



*Johann Sebastian Bach:*

*The St. Matthew Passion*

A 2013 Bach Society of Dayton Study Guide

*Bach*  
SOCIETY *of* DAYTON

This study guide, prepared by R. Alan Kimbrough with assistance from Larry Hollar, is a resource specially prepared for individuals or groups planning to attend the Bach Society of Dayton performance of J.S. Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* BWV 244 on Sunday, March 10, 2013 at 4:00 p.m. at the Kettering Adventist Church 3939 Stonebridge Road, Kettering, Ohio 45419. A 3:00 concert preview with Dayton Philharmonic Orchestra conductor Neal Gittleman precedes the performance. For more information or to order tickets (including at group rates) see [www.bachsocietyofdayton.org](http://www.bachsocietyofdayton.org) or call 927-294-2224.

The Bach Society is grateful for the support of the Miriam Rosenthal Memorial Trust Fund and other generous donors and sponsors for making this concert and this study guide possible.



## How to use this study guide

This Study Guide, designed to help prepare audience members for the March 10, 2013, Bach Society of Dayton performance of J. S. Bach's monumental *St. Matthew Passion*, has as its primary focus Bach's treatment of the basic passion narrative. You will have a chance to:

1. Read the Matthew narrative of the passion of Christ through, assigning different parts to different people if you are studying in a group. (Alternatively, if time is short, ask participants to read chapters 26 and 27 of Matthew's gospel before coming together)

2. Learn about four major musical approaches that Bach uses to tell the passion story and add commentary to it.
3. Re-read the story with Bach’s additional commentary and then reflect on your own experience of the passion story.
4. Listen to as much of the *St. Matthew Passion* as your time allows.
5. Share the program notes at the end of this study guide with your group participants before or after you come together.

Depending on your audience and the time available, you can use some or all of these parts.

For stages 2 and 4 above, it is important to have a recording of the *St. Matthew Passion* or be able to find excerpts on YouTube or elsewhere. Your local library or a friend who collects CDs may have a copy you could borrow. There are many excellent CDs now on sale, with very different approaches to the piece. Among those you might enjoy are:

*Matthäus-Passion*, Helmuth Rilling conducting, Gächinger Kantorei Stuttgart and the Bach-Collegium Stuttgart.

*Mattäus-Passion*, Otto Klemperer conducting, Philharmonia Choir and Orchestra.

Further thoughts on recording options are in Exercise 4 below (pp. 32-33).

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EXERCISE 1 (Reading the passion narrative). If you are working with a group, parcel out the parts and read the narrative through, with one person reading the lines of the Evangelist or narrator (lines in black type below), and various others taking on individual roles and the entire group reading the lines that are assigned to the various groups of characters (in red). **The goal is to remind your group of the scope and trajectory of the passion story in Matthew's gospel.**

As you think about assigning roles, here is the cast:

The Evangelist (The narrator—black type)

Individual Speakers

Jesus	A servant-girl
Judas Iscariot	Another servant-girl
Peter	Pilate
Caiaphas, the high priest	Pilate's wife

Groups of Speakers

	The chief priests/elders/scribes/Pharisees	
The disciples		The crowd
Two false witnesses		The soldiers
Bystanders		
	Those who passed by the Cross	
	The centurion and those with him	

*Once you've assigned roles, read the following text:*

## **Matthew 26**

When **Jesus** had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples,

**"You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified."**

Then **the chief priests and the elders of the people** gathered in the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and they conspired to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. But they said,

“Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people.”

Now while Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment, and she poured it on his head as he sat at the table. But when **the disciples** saw it, they were angry and said,

“Why this waste? For this ointment could have been sold for a large sum, and the money given to the poor.”

But **Jesus**, aware of this, said to them,

“Why do you trouble the woman? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. By pouring this ointment on my body she has prepared me for burial. Truly I tell you, wherever this good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.”

Then one of the twelve, who was called **Judas Iscariot**, went to the chief priests and said,

“What will you give me if I betray him to you?”

They paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

On the first day of Unleavened Bread **the disciples** came to Jesus, saying,

“Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?”

He [**Jesus**] said,

“Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, ‘The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.’”

So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal. When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve; and while they were eating, he [**Jesus**] said,

“Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.”

And they [**the disciples**] became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another,

“Surely not I, Lord?”

He [**Jesus**] answered,

“The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.”

**Judas**, who betrayed him, said,

“Surely not I, Rabbi?”

He [**Jesus**] replied,

“You have said so.”

While they were eating, **Jesus** took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said,

“Take, eat; this is my body.”

Then he [**Jesus**] took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying,

“Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Then **Jesus** said to them,

“You will all become deserters because of me this night; for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.”

**Peter** said to him,

“Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you.”

**Jesus** said to him,

“Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.”

**Peter** said to him,

“Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.”

And so said all the disciples.

Then **Jesus** went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples,

“Sit here while I go over there and pray.”

He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. Then he [**Jesus**] said to them,

“I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me.”

And going a little farther, he [**Jesus**] threw himself on the ground and prayed,

“My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.”

Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he [**Jesus**] said to Peter,

“So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Again he [**Jesus**] went away for the second time and prayed,

“My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.”

Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. Then he [**Jesus**] came to the disciples and said to them,

“Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.”

While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him.” At once he [**Judas**] came up to Jesus and said,

“Greetings, Rabbi!”

and kissed him. **Jesus** said to him,

“Friend, do what you are here to do.”

Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him. Suddenly, one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. Then **Jesus** said to him,

“Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen in this way?”

At that hour **Jesus** said to the crowds,

“Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest

me. But all this has taken place, so that the scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled.”

Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest, in whose house the scribes and the elders had gathered. But Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest; and going inside, he sat with the guards in order to see how this would end. Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for false testimony against Jesus so that they might put him to death, but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two [**false witnesses**] came forward and said,

“This fellow said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.’”

The **high priest** stood up and said,

“Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?”

But Jesus was silent. Then the **high priest** said to him,

“I put you under oath before the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.”

**Jesus** said to him,

“You have said so. But I tell you, From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

Then the **high priest** tore his clothes and said,

“He has blasphemed! Why do we still need witnesses? You have now heard his blasphemy. What is your verdict?”

They [**the scribes and elders**] answered,

“He deserves death.”

Then they spat in his face and struck him; and some [**scribes and elders**] slapped him, saying,

“Prophecy to us, you Messiah! Who is it that struck you?”

Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A **servant-girl** came to him and said,

“You also were with Jesus the Galilean.”

But he [**Peter**] denied it before all of them, saying,

“I do not know what you are talking about.”

When he went out to the porch, **another servant-girl** saw him, and she said to the bystanders,

“This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.”

Again he [**Peter**] denied it with an oath,

“I do not know the man.”

After a little while **the bystanders** came up and said to Peter,

“Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you.”

Then he began to curse, and he [**Peter**] swore an oath,

“I do not know the man!”

At that moment the cock crowed. Then Peter remembered what Jesus had said: “Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly.

## **Matthew 27**

When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus in order to bring about his death. They bound him, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate the governor. When Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he repented and

brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. He [**Judas**] said,

“I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.”

But they [**the chief priests and elders**] said,

“What is that to us? See to it yourself.”

Throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself. But **the chief priests**, taking the pieces of silver, said,

“It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since they are blood money.”

After conferring together, they used them to buy the potter’s field as a place to bury foreigners. For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah, “And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the one on whom a price had been set, on whom some of the people of Israel had set a price, and they gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord commanded me.”

Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor [**Pilate**] asked him,

“Are you the King of the Jews?”

**Jesus** said,

“You say so.”

But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer. Then **Pilate** said to him,

“Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?”

But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed. Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted. At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Jesus Barabbas. So after they had gathered, **Pilate** said to them,

“Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?”

For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over. While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his [**Pilate's**] **wife** sent word to him,

“Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him.”

Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. The governor [**Pilate**] again said to them,

“Which of the two do you want me to release for you?”

And they [**the crowd**] said,

“Barabbas.”

**Pilate** said to them,

“Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?”

All of them [**the crowd**] said,

“Let him be crucified!”

Then he [**Pilate**] asked,

“Why, what evil has he done?”

But they [**the crowd**] shouted all the more,

“Let him be crucified!”

So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he [**Pilate**] took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying,

“I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves.”

Then **the people** as a whole answered,

“His blood be on us and on our children!”

So he released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified. Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor’s headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They [**the soldiers**] put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying,

“Hail, King of the Jews!”

They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him. As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross.

And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; then they sat down there and kept watch over him. Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.” Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. **Those who passed by** derided him, shaking their heads and saying,

“You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.”

In the same way **the chief priests** also, **along with the scribes and elders**, were mocking him, saying,

“He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, ‘I am God’s Son.’”

The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way. From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And about three o’clock **Jesus** cried with a loud voice,

“Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?”

that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” When **some of the bystanders** heard it, they said,

“This man is calling for Elijah.”

At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. But **the others** said,

“Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.”

Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. Now when **the centurion and those with him**, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said,

“Truly this man was God’s Son!”

Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him. Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb. The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, **the chief priests and the Pharisees** gathered before Pilate and said,

“Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise again.’ Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him

away, and tell the people, 'He has been raised from the dead,' and the last deception would be worse than the first."

**Pilate** said to them,

"You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can."

So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.

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## EXERCISE 2 (Listening to key illustrative parts)

Now we look at how Johann Sebastian Bach took this biblical story and made it into a musical composition! There are four main musical techniques that Bach uses. As we examine each below, the bolded number references are to sections of the Passion that you will find in CD recordings (see "How to use this study guide" on pp. 2-3 above for recording suggestions).

(a) **Recitative** (pronounced reh-sih-tuh-TEEV) Bach uses this term in two senses- Most of the passion story narration—the Evangelist's lines—are sung in "recitative"—relatively free lines, with the tempo and phrasing left to the discretion of the singer. They are usually accompanied only by a single cello and the keyboard (organ or harpsichord), a combination called "continuo." An example would be **#4a** (find this cut in your recording). The Evangelist narrates: "*Da versammelten sich die Hohenpriester und Schriftgelehrten un die Ältesten in Volk in den Palast des Hohenpriesters, der da hieß Kaiphas, und hielten Rat, wie sie Jesum mit Listen griffen und töteten. Sie sprachen aber:*" (Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and they conspired to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. But they said,). Notice that the recitative ends with the introduction of the next speech, which follows immediately, without pause. (Bach also uses the term "recitative" for relatively short solo passages, introducing major solo arias by the soloists.)

(b) **The String "Halo"** However, when Jesus sings, at least in the early part of the Passion, Bach switches to regular meter and brings in the strings to give Jesus's words a "halo" effect. One example would be the very first section of narrative, **#2**. The Evangelist introduces Jesus's speech: "*Da Jesus diese Rede vollendet hatte, sprach er zu seinen Jüngern:*" (When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples,); and the strings sound just before Jesus begins to sing: "*Ihr wisset, daß nach zweien Tagen Ostern wird, und des Menschen Sohn wird überantwortet werden daß er gekreuziget werde.*" ("You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.")

A particularly moving example comes in **#11**, in which Bach strikingly sets Jesus's Words of Institution at the Last Supper in 6/4 meter. Again, the Evangelist begins: "*Er antwortete und sprach:*" ("He answered,"). The strings' halo sounds, and Jesus sings, "*Der mit der Hand mit mir in die Schüssel tauchet, der wird mich verraten. Des Menschen Sohn geht zwar dahin, wie von ihm geschrieben stehet; doch wehe dem Menschen, durch welchen des Menschen Sohn verraten wird! Es wäre ihm besser, daß derselbige Mensch noch nie geboren wäre.*" ("The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.") After a short "cadence" (usually just two chords, a dominant and tonic, establishing a key), the narration continues with the Evangelists's introduction of Judas's line: "*Da antwortete Judas, der ihn verriet, und sprach:*" ("Judas, who betrayed him, said, ); And the dialogue continues—  
 Judas—"Bin ichs, Rabbi?" (Surely not I, Rabbi?)  
 Evangelist—"Er sprach zu ihm:" ("He replied,")  
 Jesus—"Du sagest." ("You have said so.")

The Evangelist proceeds with the narration: "*Da sie aber aßen, nahm Jesus das Brot, dankete und brachs und gabs den Jüngern und sprach:*" (While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said,) at which point the meter changes to a stately 6/4, just for a measure and a half, as Jesus sings, "*Nehmet, esset, das ist mein Leib.*" ("Take, eat; this is my body"). The Evangelist introduces Jesus's next, much longer speech: "*Und er nahm den Kelch und dankete, gab ihnen den und sprach:*" ("Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying,"). The regular 6/4 meter returns for Jesus's extended passage: "*Trinket alle daraus; das ist mein Blut des neuen Testaments, welches vergossen wird für viele zur Vergebung der Sünden. Ich sage euch: Ich werde von nun an nicht mehr von diesem Geächts des Weinstocks trinken bis an den Tag, da ichs neu trinken werde mit euch in meines Vaters Reich.*" ("Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the

covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.")

(c) **Drama** Sometimes Bach uses the continuo accompaniment for dramatic sound effects. The clearest example would be **#63a**, describing the rending of the temple veil and the earthquake. The narration here ultimately introduces a two-measure sentence, sung by both choruses (**#63b**), at this moment ostensibly the voices of "the centurion and those with him" but really singing a testimony of faith applicable to the entire assembly. The Evangelist begins his narration, "*Und siehe da,*" ("At that moment,") with a slight pause for the continuo's rapid scale before resuming: "*der Vorhang im Tempel zerriß in zwei Stück von oben bis untenaus. Und die Erde erbebete, und die Felsen zerrissen, und die Gräber täten sich auf, und stunden auf viel Leiber der Heiligen, die da schliefen, und gingen aus den Gräbern nach seiner Auferstehung und kamen in die heilige Stadt und erschienen vielen. Aber der Hauptmann und die bei ihm waren und bewahreten Jesum, da sie sahen das Erdbeben und was da geschah, erschrecken sie sehr und sprachen:*" ("the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said,"; "*Wahrlich dieser ist Gottes Sohn gewesen.*" ("Truly this man was God's Son!")—just two measures in A-flat Major, but perhaps the climax of the entire Passion—the ultimate conclusion from the Crucifixion. The main action has come to a close. All that follows now concerns Jesus's burial.

(d) **The Chorus**—sometimes only Chorus I, sometimes only Chorus II, sometimes both Choruses—takes on multiple roles throughout the narration of St. Matthew's narrative. Usually the introductions make it easy to keep track of just who the singers' words belong to. Initially (**#4b**) theirs are the voices of the assembled chief priests, scribes, and elders; the next time they sing, they are the voices of Jesus's disciples (**#4d**), a role they continue to play when they sing next (**#9b**). Listen especially to **#9e**—a rapid, short chorus with a simple text: "*Herr, bin ichs?*" ("Lord, is it I?"). But the narration makes it clear that we have now not a single chorus of the disciples, but one voice after another, and Bach ingeniously has the full question asked precisely eleven times—three times by the sopranos, three times by the altos, three times by the tenors, but only twice by the basses—the implication being that the already guilty Judas remains silent.

