

LIBRETTO

Passion according to St. Mark (1774)

1. 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 most reviled,
be hailed by me!

2. Chorus

The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers
take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his
anointed.

3. Recitative

EVANGELIST. And when they had sung an hymn, they
went out into the mount of Olives. And Jesus saith unto
them,

JESUS. All ye shall be offended because of me this night:
for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep
shall be scattered. But after that I am risen, I will go before
you into Galilee.

EVANGELIST. But Peter said unto him,

PETER. Although all shall be offended, yet will not I.

EVANGELIST. And Jesus saith unto him,

JESUS. Verily I say unto thee, that this day, even in this
night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me
thrice.

EVANGELIST. But he spake the more vehemently,

PETER. If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in
any wise.

EVANGELIST. Likewise also said they all. And they came
to a place which was named Gethsemane: and he saith to
his disciples,

JESUS. Sit ye here, while I shall pray.

EVANGELIST. And he taketh with him Peter and James
and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very
heavy; and saith unto them,

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

4. Chorale

Watch, that Satan's cunning
not find you asleep,
for otherwise he will be quick
to make a fool of you!
And God gives,
to those he loves,
often in his punishments,
when they soundly sleep.

5. Recitative

EVANGELIST. And he went forward a little, and fell on the
ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might
pass from him. And he said,

JESUS. Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take
away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but
what thou wilt.

EVANGELIST. And he cometh, and findeth them sleeping,
and saith unto Peter,

JESUS. Simon, sleepest thou? couldest not thou watch one
hour? Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The
spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.

6. Aria

Jesus, your holy teachings
to protect, to honor,
be my happiness and my duty!
Mock, brazen sinners!
Hate me, profane children!
You must all go before judgment.

7. Recitative

EVANGELIST. And again he went away, and prayed, and spake the same words. And when he returned, he found them asleep again, (for their eyes were heavy,) neither wist they what to answer him. And he cometh the third time, and saith unto them,

JESUS. Sleep on now, and take your rest: it is enough, the hour is come; behold, the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise up, let us go; lo, he that betrayeth me is at hand.

EVANGELIST. And immediately, while he yet spake, cometh Judas, one of the twelve, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. And he that betrayed him had given them a token, saying,

JUDAS. Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he; take him, and lead him away safely.

EVANGELIST. And as soon as he was come, he goeth straightway to him, and saith,

JUDAS. Master, master;

EVANGELIST. and kissed him.

8. Chorale

I clasp, embrace and kiss
the countless grievous wounds
and the purple-red rivers
flowing from your feet and nails.
O, but who, loveliest Prince,
who thirst so greatly for us,
can fully comprehend and grasp
your thirst and longing for love?

9. Recitative

EVANGELIST. And they laid their hands on him, and took him. And one of them that stood by drew a sword, and smote a servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear. And Jesus answered and said unto them,

JESUS. Are ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and with staves to take me? I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took me not: but the scriptures must be fulfilled.

EVANGELIST. And they all forsook him, and fled. And there followed him a certain young man, having a linen cloth cast about his naked body; and the young men laid hold on him: And he left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked. And they led Jesus away to the high priest: and with him were assembled all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes.

10. Chorale

O, you wondrous counsel,
which one never fathoms!
O, of the tremendous deed,
which one nowhere finds!
For that which man, the slave of earth,
stubbornly has committed,
God, who is ever upright,
shall entirely be punished.

11. Recitative

EVANGELIST. And Peter followed him afar off, even into the palace of the high priest: and he sat with the servants, and warmed himself at the fire. And the chief priests and all the council sought for witness against Jesus to put him to death; and found none. For many bare false witness against him, but their witness agreed not together. And there arose certain, and bare false witness against him, saying,

FALSE WITNESS. We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands.

EVANGELIST. But neither so did their witness agree together. And the high priest stood up in the midst, and asked Jesus, saying,

HIGH PRIEST. Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee?

EVANGELIST. But he held his peace, and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him,

HIGH PRIEST. Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?

EVANGELIST. And Jesus said,

JESUS. I am: and ye shall 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, and saith,

HIGH PRIEST. What need we any further witnesses? Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye?

EVANGELIST. And they all condemned him to be guilty of death. And some began to spit on him, and to cover his face, and to buffet him, and to say unto him,

CHORUS. Prophesy:

EVANGELIST. and the servants did strike him with the palms of their hands.

12. Chorale

My savage longing for disgrace
has stricken you thus.
This affliction I have,
Jesus, brought upon you.
My guilt and misdeed
has so obligated you,
until finally it has also
unjustly slain you.

13. Recitative

EVANGELIST. And as Peter was beneath in the palace,
there cometh one of the maids of the high priest: And
when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked upon
him, and said,

WOMAN. And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth.

EVANGELIST. But he denied, saying,

PETER. I know not, neither understand I what thou
sayest.

EVANGELIST. And he went out into the porch; and the
cock crew. And a maid saw him again, and began to say to
them that stood by,

WOMAN. This is one of them.

EVANGELIST. And he denied it again. And a little after,
they that stood by said again to Peter,

CHORUS. Surely thou art one of them: for thou art a
Galilaeen, and thy speech agreeth thereto.

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

PETER. I know not this man of whom ye speak.

EVANGELIST. And the second time the cock crew. And
Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him,
Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. And
when he thought thereon, he wept.

14. Accompanied Recitative

To confess you, Lord, let this be my glory and honor!

When all the world undertakes to shun you,

yet will I not be your enemy.

No example moves me, even were it that of a king.

