

CHORALE HARMONIZATIONS *With text verse*

The chorale, a simple strophic hymn of limited pitch range with German text, originated in sixteenth-century Protestant Germany as a result of church reforms by Martin Luther (1483-1546). It is familiar today chiefly because of its importance in the church music of J.S. Bach, especially the cantatas. At some point in the majority of these elaborate vocal works (most often at the end), a single verse of a chorale, in four-part harmony, was sung by the choir. (See No. 7 of Cantata No. 78, on page 158.) These harmonizations exhibit the essence of Baroque harmonic practice and provide insight into part-writing techniques that remained fundamental to musical composition for generations.

A number of chorales are given here in two different harmonizations for comparison. Where the additional harmonization is by a composer other than Bach, it is always the simpler of the two, Bach's containing more non-chord tones, modulations and chromatic harmonies.

"Ach wie nichtig, ach wie flüchtig"

This chorale setting appears as the closing movement of Bach's Cantata No. 26, the title of which is changed to "Ach wie flüchtig, ach wie nichtig." It was composed in 1724. The hymn is by Michael Franck.

The image shows three systems of musical notation for a chorale. Each system consists of a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (grand staff). The lyrics are written below the vocal line.

System 1: The lyrics are "Ach wie flüchtig, ach wie nichtig ist der Men - schen Le - - ben! Ach wie flüchtig, ach wie nichtig sind der Men - schen Sa - - chen!".

System 2: The lyrics are "Wie ein Ne - bel bald ent - ste - het und auch wie - der Al - les, Al - les, was wir se - hen, das muss fal - len".

System 3: The lyrics are "bald ver - ge - het, so ist un - ser Le - ben se - het. und ver - ge - hen; wer Gott fürcht't, wird e - wig ste - hen. 13 Str. (In der B. A. nur die 13. Str.)".

1. Oh, how fleeting, oh, how vain is the life of man!
Our life is like a fog which rises and fades away again.

2. Oh, how fleeting, oh, how vain are the affairs of man!
Everything that we see must fall and pass away;
he who fears God will remain forever.