PERFORMANCE PRACTICE AND ANALYSIS OF
JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH’S ARIA
FOR TENOR AND FLUTE OBBLIGATO,
WÖ WIRD IN DIESEM JAMMERTALE,
FROM CANTATA BWV 114

A CREATIVE PROJECT
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Musical style, the character of the music, is truly at the mercy of its performers. When considering any performance of Johann Sebastian Bach’s music, questions of authenticity arise. The instruments available during J.S. Bach’s time (1685-1750) were different from today’s improved, modern versions. These earlier instruments and their playing capabilities are one very important reason performance practices today differ from those of centuries long ago. Differing performance practices and how the formal analysis influences these varying interpretations will be explored in this paper. Specifically, this paper will demonstrate how J.S. Bach’s aria *Wo wird in diesem Jammertale* from *Cantata BWV 114, Ach lieben Christen, seid getrost* may be performed by the tenor, flute obbligato, and continuo for whom it was written. When beginning performance preparation and access to a genuine manuscript is unavailable, as is often the case, a performer must rely on a respected score edition. Musicians are very fortunate in J.S. Bach’s case to have the Bach-Gesellschaft.

Bach-Gesellschaft was a German society founded in 1850 with the purpose of providing a complete critical edition of Bach’s works. The published editions are free from editorial additions. The project, urged on by Robert Schumann, includes most of Bach’s known works (and erroneously, some of which we now know were not written by Bach).¹ In volume 24 of *Johann Sebastian Bach’s Werke, Cantata BWV 114* is found, scored for flauto traverse, tenore, and continuo.² Any other edition of the cantata should be compared with the Gesellschaft version, to ensure correctness and clarity on

performance practices involving particular passages. An understanding of German or a good translator is most useful.

When a genuine manuscript is unavailable, acquiring a good edition is a great starting point for determining what an authentic performance would be, as opposed to a modern performance. Unfortunately, earlier music scores often indicate less interpretive guidance than more recent composers give. In such cases, as with J.S. Bach’s music, one must consult available treatises and other valid writings from the compositional era in question. Such historical treatises to be consulted include those of Altès, Corrette, C.P.E. Bach, Hotteterre, Leopold Mozart, Taffanel, Tromlitz, and Quantz.³ It is the performer’s responsibility to the composer to accurately translate the music for the audience.

Understanding the music historically and structurally is just one of the performer’s obligations. Legitimate performance practice may be determined by any number of significant factors. For example, the social and economic history during the time which the music was composed and performed, for what purpose the piece was composed, if any political events influenced the music, and by whom the piece was performed are all important considerations.

The history of the original musical instruments for which the music was written for is of the upmost concern. Such knowledge may tell a performer of the idiomatic intricacies of such an instrument, and specific characteristics of an instrument – its fingering, articulation, tone, etc. – often provide clues as to how a piece should be performed.⁴ Even paintings or photographs depicting musical life of the time period in question may become a valuable resource to be consulted on the subject of performance

⁴ Ibid.
practices of yesteryear. Finally, studying other musical works by the same composer or by a different composer from the same period may be a great learning tool. For example, when considering Bach’s *Cantata BWV 114*, one might look at some of the composer’s other works which he carefully revised in the *Gesellschaft*. Such works include his *Brandenburg concertos*, *the B minor Mass, St. Matthew Passion*, and several sacred cantatas including numbers 7, 8, 13, 32, 42, 47, 56, 58, 60, 95, 103, 105, 151, and 187.\(^5\)

J.S. Bach wrote his *Cantata BWV 114* in 1724, one year after his appointment as cantor of St. Thomas’s in Leipzig, Germany, a post which he held until his death in 1750. Bach wrote five complete church year cantata cycles in his lifetime; with cantatas performed on fifty-nine Sundays and for Feast days, this means Bach wrote at least 295 cantatas, with 165 from his Leipzig period having survived.\(^6\) During Bach’s time, the flute enjoyed enormous popularity despite its less-than-favorable intonation. The recorder, predecessor of the flute, became less suitable for the new music of the Baroque period, which required more flexible instruments with an expanded melodic range and more expressive dynamics.\(^7\) The new transverse flute was able to coexist with the vertical recorder for a time, but the transverse flute’s ability to change tone color and better pitch and dynamic control led to the eventual displacement of the recorder. During this transition, confusing and overlapping terminology was often used for the flute and recorder; Bach, however, was nearly always fairly specific in indicating which instrument he desired.\(^8\)

\(^{6}\) Ibid., 148-149.
\(^{7}\) Toff, 43.
\(^{8}\) Ibid., 189.
Bach’s decisions with regard to instrumentation are particularly significant in his works for voice, such as his aria *Wo wird in diesem Jammertale*, where the accompanying flute obbligato has particular emotional and programmatic connotations. Bach usually chose the essentially colorless recorder for themes involving “religious devotion and resignation to death,” but favored the transverse flute for emotions of a more personal nature. This particular aria asks, “Where within this veil of sorrow will my spirit find refuge?” The tenor portrays a tortured and depressed soul, asking the question seven times before singing the answer.

