

# Listening Guide

## Bach: Cantata No. 80, *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God* (*Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*), Nos. 1, 2, 5, 8

**DATE OF WORK:** 1715/c. 1744; for the Feast of the Reformation (October 31)

**FORM:** 8 movements, for chorus, soloists, and orchestra

**BASIS:** Chorale (hymn) tune (probably by Martin Luther)

### OVERALL STRUCTURE:

<i>Movement</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>Use of chorale tune</i>
1. Choral fugue	Chorus and orchestra	Embellished fugal chorale
2. Aria, duet	Soprano and bass solo	Soprano line only
3. Recitative/arioso	Bass solo	
4. Aria	Soprano solo	
5. Chorus	Chorus and orchestra	Unison chorale
6. Recitative/arioso	Tenor solo	
7. Aria, duet	Alto and tenor solo	
8. Chorale	Chorus and orchestra	4-part chorale

Original chorale tune:

phrase 1  
3  
Ein fe - ste Burg\_ ist un - ser Gott, ein' gu - te Wehr und\_ Waf - fen;  
er hilft uns frei\_ aus al - ler Not, die uns jetzt hat be - trof - fen.  
5  
Der al - te bö - se Feind, mit Ernst er's jetzt meint, gross Macht und viel  
8  
List sein grau - sam Rü - stung ist; auf Erd' ist nicht seins - gleich - en.  
9

### 1. Choral fugue (chorus and orchestra), 4/4 meter, D major

**WHAT TO LISTEN FOR:** Elaborate, imitative treatment of the familiar tune in all voice parts and in the trumpets.

Dense polyphonic texture created between chorus and orchestra for each line of text.

Canon (in strict imitation) on chorale tune heard in the instruments (trumpets and oboes vs. cellos), played in augmentation (long note-values).

TEXT	TRANSLATION	FIRST SUNG BY
Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott, ein' gute Wehr und Waffen; er hilft uns frei aus aller Not, die uns jetzt hat betroffen.	A mighty fortress is our God, a good defense and weapon; He helps free us from all the troubles that have now befallen us.	Tenors Sopranos
Der alte böse Feind, mit Ernst er's jetzt meint, gross Macht und viel List sein grausam Rüstung ist;	Our ever evil foe, in earnest plots against us, with great strength and cunning he prepares his dreadful plans.	Basses Altos Tenors Sopranos
auf Erd' ist nicht seinsgleichen.	Earth holds none like him.	Tenors

Opening fugal melody in tenors (notes of chorale marked with x):

x x x x x x x x etc.  
Ein fe - ste Burg\_ ist un - ser Gott,

Instrumental canon, based on chorale tune in augmentation:

(Shorter recordings skip to movement 8.)

## 2. Duet for soprano and bass (with oboe, violins, viola, and basso continuo), 4/4 meter, D major

**WHAT TO LISTEN FOR:** Restless string introduction, with leaping figures, which continues after voices enter.  
Soprano solo (accompanied by oboe) sings the familiar chorale tune with variations against fast-moving bass part (in polyphonic texture).

### SOPRANO

Mit unser Macht ist nichts getan,  
wir sind gar bald verloren.  
Es streit' für uns der rechte Mann,  
den Gott selbst hat erkoren.  
Fragst du, wer er ist?  
Er heisst Jesus Christ,  
der Herre Zebaoth,  
und ist kein anderer Gott,  
das Feld muss er behalten.

With our own strength nothing is achieved,  
we would soon be lost.  
But on our behalf strives the mighty one,  
whom God Himself has chosen.  
Ask you, who is he?  
He is called Jesus Christ,  
Lord of Hosts,  
And there is no other God,  
He must remain master of the field.

### BASS

Alles was von Gott geboren,  
ist zum Siegen auserkoren.  
Wer bei Christi Blutpanier  
in der Taufe Treu' geschworen,  
siegts im Geiste für und für.

Everything born of God  
has been chosen for victory.  
He who holds to Christ's banner,  
truly sworn in baptism,  
his spirit will conquer forever and ever.

Opening of soprano line with second stanza of chorale text (notes of chorale tune marked with x):

Mit uns - rer Macht \_\_\_\_\_ ist nichts ge - tan,

## 5. Chorale for unison chorus (with orchestra), 6/8 meter, D major

**WHAT TO LISTEN FOR:** Lifting, dancelike meter (6/8) set up by elaborate orchestral accompaniment featuring Baroque period trumpets, oboes, and strings.  
Slow-moving chorale tune sung by the choir in unison (all voices sing same tune) in alternation with orchestra.

### TEXT

Und wenn die Welt voll Teufel wär  
und wollten uns verschlingen,  
so fürchten wir uns nicht so sehr,  
es soll uns doch gelingen.  
Der Fürst dieser Welt,  
wie saur er sich stellt,  
tut er uns doch nicht,  
das macht, er ist gericht't,  
ein Wörtlein kann ihn fällen.

### TRANSLATION

Though the world were full of devils  
eager to devour us,  
we need have no fear,  
as we will still prevail.  
The arch-fiend of this world,  
no matter how bitter his stand,  
cannot harm us,  
indeed he faces judgment,  
one Word from God will bring him low.

Orchestral opening, with paraphrase of chorale melody:

etc.

Opening of unison chorale:

Und wenn die Welt voll Teufel wär

## 8. Chorale, for full chorus (with orchestra), 4/4 meter, D major

**WHAT TO LISTEN FOR:** 4-part hymn setting with the tune clearly heard in the top voice.  
All voices moving together (in homorhythmic texture).

Das Wort sie sollen lassen stahn  
und kein Dank dazu haben.  
Er ist bei uns wohl auf dem Plan  
mit seinem Geist und Gaben.  
Nehmen sie uns den Leib,  
Gut, Ehr', Kind, und Weib,  
lass fahren dahin,  
sie haben's kein Gewinn;  
das Reich muss uns doch bleiben.

Now let the Word of God abide  
without further thought.  
He is firmly on our side  
with His spirit and strength.  
Though they deprive us of life,  
wealth, honor, child, and wife,  
we will not complain,  
it will avail them nothing;  
for God's kingdom must prevail.

Opening of hymnlike setting of chorale, in 4 voices (instruments doubling voices) and continuo: