JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

The PASSION
According to ST. MARK, BWV 247

Helen Erwin, Soprano
Emmy Liskin, Alto
Georg Jelden, Tenor

South German Madrigal Choir
Pforzheim Chamber Orchestra

Wolfgang GÖNNENWEIN, Conductor
JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH
(1685-1750)
THE PASSION ACCORDING TO ST. MARK, BWV 247

Side 1:
Part I - Nos. 1-6

Helen Erwin, Soprano
Emmy Listkin, Alto
Georg Jelden, Tenor
Gyorgy Terebesi, Violin • Hartmut Strebel and Gerhard Braun, Flutes
Pierre Pierlot and Jacques Chambron, Oboes • Heinrich Haferland and Alfred Lessing, Violas da gamba
Eugene Dombois, Lute • Jacoba Muckel, Cello • Eva Hölderlin, Organ

South German Madrigal Choir, Stuttgart
Pforzheim Chamber Orchestra
Wolfgang GöNNENWEIN, Conductor

According to modern scholarship, Johann Sebastian Bach wrote five Passions, as he is reported to have contributed five sets of church cantatas. Two of them have been completely preserved, the Passion according to St. John and that according to St. Matthew. Of the Passion according to St. Mark, most of the music is lost. The Passion according to St. Luke is preserved in a Leipzig manuscript, partly written by Bach himself, and so weak a composition that we are justified in considering it as the work of a minor contemporary, which Bach copied for the purpose of performing it. About the fifth Passion nothing is known. Bach scholar Philipp Spitta suggested that Bach may have set to music a text which Picander published in 1725; another scholar, Smend, on the other hand, conjectures that the work was based on the Gospel of St. Matthew and composed for a single chorus, unlike the St. Matthew Passion we know.

Despite their structural relationship Bach's Passions are very different in character. The later compositions radiate tenderness and love; harsh contrasts toned down, and a heart-stirring blend of grief and bliss, such as only Bach could create, prevails throughout.

Of the St. Mark Passion (BWV 247), performed for the first time on Good Friday 1731, we have only Picander's libretto which was published in the third part of his Ernst-Schertzhaffte und Satyrische Gedichte (Leipzig, 1732). Interestingly enough, the entire libretto is reproduced, including the quotations from the gospel and the chorale texts, which may point to Picander's having had a larger share in the formulation of the text than in that of the St. Matthew Passion. Though both the score and the parts are lost, the composition may be partly reconstructed from other works. A reconstruction of sections of the work was attempted by Dietrich Hellmann, Stuttgart, 1964; its English premiere took place in Oxford, July 1965.

The introductory and the concluding chorus as well as arias No. 27, 49, and 59 were recognized as "parodies" of Numbers 1, 10, 5, 3, 8 of the funeral ode Lass Fursten (BWV 198) performed on October 17, 1727, in memory of the Electress Christiane Eberhardine. Aria No. 55 Falsche Welt may be preserved in the Weimar cantata Wilderstehet doch der Seele (BWV 54), while the music to the chorus No. 144 seems to have survived in the chorus No. 45. "Where is he that is born king of the Jews?" in the Christmas Oratorio. Some chorales of the St. Mark Passion may possibly have been included in C.P.E. Bach's collection of his father's hymn arrangements. However, when compared with the 132 numbers of the original score, the amount of fragments preserved is rather pitiful.

Evidently the St. Mark Passion was surrounded by intrigue and problems from its inception. There exists today an excerpt from the archives of the Leipzig Town Council concerning the initial performance. It seems that the town council obviously placed a good deal of legal red tape in the way of both the composer and the librettist and that Bach, at some point or other, lost his legendary temper and earned himself a rebuke from the head of the council. The archive excerpt runs as follows:

Upon A Noble and Most Wise Council's order I have gone to Mr. Bach here and have pointed out to the same that the music he intends to perform on the coming Good Friday is to be omitted until regular permission for the same is received. Whereupon he answered: it had always been done so; he did not care, for he had nothing at all to perform; and it was only a burden; he would notify the Superintendent that it had been forbidden him; if an objection were made on account of the text, he remarked that it had already been performed several times. The which I have accordingly wished to communicate to A Noble and Most Wise Council.

Andreas Gottlieb Bienengräber
Clerk
Leipzig, March 17, 1731

Our knowledge of Bach's personality indicates that he seems to have thoroughly enjoyed a good battle of words when he felt that someone was trying to take advantage of him. His sense of humor was apparently more rigorous than subtle, and in keeping with the temper of the time, somewhat on the coarse side.

The Passions are primarily interesting on account of the way they illustrated Bach's enormous penchant for the setting of a given text. Not the least asset, according to scholar Hans T. David, in Bach's musical setting of his texts was his contrapuntal ingenuity. This statement may seem surprising. We are accustomed to considering the consistent application of technical devices in music as an impediment to the free flow of imagination. We are inclined to say that a fugue is expressive in spite of its being a fugue. But there is, as Goethe remarked, "no form without content." Bach was the last of the great line of composers who achieved beauty and depth not in spite of the contrapuntal devices he used but through them.

Wonderful examples of Bach's word-paintings are: in the Saint John Passion the slow trentino of the strings reflecting the tremor of the tortured heart, or the accompaniment in wavering lines alluding to the soul that "swims in tears;" in the Saint John Passion the tortured climactic line of the Evangelist as he tells how Peter "wept bitterly," or the whiplike rhythm of the passage that talks about the scourging of Jesus; in the Actus Tragicus, the duet with its sudden hush of the accompaniment at the words sans and stille (soft and still). In introducing such patterns, Bach follows a tradition that had originated in the French chanson of the sixteenth century, grown in the madrigal, and found noble application to sacred music in the work of Schütz and others. Bach's own pictorial devices are occasionally somewhat naive, but usually they form a close bond between the text and the music, and often they not only illustrate the words but add great depth to the expression of their Affect.

While the Passion According to Saint Mark may lack the drama and dynamism of its two great predecessors, it makes up for this deficiency by a veritable plethora of fiery lyricism and textual fidelity. Some of the solo arias have a passionate beauty which Bach rarely surpassed, in spite of such other gems as the slow movement of the 2-violin concerto in D and the aria "Erharm dich mein" from the Saint Matthew Passion. Perhaps the recent resurrection of this glorious score will result in more and more frequent performances and recordings — certainly one of the greater outcomes of the renewed interest today in the lesser known works of the composer.

MARK GANTT
BACH: ST. MARK PASSION

Side 1:

No. 1: CHORUS

Geb, Jesu, geb zu deiner Pein! Ich will so lange dich beweinen, bis mir dein Trost wird wieder scheinen, dein Trost wird wieder scheinen, da dich ich versöhnnet werde sein.

Go, my Jesus, fulfill Your destiny! I will not be comforted until Your blessing lift up my heart.

No. 2: ARIA

Mein Heiland, dich vergess ich nicht, mein Heiland, mein Heiland, mein Heiland, dich vergess ich nicht, ... Ich habe dich in mich verschlossen und deinen Leib und Blut genossen und meinen Trost auf dich gerichtet, und meinen Trost auf dich, auf dich gerichtet, ... Mein Heiland, dich vergess ich nicht.

My Saviour, I cannot forget You, Your Body and Blood are within me, I live in You alone, You alone comfort me.

No. 3: CHORAL

Betrüste s. Herz, sei wohlgenüt, tu nicht so gar verzagen. Es wird noch alles werden gut, all dein Kreuß, Not und Klagen wird sich in lauter Fröhlichkeit verwandeln in gar kurzer Zeit, das wirst du wohl erfahren.

Troubled heart, be of good cheer, do not be so downcast. It will all be righted, all the cross, agony, and shame be lifted. Soon He will rise again and be among us.

No. 4: ARIA

Er kommt, er kommt, er ist vorhanden! Er kommt, er kommt, er ist vorhanden! ... Mein Jesu, ach! er suchet dich, englische doch und lasse mich. Mein Heil, statt deiner in den Banden, statt deiner in den Banden, statt deiner in den Banden, mein Jesu, ach! er suchet dich, englische doch und lasse mich ... Er kommt, er kommt, er ist vorhanden! Er kommt, er kommt, er ist vorhanden!