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EXERCISE 3 (Commentary--responses to the narrative). Besides telling the basic gospel passion story, Bach also interrupts the narrative frequently, sometimes inserting choruses, sometimes inserting verses from chorales (hymns familiar to the congregation), and sometimes inserting numbers assigned to the four soloists (soprano, alto, tenor, bass). In general these insertions give us exemplary responses—either collective or individual—to the various incidents in the narrative. They invite us, in turn, to reflect on our own responses to the passion.

So now we examine the words that Bach sets for each of these inserted passages (in red type below). You can think (talk?) about just how each of the passages works at its given place. Pay particular attention to the use of first-person pronouns in these texts. When they refer to a singular first-person (I/me/my/mine), how would you identify that person—as an individual or as a collective shared identity? When they refer to a plural identity (we/us/our), who would that collective group be? When do the texts use second-person pronouns (you/your)? When you find those, can you identify who is speaking to whom?

As you read the commentary Bach includes, also think about your own feelings and thoughts as you experience the passion story. Are they similar to the responses in the *St. Matthew Passion*, or different? How do others in your group respond?

[A note on the format of the English translation highlighted in red. All of the chorales and many of the other texts of the *St. Matthew Passion* are metrical because the language is poetic throughout. This translation below, particularly because it is not designed to be sung and can thus be free of the meter to which the German was set, is set as prose throughout to allow an easier focus on the substance of the text.]

## PART ONE

### 1. OPENING CHORUS

**Come, daughters, help me lament. Behold! Whom? The Bridegroom. Behold him! How? Like a lamb. Behold! Where? Behold his patience. Look? Where? At our guilt. See him, out of love and graciousness, bear the wood of the Cross himself.**

As this chorus is sung, a children's chorus sings a chorale above the question-answer dialogue of the chorus:

**O innocent Lamb of God, slaughtered on the trunk of the Cross, patient at all times, however You were scorned. You have carried all sins; otherwise we would have to despair. Have mercy on us, O Jesus.**

2. When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, "You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified."

### 3. CHORALE

**Beloved Jesus, how have You offended, that such a harsh sentence has been pronounced? What is the crime? What sorts of misdeed are You accused of?**

4. Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and they conspired to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. But they said, "Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people."

Now while Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment, and she poured it on his head as he sat at the table. But when the disciples saw it, they were angry and said, "Why this waste? For this ointment could have been sold for a large sum, and the money given to the poor." But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you trouble the woman? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. By pouring this ointment on my body she has prepared me for burial. Truly I tell you, wherever this good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her."

## 5. ALTO RECITATIVE

**Beloved Saviour, when Your disciples foolishly protest that this virtuous woman prepares Your body with ointment for the grave, let me in the meantime, with flowing tears from my eyes, pour water upon Your head!**

## 6. ALTO ARIA

**Repentance and regret rip the sinful heart in two. Thus the drops of my tears, desirable spices, are brought to You, loving Jesus.**

7. Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, "What will you give me if I betray him to you?" They paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

## 8. SOPRANO ARIA

**Bleed out, You loving heart! Alas! A child that You raised, who nursed at Your breast, threatens to murder its caretaker, since it has become a serpent.**

9. On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?" He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.'" So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal. When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve; and while they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me." And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, "Surely not I, Lord?"

## 10. CHORALE

**It is I. I should atone, bound hand and foot in hell. The scourges and the bonds and all that You endured, my soul has earned.**

11. He answered, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born." Judas, who betrayed him, said, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" He replied, "You have said so."

While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

## **12. SOPRANO RECITATIVE**

**Although my heart is swimming in tears, since Jesus is leaving me, yet His testament brings me joy. His flesh and blood, O Preciousness, He bequeaths into my hands. Just as in the world, among His own, He could not wish them harm, so He loves them to the end.**

## **13. SOPRANO ARIA**

**I will give You my heart; sink within, My Saviour! I will sink into You; although the world is too small for You, ah, You alone shall be for me more than heaven and earth.**

14. When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Then Jesus said to them, "You will all become deserters because of me this night; for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you to Galilee."

## **15. CHORALE**

**Acknowledge me, my Guardian, my Shepherd, take me in! From You, source of all goodness, has much good come to me. Your mouth has nourished me with milk and sweet sustenance. Your spirit has lavished upon me much heavenly joy.**

16 Peter said to him, "Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you." Jesus said to him, "Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." Peter said to him, "Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you." And so said all the disciples.

## **17. CHORALE**

**I will stay here with You; do not scorn me! I will not leave You, even as Your heart breaks. When Your heart grows pale at the last stroke of death, then I will hold You fast in my arm and bosom.**

18. Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. Then he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me."

