theory that all four types of voices were to be found in any congregation, and that the members of the congregation could read music, it was hoped that the chorales could be sung in church, harmony and all. Otherwise, the congregation simply sang the soprano part, or the tune.

Everybody knew the tunes, after all. They were mostly popular

songs. You see, the Lutheran church had been hungry for music that the worshippers themselves could sing, in contradistinction to the Catholic service, where all the singing was done by the officiating clergy and choir. And so the Protestant movement had grabbed up all kinds of melodies from all over the place: love songs, march tunes, even barroom ballads, songs that crossed the German border from France or Italy. All were eagerly taken up and made into hymns.

For example, take one of the most popular chorale melodies: "O Lamb of God, Most Holy":

L. B. sings:

O Lamb of God most ho - ly, who on the Cross did lan - guish

Doesn't that sound suspiciously like "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star"?

Twin - kle, twin - kle lit - tle star How I won - der what you are

As a matter of fact, this tune was a popular folk song of the time, known by the French title "Ah, Vous Dirai-je, Maman."

Boys' choir:

Ah vous di - rai - je ma - man ce qui cau - se mon tour - ment?

The chorale tune is different, but it has the same general shape:

Boys' choir:

O Lamb of God most ho - ly

Bach would take a tune like this, give it to the sopranos, and add harmony in three additional parts; but each of those three parts makes a melodic line that is in itself beautiful and interesting. That is the horizontal aspect of this vertical music. When you listen to this chorale as Bach harmonized it, you'll see what I mean.

Full chorus:

O Lamb of God most ho - ly

Now you can clearly hear the tune on top, sung by the soprano. But what's going on underneath? Well, the altos have been singing

Altos:

O Lamb of God most ho - ly

The tenors have this phrase:

Tenors:

O Lamb of God most ho - ly

And the basses sing:

Basses:

O Lamb of God most ho - ly

We see that each voice has its own horizontal interest, its own melodic beauty. That's why the four voices together produce music that is so profoundly engaging and rich, in spite of its great simplicity.

Rich as the chorale is, Bach took it and developed it into something even richer, called the chorale-*prelude*. A chorale-*prelude* is simply a short piece of continuous texture, within which, from time to time, appear the separate phrases of a chorale melody. The chorale-*prelude* is like a smoothly flowing river whose course is dotted with islands. The river is the main musical material, while the islands are the phrases of the chorale, isolated one from the other. That is where the counterpoint comes in, land and water together. For example, take the chorale tune: "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring":

Chorus:

Je - su, joy of man's de - sir - ing Ho - ly
wis - dom love most bright

Out of this Bach builds a chorale-*prelude* for organ. But we don't hear the tune right off. First the river begins its tranquil flow, a melodic line entirely different from the chorale tune, but vaguely related to it:

Organ

Tranquilly
p

Then the first island approaches, the first phrase of the chorale, and the river goes placidly on:

And now the second island, with the stream continuing placidly alongside it:

The counterpoint is exquisite, so limpid and expressive of the meaning of the chorale. But the counterpoint is born of harmony, the harmony of the chorale tune itself. So again we find harmony and counterpoint inextricably woven together.

From here, Bach takes counterpoint into even more complex regions where dwell the high-bred races of canons and fugues. You all know what a canon is: a device of imitation by one melodic line of another, just as we know it from the simplest rounds we all sang as kids—“Frère Jacques,” “Three Blind Mice” and so on. In a canon, as in a round, one voice always begins alone. Let’s say I begin with “Row, row, row your boat, gently down the stream”; now you will come in singing the same thing, while I go on to “Merrily, merrily,” etc., and there we have the beginning of a canon.

Now, when Bach writes a canon, no matter how complex the counterpoint gets, we can always feel a harmonic structure holding it up. For instance, this Two Part Invention begins canonically. The right hand plays a two-bar phrase, and the left hand comes in later with an exact imitation:

1. B. plays piano:

But, as if by magic, Bach picks notes which not only go together in wonderful counterpoint, but also manage to produce harmony, even though there isn't a chord to be seen. Thus these two simple lines combine to produce the greatest possible *harmonic* strength. With only two notes at a time, Bach is able to give us a clear impression of harmony so that the listener is never lost between two separate melodic lines. The implied harmony holds it all together.

