



AUSTRALIAN CHAMBER CHOIR

BACH'S GENIUS - THE MOTETS

directed by Douglas Lawrence AM
with Rosanne Hunt - 'cello & Ria Polo - organ



image courtesy of Bach-Archiv, Leipzig

The Australian Chamber Choir received a return invitation to perform at Bach's church, St Thomas, Leipzig this July, to present two Motet concerts and a Sunday morning service. Unfortunately due to the current restrictions, we are unable to travel to Europe in 2021 to complete the planned itinerary of twelve concerts and two services. We'll continue to make plans, and as soon as possible, we will invite you to accompany us on our eighth concert tour of Europe.

PROGRAM

Please follow the German tradition and reserve your applause until the end of each half

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH 1685-1750

MOTET *Der Geist hilft unser Schwachheit auf*

for two four-part choirs BWV 226

Allemande from Suite No. 4 in E^b major

for unaccompanied cello BWV 1010

MOTET *Fürchte dich nicht, ich bin bei dir*

for two four-part choirs BWV 228

Allemande from Suite No. 2 in D minor

for unaccompanied cello BWV 1008

MOTET *Jesu, meine Freude*

for five voices BWV 227

INTERVAL

MOTET *Lobet den Herrn, alle Heiden*

for four voices BWV 230

Sarabande from Suite No.3 in C major

for unaccompanied cello BWV 1009

MOTET *Komm, Jesu, komm*

for two four-part choirs BWV 229

Arioso from Capriccio in B^b major

on the departure of a dearly beloved brother BWV 992

MOTET *Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied*

for two four-part choirs BWV 225

PROGRAM NOTES

The six motets (BWV 225 to 230) that Bach is known to have composed occupy a slightly odd place in the Bach canon. It would be wrong to call them obscure, because they appear on concert programs reasonably often, and because ever since the 1950s their discography has attained a respectable size. On the other hand, they have never had anything like the renown which much of Bach's sacred oeuvre now possesses. Many music-lovers thoroughly conversant with the *St Matthew* and *St John Passion* settings, with the *Mass in B Minor*, and with several of the cantatas have failed to become comparably familiar with the motets. In short, the motets enjoy neither the benefits that derive from obvious fame, nor the mysterious glamour appertaining to neglect.

This status becomes still more puzzling in view of the motets' performance history, which gives them a unique position in Bach's output for voices. They form – to quote German scholar Thomas Braatz, writing in 2010 – 'the only category of his vocal works which continued in an unbroken tradition of performances until the present time.' Yet as Braatz also observes, over the 270 years since Bach's death, experts have on several occasions changed their minds as to Bach's motive for writing this music in the first place. They might have changed their minds once more by the time you have read these notes.

Did Bach envisage the motets as practice material for the choristers at St Thomas's in Leipzig? Thus asserted his earliest biographer, Johann Nikolaus Forkel, writing in 1802. Did Bach intend the motets, rather, as occasional substitutes for cantatas in the standard public Lutheran rite? This theory found its champion in Philipp Spitta, whose own Bach biography appeared eighty-odd years after Forkel's. Did Bach, moreover, conceive of the motets as a unified cycle? Possible but improbable. Given the time pressures that plagued Bach's life (these having been especially punitive during the decade immediately after his 1723 move to Leipzig), he is likelier to have used the motets on an ad hoc basis – according to the requirements of the ecclesiastical calendar – than to have planned them as a set.

Lately it has been conjectured that Bach, when writing the motets, had outdoor (and perhaps processional) performance in mind for each. All of them were amenable to funerary use; and considerable, if necessarily circumstantial, evidence from early-eighteenth-century Lutheran Saxony points to choral singing having been customary either before the funeral service began (at times outside the home of the deceased) or whilst the actual interment occurred. But the idea that Bach really did presuppose such al fresco contexts for his motets must remain educated guesswork. A further warning against musicological dogmatism lies in the fact that during his youth Bach

unexpectedly applied the term *motetto* to a richly-scored 1708 piece nowadays grouped with the cantatas: namely, *Gott ist mein König*, BWV 71, the sole Bach cantata which had reached print by the time its composer died in 1750.

