

A CORRELATIVE STUDY
OF THE TEXT AND VOCAL LINE
OF BACH'S CANTATA NO. 82

by 1264

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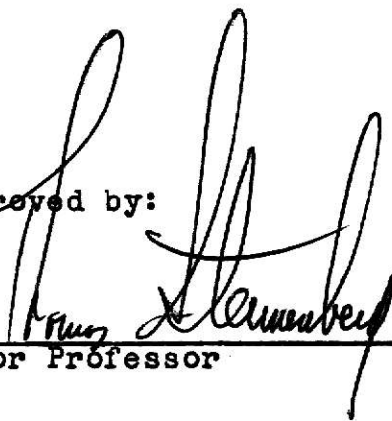
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INTRODUCTION

The Background of Johann Sebastian Bach's Solo Cantata No. 82

Johann Sebastian Bach's Cantata No. 82, one of two for bass soloist, was written for the Feast of the Purification of Mary. This cantata is one of Bach's lesser known works. The purpose of studying this cantata was to discuss such a composition of Bach's and show the correlation of the music in the vocal line to the emotional expression of the textual material. To understand this cantata it might be helpful to explore the history of the solo cantata and in particular of Cantata No. 82.

The solo cantata is not a field of composition known only through the works of Johann Sebastian Bach. The bel canto style marked the beginning of the typical Baroque solo cantata.¹ The early solo cantatas of the Baroque period were more secular in nature and were intended to give music lovers a source of operatic enjoyment in their own homes. The solo cantatas received the same place in Italian social life that the madrigal had enjoyed previously. Luigi Rossi (1597-1653) is known as the first great master of the cantata form. Somewhat later, Giacomo Carissimi (1604-1674) added a more melodic line and organized thematic material of melody and continuo bass in the cantata form and Marc Antonio Cesti (1623-1669),

1 Alec Harman and Anthony Milner, Man and His Music (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1959) pg. 261.

Carissimi's pupil, developed cantatas into almost operatic figures. From Cesti onward, the cantata followed and paralleled the development of the opera.

The first solo cantatas were composed to please the sophisticated members of the Roman elite classes. These early solo cantatas were not sacred and were very typical of the early Baroque period. The cantata forms of recitative and arioso sections and triadic harmonies were very influential upon the style as set forth by Bach in his compositions in this style later in the period.

Church cantatas are known to us exclusively in Bach's examples and were the product of this period of musical history. The term "cantata", as used by Bach, infers that this word was considered by him to mean a work for solo voice. Bach used the term "Stuck" (piece), concerto, or motetto for most of his choral cantatas.²

Vocally considered, Bach was a choral writer and is not considered as an important composer for the solo voice. But consider that ". . . nearly 600 arias and over 100 duets exist, and recitatives are much more numerous, and his choruses, apart from simple chorales, number less than 250."³ In regards to the importance of the smaller form of Bach's cantatas, solo construction and duet, trio, or solo quartet construction has proven of relatively minor use in the study of his works.

2 Harold Gleason, Music in the Baroque (Rochester, N.Y.: Levis Music Stores, 1950) pg. 120.

3 William Gillies Whittaker, The Cantatas of Johann Sebastian Bach (London: Oxford University Press, 1959) pg. 65.