

THE
FESTIVAL
BACH
1973

Grace Episcopal Church

WEST CHURCH AND DAVIS STREETS

ELMIRA, NEW YORK

THE CANTATA SINGERS

The Passion of our Lord
according to St. Matthew

Johann Sebastian Bach

Robert D. Herrema, Conductor

Sunday Evening, May 6, 1973, 7:30 p.m.

EVANGELIST		Lester Erich
JESUS		Roland Bentley
SOPRANO ARIAS	Helen Vincent, Jean Goodling	Helen Pletsch Rebecca Reinsmith
ALTO ARIAS	Joan Lester,	Gloria Kirk
TENOR ARIAS		Donald Miller

RECITATIVES

JUDAS:		Richard Wack
PETER:		Norman Campbell
HIGH PRIEST:		Michael Lynch
FALSE WITNESSES:	Jean Goodling,	Richard Wack
MAIDS:	Mary Ellen Nasser, Jennifer Nasser	
PILATE:		David Hauser
PILATE'S WIFE:		Helen Pletsch

Fifteen minute Intermission between Part I and Part II

IN MEMORIAM — — — TIMOTHY HOWELL

SOLI DEO GLORIA

PLEASE DO NOT APPLAUD DURING THE PERFORMANCE. THE SUGGESTION HAS BEEN MADE THAT APPRECIATION MAY BE SHOWN BY STANDING AT THE END OF EACH PART, WHILE THE CONDUCTOR AND SOLOIST LEAVE THE PLATFORM.

ORGAN WORKS OF J. S. BACH

Dr. Kent Hill, Recitalist

Monday Evening May 7, 1973, 8:00 p.m.

Fantasia in G. major

Schübler Chorales

Partita on "O Lamm Gottes, unshuldig"

CHAMBER MUSIC OF J. S. BACH

Tuesday Evening, May 8, 1973 8:00 p.m.

Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 — Festival Chamber Orchestra
Thomas Michalak, Conductor

Suite for Cello Solo (Unaccompanied)
Einer Holm, Cellist

Intermission

Cantata No. 82 — “Ich Habe Genug”
Donald Miller, Baritone

THE CANTATA SINGERS

SOPRANO

Joan Constanzer
Jean Goodling
Sarah Grant
Joyce Herrema
Jennifer Nasser

Mary Ellen Nasser
Sister Juliana O'Hara, SSJ
Helen Pletsch
Rebecca Reinsmith
Anna Rice

Judith Sheasley
Judy Stanton
Helen Vincent
Kay Wack

ALTO

Sue Bagdonas
Karen Campbell
Helen Clark
Patricia Clark
Elizabeth Colton
Susan Dana
Catherine Hauser

Patricia Hauser
Thelma Hilfiger
Betty Horner
Gloria Kirk
Joan Lester
Doris Palmer

Eleanor Parker
Cora Range
Joan Reppert
Ruth Roberts
Sister Mary Sayles, SSJ
Lee Whittle

TENOR

Edmund Dana
Norman Campbell

Brother Mark
Richard Sheasley

Richard Wack

BASS

Richard Bauer
Leonard Criminale
Mark Eamer
Stuart Finch

David Hauser
Edward Horner
Verne Horton

Michael Lynch
Frederick Petrie
Brother Pierre
Stephen Squires

THE ORCHESTRA FOR ST. MATTHEW PASSION

ORCHESTRA I

VIOLIN: * Benjamin Hudson
* Browning Cramer

VIOLA: * Joel Rosenberg

CELLO: * Daniel McIntosh

BASS: Ed Liberatore

FLUTE: Margaret Payne
Lenee Owen

OBOE: Patricia Thayer
Richard Granger

ORCHESTRA II

VIOLIN: Eleanor Brown
Terry Markus

VIOLA: Gary Chollet

CELLO: Carol Barrett

BASS: Betty Hirsch

FLUTE: Sally Matteson
Kirsten Peterson

OBOE: Donald Holtz
Cathy Holtz

ORGAN CONTINUO: Janet Hill

* The Atlantic Quartet

Rehearsal Accompanist and
Assistant Conductor Stephen Squires

Children's Choirs from:

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Robert Pletsch, Director

Grace Episcopal Church
Janet and Kent Hill, Directors

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GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Elmira, New York

The Rev. Samuel W. Hale, Jr., Rector

The Rev. C. James Jones, Assistant Rector

Dr. Kent Hill, Organist and Choir Master

This Program is supported in part by a grant from the New York State Council on the Arts.

The Programs given by The Cantata Singers are given without admission charge, but are dependent largely upon your contributions at each concert.