It would be useful if specialists could determine just when Bach produced the motets. Alas, very little information on that point exists. Most commentators on Bach ascribe all six motets to the 1720s. British musicologist Peter Holman maintained that of the six, *Jesu, meine Freude* is the likeliest to have been written first.

The question of whether Bach wished instruments employed for all six motets heightens the general bafflement which the motets' origins tend to inspire. Only one motet, *Der Geist hilft*, has come down to us with its own instrumental parts (even those being optional rather than normative). Bach might have directed the other five *a cappella*; he might have sanctioned a small continuo group; he might, for especially grandiose occasions, have hired instrumentalists to double the vocal lines note for note, *colla parte* (to quote the frequent eighteenth-century performance instruction for such doublings). His decisions in that matter probably depended far more upon the strength or otherwise of the *Thomasschule*'s cashflow, than on the lofty aesthetic

principles so apt to exercise subsequent ages' leisured academic classes.

MOTET *Der Geist hilft unser Schwachheit auf* for two four-part choirs BWV 226

Der Geist hilft differs from its five companions in two ways. First, as already noted, it survives with a set of instrumental parts. Second, its genesis and *raison d'être* are gratifyingly well attested: Bach composed it – as the manuscript states – for the October 1729 obsequies of the *Thomasschule*'s principal: Johann Heinrich Ernesti (Lutheran pastor and leading authority on Cicero), who six years earlier had helped to obtain for Bach his Leipzig post. From Romans 8:26-27 – this epistle being exceptionally important in Lutheran theology – Bach took the text for his motet's first two sections. The third and final section employs the third verse of a hymn by Luther himself, intended for Pentecost (*Komm, Heiliger Geist*). Hints of the polychoral idiom from early-baroque Venice, as mediated through Giovanni Gabrieli's reverent disciple Heinrich Schütz, characterise Bach's approach in this piece.

Der Geist hilft unser
Schwachheit auf,
denn wir wissen nicht, was
wir beten sollen,
wie sich's gebühret;

The Spirit also helpeth
our infirmities,
for we know not what we
should pray for as we
ought,

Der Geist hilft

sondern der Geist selbst
vertritt uns aufs beste mit
unaussprechlichem
Seufzen.

Der aber die Herzen
forschet, der weiss, was
des Geistes Sinn sei;
denn er vertritt
die Heiligen nach dem,
was Gott gefällt.

Du, heilige Brunst,
süsser Trost,
nun hilf uns, fröhlich und
getrost
in deinem Dienst beständig
bleiben,
die Trübsal uns nicht
abtreiben.

O Herr, durch dein Kraft uns
bereit
und stärk des Fleisches
Blödigkeit,
dass wir hier ritterlich
ringen,
durch Tod und Leben zu dir
dringen. Halleluja.

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but the Spirit itself maketh
intercession for us
with groanings which
cannot be uttered.

And He that searcheth the
hearts knoweth what
is the mind of the Spirit,
for He maketh intercession
for the saints according to
the will of God.

Heavenly fire,
sweet consolation,
help us now, that joyfully
and confidently
we may faithfully serve
Thee,
and not be deflected by
sadness.

O Lord, prepare us through
Thy power
and strengthen the
reluctant flesh,
so that we shall valiantly
fight,
and pass through death and
life to Thee. Alleluia.