The canon leads us naturally to the ultimate expression of counterpoint—the fugue—which in Bach's hands became a form so mighty that no composer has ever been able to equal it since. To analyze the structure of a fugue would be a whole other program, if not a course in a conservatory. But we don't have to be fugue experts to love Bach. All we have to know, really, is that the fugue grows out of the canon, and then goes off on tangents and episodes, and developments, to become a new, exciting and complex form.

But even in that maze of counterpoint, Bach saves the situation by fusing his counterpoint with harmony, so that you are never in the position of having to follow four separate melodies at once, like trying to keep up with four telephone conversations. Harmony unites the voices and makes them come together in a single entity.

Now we're beginning to have some idea of what Bach is about. The chorale, the chorale-prelude, the canon and the fugue are the four corners of Bach's musical world. Armed with our knowledge of these, plus our newfound ability to listen horizontally and vertically at the same time, we are ready for any of Bach's works. We are going to examine the opening chorus of the *Saint Matthew Passion*, that glorious work that started me off on my own private passion for Bach. Complicated as it is, there is nothing in this

chorus that we cannot now understand. It is simply a chorale-prelude, a river with islands, just like the one we heard before. Only this chorale-prelude is sung, and the river is no longer tranquil, but churning and heaving.

Orchestra:

share my an - guish Come - ye etc.
ye daugh - ters share my an - (guish)

The resulting richness of all the parts, with the orchestra throbbing beneath, is incomparable.

Full orchestra and chorale:

Andante
Come, ye Daugh-ters share my an - guish
A.
T.
Come, ye Daugh-ters share my an - guish
Come, ye Daugh-ters share my an - guish
Come, ye Daugh-ters share my an - guish
Come, ye Daugh-ters share my an - guish

This is the orchestral introduction which sets the mood of suffering and pain, preparing for the entrance of the chorus which will sing the agonized sorrow of the faithful at the moment of crucifixion. And this is all done in imitation, in canon. "Come ye Daughters, share my anguish," sing the basses, and they are answered in canon a fifth higher by the tenors:

Men sing:

TENORS:
Come ye daugh - ters share - my an - guish Come ye daugh - ters share - my an - (guish) etc.

BASSES:
Come ye daugh - ters share - my an - guish Come ye daugh - ters share - my an - guish Come ye daugh - ters share - my an - guish

All this time, the female voices are singing a counter-canon of their own:

Women sing:

SOPRANOS:
Come ye daugh - ters share my an - guish

ALTOS:
Come ye daugh - ters share my an - guish

Full orchestra and chorale:

share my an - guish Come, - ye Daugh - (ters) etc.

ye Daugh - ters share my an - (guish) etc.

Daugh - ters share my an - (guish) etc.

Daugh - ters share my an - guish Come, etc.

etc.

Then suddenly the chorus breaks into two antiphonal choruses "See Him!" cries the first one. "Whom?" asks the second. And the first answers: "The Bridegroom see. See Him!" "How?" "So like a Lamb." And then over and against all this questioning and answering and throbbing, the voices of a boys' choir sing out the chorale tune, "O Lamb of God Most Holy," piercing through the worldly pain with the icy-clear truth of redemption:

Boys' choir:

O Lamb of God most ho - ly

The contrapuntal combination of the three different choruses is thrilling. There is nothing like it in all music:

Full chorus:

Andante

BOYS' CHOIR

CHORUS I & II

See Him! Whom? The Bride - groom see, See Him! How? So like a Lamb Come - ye daugh - ters share - my an - He Come ye ly etc.

