

LIBRETTO

Passion according to St. Matthew (1769)

1. Chorale

Christ, who blesses us
has done no wrong
for us he was seized in the night
like a thief,
led before godless people
and falsely accused,
derided, mocked and spat upon,
as the Scripture says.

2. Chorus with Chorale

He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we
did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

My soul magnifies the Lord.

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was
bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace
was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

And my soul rejoices in God, in my Savior.

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every
one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the
iniquity of us all.

3. Recitative

EVANGELIST. Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place
called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples,

JESUS. Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder.

EVANGELIST. And he took with him Peter and the two
sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy.
Then saith he unto them,

JESUS. My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death:
tarry ye here, and watch with me.

EVANGELIST. And he went a little farther, and fell on his
face, and prayed, saying,

JESUS. O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from
me, except I drink it, thy will be done.

EVANGELIST. And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth
them asleep, and saith unto Peter,

JESUS. What, could ye not watch with me one hour?
Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the
spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

EVANGELIST. He went away again the second time, and
prayed, saying,

JESUS. O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from
me, except I drink it, thy will be done.

4. Chorale

What my God wills, is always done.

What he wills is for the best.

He is ready to help
those who believe firmly in Him.

He saves us from affliction,

the holy God,

and chastises within measure.

The one who trusts in God,

relies firmly upon Him,

him will He not abandon.

5. Recitative

EVANGELIST. And he came and found them asleep again:
for their eyes were heavy. And he left them, and went away
again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.

Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them,

JESUS. Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour
is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands
of sinners. Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that
doth betray me.

EVANGELIST. And while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the
twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords
and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the peo-
ple. Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying,
Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he: hold him fast.

6. Accompanied Recitative

Will you betray the friend of mankind,
the holy one, who knows your conscience?
Revenge awakens; it sees the evil
in your dark, deep glance;
it sees hell entire in you.
Nature quakes at your transgressions;
the most formidable are dwarfed by it.

7. Recitative

EVANGELIST. And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said,
JUDAS. Hail, master;
EVANGELIST. and kissed him. And Jesus said unto him,
JESUS. Friend, wherefore art thou come?

8. Aria

How calm your visage remains
at your disciple's heinous deeds!
He comes, your friend, to betray you,
death along with him. You do not waver.
Be calm like him,
soul, do not waver!
When storms assail you,
be full of confidence!

9. Recitative

EVANGELIST. Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus
and took him. And, behold, one of them which were with
Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and
struck a servant of the high priest's, and smote off his ear.
Then said Jesus unto him,
JESUS. Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they
that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest
thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall
presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?
But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it
must be?

10. Arioso

You to whom angels bow,
to whom all creation sings,
when love of humankind compels you
to descend from the throne,
you come prepared for death;
a chalice awaits you,
brimming with wrath;
you empty it for me.

11. Recitative

EVANGELIST. In that same hour said Jesus to the multi-
tudes,
JESUS. Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and
staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the
temple, and ye laid no hold on me. But all this was done,
that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.
EVANGELIST. Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled.

12. Chorale

I want to stand here by you,
ah, do not despise me!
I do not wish to leave you,
when your heart is breaking.
When your head will grow pale
in the last pang of death,
then I will enfold you
in my arms and in my bosom.

13. Recitative

EVANGELIST. And they that had laid hold on Jesus led
him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes
and the elders were assembled. But Peter followed—

14. Arioso

O Peter, do not follow!
The disciples fled, flee with them!
Senses, awaken and warn him!
O you, his angel, hold him back!
In vain!—

15. Recitative

EVANGELIST. But Peter followed him afar off unto the
high priest's palace, and went in, and sat with the servants,
to see the end. Now the chief priests, and elders, and all
the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him
to death; but found none: yea, though many false witnesses
came, yet found they none. At the last came two false wit-
nesses, and said,
WITNESSES. This fellow said, I am able to destroy the
temple of God, and to build it in three days.
EVANGELIST. And the high priest arose, and said unto
him,
HIGH PRIEST. Answerest thou nothing? what is it which
these witness against thee?
EVANGELIST. But Jesus held his peace. And the high
priest answered and said unto him,

HIGH PRIEST. I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God.

EVANGELIST. Jesus saith unto him,

JESUS. Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

EVANGELIST. Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying,

HIGH PRIEST. He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy. What think ye?

EVANGELIST. They answered and said,

CHORUS. He is guilty of death.

EVANGELIST. Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands, Saying,

CHORUS. Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote thee?

16. Chorale

Who struck you so,
my Savior, and so cruelly
sentenced you to torments?
You are no sinner
like us and our offspring,
you know nothing of misdeeds.

17. Recitative

EVANGELIST. Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, woman. Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee.

EVANGELIST. But he denied before them all, saying,

PETER. I know not what thou sayest.

EVANGELIST. And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there,

WOMAN. This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth.

EVANGELIST. And again he denied with an oath,

PETER. I do not know the man.

EVANGELIST. And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter,

CHORUS. Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech bewrayeth thee.

EVANGELIST. Then began he to curse and to swear, saying,

PETER. I know not the man.

EVANGELIST. And immediately the cock crew. Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crew, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.

18. Aria

Turn toward my pains,
God of graciousness,
see my downcast heart,
accept it as sacrifice!

Ah, I sink, if you will not lift me,
Most Good, who can protect and forgive,
Father, who cannot eternally be angry.

19. Recitative

EVANGELIST. When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death: and when they had bound him, they led him away, and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor. Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying,

JUDAS. I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.