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Allemande from Suite No. 4 in E^b major

for unaccompanied cello BWV 1010

MOTET *Fürchte dich nicht, ich bin bei dir* for two four-part choirs BWV 228

Incorporating words from Isaiah 41 and 43, as well as from a hymn called *Warum sollt ich mich denn grämen* ('Why should I grieve') by seventeenth-century Lutheran theologian and poet Paul Gerhardt, *Fürchte dich nicht* is habitually associated in the Bach secondary literature with a February 1726 funeral: that of Susanna Sophia Winkler, widow of a Leipzig councillor. But on stylistic grounds some have argued that Bach wrote the piece long before, during his young manhood (1708-1717) at Weimar's court. Neither hypothesis automatically invalidates the other, since Bach's fondness for recycling his own material is well documented. There are two sections, the first treating exclusively the lines from Isaiah, while the second combines these lines with Gerhardt's text. The aforementioned Peter Holman notes a link between BWV 228 and the composer's cousin once removed (whose daughter became Johann Sebastian's first wife): BWV 228 'has exactly the same formal scheme as the eight-part setting of *Fürchte dich nicht* by Johann Michael Bach (1648-1694).'

Fürchte dich nicht, ich bin 'Fear not, for I am
bei dir; with thee;

Fürchte dich nicht

weiche nicht,
denn ich bin dein Gott!
Ich stärke dich,
ich helfe dir auch,
ich erhalte dich durch die
rechte Hand meiner
Gerechtigkeit.
Fürchte dich nicht, denn ich
habe dich erlöst,
ich habe dich bei deinem
Namen gerufen,
du bist mein.

Herr, mein Hirt, Brunn
aller Freuden,
du bist mein, ich bin dein,
niemand kann uns
scheiden. Ich bin dein,
weil du dein Leben
und dein Blut mir zugut
in den Tod gegeben.
Du bist mein, weil ich dich
fasse
und dich nicht,
o mein Licht,
aus dem Herzen lasse.
Lass mich hingelangen,
da du mich und ich dich
lieblich werd umfängen.

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be not dismayed,
for I am thy God!
I will strengthen thee,
yea I will help thee;
I will uphold thee with the
right hand of my
righteousness.
Fear not, for I have
redeemed thee;
I have called thee
by thy name;
thou art mine.'

Lord my shepherd, source
of all joys,
Thou art mine, I am Thine,
none can part us.
I am Thine, because
Thou gavest Thy life
and Thy blood for my sake,
and embraced death.
Thou art mine, because I
hold Thee
and will never let Thee,
O my light,
leave my heart.
Let me reach the place
where I shall embrace Thee
and Thou me in all eternity.

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Allemande from Suite No. 2 in D minor for unaccompanied cello BWV 1008

MOTET *Jesu, meine Freude*

for five voices BWV 227

Of all Bach's motets, *Jesu, meine Freude* is not only the longest and most elaborate, but the one most commonly performed as a free-standing piece without the others. Bach appears to have intended it for the funeral – which indubitably occurred in July 1723 – of a prominent Leipzig lady, Johanna Maria Käsin, whose husband was the city postmaster. (Some documents spell the couple's surname 'Kees.') The motet's main chorale melody, dominating the thematic argument, did not originate with Bach. He found it in a 1653 collection called *Praxis pietatis melica*, by an earlier Lutheran composer, Johann Crüger. Some of the words are by the German hymn-writer Johann Franck (1618-1677), for whose texts Bach presumably had a special esteem, since he chose them several times for use in his cantatas. The remaining words rework the eighth chapter from St Paul's Epistle to the Romans.

Jesu, meine Freude,
meines Herzens Weide,
Jesu, meine Zier,
ach wie lang, ach lange
ist dem Herzen bange

Jesus, my joy,
pasture of my heart,
Jesus, my adornment
ah how long, how long
is my heart filled with

Jesu meine Freude

und verlangt nach dir!
Gottes Lamm, mein
Bräutigam,
ausser dir soll mir auf Erden
nichts sonst Liebers
werden.

Es ist nun nichts
Verdammliches an denen,
die in Christo Jesu sind,
die nicht nach dem Fleische
wandeln, sondern
nach dem Geist.

Unter deinem Schirmen
bin ich vor den Stürmen
aller Feinde frei.

Lass den Satan wittern,
lass den Feind
erbittern,
mir steht Jesus bei.
Ob es jetzt gleich kracht und
blitzt,
ob gleich Sünd und Hölle
schrecken:
Jesus will mich decken.

