

## THE VOCAL MUSIC OF J.S. BACH<sup>1</sup>

CLASS 2 Sept 28 CANTATA 140, "Wachet auf" performed by the Washington Bach Consort

### Summary

Since its founding in 1979, the Washington Bach Consort has been one of the nation's premier performing groups specializing in the music of Bach. This class will feature a special performance by the consort of one of Bach's best known cantatas, a lecture by the Bach scholar Michael Marissen, and a live Q&A with members of the Consort.

### Outline

1. remarks on the music by Prof. Michael Marissen
2. video performance Cantata 140, "Wachet Auf," Washington Bach Consort
3. Q&A with Jessica Powell-Eig and Matthew Hill of the Washington Bach Consort

Cantata 140 "Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme," (Awake calls the voice to us)  
First performed 25 November 1731

This is the most famous, and most often performed, of Bach's church cantatas.

The festive, eager, opening chorus sets two groups of strings (violins and viola) against oboes and bassoon. Bach adopts the majestic French overture rhythm, with its double-dotted rhythm, and introduces a rising figure, suggesting the ascent of the soul. Following the multi-layer introduction, the altos enter with a jazzy-sounding "alleluia," followed in turn by the other voices. Bach telescopes several different scenes into this one chorus: the coming of the Bridegroom (a reference to Christ); the historic Jerusalem, with the night-watchman on his rounds; and Bach's own Leipzig, all abuzz with preparations for Advent and Christmas.

A brief tenor recitative is followed by a love duet for soprano, representing the soul, and the bass, representing Christ. A piccolo violin, smaller and therefore higher in pitch than a standard violin, accompanies the pair, emphasizing the feeling of yearning in the music.

The watchman's song of number 4 contains one of Bach's most famous melodies. The chorus tenors sing the chorale theme from the opening chorus, while the violins and violas play a contrasting melody that fits the tenors' chorale theme perfectly. This movement has never been out of the repertoire, with hundreds of transcriptions for solo instruments, instrumental ensembles, and voices.

The bass recitative that follows frames the dramatic words in complex and expressive harmonies. Number 6 is another love duet between soprano and bass, this time with a playful oboe instead of a yearning violin playing the obbligato. The cantata closes with the joyful chorale theme in Bach's brilliant harmonization.

Text of Cantata 140, "Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme"

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<p>1. Choral Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme, der Wächter sehr hoch auf der Zinne, wach auf, du Stadt Jerusalem. Mitternacht heißt diese Stunde, sie rufen uns mit hellem Munde, wo seid ihr klugen Jungfrauen? Wohlauf, der Bräut'gam kömmt, steht auf, die Lampen nehmt, Alleluia! Macht euch bereit zu der Hochzeit, ihr müsset ihm entgegen gehn. (" Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme," verse 1)</p>	<p>1. Chorus Awake, calls the voice to us of the watchmen high up in the tower; awake, you city of Jerusalem. Midnight the hour is named; they call to us with bright voices; where are you, wise virgins? Indeed, the Bridegroom comes; rise up and take your lamps, Alleluia! Make yourselves ready for the wedding, you must go to meet Him.</p>
<p>2. Rezitativ T Er kommt, er kommt, der Bräut'gam kommt, ihr Töchter Zions, kommt heraus, Sein Ausgang eilet aus der Höhe in euer Mutter Haus. Der Bräut'gam kommt, der einen Rehe und jungen Hirschen gleich auf denen Hügeln springt und euch das Mahl der Hochzeit bringt. Wacht auf, ermuntert euch, den Bräut'gam zu empfangen; dort, sehet, kommt er hergegangen.</p>	<p>2. Recitative T He comes, He comes, the Bridegroom comes, O Zion's daughters, come out, his course runs from the heights into your mother's house. The Bridegroom comes, who like a roe and young stag leaps upon the hills; to you He brings the wedding feast. Rise up, take heart, to embrace the bridegroom; there, look, He comes this way.</p>
<p>3. Arie- Duett S B (Dialog - Seele, Jesus) Wenn kömmt du, mein Heil? - Ich komme, dein Teil. - Ich warte mit brennenden Öle. Eröffne den Saal - Ich öffne den Saal - zum himmlischen Mahl. Komm, Jesu. - Ich komme, komm, liebliche Seele. -</p>	<p>3. Aria - Duet S B (Dialogue - Soul, Jesus) When will You come, my Savior? - I come, as Your portion. - I wait with burning oil. Now open the hall - I open the hall - for the heavenly meal. Come, Jesus! - I come, come, lovely soul! -</p>
<p>4. Choral T Zion hört die Wächter singen, das Herz tut ihr vor Freuden springen, sie wachet und steht eilend auf. Ihr Freund kommt von Himmel prächtig, von Gnaden stark, von Wahrheit mächtig, ihr Licht wird hell, ihr Stern geht auf. Nun komm, du werthe Kron', Herr Jesu, Gottes Sohn, Hosianna! Wir folgen all zum Freudensaal und halten mit das Abendmahl. (" Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme," verse 2)</p>	<p>4. Chorale T Zion hears the watchmen sing, her heart leaps for joy within her, she wakens and hastily arises. Her glorious Friend comes from heaven, strong in mercy, powerful in truth, her light becomes bright, her star rises. Now come, precious crown, Lord Jesus, the Son of God! Hosannah! We all follow to the hall of joy and hold the evening meal together.</p>