**19. TENOR RECITATIVE and CHORALE (A complicated composition, in which lines of the tenor soloist are interrupted by the chorus, which sings a verse of a chorale. )**

**Tenor: O pain! Here the tormented heart trembles; how it sinks down, how His face pales!**

**Chorus: What is the cause of all this trouble?**

**Tenor: The Judge leads Him before judgment. No comfort, no helper is there.**

**Chorus: Alas! My sins have struck You down.**

**Tenor: He suffers all the torments of Hell; He must pay for the crimes of others.**

**Chorus: I, alas, Lord Jesus, have earned what you endure.**

**Tenor: Ah! Could my love for You, my Saviour, diminish or bring aid to Your trembling and Your despair, how gladly would I stay here!**

**20. TENOR ARIA and CHORALE (The combination continues, with the chorus initially repeating a single line, then interjecting a comment, then returning to the repeated single line.**

**Tenor: I will watch with my Jesus.**

**Chorus: So our sins fall asleep.**

**Tenor: My death is atoned for by His soul's anguish; His sorrow makes me full of joy.**

**Chorus: Therefore His meritorious passion must for us be both truly bitter and sweet.**

21. And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want."

## **22. BASS RECITATIVE**

**The Saviour falls down before His father; through this He lifts up Himself and everyone from our fall to God's grace again. He is ready to drink the Cup of death's bitterness, in which the sins of this world are poured and which stink horribly, since doing so is pleasing to our loving God.**

## **23. BASS ARIA**

**Gladly will I force myself to take on the Cross and the Chalice; yet I drink after the Saviour. For His mouth, which flows with milk and honey, has sweetened the grounds and the bitter taste of sorrow, through His first sip.**

24. Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Again he went away for the second time and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done."

## **25. CHORALE**

**What my God wills always occurs; His will is the best. He is ready to help those who believe firmly in Him. He gives aid in need, this righteous God, and punishes with measure. Whoever trusts in God and builds upon Him firmly, God will never abandon.**

26. Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour

is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.”

While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him.” At once he came up to Jesus and said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” and kissed him. Jesus said to him, “Friend, do what you are here to do.” Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him.

**27a SOPRANO and ALTO ARIA with CHORUS (Bach writes a duet for the soprano and alto soloists, which is interrupted repeatedly by the chorus’s single interjection.)**

**Soprano and alto: Thus my Jesus is now captured. Moon and light for sorrow have set, since my Jesus is captured. They take Him away. He is bound.**

**Chorus: Leave him, stop, don’t bind Him!**

**27b CHORUS**

**Are lightning and thunder extinguished in the clouds? Open the fiery abyss, O Hell; crush, destroy, devour, smash with sudden rage the false betrayer, the murderous blood!**

28. Suddenly, one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, “Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen in this way?” At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, “Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. But all this has taken place, so that the scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled.” Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

**29. CHORALE (In most performances, Part One ends with an elaborate and long setting of the well-known chorale “O Mensch beweine deine Sünde groß”—the chorale melody sung by a children’s chorus above a polyphonic setting of the same text for four-part**

chorus, with full orchestration. Bach also provided a straight-forward alternate chorale for the conclusion of this section. Here are both texts. You can debate which is the more effective.)

**O mankind, mourn your great sins, for which Christ left His Father's bosom and came to ear. From a virgin pure and tender He was born here for us. He wished to become our Intercessor. He gave life to the dead and laid aside all sickness until the time aproached when He would be offered for us, bearing the heavy burden of our sins indeed for a long time on the Cross.**

**Alternate chorale: I shall not let Jesus go from me, I shall go always by his side; for ever and ever Christ will lead me to the waters of life. Blessed are they who say with me; I shall not leave my Jesus.**

## **PART TWO**

**30. ALTO ARIA with CHORUS (Another complicated composition, essentially a dialogue between the soloist and the chorus. The text is based on The Song of Solomon 6:1-- Where has your beloved gone, O fairest among women? Which way has your beloved turned, that we may seek him with you?)**

**Alto: Alas, now my Jesus is gone!**

**Chorus: Where, then, has your beloved gone, O most beautiful among women?**

**Alto: Is it possible? Can I behold it?**

**Chorus: Which way has your beloved turned?**

**Alto: Alas! My lamb in the claws of a tiger; alas, where has my Jesus gone?**

**Chorus: We will seek Him with you.**

**Alto: Alas! What shall I say to the soul when she aske me anxiously: Alas! Where has my Jesus gone?**

31. Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest, in whose house the scribes and the elders had gathered. But Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest; and going inside, he sat with the guards in order to see how this would end. Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for false testimony against Jesus so that they might put him to death, but they found none,

### **32 CHORALE**

**The world has judged me deceitfully, with lies and false statements, many traps and secret snares. Lord, perceive me truthfully in this danger; protect me from malicious falsehoods!**

33. though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward and said, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.'" The high priest stood up and said, "Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?" But Jesus was silent.

### **34. TENOR RECITATIVE**

**My Jesus is silent at false lies, in order to show us that His merciful will is bent on suffering for us, and that we, in the same trouble, should be like Him and keep silent under persecution.**

### **35. TENOR ARIA**

**Patience, patience! When false tongues pierce. Although I suffer shame and scorn, contrary to my guilt, indeed, dear God shall revenge the innocence of my heart.**

36. Then the high priest said to him, "I put you under oath before the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God." Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven." Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has blasphemed! Why do we still need witnesses? You have now heard his blasphemy. What is your verdict?" They answered, "He deserves death." Then they spat in his face and struck him; and some slapped him, saying, "Prophecy to us, you Messiah! Who is it that struck you?"