Denn das Gesetz des
Geistes, der da lebendig
machet in Christo Jesu,

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anxiety and longing for You!
Lamb of God, my
Bridegroom,
Apart from You on the earth
there is nothing
dearer to me.

Now there is nothing
damnable in those who are
in Christ Jesus,
who do not walk after the
way of the flesh, but
after the way of the Spirit.

Beneath your protection
I am free from the attacks
of all my enemies.

Let Satan track me down,
let my enemy be
exasperated –
Jesus stands by me.
Even if there is thunder and
lightning,
even if sin and hell spread
terror:
Jesus will protect me.

For the law of the spirit,
which gives life
in Christ Jesus,

Jesu meine Freude

hat mich frei gemacht
von dem Gesetz der Sünde
und des Todes.

Trotz dem alten Drachen,
Trotz des Todes Rachen,
Trotz der Furcht dazu!
Tobe, Welt, und springe,
ich steh hier und singe
in gar sichrer Ruh.
Gottes Macht hält mich in
acht; Erd und Abgrund
muss verstummen,
ob sie noch so
brummen.

Ihr aber seid nicht
fleischlich, sondern
geistlich, so anders Gottes
Geist in euch wohnet.
Wer aber
Christi Geist nicht hat,
der ist nicht sein.

Weg mit allen Schätzen!
Du bist mein Ergötzen,
Jesu, meine Lust!
Weg ihr eitlen Ehren,
ich mag euch nicht hören,
bleibt mir unbewusst!

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has made me free
from the law of sin
and death.

I defy the old dragon,
I defy the jaws of death,
I defy fear as well!
Rage, world and spring to
attack, I stand here and sing
in secure peace.
God's might takes care of
me; earth and abyss
must fall silent,
however much they
rumble on.

You, however, are not of
the flesh, but rather of the
Spirit, since the Spirit of
God lives otherwise in you.
Anyone, however, who
does not have Christ's
Spirit, is not His.

Away with all treasures!
You are my delight,
Jesus, my joy!
Away with empty honours,
I will not hear you,
Remain unknown to me!

Jesu meine Freude

Elend, Not, Kreuz, Schmach
und Tod
soll mich, ob ich viel muss
leiden,
nicht von Jesu scheiden.

So aber Christus in euch ist,
so ist der Leib zwar tot um
der Sünde willen;
der Geist aber ist das Leben
um der Gerechtigkeit
willen.

Gute Nacht, o Wesen,
das die Welt erlesen,
mir gefälltst du nicht.
Gute Nacht, ihr Sünden,
bleibet weit dahinten,
Kommt nicht mehr ans
Licht!
Gute Nacht, du Stolz und
Pracht!
Dir sei ganz,
du Lasterleben,
gute Nacht gegeben!

So nun der Geist des, der
Jesum von den Toten
auferwecket hat,

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Misery, distress, affliction,
disgrace and death,
even if I must endure much
suffering,
will not separate me from
Jesus.

However if Christ is in you,
then the body is dead
indeed for the sake of sin;
but the spirit is life
for the sake of
righteousness.

Good night, existence
chosen by the world,
you do not please me.
Good night, you sins,
stay far behind me.
Come no more to the
light!

Good night, pride and
splendour!
once and for all,
sinful existence,
I bid you good night!

Therefore now since the
Spirit of Him who raised
Jesus from the dead

Jesu meine Freude

in euch wohnt, so wird
auch derselbige,
der Christum von den Toten
auferwecket hat, eure
sterblichen Leiber lebendig
machen, um des willen, daß
sein Geist in euch wohnt.

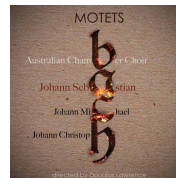
Weicht, ihr Trauergeister,
denn mein Freuden
Meister, Jesus,
tritt herein.

Denen, die Gott lieben,
Muss auch ihr Betrüben
lauter Zucker sein.
Duld ich schon hier Spott
und Hohn,
dennoch bleibst du auch im
Leide,
Jesu, meine Freude.