PROGRAM NOTES

The recitation of the Passion of Christ during Holy Week, using each of the four Evangelists successively, is nearly as old as the Christian Church. The more extended account of St. Matthew has been a favorite among the many musical settings that followed. After earlier uses of Gregorian chant, an established tradition became that of assigning the narration and utterances by the characters of the Passion to solo voices and providing polyphonic setting for the turbae or crowd choruses. Composers who contributed to these Dramatic Passions include Victoria, Orlando di Lasso, and William Byrd. A first German setting was by Johann Walther, friend and musical advisor of Luther (long known for his emphasis on hymns and chorales as part of a reformed service). Another sixteenth-century form was an entirely choral setting, unaccompanied. The seventeenth century brought to Germany the influence of Italian opera, especially through Heinrich Schütz, who carried the a cappella Passion to perfection. The use of instruments for the Passion dates from a 1643 work of Thomas Selle. Christian Flor in 1667 and Johann Theile in 1673 added respectively chorale melodies and contemplative arias. A further development was an Opera Passion, used in Hamburg, set entirely to poetic libretti; a notable work is that of Barthold Brockes, whose poetry has a setting by Handel and was influential for Bach, who includes some of it in his St. John Passion.

These elements and others find a synthesis in Bach, at work as Cantor in Leipzig in the St. Thomas and St. Nicholas Churches. An early undertaking there provided the 1723 St. John Passion (Cantata Singers, 1968). The two-choir St. Matthew dates from 1729. A St. Mark of 1731 exists partially. There are various conjectures concerning an earlier single-choir St. Matthew, composed possibly in Weimar. A St. Luke has a text extant in Bach's handwriting, but the accompanying music as sometimes considered that of another composer. All five Passions (if there were five) were probably used as part of the exceedingly long Good Friday services in Leipzig, the St. Matthew definitely first on April 15, 1729. The work, the most celebrated of its kind and very likely the greatest single religious composition, is written monumentally for two choruses (and a treble choir as well for the prologue), each with its own orchestra and organ. The original Bach version used all male voices (the custom of the time) but a total of not more than thirty-two voices and twenty-eight instrumentalists.

The text, besides rigid adherence to the gospel uses chorale stanzas (and accompanying melodies) selected by Bach and poetry written by C.F. Henrici (working under the pseudonym of Picander), a local writer and Bach's friend, who provided the verses for the contemplative arias. Bach divided the story into two harmonious wholes. Part I comprises the conspiracy of the high priests, the anointing of Christ, the institution of the Lord's supper, the prayer on the Mount of Olives, the betrayal by Judas, the taking of Jesus, and the flight of the disciples (ending with Matthew XXVI, 56). Part II includes the hearing before Caiaphas, Peter's denial, the judgment of Pilate, the death of Judas, the progress to Golgotha, and the crucifixion, death, and burial of Christ. In the first a solemn stillness pervades in a lyric vein, in the second a passionate stir in a dramatic setting. The first offers a climax in the institution of the Eucharist (No. 17), "Take ye, eat ye, this is my body," the second in the observation by the onlookers of the Crucifixion (No. 73), "Truly, this was the Son of God." Part I, following a prologue chorus, divides the Passion text into some twelve scenes (as recitatives and turbae), some six of them followed by meditative chorales and another six followed by contemplative orchestrated recitatives and arias (in one case, a duet). Several of the arias have chorus accompaniment. Part II follows a similar arrangement. There is a prologue and some fifteen scenes, seven followed by chorales, eight followed by recitatives and arias, and a final chorus.

The Matthew story, most detailed of the gospel accounts, allows in every incident scope for meditation. Almost every event poses a question in posterity's mind, which can be expressed and perhaps answered in posterity's voice by some form of aria. Bach's arias (for example, No. 12 and 47) display Italian influence. A remarkable aspect of their treatment, however, is the chorus additions in simpler homophonic arrangement. No. 25, for example, has the tenor express sympathy for the agony of Jesus, but he is interrupted by the anguish of the chorus, "What has brought on Thee this tribulation?" The anguish is soothed in the resolution to cling to Jesus alone (No. 26), while the chorus represents the "falling asleep of sin." No. 33 a duet lamentation of deep melancholy on the seizure of Christ, is broken by the vehement cry of "Loose Him! Bind Him not!" by the chorus. Then a burst of vivace calls upon Heaven to hurl down thunder and lightning on the traitor and his accomplices. The music wars and raves like the wind and storm. Other notable uses of the florid aria and simpler madrigal chorus technique are Nos. 36 and 77. A motif for many of the arias was supplied by the poetry of Picander (who inherited the idea from the earlier Brockes), wherein an allegorical figure of the Daughter of Zion bewails the suffering and converses with the souls of the saved; this image appears in No. 25, 33, 36, 70, 77, and possibly No. 1. It is most apparent in No. 36, where the contralto solo seeks the Saviour and the chorus replies, "Whither has thy dear one departed?" Much of this also recalls Old Testament imagery (as in the Song of Solomon).

