

Program Notes- *Music from the Heavens*, May 6, 2018

Cantata No. 51, BWV 51 “Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen”

J. S. Bach (1685-1750)

This is one of Bach's most popular cantatas, written in great gladness for the glory of God and calling for His praise. The distinguishing feature of this cantata is the presence and virtuosity of the solo trumpet part. The outer movements feature the trumpet, often playing in alternation or imitation of the soprano.

Aria: Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen [Exult in God in all the lands]; is a da capo aria in ritornello form, with brilliant virtuoso passages in the voice and the trumpet. Much of the work is premised on an intricate interplay of the two solo parts, both of which require a high C and great flexibility.

Recitative: Wir beten zu dem Tempel an [We pray at your temple]; This recitative is for the soprano and strings, with the trumpet silent. Beginning as a recitativo accompagnato, it simplifies to a secco passage on the words "von seinen Wundern lallen" (chatter about His wonders), ending in a transition to the second aria:

Aria: "Höchster, mache deine Güte" (Highest, renew your goodness), uses the simplest means to express its message of gratitude to the Lord.

Chorale: "Sei Lob und Preis mit Ehren" (Glory, and praise with honor); is in the form of a chorale fantasy; the soprano sings the chorale tune without ornament or interpolations, while the lively, contrapuntal accompaniment is played by two violins and continuo. The movement continues at some length and leads without pause into the final movement:

Finale: “Alleluja”; is in the form of a fugue, marked especially by the return of the solo trumpet, playing a part equal to the soprano and the first violin. This is a very festive piece altogether, with the final movement emphasizing the joyousness of the music in exciting fashion.

Little is known about the origins of this cantata, which is unusual not only in its instrumentation, but also in the lack of a specific Sunday in the Lutheran church year to which to ascribe the text; in the MS Bach sets the cantata for performance on the 15th Sunday after Trinity, “et in ogni tempo” (“and at any time”).

Symphony 4 in G major

Gustav Mahler (1860-1911)

Written in 1899-1900, premiered on November 25, 1901 in Munich. This symphony is the conclusion of Mahler's Wunderhorn symphonies, so called because the quartet of symphonies makes thematic use of melodies based on texts from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (The Boy's Magic Horn).

The fourth has extensive musical links to the Third Symphony, apart from the general similarity of all four symphonies; Mahler had planned to use the final song, “das himmlische Leben” [“The Heavenly

Life”] in the Third Symphony, but changed his mind later. There are passages and melodies throughout the symphony which can be seen as leading up to the final song.

Movement 1: the movement starts with two flutes a fifth apart, the upper flute preceding each eighth note with a fast grace note, making a “quasi-bell” sound. This idea recurs at times throughout the movement. The first theme enters with the first violins and is answered in the lower strings. It is a beautiful, flowing melody, decorated with turns and other ornamentation. A second theme enters quickly, played by the violas initially and taken up by the woodwinds; this theme uses repeated notes. Throughout the movement there is a great deal of contrapuntal activity, melodies layered atop one another and fragmented passages utilizing portions of thematic material, particularly the flute passage from the opening. Tempo variations, key changes and thematic modifications proceed in profusion, leading to a rapid coda and the brightly colored ending to the movement.

Movement 2: Ländler in 3/8, c minor with two trios in F major. The solo horn starts the movement, then the solo violin plays the principal theme on a violin tuned a whole step higher than normal; it is speculated that this represents Death leading us to... wherever. The tone of the movement is rather dark, at least in the c minor sections, with a sardonic turn of phrase in the treatment of the melodies.

Movement 3: Ruhevoll [Poco adagio], 4/4. While the musical material is not particularly chorale-like, the textures [lengthy chordal sections, much divisi in the strings, a pulsating bass line in cellos and basses] are reminiscent of many other slow movements. The particular haunting quality in Mahler’s slow movements is very present here, especially in the very slowest parts of the movement. As the movement proceeds, the meter changes to a triple beat, then returns to duple time with a great acceleration, then ending in a big slowing down, *fff*, with fanfares in the brass and divisis in the strings.

Movement 4: Sehr behaglich, 4/4. The great novelty of this movement is the inclusion, in an otherwise fairly classical symphonic structure, of a singer, a soprano performing “Das Himmlische Leben”, from the Des Knaben Wunderhorn songs. This song antedates the symphony by seven or eight years. The style of the song is childlike, and the conductor is instructed to keep everything in the orchestra extremely discreet (*äusserst diskret*), presumably for reasons of balance, but also to keep everything in conformity with the innocence of the text.