He comes, He comes, He is nigh! My Jesus, ah! He seeks me, my Saviour, He has come to release me from bondage! He comes, He comes, He is nigh!

No. 5: CHORAL

Jesu, ohne Missetat, im Garten vorhanden, da man dich gebunden hat fest mit harten Banden Wenn uns will der böse Feind mit der Sünde binden, so lass uns, o Menschenfreund, dadurch Lösung finden.

In that fateful garden, the soldiers come, they come to bind the Innocent One! Destroy Thy bonds, o mighty Saviour, and ours as well!

No. 6: ARIA

Falsche Welt, dein schmeichelnd Küssen, Falsche Welt, dein schmeichelnd Küssen, ist der Frommen Seelen Gift, ist der Frommen Seelen Gift, ist der Frommen Seelen Gift, Falsche Welt, dein schmeichelnd Küssen, ist der Frommen Seelen Gift ... Deine Zungen sind voll Stechen, und die Worte, die sie sprechen, sind zu Fallen angestift!

False world, hypocritical kisses, poison to the soul! Tongues like serpents and empty words!

Side 2:

No. 7: CHORAL

Ich will hier bei dir stehen, verachte mich doch nicht, von dir will ich nicht geben, wenn dir deiner Herze bricht. Wenn dein Haupt wird erbläsen im letzten Todesstoss, als, dann will ich dich fassen in meinen Arm und Schloss.

I will stand by You, do not cast me away! When Your Head bursts from its final wound, then will I embrace You and take You to my heart.

No. 8: ARIA

Mein Troster ist nicht mehr bei mir, Mein Jesu, soll ich dich verlieren, und zum Verderben sehen führten, und zum Verderben sehen führten? Mein Troster ist nicht mehr bei mir, mein Jesu, soll ich dich verlieren und zum Verderben sehen führen? Das kommt der Seele schmerlich für. Der Unschuld, welche nichts verbrochen, dem Lamm, das ohne Missatet, wird in dem ungerechten Rat, ein Todes urteil zugespredchen Der Unschuld, welche nichts verbrochen dem Lamm, das ohne Missatet, wird in dem ungerechten Rat, ein Todes urteil zugespredchen.

My Comforter is not by me, o, sweet Jesus, must I see You in the bonds of ruin and shame? The innocent lamb is given up to false justice: He will be slaughtered!

No. 9: CHORAL

Man hat dich sehr hart verbärmnet, dich mit grossem Schimpf, und mit Dornen gekrönt Was hat dich dazu bewegt? Das du möchtest mich ergötzen, mir die Ehrenkron aufsetzen. Tausend, tausend mal sei dir, lieber Jesu, Dank dafür.

They have sorely mocked You, have laid great shame upon Your brow, they have crowned You with thorns. However, I will lift up my face to You and for Your blessings a world of thanks.

No. 10: ARIA

Welt und Himmel, nehmt zu Ohren, Jesus schreit überlaut, Jesus schreit überlaut, Welt und Himmel, nehmt zu Ohren, Jesus schreit überlaut ... Allen Sündern sagt er an, dass er nun genug getan, dass er nun genug getan, genug, dass das Eden aufgebaut, aufgebaut, welches wir zuvor verloren, welches wir zuvor verloren welches wir zuvor verloren Welt und Himmel zu Ohren, Jesus schreit überlaut.

World and Heaven, my Jesus cries aloud. He cries with pain and suffering! He bears all our sins upon His shoulders, that we might regain the kingdom of heaven.

No. 11: CHORAL


O Jesus! My Comfort and Joy! I beg You with tears, let me follow You to the grave.

No. 12: CHORUS


At the side of Your tomb, o my Jesus, I will stand, and be merry and joyful of heart, for it will be said of You, 'Look, He has arisen, and has conquered Death.'
MUSICAL HERITAGE SOCIETY

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PART I

Helen Erwin, Soprano
Emmy Liskin, Alto
Georg Jelden, Tenor

SOUTH GERMAN MADRIGAL CHOIR, STUTTGART
Pforzheim Chamber Orchestra

WOLFGANG GÖNNENWEIN, Conductor

Recorded by ERATO
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PART II
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South German Madrigal Choir, Stuttgart
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