A distinct contrast to the arias is provided by the interpolated traditional chorales, also intended as meditation and reflection on the gospel. Some fifteen appear, largely in simple arrangements. Chorale tunes were well known to the hearers of Bach's time, and their use accentuates a sense of congregational participation. The famous "Passion Chorale" (O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden), a constant favorite of Bach in many compositions, occurs five times with different texts and different harmonizations-- a remarkable exercise in variation but quite typical of Bach. It appears repeatedly at times of major crisis in the story of the Passion; perhaps its most effective appearance is in the magnificent climax of No. 72, "When comes my hour of parting," following the expiration of Jesus at the end of No. 71 ("And again did Jesus cry aloud and was gone"). Another chorale is the chorus of No. 26, referred to above. Two others are handled as chorale fantasia (recalling Bach's similar organ efforts) in the elaborations of No. 1, built on O Lamm Gottes unshuldig, where treble soprano carries the melody as cantus firmus against the overwhelming counterpoint of the other voices, and in No. 35.

The Evangelist and other persons introduced (two Maids, two false witnesses, Pilate's wife, Judas, Pilate, Caiaphas, and two priests) sing largely in recitativo secco, though the Evangelist's narrative often concentrates on special sentiment and telling rather than mere narration. When Jesus speaks, strings (floating like a glory," according to one critic) are added to distinguish Him from others. There is a distinction also in the major use of reeds instead of strings for the arias. The chorus portions of a narrative, while using elaborate polyphonic form, are extraordinary for their conciseness. The most remarkable is the setting of the single word "Barabbas" (No. 54). The chorus of the disciples (for example, No. 14) demonstrate humble devotion, while the chorus of the persecutors betray fanatical hatred, rising to terrible rage (Nos. 54 and 59) on "Let Him be crucified!"

The whole is introduced by the desolate prologue, "Come, ye daughters, share my wailing," beginning as a canon by basses and tenors, combined with a countercanon by sopranos and altos, then dissolving into a splendid antiphonal dialogue between the two choruses, in imitation of a crowd calling to and answering each other. The whole is accompanied by a continual throbbing in the orchestra that can perhaps best be

compared to the beating of a fear-laden heart. The portrayal of the wailing of the Daughters of Jerusalem, stemming from St. Luke, accompanying the procession of Christ on His way to Golgotha, has seemed to some an inappropriate beginning. It appears to derive, however, from traditional Good Friday processions re-enacting the scene, still practiced in some parts of Germany as late as the nineteenth century. This device of Bach in No. 1, combined with the chorale melody, is another eminently congregational element, helping to make the St. Matthew, despite its artistry, to a high degree popular. Popular elements are also notable in certain German folklore themes about sentient nature, notably the moon and stars in No. 33 and the imitation of the crowing of the cock in No. 46. The final choruses are a splendid lulling--indeed, a lofty lullaby, for which the Germanic temperament offers many examples. There is a remarkable maternal-like parallel in No. 1, where the women are asked to weep for a great loss, and in the arias using the figure of the Daughter of Zion. Bach's imagery becomes confused only in No. 12, "Bleed and break," which seems to recall the sadness of Mary or possibly the Daughter of Zion. But the words, clothed in one of Bach's most beautiful soprano arias, are largely meaningless.

Examples of Bach's vaunted mysticism, word coloring, and dramatic "tone speech" are overwhelmingly numerous; a few only can be added here to supplement previously detailed examples. The dramatic counterpoint of the disciples' chorus. (No. 17), "Lord, is it I," where the voices tumble over one another, employs the phrase eleven times (for each of the disciples except Judas). The halo of strings accompanying Christ's utterances ceases only once, in No. 71 at "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani." At this one moment Christ is mortal. In No. 21, the Evangelist's recitative "they went out unto the Mount of Olives" literally climbs the scale to show the ascent. In No. 30 the phrase "the flesh is weak" concludes on a marvellously weakened harmony. The kiss of Judas in No. 32 is of scheming fake sweetness. No. 54, at the phrase "and led Him away," has the orchestra pulsating with inexorable footsteps.

The central theme is pain engulfed in the larger idea of God's love. We are also made deeply aware of man's trust. One critic has further described the St. Matthew as an "exploration of eternity with the capacity to see past, present, and future." This was the mark of Bach, who could carry thought, through music, from out the eighteenth century. The St. Matthew is "the epitome of tender love, the love of humanity for other humanity; the love that sees a divinity within the human, or a human in the divine."

--L. R. Criminale

Sources: Spitta, Smallman, Blume, Adler, Mann, Barry, Schweitzer, Young, Bernstein.

May 6, 1973