EVANGELIST. And they said,

CHORUS. What is that to us? see thou to that.

EVANGELIST. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.

20. Aria

Unrepentant sinner! Such deeds
you commit yet feel them not.
A heart full of malice you call strength
and conscience, an invention.

In the end you will awaken, too late.
Full of terror you will tumble down
to the abyss, which you see gaping before you.

21. Chorale

God, great above all gods!
Holy Trinity!
apart from you there is no savior.
Lead me to the right side
when Satan draws his bow;
my weakness oppresses me,
wishes to devour all my comfort
and bring me to despair.

22. Recitative

EVANGELIST. And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said,

CHIEF PRIESTS. It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood.

EVANGELIST. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Wherefore that field was called, the field of blood, unto this day. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me. And Jesus stood before the governor: and the governor asked him, saying,

PILATE. Art thou the King of the Jews?

EVANGELIST. And Jesus said unto him,

JESUS. Thou sayest.

EVANGELIST. And when he was accused of the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing. Then said Pilate unto him,

PILATE. Hearst thou not how many things they witness against thee?

EVANGELIST. And he answered him to never a word; in-somuch that the governor marvelled greatly.

23. Aria

Thunder but a word of power,
Lord, and temerity must hesitate.

However, without uttering a word,
innocence endures blame
and thinks only of me.

24. Recitative

EVANGELIST. Now at that feast the governor was wont to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they would. And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas. Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them,

PILATE. Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ?

EVANGELIST. For he knew that for envy they had delivered him. When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him. But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus. The governor answered and said unto them,

PILATE. Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you?

EVANGELIST. They said,

CHORUS. Barabbas.

EVANGELIST. Pilate saith unto them,

PILATE. What shall I do then with Jesus that is called Christ?

EVANGELIST. They all say unto him,

CHORUS. Let him be crucified.

EVANGELIST. And the governor said,

PILATE. Why, what evil hath he done?

25. Chorale

But what can be the cause of such sufferings?

Ah, my sins have struck you down.

Ah, I, Lord Jesus, am responsible

for what you have endured.

26. Recitative

EVANGELIST. But they cried out the more, saying,

CHORUS. Let him be crucified.

EVANGELIST. When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying,

PILATE. I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it.

EVANGELIST. Then answered all the people, and said,

CHORUS. His blood be on us, and on our children.

EVANGELIST. Then released he Barabbas unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.

27a. Accompanied Recitative

How the savage people roar! They froth with rage
and demand innocent blood
and raise whips!

O grief! His whole body is a wound!
And yet—

27b. Arioso

What an example of patience!
Not a word escapes his mouth.

28. Duet

- I. Model of patience and love,
might we be like you!
- II. Let soft, gentle inclination
of your good spirit flow to us!
- I, II. Let it enliven our spirit!
 - I. Your forbearance and patience
spare the sinners.
 - II. You gladly forgive the guilt
of your children.
- I, II. Let us too forgive!

29. Recitative

EVANGELIST. Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers. And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying,
CHORUS. Hail, King of the Jews!
EVANGELIST. And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head.

30. Chorale

O head covered in blood and wounds,
covered in pain and covered in scorn!
O head, bound in mockery
with a crown of thorns!
O head, else finely adorned
with highest honor and glory
yet now reviled,
be hailed by me!

31. Recitative)

EVANGELIST. And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him. And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross. And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull, they gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink. And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots. And sitting down they watched him there; and set up over his head his accusation written,

THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS. Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left. And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying,

CHORUS. Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.

EVANGELIST. Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said

CHORUS. He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.

EVANGELIST. The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth. Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying,

JESUS. Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?

EVANGELIST. that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

32. Accompanied Recitative

Do you complain that you have been abandoned by God?
Beloved Son, can your Father leave you?
No, it is I, I His holy eye must hate.
From sinners God averts his face;
He does not forsake you.
My guilt cast you down in deepest night.
You do not see the Father who watches over you.
Yet—soon it is finished.—
Then in Your kingdom shines
a new day and truth, justice and light.

33a. Aria

The sins of men hide your Father's face from you.
Yet tremble, you who strangle him;
he comes indeed to judge.
Yes, tremble!

33b. Chorus

Then light and majesty stream
from the throne, which sits upon clouds.
His eye blazes; the impudent tremble.

33c. Aria

How happy the sight will be to me!
He will give me his right hand
and say: you are mine!

34. Recitative

EVANGELIST. Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said,

CHORUS. This man calleth for Elias.

EVANGELIST. And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. The rest said,

CHORUS. Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him.

EVANGELIST. Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.

35a. Accompanied Recitative

The almighty celebrates death.—
The sun hides its gaze
and covers its face in deep night.—
The earth shudders in reply!
Its bowels tremble.
The deep foundations of the cliffs
are shaken,
the steep heights crash
and topple down.—
There a grave is raised
and its robbery is revealed.—
The Roman is amazed, sees nature outraged.
He worships and swears,
Truly, the deceased was the Son of God!

35b. Arioso

My deeply bowed heart casts itself
upon Golgotha, to gather up all his blood.
Oh, might I perish here by his cross!
He died for me.

36. Chorale

Christ, you lamb of God, who take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us!

Christ, you lamb of God, who take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us!

Christ, you lamb of God, who take away the sins of the world, grant us peace!

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Translator's note:

To keep the focus on the original text, the choice was made to follow the German as literally as possible. I thank Ulrich Leisinger for his kind assistance. Biblical portions are from the King James Version.