



CANTATA EIN FESTE BURG

J.S Bach (Somewhere between 1723-1731)



POINTS OF INTEREST:

- Features of Baroque music
- Features of choral sacred music
- How does the music reflect the text?
- Textural relationships between voices and instruments.

MOVEMENTS 1, 2, 8

RHYTHM, METRE AND TEMPO:

- Mvnt 1: 4/2, melismatic passages containing continuous quavers, ties, occasional dotted rhythms,
- Mvnt 2: 4/4, moto perpetuo semiquavers, mostly semibreves for bass soloist, decorative passagework
- Mvnt 8: 4/4, anacrusis opening, pauses at the end of each phrase, mainly crotchet rhythms with quaver passing notes.

MELODY AND TEXT SETTING:

- Uses Cantus firmus, respecting melodic shape, varying rhythms and adding embellishments in the different movements.
- Sequence
- Transposition
- Ornamentation
- Scalic passages
- Melisma
- Chorale is entirely syllabic

CONTEXT:

- One of the greatest Baroque composers, much music of sacred nature and produced for the churches where he held the position of director of music.
- Cantata: an integral part of the Lutheran liturgy and followed immediately after the reading of the Gospel. A vocal composition with instrumental accompaniment and made up of many movements.
- Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott: composed this chorale cantata, in which both text and music are based on Martin Luther's hymn of the same name, whilst in the position of Cantor of St Thomas Church in Leipzig. Uses a cantus firmus, which translates as 'fixed song', and is a pre-existing melody forming the basis of a polyphonic composition.
- Cantata consists of 8 movements.

HARMONY AND TONALITY:

- D major with modulations to closely related keys.
- Chords are diatonic and functional.
- Frequent perfect cadences to confirm the modulation to a new key.
- Rare example of imperfect cadence in bar 10 of the eighth movement.
- Long tonic pedal note for 4 bars at the end of the first movement.
- Suspensions (common of Baroque period).
- Secondary and dominant sevenths
- Mostly root position and first inversion chords.

SONORITY:

- 4 vocal soloists (soprano, alto, tenor and bass), 4 part SATB choir, three oboes, and violin 1 and 2.
- Unusually for a cantata, writes for 'Violoncello e cembalo' and 'Violone e organo'.
- Mvnt 1: SATB choir and tutti orchestra. Vocal lines are closely doubled by the orchestra.
- Mvnt 2: Aria is a duet for soprano and bass with string accompaniment and solo oboe.
- Mvnt 8: Chorale for 4 part SATB choir with orchestral accompaniment doubling the vocal lines.

TEXTURE:

- Mvnt 1: Contrapuntal, fugal entries, subject and countersubject, unembellished cantus firmus played in canon with oboes and 2nd continuo.
- Mvnt 2: melody-dominated homophony, contrapuntal soprano and bass, soprano and oboe in heterophony.
- Mvnt 8: homophonic (typical of chorale)