<p>5. Rezitativ B          So geh herein zu mir,          du mir erwählte Braut!          Ich habe mich mit dir          von Ewigkeit vertraut.          Dich will ich auf mein Herz,          auf meinen Arm gleich wie ein Sigel setzen,          und dein betrübtes Aug' ergötzen.          Vergiß, o Seele, nun          die Angst, den Schmerz,          den du erdulden müssen;          auf meiner Linken sollst du ruhn,          und meine Rechte soll dich küssen.</p>	<p>5. Recitative B          So come in to Me,          you My chosen bride!          I have to you          eternally betrothed Myself.          I will set you upon My heart,          upon My arm as a seal,          and delight your troubled eye.          Forget, O soul, now          the fear, the pain          which you have had to suffer;          upon My left hand you shall rest,          and My right hand shall kiss you.</p>
<p>6. Arie - Duett S B (Dialog - Seele, Jesus)          Mein Freund ist mein,          -und ich bin dein,-          die Liebe soll nichts scheiden.          Ich will mit dir          -du sollst mit mir-          im Himmels Rosen weiden,          da Freude die Fülle, da Wonne wird sein.</p>	<p>6. Aria - Duet S B (Dialogue - Soul, Jesus)          My Friend is mine,          - and I am yours, -          love will never part us.          I will with You          - you will with Me -          graze among heaven's roses,          where complete pleasure and delight will be.</p>
<p>7. Choral          Gloria sei dir gesungen,          mit Menschen- und englischen Zungen,          mit Harfen und mit Zimbeln schon.          Von zwölf Perlen sind die Pforten,          an deiner Stadt sind wir Konsorten          der Engel hoch um deine Thron.          Kein Aug' hat je gespürt,          kein Ohr hat je gehört          solche Freude,          des sind wir froh,          io,io,          ewig in <i>dulci júbilo</i>.</p>	<p>7. Chorale          Let Gloria be sung to You          with mortal and angelic tongues,          with harps and even with cymbals.          Of twelve pearls the portals are made,          In Your city we are companions          Of the angels high around Your throne.          No eye has ever perceived,          no ear has ever heard          such joy          as our happiness,          lo, io,          eternally in <i>dulci júbilo!</i></p>
<p>"Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme," Philipp Nicolai (mov'ts. 1, 4, &amp; 7)</p>	
<p>translation ©Pamela Dellal</p>	

## Resources:

Nicholas Kenyon, *The Faber Pocket Guide to Bach*,  
 Boyd, Malcolm, ed. *J.S. Bach*,

Bach Cantata Website page for Cantata 140. Includes vocal and full score, lists of recordings, extensive discussions

<https://www.bach-cantatas.com/BWV140.htm>

Vocal score for Cantata 140. If you're a choral singer, you will appreciate how this remarkable work unfolds. Sing along!

