

Martin Luther: Text & Melodie
Stephan Mlahu, 5-stimmiger Satz



Foto: Wartburg near Eisenach, Thüringen. PD, (Wikimedia Commons)

Ein Feste Burg Ist Unser Gott

from Luther, Martin / Mahu, Stephan
Evangelical hymnal, N°. 362

With Informations from

https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ein_feste_Burg_ist_unser_Gott

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Mighty_Fortress_Is_Our_God

https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ein_feste_Burg_ist_unser_Gott

If we discuss over Music in Renaissance Times in Germany and Europe, we cannot ignore the protestant hymnbook (german "Evangelisches Kirchengesangbuch"), in which many Renaissance melodies have been handed down to the present day - with some clerical changed text-verses. Among many "cover versions" were popular dance-tunes, love songs and more - in short: a cross-section of the former Renaissance hit parades. --

This Hymn, however, is no copyright infringement. "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" (German: "Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott") is one of the best known hymns by the reformer Martin Luther, himself. Luther wrote the words and composed the melody sometime between 1527 and 1529. It has been translated into English at least seventy times and also into many other languages. The words are a paraphrase of Psalm 46. The five-part movement SATBB goes back to Stephan Mahu, (also Étienne Mahu, * between 1480 and 1490 in the then County of Flanders; † 1541 or later, a Franco-Flemish composer, singer, trombonist and bandmaster of the Renaissance). It is not the only version of this hymn, but one of the most beautiful.

-- History --

"A Mighty Fortress" is one of the best loved hymns of the Lutheran tradition and among Protestants more generally. It has been called the "Battle Hymn of the Reformation" for the effect it had in increasing the support for the Reformers' cause. --

While 19th-century musicologists disputed Luther's authorship of the music to the hymn, that opinion has been modified by more recent research; it is now the consensus view of musical scholars that Luther did indeed compose the famous tune to go with the words.

-- Reception --

Heinrich Heine wrote in his 1834 essay „Over Germany“ on Luther, a history of emancipation in Germany beginning with the Reformation, that "Ein feste Burg" was the Marseillaise of the Reformation. In Germany, "Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott" was historically also used as a patriotic paean, which is why it was regularly sung at nationalistic events such as the Wartburg Festival in 1817. This patriotic undertone of the hymn emanates from its importance for the Reformation in general, which was regarded by the Protestants not only as a religious but as a national movement delivering Germany from Roman oppression. Furthermore, the last line of the fourth stanza of the German text reads: "Das Reich muss uns doch bleiben", which is generally translated into English as "The Kingdom must remain ours" whilst it may also be interpreted as meaning: the Holy Roman Empire must remain with the Germans.

Tradition states that the sixth Lutheran King of Sweden, Gustavus Adolphus, had it played as his forces went to battle in the Thirty Years' War. The hymn had been translated into Swedish already in 1536, presumably by Olaus Petri, with the incipit, "Vår Gud är oss en väldig borg". In the late 19th century the song also became an anthem of the early Swedish socialist movement.

In addition to being consistently popular throughout Western Christendom in Protestant hymnbooks, it is now a suggested hymn for Catholic Masses in the U.S., and appears in the Catholic Book of Worship published by the Canadian Catholic Conference in 1972.

-- English translations --

The first English translation was by Myles Coverdale in 1539 with the title, "Oure God is a defence and towre". The first English translation in "common usage" was "God is our Refuge in Distress, Our strong Defence" in J.C. Jacobi's Psal. Ger., 1722, p. 83. --

An English version less literal in translation but more popular among Protestant denominations outside Lutheranism is "A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing", translated by Frederick H. Hedge in 1853; this version is the one included in the United Methodist Hymnal. Another popular English translation is by Thomas Carlyle and begins "A safe stronghold our God is still". --

Most North American Lutheran churches have not historically used either the Hedge or Carlyle translations. Traditionally, the most commonly used translation in Lutheran congregations is a composite translation from the 1868 Pennsylvania Lutheran Church Book ("A mighty fortress is our God, a trusty shield and weapon"). In more recent years a new translation completed for the 1978 Lutheran Book of Worship ("A mighty fortress is our God, a sword and shield victorious") has also gained significant popularity.

This translation is added on the score itself, too.

-- French Translation --

Literal translation and metrical transcription (Henri Lutteroth, 1845) can be found on //

https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ein_feste_Burg_ist_unser_Gott

This translation is added on the Score itself, too.

