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Two recent adaptations of the aria "Aus Liebe will mein Heiland sterben" from J. S. Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* BWV 244--one for solo piano and one for symphonic metal band--take the work to be very slow indeed. This has been the tendency in the aria's performance overall: to regard it as a tragic and time-stopping moment in Picander and Bach's passion narrative. Commentators have wondered, though, how such slow and somber music could have been re-used by its creators in the so-called Cöthen Funeral Music BWV 244a with a new text that opens with the words "Mit Freuden sei die Welt verlassen."

We do not know how fast the aria was performed in Bach's time (though there are no indications that it was understood as a very slow piece) but we have ample evidence on its tempo in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The slow tempo did not originate with Felix Mendelssohn, who included the aria in his Leipzig performance of the passion in 1841. The aria's character appears to have been established in critical writings in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that regarded it as transcendent and representative of the passion's supposed pure tragedy; in influential editions that assigned slow tempo and metronome markings; and in recordings that document very slow tempos, only recently somewhat moderated. Modern writings that consider the aria central to the passion and performance practices that realize the piece with large choruses and orchestras have cemented this view.

We do not know how Bach performed the aria, but if we set aside the tempo inherited from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the work's doctrinal and affectively relatively neutral text and its musical construction suggest the plausibility of a much faster tempo. And this, in turn, could explain why it occurred to Bach and Picander to re-use it for a text that begins with the concept of joy. The very slow "Aus Liebe" adaptations are thus readings of the received performance tradition of the work.