<https://www.bach-cantatas.com/Scores/BWV140-V&P.pdf>

## Appendix

## Notes on Cantata 140 by Craig Smith, Emmanuel Church, Boston

The twenty-seventh Sunday after Trinity appears only every eleven years in the liturgical calendar, when Easter is celebrated very early in the season. During the 2nd Jahrgang the liturgical year only went through the 25th Sunday after Trinity. No cantata based upon a chorale melody has been found for the Twenty-sixth Sunday after Trinity. But in 1731, when the Sunday occurred, Bach wrote Cantata BWV 140, which is of the genre we have been considering here. This is the last parable considered in the liturgical year. It is a difficult one, again of a strong eschatological slant. Bach chooses to ignore that side of the parable and instead introduces passages from the Song of Songs. They are treated as love duets between Christ and the Soul. In addition the main chorale melody is set as the night watchman's song in between the two duets, again a reference to Song of Songs.

The Philipp Nicolai hymn "Wachet auf!" is the basis for our cantata. Two great Nicolai hymns are used prominently in the second Jahrgang: "Wachet auf!" in BWV 140 and "Wie schön leuchtet den Morgenstern" in BWV 1. Both are large-scale bar-form pieces, with three big phrases repeated in the Stollen (the A section of the chorale tune, repeated once, literally translated as "stanza"), the lower voices gradually 'catch up.' By the beginning of the *Abgesang* (the B section of the chorale tune, literally translated as "aftersong"), and six phrases in the *Abgesang*. In both chorales the *Abgesang* begins with two small identical phrases, and ends with a phrase that refers strongly to material in the Stollen. With such a distinctive form, it is interesting to compare the structures of the two large chorale fantasias. "Wie schön" begins with at least four separately identifiable themes, some of them derived from the chorale, some of them colorations of the text. These themes are not only elaborately and imaginatively combined into a patchwork, but are often associated with the three particular concertante groups represented in the cantata's colorful orchestration. Our cantata here, "Wachet auf!" is very differently constructed. One major thematic idea and a subsidiary dependent idea predominate. Rather than any kind of patchwork alternation of the ideas as we have seen in BWV 1, the 2nd subject almost always appears, propelled by the accumulated energy of the first idea. There is a strong antiphonal effect achieved by the alternation of the wind and string groups.

The contrasting way that the material is used in the two cantatas is the result of Bach's decision to represent the chorale as a grand procession, no doubt reflecting the procession of the wise and foolish virgins. The processional idea is achieved in other, more subtle ways. If one looks at the relationship of the long-note cantus and the three voices underneath, one sees that at the beginning the cantus plays a full 2 1/3 bars before the first entrance of one of the lower three voices. Throughout the three phrases of the *Abgesang*, the lower voices gradually 'catch up.' By the beginning of the *Abgesang* the bottom voices begin ahead of the cantus, and in the ninth phrase, the alleluia, the lower voices play for fifteen bars before the cantus entrance. In the last three phrases the cantus and the lower voices enter simultaneously, as if all the participants had been given a chance to catch up with the procession.

There are however, many other elements at play in this very complex and large movement. It is the common wisdom that the climax of the movement is the large and expressive "alleluia." As marvelous as this alleluia is, it is the following phrase "Macht euch bereit" (make yourselves ready) that is one of the stunning moments in all of Bach. Here, not only, have all the voices come together, but Bach makes the startling and triumphant modulation to the sub-dominant. That sub-dominant functions in a way made popular by the great Classical era composers of making the final cadence inevitable. Just as Mozart or Haydn would begin his journey home in a sonata-allegro structure, this thrilling modulation to Ab sustains a sense of heightened anticipation all the way to the achievement of the dominant at the end of the 10th phrase, bar 177. From here the end is assured. The first movement of "Wachet auf!" is one of the grandest of Bach's chorale fantasias. The chorale moves unusually slowly and, as has been noted before is in twelve phrases. To keep the listener clear as to where he is in the movement Bach resorts to the most sophisticated of means. This is truly a revolutionary work.