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dwells in you, that same
who raised Christ
from the dead
will make your mortal
bodies living,
for the sake of His spirit
that dwells in you.

Go away, mournful spirits,
for my joyful
Master, Jesus,
now enters in.
For those who love God
even their afflictions
become pure sweetness.
Even if here I endure shame
and disgrace,
even if I remain
in suffering,
Jesus, my joy.



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INTERVAL

MOTET *Lobet den Herrn, alle Heiden* for four voices BWV 230

Shortest of the six motets, *Lobet den Herrn* (the words to which come from Psalm 117) has inspired doubts as to whether Bach himself wrote it. While the standard Bach catalogue undeniably contains several interlopers – for example, the clichéd and bland St Luke Passion, included in the BWV lists for no more convincing reason than that Bach took the trouble to copy out the score – it would be premature to dispute the authenticity of BWV 230, which was published in 1821. As Peter Holman remarks: ‘it is

Lobet den Herrn

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difficult to see who else could have written such a vigorous, compact yet expansive work, cast in true motet style as a series of contrapuntal points within one long movement, to which is appended a contrasted triple-time *Alleluia*.’ Even by Bachian standards the polyphony is ornate, double-fugue writing being almost commonplace.

Lobet den Herrn,
alle Heiden,
und preiset ihn,
alle Völker!

Denn seine Gnade und
Wahrheit
waltet über uns in Ewigkeit.
Halleluja.

Praise the Lord,
all nations,
and praise Him,
all peoples!

For His grace and
truth
rule over us for eternity.
Alleluia.

Sarabande from Suite No.3 in C major for unaccompanied cello BWV 1009

MOTET *Komm, Jesu, komm*

for two four-part choirs BWV 229

With this motet, Bach resorted to words which date from 1684, their author having been Leipzig poet and university professor Paul Thymich. Almost certainly Bach encountered Thymich’s text – it had been written for the obsequies of Jacob Thomisius, rector of the *Thomasschule* – through the use made of it by an earlier

Komm, Jesu, komm

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church musician of consequence, who had died in 1701: Johann Schelle, a student of Schütz during the latter's old age. (Schelle's cousin Johann Kuhnau was Bach's immediate predecessor as Leipzig cantor.) Thymich's deliberate allusions to Christ's words as quoted in John 14:6 – 'I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life' – were, for Bach's contemporaries, immediately recognisable. Nevertheless, maybe in order to concentrate congregations' minds, Bach (unlike Schelle) discarded most of Thymich's original eleven verses, choosing to set only the first and the last of them.

Komm, Jesu, komm,
mein Leib ist müde,
die Kraft verschwindt
je mehr und mehr,
ich sehne mich
nach deinem Friede;
der saure Weg wird mir
zu schwer!
Komm, ich will mich dir
ergeben;
du bist der rechte Weg,
die Wahrheit und das
Leben.

Drum schliess ich mich
in deine Hände
und sage, Welt, zu

Come, Jesus, come,
my flesh is weary,
my strength doth fade
more and more,
for now I yearn
to reach Thy stillness;
this bitter path doth me
oppress!
Come, myself to Thee I'll
offer;
Thou art the proper way,
the true way and the true
life.

Thus to Thy hands myself
committing,
I say, O world, to thee,

Komm, Jesu, komm

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guter Nacht!
Eilt gleich mein
Lebenslauf zu Ende,
ist doch der Geist wohl
angebracht.
Er soll bei seinem
Schöpfer schweben,
weil Jesus ist und
bleibt Der wahre Weg
zum Leben.

good night!
Though haste my life its
course to finish,
yet is my soul now well
prepared.
It shall beside its Maker
hover,
for Jesus is and bides
the proper path
to true life.