-- Compositions based on the hymn --

The hymn has been used by numerous composers, including Johann Sebastian Bach as the source for his chorale cantata *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*, BWV 80. Bach set the tune twice in his *Choralgesänge* (Choral Hymns), BWV 302 and BWV 303 (for four voices). He used strains of the tune in his Christmas Oratorio. There is a version for organ, *Chorale Prelude* BWV 720, written by Bach for the organ at *Divi Blasii*, Mühlhausen. Two orchestrations of Bach's settings were made by conductors Leopold Stokowski and Walter Damrosch. -- Dieterich Buxtehude also wrote an organ chorale setting (*BuxWV 184*), as did Johann Pachelbel. -- George Frideric Handel used the melody in his *Solomon*, which is probably a wrong attribution. -- Georg Philipp Telemann also made a choral arrangement of this hymn and prominently used an extract of the verses beginning *Mit unsrer Macht ist nichts getan* in his famous *Donnerode*. --

Felix Mendelssohn used it as the theme for the fourth and final movement of his *Symphony No. 5*, Op. 107 (1830), which he named *Reformation* in honor of the Reformation started by Luther. -- Joachim Raff wrote an *Overture* (for orchestra), *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*, Op. 127. -- Giacomo Meyerbeer quoted it in his five-act grand opera *Les Huguenots* (1836), and Richard Wagner used it as a "motive" in his "*Kaisermarsch*" ("*Emperor's March*"), which was composed to commemorate the return of Kaiser Wilhelm I from the Franco-Prussian War in 1871. -- Two organ settings were written by Max Reger: his chorale fantasia *Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott*, Op. 27, and a much

shorter chorale prelude as No. 6 of his 52 Chorale Preludes, Op. 67, in 1902. -- Claude Debussy quoted the theme in his suite for piano duet, En blanc et noir. Alexander Glazunov quoted the melody in his Finnish Fantasy, Op. 88, along with several Finnish folk tunes. --

Ralph Vaughan Williams used the tune in his score for the film 49th Parallel, most obviously when the German U-boat surfaces in Hudson Bay shortly after the beginning of the film. -- Flor Peeters wrote an organ chorale setting "Ein feste Burg" as part of his Ten Chorale Preludes, Op. 69, published in 1949. -- More recently it has been used by band composers to great effect in pieces such as Psalm 46 by John Zdechlik and The Holy War by Ray Steadman-Allen. The hymn also features in Luther, an opera by Kari Tikka that premiered in 2000. -- It has also been used by African-American composer Julius Eastman in his 1979 work Gay Guerrilla, composed for an undefined number of instruments and familiar in its recorded version for 4 pianos. Eastman's use of the hymn can arguably be seen as simultaneously a claim for inclusion in the tradition of "classical" composition, as well as a subversion of that very same tradition. -- Mauricio Kagel quoted the hymn, paraphrased as "Ein feste Burg ist unser Bach", in his oratorio Sankt-Bach-Passion, which tells Bach's life and was composed for the tricentenary of Bach's birth in 1985.

If ever a Renaissance melody grew to historical and political significance, this was it! –

My conversion to MuseScore 3.6.2

The music is set for a five-part vocal ensemble SATBB, as can be easily seen from the notes. I include all parts in notation as additional PDF files and as additional .MP3 files, leaving at least the German text under the staves, as well as the C clefs in the score.

And with the sheet music for vocal ensemble, a problem always arises: With what sound do we have it rendered?

Honestly, with a church organ, "vox humana" is often considered the most beautiful of all stops. Unfortunately, this is not the case with computer software (or MIDI voices) (at least with the sound font for MuseScore). If you really play the digital Ahhh... or Ohhh... or Dooo... voices in a church, you don't have to be surprised that currently a lot of Christians are leaving the major denominations!

Since I do not want to contribute to the loss of members of the churches and do not want to distort this beautiful song, I have made a quintet for reed instruments out of it: oboe, English horns and bassoons, because this already comes quite close to the human voice. Alternatively, an ensemble of strings would be conceivable. The German song text is left in syllabic letters below the notes to give a church choir the possibility to use this arrangement for rehearsal.

Dear choir directors: Reach out, and it would be an honor to me!

Let me know what you think.

Friendly Regards

FarrierPete

Still member of „Evangelische Kirche Deutschland“ (EKD, Lutherans)

Pages	4
Duration	02:16
Measures	30
Key signature	1 flat (F-Major)
Ensemble	Vocal Quintett
Parts	5
Part names	Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bariton, Bass
Privacy	Everyone can see this score
License	© CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0 by FarrierPete (Creative Commons, Attribution, non-commercial, share alike) For Notesetting, Arrangement and Sound-Mix (Raumklang +)
Software	MuseScore 3.6.2 (www.musescore.org) Free software, open source.