

Vom Himmel hoch da komm ich her

(From Heaven above to earth I come)

- a suite of settings edited 2012 by Klaus Smedegaard Bjerre

Users of my church related editions have wanted music extending beyond the settings of single hymn verses. I agree upon that wish, as it concurs with one of my own preferred performance formats for church use. My project of presenting Danish hymns has a few shorter compilations, and there is a suggestion for sequencing the Easter hymns into a suite. 'All People That on Earth do dwell' has been presented in a suite of international settings.

This present edition expands from the hymn format by including a freer contrapuntal organ setting as well as an excerpt from an oratorio. This provides greater musical variety, but it also calls for a more flexible approach by the performing ensembles, especially because the range limits known from the hymn editions cannot be respected in the non-hymn sections. Some very specialized groups like trombone and tuba quartets may omit some sections if performing on their own, whereas they will be able to provide valuable contributions within larger mixed ensembles performing the full suite of settings. The repeats are redundant in a purely instrumental performance, where verses may be played or omitted at the liking of the musical director. The repeats only are included here as a preparation for joint performance with a planned choir version presenting the full 15-verses translation of Luther's hymn.

The opening and ending (bar #125) version are from collections of Luther's hymns. The first setting hardly is from Luther's era, but rather appears like being by Bach or being based on one of his settings. The last setting appears like being older, even if its last harmonic turn is still very well known.

At bar #9 you will find the setting of #17 from Bach's Christmas Oratorio.

Zachow was one of Handel's teachers. He wrote a contrapuntal setting for two verses of this present hymn. The first of these verses is found at bar #17. The second one is at bar #71.

The setting at bar #39 is from the 1906 English Hymnal. It is based on a setting by Bach, but some changes apparently have been made to avoid the crossing of parts.

Schumann's version from 1539 as found in the 1954 Danish Hymnal is at bar # 47. Harmonies by Laub.

One more setting by Bach, as found in the Breitkopf & Härtel collection, is at bar #55.

At bar #63 Schumann's version from 1539 is in the setting from the 1917 ULCA Common Service Book. Not identical to the version from the Danish Hymnal, but clearly coming out of the same school of hymn harmonization.

The version at bar #96 is a transposed version the #23 from Bach's Christmas Oratorio. Bach here interjects flute-&-oboe-interludes between the strains of the verse. Also adds a coda for the same instruments. These sections are named A, B, C, and D in this edition. They may be omitted by ensembles without a sufficiently large or versatile line-up of instruments. Woodwinds and string instruments should be preferred over brasses in the ABCD-sections. This present notation suggests the verse strains being played by different instruments than the interludes and the coda. The 4'-string version mostly has been taken down to 8' in this setting of the hymn. The 2' recorder version should be treated very carefully in this verse to avoid overpowering. These two 'super-octave' settings are not self-carrying like in the general hymn project, whereas the 4' settings for flutes and for recorders will work also in stand-alone performances. This version should be played quite gently to reflect the pastoral nature of Bach's 'triplet'-sub-divisions. To make this rhythmic element more obvious the agile instrumental bass voicing has been chosen over the more static vocal bass line.

Of course a full tutti playing through all of the hymn settings is possible, yet larger ensembles may get much more efficient performances from contrasting tutti sections with various sub-ensembles. No suggestions have been made for the dynamic, as these should be made to fit local ensembles and their acoustic environments.

Depending on specific ensemble needs it also may prove itself efficient to vary the allocation of certain instruments to different voice lines in certain verses, so that for example the 1st trombone only plays the soprano line in one or two verses, whereas its superb abilities for carrying alto or tenor lines are utilized in other verses. Same considerations will apply for other instruments capable of playing with a wide dynamic scope.

This editor has studied Bach's style of chorale setting and also was trained in doing settings in this style. Bach is inimitable anyway, but we students were discouraged from applying certain voicing traits often used by Bach himself. One trait is about the leading note in the tenor not going to the obvious root of the tonic, but rather jumping a fourth upwards to the third. You will see this in the passage from bar # 51 to #52. And with the relative tonic of G major just before letter C. Bach clearly wrote these chorale settings for SATB-vocals. But the implicit expectation of an organ accompaniment with the bass doubled in the 16'-range also is obvious, because Bach was somewhat liberal about the bass line going higher than the tenor line, even if the bass line clearly carries the notes intended to be the lowest ones of the given vertical constellations of pitches. Within this edition there is very little musical harm done by a performance without the bass line being represented in the 16'-range. However the grand staff notation in the keyboard score would suffer a bit readingwise in two short passages. Here the tenor and bass lines have been switched. These spots are marked **NB!** in that part.

Imitation between lines is an obvious element of Bach's masterful counterpoint. In his present settings he repeats a little joke of pre-imitating a tiny sequence of notes from the tune in the alto and bass lines (## 11-12, 40-41, 56-58). Emphasizing this joke easily may be overdone, but I doubt it would be in the spirit of Bach to neglect it.