Arioso from Capriccio in B^b major

on the departure of a dearly beloved brother BWV 992

MOTET *Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied*

for two four-part choirs BWV 225

Bach scholars have tentatively attributed this motet to the 1727 funeral of Christiane Eberhardine, the Lutheran Electress of Saxony, who – although titular Polish queen – found Catholic Poland so uncongenial a country that she refused even to visit it, let alone to live in it. (Her funeral indubitably elicited from Bach his famous *Trauerode*, BWV 198.) *Singet dem Herrn* incorporates in its outer movements various lines from Psalms 149 and 150 in the standard Lutheran Bible. These lines have nothing self-evidently mournful about them, quite the reverse. By contrast, the motet's central movement sets verses from the sixteenth-century Lutheran poet

Singet dem Herrn

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Johann Grauman, alias Johannes Poliander; and these words demonstrate a much more explicitly sorrowful tone, what with their unmistakable *memento mori* in such images as mown grass being dispersed by the wind. On the thirty-three-year-old Mozart, when he visited Leipzig in 1789, *Singet dem Herrn* left a powerful impression. (He could well have borne its counterpoint in mind when he came to write the *Jupiter Symphony's* finale.) Despite, or because of, the fact that Mozart had not hitherto experienced much of Bach's music in performance – what little he knew of it had come chiefly from score-reading – he found the motet revelatory. Herewith, the eyewitness account of this occasion by critic Johann Friedrich Rochlitz, in 1789 a *Thomasschule* theology student:

Hardly had the choir sung a few measures when Mozart sat up, startled; a few measures more and he called out: 'What is this?' And now his whole soul seemed to be in his ears. When the singing was finished he cried out, full of joy: 'Now, there is something one can learn from!'

Singet dem Herrn ein
neues Lied,
die Gemeinde der Heiligen
sollen ihn loben. Israel
freue sich des, der ihn
gemacht hat. Die Kinder
Zion sei'n fröhlich über

Sing ye the Lord a new
song; the assembly of
saints should be telling His
praises. Israel, be joyful in
Him who hath made thee.
Let Zion's children rejoice
in Him who is their mighty

Singet dem Herrn

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ihrem Könige, sie sollen
loben seinen Namen im
Reihen; mit Pauken und mit
Harfen sollen sie ihm
spielen.

Wie sich ein Vater
erbarmet Gott, nimm dich
ferner unser an, über seine
junge Kinderlein, so tut der
Herr uns allen, so wir ihn
kindlich fürchten rein.
Er kennt das arm
Gemächte,
Gott weiss, wir sind nur
Staub,
denn ohne dich ist nichts
getan mit allen unsern
Sachen.
Gleichwie das Gras vom
Rechen,
ein Blum und fallend Laub.
Der Wind nur drüber
wehet, so ist es nicht mehr
da, drum sei du unser
Schirm und Licht,
und trügt uns unsre
Hoffnung nicht, so wirst
du's ferner machen.

king; let them be praising
His name's honour in
dances; with timbrels and
with psalteries unto Him be
playing.

As does a father
mercy show
to his own dear little
children, so doth the
Lord to all of us, if as pure
children we fear Him.
He sees our feeble
powers,
God knows we are but
dust;
for, lacking Thee, nought
shall we gain from all of our
endeavours.
Just as the grass in
mowing,
or bud and falling leaf,
If wind but o'er it bloweth,
it is no longer
there, so be Thou our true
shield and light,
and if our hope betray us
not, Thou wilt thus
henceforth help us.

Singet dem Herrn

Also der Mensch
vergehet,
sein End, das ist ihm nah.
Wohl dem, der sich nur
steif und fest
auf dich und deine Huld
verlässt.

Lobet den Herrn in seinen
Taten, lobet ihn in seiner
grossen Herrlichkeit!
Alles, was Odem hat,
lobe den Herrn, Halleluja!

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Kristina Lang
Elizabeth Lieschke
Katherine Lieschke

Alto

Elizabeth Anderson*
Neda Bizzarri
Melissa Lee
Isobel Todd

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Even so is man's life
passing,
His end to him is near.
Blest he whose hope, both
strong and firm,
On Thee and on Thy grace
can rest.

Praise ye the Lord in all His
doings, praise ye Him in all
His might and majesty! All
things which have breath,
praise ye the Lord, Alleluia!

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Ben Owen
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Bass

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