The first step in formally understanding *Wo wird in diesem Jammertale* begins with a look at the form. An important compositional technique which emerged during the Baroque period was the “concerted style,” or *stile concertato*. Typically in a *da capo* aria, the soloist or *concertino* performs virtuosic music against alternating passages performed by the *tutti*, or full ensemble. The *tutti* passage material is derived from the opening statement, the ritornello. The soloist would then often develop new material derived from the ritornello. *Da capo* aria became favored form in the first half of the eighteenth-century, especially found in opera, and allowed for massive variation in detail.

Bach uses *da capo* aria form in *Wo wird in diesem Jammertale* to give the piece two very different emotional connotations. A *da capo* aria is a ternary form, with an A section followed by a contrasting B section. The instruction “*da capo*” is given at the end

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9 Ibid.
of the B section to indicate the performers’ return to the beginning to repeat the A section. The A section of this particular aria spans measures 1-55, with measure 55 eliding into the B Vivace section, which extends through measures 55-77. The A section, which follows the standard of a binary form (without repeats), starting in D minor and ending in the relative F major, serves to portray a very tortured emotion as the tenor asks the aforementioned question, “Where in this veil of sorrow will my spirit find refuge?” seven times. The spirited answer then, typical of the usual harmonically-wandering section B, appears in measure 55: “To Jesus’s paternal hand alone shall I turn in my weakness.”

Bach’s view on the importance of text and its relationship with his music may be described as this: “His music lifts the words to a higher power, bringing out in transfigured form what seems struggling for expression in the mediocrity or, - as often enough happens – the banality of the poem.”

Bach expert Schweitzer further comments on how Bach is aware how little remains of the text after he has given the real emotional power to the words byway of his emotional music. This awareness of strength in his music is what made Bach utilize the contemporary Italian da capo aria; Bach had the ability to animate even this form.

The next step of the performer might be analyzing the musical phrases – both larger and smaller. In Wo wird in diesem Jammertale, a closer look at the beginning ritornello in measures 1-13 reveals a highly-embellished flute obbligato over a minimal continuo part. Such writing leaves little room for the flutist to add his or her own

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12 Schweitzer, 36.
13 Ibid., 36-37.
ornamentation; likewise, the tenor part is also highly ornamental. When a player is deciding which notes in a phrase deserve more emphasis than others in a Baroque piece, such as non-chord passing tones, suspensions, retardations, appoggiaturas and so on, Johann Joachim Quantz may be consulted. In his treatise *On Playing the Flute*, Quantz speaks at length on the foremost attributes of good execution in general. Several important points he makes include the following:

Good execution must be first of all true and distinct… [each note must be heard and sounded] with its true intonation, so that all will be intelligible to the listener…You must try to make each sound as beautiful as possible…The tonguing on wind instruments…must always be used in conformity with the aims of the composer…Musical ideas that belong together must not be separated…Good execution must be rounded and complete.\(^{14}\)

Many other questions on performance execution arise within the first small phrase, which may be considered from the first measure to the downbeat of measure three. When considering what a valid tone concept should be in this phrase and the following phrases in the aria, a flutist should center his or her thoughts on vibrato: which kind and how much should be used, if any at all? What would be the authentic way to perform vibrato, and should vibrato be used on a modern instrument playing a piece written for the transverse flute of 1724? French flutists, upon rediscovering the early music of the flute, found it needed readjustments from the modern musical style. Gaubert thought that the early repertoire should be played with restraint: “With Bach, as with all the great classical masters, the player must observe the utmost simplicity of style. There

should be no vibrato or quavering of the sound – an artifice best left to mediocre instrumentalists and inferior musicians.”

On the other hand, the 1707 flute method of Jacques Martin Hotteterre devotes one whole section of his Principes to the finger vibrato, which was very popular during his time. The finger vibrato, or Flattement ou Tremblement mineur, was mostly used as an ornament on long notes. Moreover, Quantz also advised on long notes, writing in his treatise, “…you must begin pianissimo, allow the strength of the tone to swell to the middle of the note, and from there diminish it to the end of the note in the same fashion, making a vibrato [Bebung or flattement] with the finger on the nearest open hole… [always remaining] in tune with the accompanying instruments.”

Ornamentations must also be considered. With regards to appoggiaturas, descending appoggiaturas should fall either on or before the beat, depending on context, opinion, and changes in style during the Baroque period. Certain composers would request the exact length in appoggiatura notation, but would fail to be consistent in writing so throughout their music. It must be noted that in Germany, especially in J.S. Bach’s works, an affinity for long, on-beat passing notes grew. Bach would notate this, yet also wrote grace notes “in the same context.” Such an occurrence may have been deliberate, or simply an inconsistency.

As for trills, which are found in Wo wird in diesem Jammertale, Quantz indicated slower speeds should be used for “melancholy moods and in resonant acoustics,” and

17 Ibid., 22.
18 Quantz, 165-166.
20 Ibid.
quicker trills should be used for lively pieces and “in a dry room.” In Baroque music, trills were expected at standard cadence points, but frequently not written-in by the composer. In this aria, the flute should be sure to add trills at both the end of the A and B sections (measures 55 and 77, respectively), and more so at the finish of the second playing of the beginning da capo’s full return.

What is a modern-instrument performer to do then, when playing Baroque music on a Boehm flute? The modern player should study all the performance practices of the early music, just as if they were playing on an earlier instrument. The modern player is obligated to execute the performance within the constructs of the era in which a piece was composed. However, the modern player should not “introduce anachronisms into the performance of Baroque music.” An imitation of the effective finger vibrato as an ornamental means is quite acceptable, whereas a “wide, Brahmsian, orchestral-style vibrato” is decidedly unacceptable.

The beginning ritornello section in measures 1-13 establishes the tonality (D minor) through use of the tonic pedal in the continuo. This pedal acts as an “anchor” for the flute obbligato, which emphasizes non-harmonic chord tones. The minimal, unadorned continuo provides a constant tonic (D minor) pedal on beats one and two in measures 1 through 5. This motion, together with chord changes in the right hand and the overlaying flute obbligato, lends a certain tortured emotion to the aria’s ritornello section. The flute obbligato especially punctuates a feeling of angst; the opening flute motive

21 Ibid., 95
22 Ibid.
23 Toff, 158.
24 Ibid.
stresses the flat-6 which was so popular in Bach’s time by leaping a minor-sixth from this note (B-flat) to the downbeat of measure 2. Hereafter, the flute leaves an unresolved leading tone upon its melodic continuation of a mournful line, complete with tri-tone later in the measure (A to E-flat). The keyboard’s right hand provides three diminished triads in measure two, further adding to the strong emotion being portrayed (see example 1).

Ex. 1. Opening from J.S. Bach’s Wo wird in diesem Jammertale, BWV 114, Mm. 1-2.

The solo flute line is full of chromaticism from the very beginning, including non-chord tones, tri-tones, sequencing, melodic minor scales, and ornaments throughout the ritornello to the first perfect authentic cadence marking the tenor’s entrance in measure 13. The opening textual line confirms the aforementioned tortured emotion portrayed in the flute line in the beginning measures. The tenor sings Wo wird in diesem Jammertale vor meinen Geist (Where within this veil of sorrow will my spirit find refuge) in a manner much like the opening flute line in measures 1-2. The tenor’s opening motive is exact to the flute’s opening motive in rhythm, and similar in intervallic structure.
Ex. 2. Tenor entrance from J.S. Bach’s Wo wird in diesem Jammertale, BWV 114, Mm. 13-15.

The tenor also stresses the leading tone (c#) in measures 14 and 17, creating tension. The flute, which has been a solo instrument up to this point, joins the tenor in a duet in measure 14, making for a trio sonata with the presence of the continuo (see example 2).

Paul Badura-Skoda remarks on the Pralltriller, or trill signs in Bach’s quick passages of music in his book, Interpreting Bach at the Keyboard. Bach often wrote this type of ornament in passages where only three notes could be accommodated in order to avoid slowing the tempo where the unornamented notes begin to drag. The flutist concerned with execution of the successive trills beginning in measure 7 should execute only a three-part Pralltriller, or snapped turn, being careful not to overburden or crush the air with the ornaments (see example 3). Anything more than a three-part turn would
seem too quick. Likewise, if the embellishments are too slow and do not agree with the harmony, execution would be considered poor.25

Ex. 3. Flute Pralltriller shown from J.S. Bach’s Wo wird in diesem Jammertale, BWV 114, Mm. 7-8.