### **37. CHORALE**

**Who has struck You thus, my Saviour, and with torments so evilly used You? You are not at all a sinner like us and our children. You know nothing of transgressions.**

38. Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant-girl came to him and said, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean." But he denied it before all of them, saying, "I do not know what you are talking about." When he went out to the porch, another servant-girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth." Again he denied it with an oath, "I do not know the man." After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you." Then he began to curse, and he swore an oath, "I do not know the man!" At that moment the cock crowed. Then Peter remembered what Jesus had said: "Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

### **39. ALTO ARIA**

**Have mercy, my God, for the sake of my tears! Look here; heart and eyes weep bitterly before You. Have mercy, have mercy!**

### **40. CHORALE**

**Although I have been separated from You, yet I return again. Even so Your Son set the example for us through His anguish and mortal pain. I do not deny my guilt, but Your grace and mercy is much greater than the sin that I constantly discover in myself.**

41. When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus in order to bring about his death. They bound him, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate the governor. When Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. He said, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." But they said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself." Throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself. But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since they are blood money."

### **42. BASS ARIA**

**Give me my Jesus back! See the money, the murderer's fee, tossed at your feet by the lost son!**

43. After conferring together, they used them to buy the potter's field as a place to bury foreigners. For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the one on whom a price had been set, on whom some of the people of Israel had set a price, and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me."

Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You say so." But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer. Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?" But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

#### **44. CHORALE**

**Commit your path, and whatever troubles your heart, to the most faithful caretaker. He, who directs the heavens, who gives path, course, and passage to the clouds, air and winds, He will also find ways for your feet to follow.**

45. Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted. At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Jesus Barabbas. So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?" For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over. While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him." Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." Pilate said to them, "Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" All of them said, "Let him be crucified!"

#### **46. CHORALE**

**How strange is this punishment! The Good Shepherd suffers for the sheep. The Lord, the rightoue One, atones for the crime on His servant's behalf.**

47. Then he asked, "Why, what evil has he done?"

#### **48. SOPRANO RECITATIVE**

**He has done good things for all of us. He gave sight to the blind; He made the lame to walk. He told us His Father's word. He drove out the devil. He has strengthened the troubled. He took sinners in and embraced them. Other than that, my Jesus has done nothing!**

#### **49. SOPRANO ARIA**

**Out of love my Saviour wants to die (even though He knows nothing of a single sin) so that the eternal destruction and the punishment of judgment would not remain upon my soul.**

50. But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!" So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." Then the people as a whole answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!"

So he released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

#### **51. ALTO RECITATIVE**

**Forgive this, God! Here stands the Saviour bound. O scourging, O blows, O wounds! You hangmen, stop! Doesn't the soul's anguish, the sight of such horror, soften you? Alas, indeed! You have such hearts that are like the whipping posts themselves and even much harder. Have mercy. Stop!**

#### **52. ALTO ARIA**

**If the tears on my cheeks can do nothing, then take my heart as well! Yet let it, for the flow, when the wounds gently bleed, be the offering-bowl as well.**

53. Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head.

## **54. CHORALE**

**O Head, full of blood and wounds, full of suffering and shame! O Head, bound in mockery with a crown of thorns! O Head, once beautifully adorned with the highest honor and beauty, now rather supremely defiled: be greeted by me!**

**You noble countenance, before which the great powers of the world should rather tremble and cower, how spat upon You are. How ashen You have become! Who has treated the light of Your eyes, which is like no other light, so shamefully?**

55. After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him. As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross.

## **56. BASS RECITATIVE**

**Yes, willingly are flesh and blood compelled to the Cross. The better it is for our souls, the bitterer it feels.**

## **57. BASS ARIA**

**Come, sweet Cross. This I want to say: My Jesus, give it always to me! If my suffering becomes too heavy one day, You Yourself will help me bear it.**

58. And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; then they sat down there and kept watch over him. Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants

to; for he said, 'I am God's Son.'" The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way.

## **59. ALTO RECITATIVE**

**Alas, Golgatha, unblessed Golgatha! The Lord of glory must shamefully perish here. The blessing and salvation of the world is placed on the Cross as a curse. From the Creator of heaven and earth, earth and air shall be withdrawn. The innocent must die here guilty. This touches my soul deeply. Alas, Golgatha, unblessed Golgatha!**

## **60. ALTO ARIA with CHORUS (Another dialogue aria, in which the Chorus repeatedly asks, "Where?")**

**Look: Jesus has stretched out His hands to embrace us. Come! [Where?] In Jesus's arms seek redemption, receive mercy. Seek it! [Where?] In Jesus's arms. Live, die, rest here, you forsaken little chicks. Stay! [Where?] In Jesus's arms.**

61. From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "This man is calling for Elijah." At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last.

## **62. CHORALE**

**When I must depart one day, do not part from me. When I must suffer death, come to me! When the greatest anxiety will constrict my heart, wrest me out of the horror by the power of your anguish and pain.**

63. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. Now when the centurion and those with

him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, "Truly this man was God's Son!" Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him. Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him.