After a brief secco tenor recitative, the solo soprano and bass sing their first love duet. Although deriving from the Song of Songs, the text is purely Christian, a love duet between Christ and the Soul. Christ is here wooing the soul using the characteristic instrument of nighttime serenading the piccolo violin, a small instrument tuned up a third from the normal violin. There is a great sense of yearning, of longing in this music. Bach chooses not only the exotic obbligato instrument, but puts the work into the pastorale Siciliano rhythm 6/8 to make this an evocative outdoor serenade. The duet is, like the first movement, a musically very complex work, the juxtaposition of the mannered dotted figure of the opening with the elaborate figuration that follows produces great tension that is never really released throughout the movement.

The watchman's song #4, the third verse of the chorale, is a brilliant dramatic gesture. This is an overused word in the music of Bach but here one truly senses a change of scene, of an event on stage. While the duet of intensity and importance is taking place, in another part of the city, the watchmen is going about his business, probably whistling that wonderful tune that is played in all the strings and has obsessed Bach scholars for literally hundreds of years. Every one knows that it is one of the most wonderful melodies he has ever heard, but nobody knows why. Its very casualness is an important theatrical gesture. The words themselves have an artless quality, something that the watchmen have known since childhood, and that they have no idea are so important here.

Although all signs point to the fact that this work was written in great haste, Bach puts an enormous amount of care into the progression of movements. At this juncture he writes one of his greatest accompanied recitatives, a work filled with such harmonic expressivity that it becomes the emotional climax of the cantata. The wonderful, light-hearted duet with oboe is so artless, rather like the watchmen's song, that its incredible technical expertise can be easily missed. The sense of endless abundance and joy is expressed many ways but the wonderful and unnecessary modulation to g minor in the last five bars of the B section is a marvelous touch. One is reminded of the superscript over the last piece in Schumann's *Davidsbündlertänze* "Quite redundantly he added the following, but his eyes shone."

Bach clearly hears the final chorale very slowly for he chooses a half-note unit of measure, something very rare in the chorales. It has become probably his most well-known chorale harmonization.

©Craig Smith, adapted by Ryan Turner

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Analysis of Cantata 140 by Robert Greenberg, from "Bach and the High Baroque," audio-video course by The Teaching Company, © 1998 The Teaching Company

Cantata text based on The Gospel of Matthew, chapter 25

There were ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.' 'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.' But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him

to the wedding banquet.... Keep awake, then, for you do not know the day when your Lord will come.

Words by Picander (Christian Friedrich Henrici) based on Matthew text. Message of the story:

- Bridegroom is Jesus. Virgins are the soul, or the soul of humanity.
- Be ready. If you are ready to be saved, you will be saved. If not, not.

### Movement I Chorale

Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme,  
der Wächter sehr hoch auf der Zinne,  
wach auf, du Stadt Jerusalem.  
Mitternacht heißt diese Stunde,  
sie rufen uns mit hellem Munde,  
wo seid ihr klugen Jungfrauen?  
Wohlauf, der Bräut'gam kömmt,  
steht auf, die Lampen nehmt,  
Alleluia!  
Macht euch bereit  
zu der Hochzeit,  
ihr müsset ihm entgegen gehn.

Awake, calls the voice to us  
of the watchmen high up in the tower;  
awake, you city of Jerusalem.  
Midnight the hour is named;  
they call to us with bright voices;  
where are you, wise virgins?  
Indeed, the Bridegroom comes;  
rise up and take your lamps,  
Alleluia!  
Make yourselves ready  
for the wedding,  
you must go to meet him

Ritornello , beginning Oboes Oboes Oboe

The image shows a musical score for the beginning of the Ritornello. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff for Oboes and a bass clef staff for Violins. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats) and the time signature is 3/4. The score is divided into three measures, each labeled with the instrument playing: 'Oboes', 'Oboes', and 'Oboe'. The first measure shows the Oboe playing a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and the Violins playing a similar pattern. The second measure shows the Oboe playing a more complex rhythmic pattern and the Violins playing a similar pattern. The third measure shows the Oboe playing a rhythmic pattern and the Violins playing a similar pattern. The score ends with 'etc.'.

Violins Violins Violins etc.

Orchestral introduction, beginning with an emphatic ritornello theme (repeating theme). This theme includes three phrases, each with its own motives.