Throughout the A section of this da capo aria, the tenor sings the same text asking the question, Wo wird in diesem Jammertale vor meinen Geist seven different times. After the initial asking of the question which ends in a half cadence on measure 17, the flute continues its soloistic portrayal of a separate melodic line in measures 17-21, much in the same manner of the instrument’s opening ritornello (see example 4). The flute and continuo interlude in these measures serves to reinforce the text and increase its feeling of turmoil, especially because the half cadence served to continue a tonicizing of the dominant in the following measures.

Ex. 4. Opening from J.S. Bach’s Wo wird in diesem Jammertale, BWV 114, Mm. 17-21.

This tonicization of the dominant does not last long, and an implied V7 in measure 21 along with a revisiting of the tonic pedal keeps us firmly planted in D-minor in measures 14-40.

At measure 22 begins the second asking of the tenor’s question, which is identical in measures 21 and 22 as to measures 13-15. The tenor and flute may especially want to emphasize the last beat of measure 24, where the flute spans the interval of a tri-tone to correlate with the tenor line’s ascent upon completing the question (see example 5).
Ex. 5. from J.S. Bach’s *Wo wird in diesem Jammertale, BWV 114*, Mm. 24-27.

Schweitzer points out how the solos in this aria drive more towards the characteristic. As the tenor asks the question in the measures above, the flute accompaniment seemingly insinuates the “confused uncertain beating of wings.” The staccato in this case should be thought of as not short, but separated from the previous notes and held long enough to establish that sense of uncertainty Schweitzer is suggesting. Also, the eighth notes should not be accented upon making the leap from the lower note to the higher note (see example 6).

Ex. 6. Flute line from J.S. Bach’s *Wo wird in diesem Jammertale, BWV 114*, Mm. 25-27.

Bach has stayed in the tonic key for all but this last bit of the question; as the tenor sings *Zuflucht sein* in measures 24-25, the harmony briefly shifts to V7 of G minor (iv), while the bass continues to expand the presence of its tonic pedal in measures 21-27. The continuo’s constant reminder of the tonic on beats one and two help the forward

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26 Schweitzer, 369.
motion progress toward an expected perfect authentic cadence in D minor. Instead, Bach delays this gratification, and chooses to apply a perfect authentic cadence in the relative F major in measure 32. This is a crucial point in part A; as the tenor asks the same question a fifth time, the flute rests for a few beats and leaves this unexpected transition for the continuo alone. The continuo would, in turn, be expected to bring out this cadence more, to clarify the surprising switch to the listener.

F major marks the half-way point of section A, and a flute solo and continuo interlude follow in measures 32-40, recapitulating the beginning ritornello almost entirely in the new key (see example 7).

Ex. 7. F major “recapitulation” from J.S. Bach’s Wo wird in diesem Jammertale, BWV 114, Mm. 32-34.

We find a half cadence on the downbeat of measure 36 with “ti” in the bass. This is most interesting, because Bach especially avoids a perfect authentic cadence here; he could have easily placed one at measure 36 instead of a half cadence. Rather, Bach chooses to delay a perfect authentic cadence until measure 40, when he completes the F major section (see example 8). This is a very “special” place in the aria, and the flute
may or may not choose emphasize measure 36 to bring out this dramatic and surprising cadential moment. After this occurrence, the melodic line and scalar motion in the continuo drive the motion forward, towards the previously-anticipated perfect authentic cadence.

Ex. 8. Possible alternate ending from J.S. Bach’s *Wo wird in diesem Jammertale*, BWV 114, Mm. 35, 40.

After the F major downbeat in measure 40, the tenor’s sixth asking of the question and entrance of *Wo, Wo* on flat-6 (E-flat) instigates an abrupt shift to G minor modality (measures 40-42). Unstable harmonies present tonal migration next, which serve to eventually reinstate the tonic in measure 46. A third deviation from a perfect authentic cadence in measure 48 presents us with another half cadence. While the bass line from measure 46 onward implies tonic, the other voices intentionally avoid sounding a complete tonic. At this point, we find a new and interesting feature in the bass line – measures 48-51 act as a sort of lamenting bass, marking the emotional climax of part A. This also marks the seventh and final time the tenor asks the repeated question (see example 9).
While this seventh asking of the question is occurring, the flute obbligato leads into a restatement of measures 5-13, in the original key of D minor. Section A finishes with a perfect authentic cadence on a D minor chord in measure 55.