#### **64. BASS RECITATIVE**

**In the evening, when it was cool, Adam's fall was made apparent. In the evening, the Saviour bowed Himself down. In the evening the dove came back, bearing an olive leaf in its mouth. O lovely time! O evening hour! The pact of peace with God has now been made, since Jesus has completed His Cross. His body comes to rest. Ah, dear soul! Ask; go; have them give you the dead Jesus. O wholesome, O precious remembrance!**

#### **65. BASS ARIA**

**Make yourself pure, my heart. I want to bury Jesus myself. For from now on He shall have in me, forever and ever, His sweet rest. World, get out; let Jesus in!**

66. So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb. The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, "Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again.' Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He has been raised from the dead,' and the last deception would be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can." So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.

**67. SOPRANO, ALTO, TENOR, BASS RECITATIVE with CHORUS (Each of the soloists—bass, tenor, alto, and soprano, ascending in vocal**

range—has a line, to which the Chorus repeatedly responds with the same benediction.)

**Bass: Now the Lord is brought to rest.**

**Chorus: My Jesus, good night!**

**Tenor: The weariness that our sins have given Him is over.**

**Chorus: My Jesus, good night!**

**Alto: O blessed bones. See, how I weep over You with repentance and regret, since my fall has brought such anguish upon You!**

**Chorus: My Jesus, good night!**

**Soprano: Lifelong, thousand thanks to You for Your suffering, since You held my soul's salvation so dear.**

**Chorus: My Jesus, good night!**

## **68. CHORUS**

**We sit down with tears and call to You in the grave: rest gently, gently rest! Rest, you exhausted limbs! Rest gently, rest well. Your grave and headstone shall, for the anxious conscience, be a comfortable pillow and the resting place for the soul. Rest gently, gently rest! Highly contented, there the eyes fall asleep.**

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EXERCISE 4 (Further listening). Select a full-length recording and listen to how Bach's music further shapes any of these passages of text. Many recordings exist, and although

Amazon.com and other sources will provide some customer comments, individual taste will clearly prefer some performances to others. Among the choices available, you may want to look for German language or English language performances. You may prefer period instruments to modern instruments. You may want to check to see if a particular recording uses both organ and harpsichord or only one or the other. You may prefer a female alto soloist or a countertenor (male alto) soloist. You may prefer mixed choirs or choirs of men and boys. And some recordings may feature soloists with whom you are already familiar and whose voices you find especially attractive, or conductors whose work you have admired. YouTube also has a rather long list of excerpts from various performances and some full-length performances.

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EXERCISE 5 (Read the program notes for the March 2013 Bach Society of Dayton concert)

### **Program Notes**

**J.S. Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* (BWV 244)** came nearly on the heels of Bach's *St. John Passion*, which Bach had written for Good Friday 1724 and revised for Good Friday 1725. Bach wrote both versions for Good Friday Vespers at the St. Thomas Church in Leipzig. The *St. Matthew Passion* took place there as well, probably first on Good Friday 1727, with a revised version likely in 1729, and a

culminating revision in 1736. When Mendelssohn initiated the Bach revival in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, he edited (and altered) this later version of the St. Matthew, a copy of which his grandmother had given the teen-aged Mendelssohn as a gift. This 1736 version is most often performed today, and it is the basis for the Bärenreiter edition that the Bach Society is using for today's performance.

This Passion setting, significantly longer than Bach's earlier setting of the Johannine Passion, in itself would last about three hours if it were sung without cuts. Modern audiences may justly wonder about the endurance powers of the people who first heard it in its liturgical setting. For, as Daniel Melamed has pointed out in *Hearing Bach's Passions* (Oxford University Press 2005), those Good Friday Vespers in Leipzig's main Lutheran churches began with a hymn at 1:45 p.m. The hymn was followed by Part I of the sung Passion. Between that and Part II of the Passion came a sermon lasting at least an hour. The second part of the Passion was followed by a motet by Jacob Handl (Gallus)—“Ecce, quomodo moritur justus,” a collect, a reading from Isaiah, and a final hymn.

Today's Bach Society of Dayton performance, like Mendelssohn's in 1829, has been at least slightly abridged to make for a reasonable concert length. Because of the occasional cuts, the numbering in today's program probably follows the numbering of no existing vocal score and may be significantly different from the numbering used in various recordings and commentaries. We have also abbreviated several of the *da capo* arias, not repeating the first sections of those arias in their entirety. Several other features of today's performance may differentiate it from recordings or other performances that people may have heard earlier. We are extremely fortunate to be joined by the Kettering Children's

Choir Concert Choir for the opening and closing choruses and for the chorales that Bach used to punctuate different segments of the Gospel narrative. Bach composed the work with a Gospel text from Luther's German Bible, the vernacular version familiar to Lutherans in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. He would surely have endorsed the practice of singing the work in an audience's vernacular today, and English singing versions of the work are certainly available. But since today's performance is a concert, not a church service, we have elected to sing the work in German—duplicating the sound of the language Bach used.

