

Dance and Its Use in the Chorale Cantatas of J. S. Bach

RICHARD GARD

Richard Gard received the Director's Prize for best student Colloquium presentation in 2004. His presentation is included in almost complete form on the accompanying DVD.

It is well known that Johann Sebastian Bach utilized dance forms in his compositions. But Bach incorporated a variety of styles, genres, and textures in his music—could it be that dance was just one more resource in his compositional palette?

Owing to the pervasive notoriety and social importance of dance, it is likely that dance forms and textures conveyed an embedded message for Bach and for his audience that would make their inclusion in sacred music notable. Furthermore, acknowledging dance as a social ritual raises interesting questions about the practice of inserting secular music and dramatic forms into liturgical services. Many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century German pastors and musicians had no qualms about the wholesale importation and mixing of operatic recitative and aria, folk tunes and medieval melodies—or even a jolly dance—in their worship music. This intersection of sacred and secular offers a lesson of diversity and inclusion for twenty-first-century musicians and liturgists.

This talk will show that during the years 1723 and 1724 Bach experimented with a compositional technique using a noble dance (usually the sarabande) in the penultimate movement of some chorale cantatas. The technique was refined during his second Leipzig cycle and continued for as long as he composed chorale cantatas; it was used in connection with images of heaven, Advent, and Jesus as the bridegroom.

Richard Gard enjoys a successful career as a conductor and educator. He conducts several performance ensembles including the Yale Bruckner Choir, the NVCC College Choir, the Western Connecticut State University Concert Choir, Vox Concordis, the Richard Gard Singers, and the Wind Ensemble of Western Connecticut. He is the director of music at Saint Thomas More Chapel at Yale. He is also chair at Naugatuck Valley Community College, Connecticut's most comprehensive two-year music program. He will receive his DMA in May of 2007. Richard continues to apply the fruits of his dance research with recent performances of Bach's Cantata 80 and Handel's Chandos Anthem 6.