Phrase c:

Upwards sweeping string scales continue and heighten the sense of upwards yearning created by Phrase "b", bringing the Ritornello Theme to its conclusion

Syncopated rising/falling motives in Violins and Oboes create a mood of yearning and anticipation

Chorus, lines 1-3: The boy sopranos sound the watchman's call to awaken, in simple regular meter. The other voice parts fill in, elaborating on the theme. The sopranos will sing the chorale melody unadorned throughout. Call to awaken. Other parts add mood, drama, psychological angles, and pictures in music. Thus, with the sopranos singing "Awake!" because the Savior is coming, the other parts show excitement with quick motives and rising lines. Other parts use the same words but different melodic ideas.

Line 2: each vocal part moves quickly upward, to the words, "the watchmen high on the battlements"

*Soprano: der Wäch-ter sehr hoch auf*  
*Tenor: der Wäch-ter sehr hoch*  
*Alto: der Wäch-ter sehr hoch*  
*Bass: der Wäch-ter sehr hoch*  
 Continuo

mm. 29-34

Lines 4-6: The ritornello theme returns, all phrases: a, b, c. Sopranos continue to announce the coming of the Savior: The hour is Midnight/ they call to us loud and clear/ where are you, wise virgins?

Lines 7-8: We hear the ritornello theme, phrases b and c only. The chorus calls out in excitement, “Rise up and take your lamps!” The tenors and basses are now leading the rush of energy, “Here he comes! Wake up!”

Line 9: The chorus sings a jubilant “Alleluia!” drawing out the syllables in Italian style.

*Al - - - - - le-lu-ja, al-le-lu-*  
 Altos  
*ja, al - le - lu - ja,*  
 Tenors  
*Al - - - - - le-lu-ja, etc.*

Lines 10-11: Phrase a of ritornello theme appears in minor. “Prepare the wedding! You must go out to meet him!” Finally, the orchestra plays the entire ritornello theme again, ending the movement.

Movement 2: Tenor recitative

Tenor as narrator, convention in Bach and other Baroque composers.

Movement 3: Duet, Soprano/Bass. Like a love duet between the soul and Jesus. Quite operatic, as is movt. 6 duet.



**Movement 4:** chorale with tenors. Lyrical and calm. First, beautiful justly famous melody in strings. Represents the place at night: dark and mysterious. Then tenors (the watchmen) come in with chorale theme.

#### Movement 4: Chorale

The movement begins with a theme both serene and grand in the violins and violas.



The tenors now enter with an entirely different melody, the hymn tune that the sopranos sang in movement 1. The interplay between these two themes makes this one of the most often played movements in all of Bach's cantatas.

*Soprano:* Wa - chet auf, ruft uns die

Zion hört die Wächter singen,  
das Herz tut ihr vor Freuden springen,  
sie wachet und steht eilend auf.  
Ihr Freund kommt von Himmel prächtig,  
von Gnaden stark, von Wahrheit mächtig,  
ihr Licht wird hell, ihr Stern geht auf.  
Nun komm, du werthe Kron',  
Herr Jesu, Gottes Sohn,  
Hosianna!  
Wir folgen all  
zum Freudensaal  
und halten mit das Abendmahl.

Zion hears the watchmen sing,  
her heart leaps for joy within her,  
she wakens and hastily arises.  
Her glorious Friend comes from heaven,  
strong in mercy, powerful in truth,  
her light becomes bright, her star rises.  
Now come, precious crown,  
Lord Jesus, the Son of God!  
Hosannah!  
We all follow  
to the hall of joy  
and hold the evening meal together.

**Movement 5:** Recitative for bass. Calm, reassuring. Christ welcomes the bride. Accompanied (not secco) recitative. Strings give effect of a halo around Christ's voice.

**Movement 6:** Duet S/B. Now soul and Savior are united. Dance-like, lilting. Solo oboe weaves around the two voices.

Mein Freund ist mein,  
-und ich bin dein,-  
die Liebe soll nichts scheiden.  
Ich will mit dir  
-du sollst mit mir-  
im Himmels Rosen weiden,  
da Freude die Fülle, da Wonne wird sein.

My Friend is mine,  
- and I am yours, -  
love will never part us.  
I will with You  
- you will with Me -  
graze among heaven's roses,  
where complete pleasure and delight will be.

Movement 7: Chorale melody, harmonized in 4 parts.