Much commentary on the *St. Matthew Passion* stresses what Bach emphasized in his 1736 version—the scoring of the work for two choruses and two orchestras, an arrangement that will be visually apparent. In his 1736 orchestration, Bach calls for a separate “continuo” group—cello (or bassoon) and keyboard—in each orchestra. A document from the sexton of St. Thomas's Church notes that the performance that year used “both organs” in the church. But Bach's earlier version had only one continuo group, and that is the practice we are following today. Melamed presents a very convincing case for thinking that Bach's two choruses each had only four (male) singers, one on each vocal part, with the solo lines in the narrative, including that of the tenor Evangelist, as well as all of the interpolated vocal recitatives and arias, sung by those same eight singers. Since all of the musicians would have been above and behind the congregation, any confusion about vocal roles would have been principally aural, not visual. We, like most performances today, use soloists in addition to a chorus divided into two complementary four-part groups, and we hope that the resulting visual separation, along with the printed text and translation in this program booklet, will let our audience follow the basic “story” with relative ease. (Bach's

original congregation, at least the wealthier members of it, also had access to printed librettos.)

The printed librettos should also make it relatively easy to distinguish among the three principal strands in the text. The basic narration follows the account of Jesus' Passion in St. Matthew's Gospel, chapters 26 and 27, without significant alteration. (The English version included in this program booklet is taken from The New Revised Standard Version, the one most frequently used in Protestant lectionaries today. For an annotated modern English translation that tries to be as faithful to Bach's German text as possible, see the impressive work of Michael Marissen in *Bach's Oratorios* [Oxford University Press 2008]). Bach frames that narration with two large choruses, whose poetic texts come from a librettist with whom he worked closely on a number of occasions--Christian Friedrich Henrici (also called "Picander"). Henrici also wrote the poetic texts for the solo recitatives and arias—the former often metrically irregular and loosely rhymed, the latter far more regular in meter and rhyme scheme.

The third strand of music comes from the chorale verses that Bach carefully places throughout the composition. These chorales—both the music and the texts—would have been familiar to the original congregation. But whereas that congregation would have been accustomed to singing all the verses of any given chorale in a liturgical service, Bach (with Picander's help?) very carefully selects single (or occasionally pairs of) stanzas that will fit most aptly at a given point in the narrative. Probably the most familiar of these chorales today is what is sometimes known as the "Passion Chorale"—"O sacred head sore wounded." That tune, attributed to Hans Hassler (1564-1612), was used for several different

chorale texts in Bach's day, and he uses verses from at least three texts to that tune. The chorale, with different harmonizations and in different keys, appears five times in the Passion—the last (and the one pitched lowest) occurring immediately after Jesus' death. In the 1736 version, Bach ends Part I with a lengthy expanded treatment of another familiar Lenten chorale—"O Mensch, bewein dein Sünde gross"; today's performance substitutes a simpler straightforward chorale, with which Bach ended earlier versions of Part I—"Jesum laß ich nicht von mir."

The music used for these three strands of text differs quite unmistakably as well. Bach uses basic "recitative" for the narration—sometimes incorporating additional instruments, particularly for the lines assigned to individual voices or crowd voices. The most widely noted of these additions would surely be the "halo" effect that Bach creates as he adds strings whenever Jesus sings, until Jesus is led away from Pilate's palace to be crucified. And these recitatives, unlike the plainsong narrations of earlier sung passions, can become extremely dramatic. Listen, for example, to the sound painting when Jesus dies and the temple veil is torn in half and we have an earthquake (#61 in this program's numbering). The second strand of music is the already familiar hymn repertory—homophonic, metrical settings of very regular hymn stanzas. The third strand of music comes with the soloists' recitatives and arias, highly ornamented, polyphonic music reminiscent of (and derived from?) the Italian Baroque operatic traditions alive in Bach's era. Just as the operas would pause the dramatic action for highly expressive solo arias, Bach stops the Passion narrative for different soloists to offer very individual reflections on and responses to the action that has just occurred. For instance, just after the scene of Peter's denial, which ends with

the line “And he [Peter] went out and wept bitterly,” we have the famous alto aria “*Erbarme dich*”—“Have mercy”—in which the soloist responds with the believer’s own tears : “Have mercy, my God, / for the sake of my tears! / Look here: heart and eyes / weep bitterly for You.” Melamed also points out the occasional contextual echo in the music for these arias. The bass aria (#44 in this booklet’s numbering) immediately following the episode when Judas tries to return the thirty pieces of silver—“*Gebt mir meinen Jesum wieder!*” (Give me my Jesus back! / See the money, the murderer’s fee, / tossed at your feet by the lost son!—with its “vehement, rhythmically irregular declamation of the text, the singer’s wide-ranging line and rapid runs, and the furious virtuosity of the solo violin part”—would have been recognized as a conventional operatic bass “rage aria”.

The Bach Society of Dayton is pleased, as part of its tenth anniversary year celebration, to offer people the opportunity to hear this seldom-performed masterwork. Bach’s original intentions would have been to provide music that would instruct and move his audience. Our principal aim is less didactic, though no less ambitious--to provide our listeners with music they can enjoy and understand as great music.

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