

## Bach-Stokowski, *Mein Jesu! was für Seelenweh*, BWV 487



**Johann Sebastian Bach** (31 March 1685 – 28 July 1750) was a German composer and organist whose ecclesiastical and secular works for choir, orchestra, and solo instruments drew together the strands of the Baroque period and brought it to its ultimate maturity. Although he introduced no new forms, he enriched the prevailing German style with a robust contrapuntal technique, an unrivalled control of harmonic and motivic organization, and the adaptation of rhythms, forms and textures from abroad, particularly Italy and France.

The cantata **Mein Jesu** was originally written for voice and *basso continuo* (usually organ and cello) and is part of the Schemelli's *Musikalisches-Gesangbuch* (Song Book): sixty-nine pieces (BWV 439-507) prepared by J.S. Bach and published in 1736. For the most part, the majority of the melodies were already in existence and Bach's principle task was to add a bass line to each one. He may have altered certain melodic details to render the tunes more suited to his harmonic language. As we know them today, these two-part miniatures offer not only numerous superb melodies, but also a brilliant demonstration of Bach's contrapuntal and harmonic mastery. Stylistically, the pieces are somewhat related to the four-part chorales, but are more elaborated than the average Lutheran hymntune. Shared characteristics include relatively short durations, frequent use of AAB form, modulation to closely related keys, and the occasional appearance of modal key-signatures.

In 1930s, one of the most influential conductors of his generation, Leopold Stokowski, arranged nearly 40 works by Bach for the modern symphony orchestra (the arrangement of **Mein Jesu** was completed in 1937). Stokowski had progressive views, lurid presence on the concert stage, and innovative approach to music-making. Stokowski embraced everything modern, and synthesized music, art, and dance in ways that were new to the American audiences. His interest in sound reproduction and transmission resulted in pioneering recordings utilizing the latest technological developments. In his pursuit of the perfect balance and blends of color in the concert hall, he often experimented with the placement of players' seating by moving sections of the orchestra to different parts of the stage. Stokowski's unorthodoxy is perhaps his greatest legacy, for it was his willingness to take risks and challenge convention that occasioned his most significant triumphs.