The *Vivace*, or section B of the *da capo* aria (beginning in measure 55), completely changes the character heard thus far. Whereas section A was filled with angst and worry, the *Vivace* mood lifts and feels hopeful with a nice light “lilting” feeling throughout in the relative F major. The B section is harmonically much freer and exploratory in nature, in comparison with the formal A section. This has much to do with the hopeful meaning of the text in this second section. The tenor provides a perfect transition from D minor to the new tonality, F major. Without the continuo and flute present, the tenor alone provides a smooth elision from D minor with the first four notes of *Allein zu*. The tenor outlines the D minor triad, and when the continuo enters in the second half of the measure, F major is firmly established (see example 10).
Ex. 10. Transitional elision in tenor line, from J.S. Bach’s *Wo wird in diesem Jammertale*, BWV 114, Mm. 54-55.

At this point, the continuo provides a strong I-IV-I motion in measures 55-57, waiting until the downbeat of measure 57 to place the first root position tonic chord. Meanwhile, the virtuosic flute obbligato serves to strengthen the tenor line by embellishing the tenor’s skeletal structure with constantly running sixteenths grouped in six notes at a time. The flutist should be careful to group these sixteenths not in triplets, but in groups of six to keep the constant flow of four beats per measure. To divide the beats by triplets changes the forward motion to a more vertical sound, whereas a linear sound is desired (see example 11).

Ex. 11. Flute line from J.S. Bach’s *Wo wird in diesem Jammertale*, BWV 114, Mm. 56-57.

After hearing the first vocal line of this new section, the listener should feel much more hopeful about the situation. The tenor sings the answer to his question in part one, which is a most hopeful *Allein zu Jesu Vaterhänden will ich mich in der Schwachheit*
wenden (To Jesus’s paternal hands alone shall I turn in my weakness). Schweitzer remarks that when this answer comes, “the soul also finds the path along which it is to take wing; it glides through the air with a uniform and easy motion,” which is clearly seen in the flute line of example 11. The tenor and flute will especially want to avoid any feeling of “heaviness” in this section; such a misinterpretation would be musically conflicting with the lighter quality of the text.

The flute’s surprising B-natural on the second beat of measure 58 implies a shift in tonality, and Bach indeed uses sequencing in the flute in measures 58-63 and a circle-of-fifths statement in the continuo (measures 59-60) to help the performers reach the tonicization of A minor on the downbeat of measure 65 (see examples 12 and 13).

Ex. 12. Flute sequencing from J.S. Bach’s Wo wird in diesem Jammertale, BWV 114, Mm. 58-59.

Ex. 13. Continuo “circle-of-fifths” from J.S. Bach’s Wo wird in diesem Jammertale, BWV 114, Mm. 59-60.

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27 Ibid.
Bach does not stay in a minor for very long, however, with the reappearance of B-flats in measure 66. A brief tonicization of D minor occurs, and Bach leads us back to tonic with a V7-I perfect authentic cadence in F major at measure 68. F major continues until the flute stresses an E-flat upon measure 70’s downbeat. This E-flat seventh built upon an F major triad implies a movement to the key of B-flat. Indeed, B-flat major is the key tonicized in measures 70-72, with a nice cadential 6/4 solidifying this fact in measures 71-72.

There are several musically-important moments in the aforementioned paragraph. When the flute is helping to shift gears and tonicize a new key, the flute should especially “weight” any key notes, such as its E-flat on the downbeat of measure 70. The continuo can equally provide support at these points to further grab the audience’s attention. If these key points are not stressed enough, the listener may find himself or herself lost in the more flexible, ever-changing tonality of this section of the aria.

Bach does not continue to tonicize B-flat after measure 72, as F-sharps appear halfway through measure 73. Such implies a movement to the relative minor, G minor. Indeed, G minor is the tonicized key in the measures to follow (74-75), while the flute continues its obbligato with modulatory passages. Bach uses measures 76-77, the final two measures of section B, to cadence into A major in the continuo and tenor. This brings us to a key point: Bach is using the end of section B to both complete the section and provide a connection to the full da capo return in D minor. Bach chooses to leave section B “unfinished,” and a half cadence on the dominant of D minor serves to signal the return to section A (see example 14).
Ex. 14. Half cadence at da capo, from J.S. Bach’s *Wo wird in diesem Jammertale*, BWV 114, Mm. 76-77.

As mentioned earlier in this discussion, it would be most appropriate for the flute to lead the other voices in a slight ritardando towards the final half cadence. It would also be appropriate and expected to add a trill from D to C# on the last note. Both of these performance practices will help provide a fresher start for the audience and the performers upon the return to the aria’s beginning.

J.S. Bach wrote some of his greatest music for the transverse flute in his sacred cantatas during the 1720’s. This cantata is one of many displaying the beauty of a solo voice intertwined with an instrumental obbligato typical of Bach’s arias. Studying the performance practices of the Baroque era together with the analysis of the piece in question will undoubtedly make for a valid performance, regardless if traditional or modern instruments are played.
Works Cited