To confess you, Lord, let this be my glory and honor!

God, I have taken many a brazen step,

with intent mistaken you and forsworn duty to you,

how often, how often, o God!

15. Aria

Before you, the Father, who forgives,
I weep for my fall, full of remorse.
Ah, Father of mercy,
God, be gracious toward me and forgive!

16. Recitative

EVANGELIST. And straightway in the morning the chief
priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and
the whole council, and bound Jesus, and carried him away,
and delivered him to Pilate. And Pilate asked him,

PILATE. Art thou the King of the Jews?

EVANGELIST. And he answering said unto him,

JESUS. Thou sayest it.

EVANGELIST. And the chief priests accused him of many
things: but he answered nothing. And Pilate asked him
again, saying,

PILATE. Answerest thou nothing? behold how many
things they witness against thee.

EVANGELIST. But Jesus yet answered nothing; so that
Pilate marvelled. Now at that feast he released unto them
one prisoner, whomsoever they desired. And there was
one named Barabbas, which lay bound with them that had
made insurrection with him, who had committed murder
in the insurrection. And the multitude crying aloud began
to desire him to do as he had ever done unto them. But
Pilate answered them, saying,

PILATE. Will ye that I release unto you the King of the
Jews?

EVANGELIST. For he knew that the chief priests had de-
livered him for envy. But the chief priests moved the peo-
ple, that he should rather release Barabbas unto them. And
Pilate answered and said again unto them,

PILATE. What will ye then that I shall do unto him whom
ye call the King of the Jews?

EVANGELIST. And they cried out again,

CHORUS. Crucify him.

EVANGELIST. Then Pilate said unto them,

PILATE. Why, what evil hath he done?

EVANGELIST. And they cried out the more exceedingly,

CHORUS. Crucify him.

EVANGELIST. And so Pilate, willing to content the people,
released Barabbas unto them, and delivered Jesus, when he
had scourged him, to be crucified.

17. Accompanied Recitative

The murderer Barrabas, the evildoer,
him Pilate sets free? Barbarous! Are you deluded?
Do you know no duty as judge?
Has justice been so shamelessly desecrated?
The murderer you set free, the villain?
And Jesus is condemned? Inhumane judgment!

18. Aria

Lord, arise and save your holy ones
and give the sinners their due!
Let misfortune befall them
for threatening virtue!

19. Chorale

Dearest Jesus, what sin have you committed,
that such a sharp judgment has been spoken?
What is the guilt, into what misdeeds
have you fallen?

20. Recitative

EVANGELIST. And the soldiers led him away into the hall,
called Praetorium; and they call together the whole band.
And they clothed him with purple, and platted a crown of
thorns, and put it about his head, and began to salute him,
CHORUS. Hail, King of the Jews!

21. Aria

I tremble, Lord, before their voice.
How terribly they rage in fury,
you Son of love, against you!
As they rejoice over their evil,
so I shall feel remorse for my guilt.
Take mercy, Savior, on me!

22. Recitative

EVANGELIST. And they smote him on the head with
a reed, and did spit upon him, and bowing their knees
worshipped him. And when they had mocked him, they
took off the purple from him, and put his own clothes on
him, and led him out to crucify him. And they compel one
Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the coun-
try, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear his cross.
And they bring him unto the place Golgotha, which is, be-
ing interpreted, the place of a skull. And they gave him to
drink wine mingled with myrrh: but he received it not.

23. Chorale

Your thirst and drink of gall shall nourish me,
when I have no other sustenance,
may your cry of anguish be of good to me,
save me from the fires of hell!

24. Recitative

EVANGELIST. And when they had crucified him, they
parted his garments, casting lots upon them, what every
man should take. And it was the third hour, and they cru-
cified him. And the superscription of his accusation was
written over, THE KING OF THE JEWS. And with
him they crucify two thieves; the one on his right hand,
and the other on his left. And the scripture was fulfilled,
which saith, And he was numbered with the transgres-
sors. And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their
heads, and saying,

CHORUS. Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and build-
est it in three days, save thyself, and come down from the
cross.

EVANGELIST. Likewise also the chief priests mocking
said among themselves with the scribes,

CHORUS. He saved others; himself he cannot save. Let
Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that
we may see and believe.

EVANGELIST. And they that were crucified with him re-
viled him.

25. Aria

When, Savior, those who despise you
once see you as judge,
when on the most terrible of all days,
when the unrighteous shudder before you in judgment:
I tremble not!
When kings, when nations tremble:
I fear no judgment!
For your sake shall I live.
I tremble not!

26. Recitative

EVANGELIST. And when the sixth hour was come, there
was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.
And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying,
JESUS. Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?

EVANGELIST. which is, being interpreted, My God, my
God, why hast thou forsaken me?

27. 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.

28. Recitative

EVANGELIST. And some of them that stood by, when they heard it, said,

CHORUS. Behold, he calleth Elias.

EVANGELIST. And one ran and filled a sponge full of vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink, saying,
A JEW. Let alone; let us see whether Elias will come to take him down.

EVANGELIST. And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost.

29. Chorus

Now we need not taste death,
God has removed from it all its terrors;
the intercessor died to set us free.

Now we have found life.

Come, last hours of death!

You must be sacred to Christians!

30. Chorale

Appear as a shield unto me,
as comfort in my death,
and let me see your image
in your distress of crucifixion!
Then I will gaze upon you,
then I will full of faith
clasp you close to my heart.
Who thus dies, dies well.

Translation © 2015 by Ruth B. Libbey

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.