O Lamb of God most ho -

Who ever said Bach was undramatic? In this chorus, before the narrator has even begun to tell the story, the drama is already laid before us as tellingly as in the opening of a Greek tragedy. For Bach, nothing could exceed in pity, terror or exaltation the simple story of Christ and the wonder of man's relation to Him. And it is here, in the drama of Christianity, that Bach's dramatic genius burns most brightly.

For example, in the *Saint Matthew Passion*, the events of the Passion Play are sung by a solo tenor in the barest recitative style, accompanied only by a harpsichord, cello and bass. But when the voice of Jesus is heard, even in the recitative passages, the strings enter and surround it with glowing chords, which have often been compared to a halo. Here is such a recitative section, describing the scene of the Last Supper, where Jesus tells his disciples that one of them will betray him—and listen for that halo:

EVANGELIST:

And when eve-ning came, He sat down with the twelve and he said as they were eat - ing "Ver - i - ly I say to you one of_ you_ shall be

(STRINGS)

Jesus:

(HALO)

tray me."

Then there follows one of the most dramatic moments of the whole work, as the disciples' voices tumble over one another in the fearful, anxious question: "Lord, is it I?" Here is a pure dramatic use of counterpoint which makes the scene as real as if it were being acted. Again, Bach the nondramatist turns out to be the superdramatist of them all:

Chorus:

Allegro

LORD! is it I? LORD! is it I? LORD! is it I? LORD! is it I?

is it IP LORD! is it IP

is it IP LORD! is it IP LORD!

LORD! is it IP LORD!

IP LORD! is it IP

LORD! is it IP

LORD! is it IP

is it IP LORD!

IP LORD! is it IP

There is a fascinating sidelight to this little chorus. It turns out that the phrase "Lord, is it IP?" is repeated exactly eleven times, once for each of the disciples except Judas, who is understandably silent. But this is not only a dramatic device. It reflects Bach's tremendous preoccupation with numbers as symbols. Bach was a mystic, for all his plain, provincial, Lutheran simplicity; and one aspect of this mysticism was his interest in numerology. He was

fond of that Talmudic trick of substituting numbers for letters of the alphabet and deriving mystical conclusions from the results.

For example, on the principle that A equals 1, B equals 2, etc., the name of Bach adds up to 14. For him, this became a mystic number. The first digit, 1, is the most holy of all numbers, and the second, 4, represents the four gospels. Furthermore, 1 subtracted from 4 is 3, the Trinity. 1 and 4 added are 5, the five books of Moses. The factors of 14 are 2 and 7, both ancient mystic symbols. But, luckiest of all, the whole name of Johann Sebastian Bach adds up to 41 (in the old German alphabet), which is the exact inversion of 14 (the sum of B-A-C-H); and that, to a contrapuntal mind, must have been a miraculous sign. In fact, in the very last piece he wrote before he died (the chorale-fantasia *Vor dem Thron tret' ich allhier*), the first phrase contains exactly 14 notes, and the whole melody contains 41 notes.

This almost naive mystic streak shows up all through the *Passion*, in the form of musical pictorialism. For Bach, notes were not just sounds, but the very stuff of creation. If he could use them to shape the Cross, or to depict a gesture of Christ's hand, or to suggest the flight of the spirit to heaven, then he was happy. For example, take this recitative later on in the *Passion*:

Soloist:

And when they had sung a hymn of praise to - ge - ther

They went out un - to the Mount of Ol - ives

Did you hear the slow ascent to the Mount of Olives?

Harpsichord and singer:

ACCOMPANIMENT

EVANGELIST:

They went out un - to the Mount of Ol - ives

And that is not all. As it continues, listen to the musical continuation that Bach creates to the words "And the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad":

Soloist and harpsichord:

Vivace

Jesus:

I will smite, I will smite the shep - herd And the

mf (The scattering of the Flock)

sheep of the flock shall be scat - ter - ed a - broad

etc.

And then a lyric image of the Ascension, through another simple scale:

Moderato

p But when I am ri - sen a - gain Then I will go -

(The Ascension)

fore you - in - to Ca - li - lee

But how different is this scale, with its halo of strings, from the dry one depicting the ascent to the Mount of Olives!

