

Preface

Dietrich Becker, North-German composer, violinist, and organist, was born in 1623 in Hamburg, and died there in 1679. Becker numbered among the leading personalities in the rich musical life of seventeenth-century Hamburg. Initially, Becker was organist of the Schlosskirche in Ahrensburg (1642), but later devoted himself to the violin. As a violinist he was for a short time a member of the Celle court chapel (1656-1661), soon thereafter solo violinist of the Hamburg town band, and from 1667 its director, as successor to Johann Schop the elder.

Besides two collections of instrumental music (*Erster Theil zwey-stimmiger Sonaten und Suiten*, Hamburg, 1674¹; *Musicalische Frühlings-Früchte*, Hamburg, 1688), several of Becker's cantatas have come down to us: two funeral cantatas for four voices, three *da braccio* instruments, and basso continuo, and several sacred concertos, including the present work, *Schaf in mier gott ein reineß Hertz*, for alto, two violins, two violas da gamba, violone or bassoon, and basso continuo.

The text is a compilation of psalm verses from the Old Testament. The first section, introduced by a "Simphonia," is a setting of three lines of the fourth penitential psalm (Psalm 51:12-14):

Create in me a clean heart, O God
And renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from your presence
And take not your holy Spirit from me.
Restore unto me the joy of your salvation
And uphold me with a willing spirit.

The following second "Simphonia" moves away from the original key of G major, reaching E major via the keys E minor, F-sharp major, and B major. This part represents the harmonically richest section of the cantata and in this way distinguishes itself from the beginning and end of the work. The text of the second section is the tenth verse from Psalm 143:

Teach me to do your will,
For you are my God
Let your gracious spirit lead me on the right path.

In the original manuscript, the orthography in the voice part is inconsistent. For the present edition, the text has been transcribed and adapted to modern orthography.

Title page of the continuo part reads: "Concerte. a 6 Alto solo / Con 5 Instrumento."

Alongside the cantatas *Der Herr hat seinen Stuhl im Himmel bereitet* by Nicolaus Bruhns and Johann Michael Bach's *Ach wie sehnlich wart ich der Zeit*, Becker's cantata is one of the few works in the sphere of the *stylus phantasticus* to be written for the formation of a solo voice, two violins, two violas, and basso continuo. Noteworthy is the explicit use of two violas da gamba in this cantata. The ranges of the viol parts extend from f-sharp to a' and d to g'; the parts could therefore also be played on violas da braccio, which would have been usual at that time. It is probably for this reason that Becker added the designation "da gamba," i.e., in order to exploit the special timbre of the viols in this cantata and to preclude the use of violas.

The designation of the voice part as "Alto" is an indication that the pitch standard must have been very high in Hamburg (according to the most recent findings, A = ca. 480 Hz). Depending on the pitch standard (for example, A = 415 Hz), the use of a high tenor voice would be entirely possible (range: e-a'). In the original, the voice part is notated in alto clef.

The manuscript of the present cantata is found in the holdings of the Düben Collection of the Uppsala University Library, call number **S-Uu Vok.mus. i hskr. 3:6**, and consists of individual parts for alto, violin 1, violin 2, viola da gamba 1, viola da gamba 2, violone or bassoon, and continuo.

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Heidi Gröger
Translation by Howard Weiner

¹ From this collection, Becker's *Sonata à 2. Violino & Violadagamba* has also been published by Edition Güntersberg, edited by L. and G. von Zadow, G502 facsimile, G064 modern edition.