

Bach “Schafe können sicher weiden” from BWV 208

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Bach “Schafe können sicher weiden” [from BWV 208.](#) “Sheep may safely graze”

This is the sixth album on Deutsche Grammophon of pianist brothers Lucas and Arthur Jussen. Despite their young age, they have been part of the international concert world for years and are praised by both the press and audiences. They have waited some time with recording the music of Bach, but felt ready to do so now. Together with Amsterdam Sinfonietta they play on this album two concertos for two pianos – BWV 1060 and 1061 -, to which they added five Choral Preludes for quatre-mains and one for two pianos. Lucas & Arthur Jussen – Bach: Schafe können sicher weiden, BWV 208.



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About this piece

“**Sheep may safely graze**” (German: *Schafe können sicher weiden*) is a [soprano aria](#) by [Johann Sebastian Bach](#) setting words by [Salomon Franck](#). The piece was written in 1713 and is part of the [cantata *Was mir behagt, ist nur die muntre Jagd*, BWV 208](#). The cantata’s title translates *The lively hunt is all my heart’s desire*, and it is also known as the *Hunting Cantata*.

Like the same composer’s “[Jesu, Joy of Man’s Desiring](#)”, *Sheep may safely graze* is frequently played at weddings. However, the cantata of which it forms a part was originally written for a birthday celebration, that of [Christian, Duke of Saxe-Weissenfels](#). Bach was based at the nearby court of [Weimar](#), and musicians from both courts appear to have joined together in the first performance in [Weißenfels](#). Bach is known to have used the music again for other celebrations, but it remained unpublished until after his death.

Text

The piece’s English title is well known enough for it to evoke a pastoral scene: it has been referenced in discussions of how European culture depicts domestic animals and sheep in

particular.

Franck's words are given to mythological characters, in this case [Pales](#), a deity of shepherds, flocks, and livestock. Pales compares the peaceful life of sheep under a watchful shepherd to the inhabitants of a state with a wise ruler.

Schafe können sicher weiden
Wo ein guter Hirte wacht.

Wo Regenten wohl regieren
Kann man Ruh' und Friede spüren
Und was Länder glücklich macht.

Sheep may safely graze and pasture
In a watchful Shepherd's sight.

Those who rule with wisdom guiding
Bring to hearts a peace abiding
Bless a land with joy made bright.

Arrangements

Keyboard

"Sheep may safely graze" was [arranged](#) for piano by the American composer [Mary Howe](#). Another notable piano transcription was made by Dutch pianist [Egon Petri](#), published in 1944. American composer and electronic musician [Wendy Carlos](#) arranged and recorded "Sheep may safely graze" on a [Moog synthesizer](#) for her 1973 album [Switched-On Bach II](#). For piano-four-hands there is a version by [Duo Petrof](#).

Band and orchestra

Australian-born composer [Percy Grainger](#) wrote "free rambles" on Bach's "Sheep may safely graze". He first wrote "Blithe Bells" (as he called his free ramble), for "[elastic scoring](#)" between November 1930 and February 1931. In March 1931, he scored a [wind band](#) version.

The piece was arranged for string orchestra by British composer [Granville Bantock](#). There is also an orchestral arrangement by British composer Sir [William Walton](#), part of the ballet score [*The Wise Virgins*](#).