We begin to see now what the great Albert Schweitzer calls Bach's "tone-speech," by which he means that mystic fusion of words and notes that resulted in a whole new Bachian language. It is in this language that Bach writes his drama, not only in the recitative sections where the story is being told, but everywhere in the *Passion*.

For instance, there now comes a chorale which is heard no fewer than five times throughout the course of the work, a beautiful melody:

Piano:

Each time this chorale appears, it is presented in a new way: with different words, in different keys, and with different harmonizations. And through these differences of tone-speech, Bach is able to communicate a variety of meanings that is phenomenal.

In this first appearance of the chorale, the words are "Acknowledge me, my Keeper, my Shepherd," referring to the sheep in the preceding recitation. The harmonic setting is, therefore, simple and pastoral. The inner voices move scalewise, with no ornamental skips or elaborate counterpoint:

Chorus:

But, at the moment when Jesus dies, the chorale is heard again in a very different arrangement. The words are now: "When I, too, am departing, then part Thou not from me." Accordingly, the harmonies are now brooding, chromatic, mysteriously twisted with suffering, and darkened by the presence of death:

Chorus:

an - guish By Thine own woe and - pain.

This musical score shows a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has a melodic contour that rises and then falls. The piano accompaniment features a prominent, sustained chord in the right hand and a more active bass line in the left hand.

This is one of the most awe-inspiring moments in all music. But then, almost every moment in the *Passion* is awe-inspiring. Over and over again, Bach gives us this magic through his extraordinary unity of words and music.

For example, in the Gethsemane scene, when Jesus finds his disciples sleeping. He says: "What, could ye not watch with Me one hour? Watch ye, and pray ye enter not into temptation." And he continues:

Soloist and strings:

The spi - rit in - deed is will - ing But the flesh is weak...

(STRINGS) (HALO)

This score features a vocal line and a string accompaniment. The vocal line is marked with a fermata over the word 'in'. The string accompaniment consists of a sustained, shimmering chord in the right hand and a simple bass line in the left hand, creating a 'halo' effect.

How wonderful is the setting of that word *weak!* You are expecting a normal resolution of the harmony:

But the flesh is weak...

This score shows a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has a melodic contour that rises and then falls. The piano accompaniment features a prominent, sustained chord in the right hand and a more active bass line in the left hand.

But Bach paints the word for us by an irresolute chord!

But the flesh is weak...

This score shows a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has a melodic contour that rises and then falls. The piano accompaniment features a prominent, sustained chord in the right hand and a more active bass line in the left hand.

Can you feel the "weakness" of the harmony?

And, as for word-painting, nothing excels the moment of betrayal, when Judas kisses his master. The kiss, with all its fake sweetness, is made almost visual to us, in an overromanticized phrase:

EVANGELIST: And straight-way came he to Je - sus and said All hail to thee O Mas - ter And kiss - ed Him...

JUDAS: All

EVANGELIST: And kiss - ed Him...

This score shows a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has a melodic contour that rises and then falls. The piano accompaniment features a prominent, sustained chord in the right hand and a more active bass line in the left hand.

The moment when Jesus is captured is signaled by one of the great pieces of the whole work, a duet for soprano and alto, with choral backing, on the words "Alas, my Jesus now is taken." This is no longer just word-painting, but scene-painting on the largest scale. It is like one of those great choruses in Greek tragedy. The two solo singers are like the chorus leaders; and as their contrapuntal lament spins out, it is broken into by startling cries of "Leave Him, bind Him not!" from the chorus of disciples:

Duet and chorus:

Moderato
SOPRANO SOLO:
A - las my Je - sus now is tak - A - las my

(DISCIPLES)
Je - sus now is tak - LEAVE HIM! LEAVE HIM! BIND HIM NOT!

Then as the soloists sing, "He's led away. Ah, they have bound Him," we hear heavy measured treads in the orchestra, as of inexorable footsteps:

Duet and orchestra:

ALTO, SOPRANO
DUET:
He's led a - way, ah - they have bound

ORCH:
He's led a - way, ah - they have bound

bound etc.

And then it all erupts in a tremendous choral outburst, calling on the lightning and thunder to destroy these murderers. After hearing this fugal chorus, you can never again say that counterpoint is dull. This is drama at the boiling point:

Double Chorus:

Thun - ders! Light - nings! Thun - ders! Light - nings! Thun - ders! Light - nings! Thun - ders!

Vivace

CHORUS I

CHORUS II

ORCH.

f

etc.

Soloists and chorus:

PLATE:

Tell me whe - ther of the two here will ye that

EVANGELIST:

I re - lease to you 8 They an - swered

S.

A. BAR - AB - BARI

T. BAR - AB - BARI

B. BAR - AB - BARI

Or the last, heart-breaking moment on the Cross:

Soloists:

EVANGELIST:

And a - bout the ninth — hour Je - sus cried a - loud and

Pure drama, on the highest level—the Bachian level. And on through the work, with unbelievable consistency, this level is maintained, as in the moment when Pontius Pilate offers the mob their choice of Barabbas or Jesus to be released:

Adagio
 JESUS: E - li, E - li, la - ma, la - ma sa - bach - tha - ni?
 said: E - li, E - li, la - ma, la - ma sa - bach - tha - ni?

This is the only time that Jesus' words are not framed by the halo of the strings. A master stroke, for at this one moment of death, Christ is mortal. There follows the most dramatic moment of all.

Soloist and orchestra:

Fast and agitated
 EVANGELIST:
 And then be - hold the veil of the tem - ple was rent in - twain From - the top un - to the

CELLOS,
 BASSES
 Continuo

bot - tom

And then the final chorus—the farewell to Christ in the tomb, like a great, exalted lullaby:

Chorus:

Andante sostenuto
 CHOR. I & II:
 In — deep - est — grief
 here — sit — we —

pp

weep - ing — Hearts turned to — Thee —

CHOR. I

— O Sav - iour - blest Rest Thee soft - ly

CHOR. II

ly, soft - ly

CHOR. I & II

rest — Thee soft - ly

rest

The musical score consists of two systems of staves. The first system is for CHOR. I and CHOR. II. The lyrics are: "— O Sav - iour - blest Rest Thee soft - ly" for CHOR. I and "ly, soft - ly" for CHOR. II. The second system is for CHOR. I & II. The lyrics are: "rest — Thee soft - ly" and "rest". The score includes various musical notations such as rests, dynamics (p, f), and articulation marks.

Oh, if it were only possible to show you all the wonders of this work! But they are infinite. Nobody knows them all, even with a lifetime of study. And think that this is only one work in the vast catalogue of Bach's output, one volume among all these dozens!

(L. B. shows the complete edition of Bach's works, forty-odd huge volumes)

songs, dances, suites, partitas, sonatas, toccatas, preludes, fugues, cantatas, oratorios, masses, passions, fantasias, concertos, chorales, variations, motets, passacaglias—the white-hot creation of fifty ceaseless years.

And what is it that holds all these pages together, that makes it all inevitably the product of one man? The religious spirit. For Bach, all music was religion; writing it was an act of faith, and performing it was an act of worship. Every note was dedicated to

God and to nothing else. And this was true of all his music, no matter how secular its purpose. The six *Brandenburg Concertos* for orchestra were technically dedicated to the Margrave of Brandenburg, but the notes praise God, not the Margrave. Every last cello suite or violin sonata, every prelude and fugue from *The Well-Tempered Clavier* praises God.

This is the spine of Bach's work: simple faith. Otherwise, how could he have ever turned out all that glorious stuff to order, meeting deadlines, and carrying on so many simultaneous activities? He played the organ, directed the choir, taught school, instructed his army of children, attended board meetings, kept his eye out for better-paying jobs. Bach was a man, after all, not a god; but he was a man of God, and his godliness informs his music from first to last.