

LIBRETTO

Passion according to St. Luke (1771)

1. Chorus

Now he is there. Off to the bloodshed,
you murderers! He is there.
The hour approaches. His blood will flow
willingly, in atonement for you and us.
The grievous hour is near!
The earth shakes. Forest, hill,
vale and meadow tremble,
and defiant cliffs shatter
with the quaking of nature.

2. Aria—Recitative—Aria— Accompanied Recitative

Holy, holy, holy
is the raging God!
Holy, holy, holy
is the avenging God!

Already the sacrificial smoke
from the sacred altar rises into heaven.
The victim arrives amid hostile tumult
and offers himself up to his slayer.

Holy, holy, holy
is the suffering God!
Holy, holy, holy
the peacemaking God!

The murderous rage
will soon kill the innocent lamb.
Flow to us, o blood,
o blood of the lamb,
blood of the hero, flower of the house
of Judah! From the distress
of sin will you free us.
O judge, look down from the throne!
The sacrificial victim is now there: This victim is
your son.

3. Chorale

O innocent lamb of God
slaughtered on the stem of the cross,
ever found patient,
although you were despised.
You have borne all sin,
otherwise must we have despaired.
Have mercy on us, o Jesus!

4. Recitative

EVANGELIST. And he came out, and went, as he was wont,
to the mount of Olives; and his disciples also followed him.
And when he was at the place, he said unto them,
JESUS. Pray that ye enter not into temptation.
EVANGELIST. And he was withdrawn from them about a
stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, saying,
JESUS. Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me:
nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.
EVANGELIST. And there appeared an angel unto him
from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he
prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great
drops of blood falling down to the ground. And when
he rose up from prayer, and was come to his disciples, he
found them sleeping for sorrow, and said unto them,
JESUS. Why sleep ye? rise and pray, lest ye enter into
temptation.

5. Duet

"Rise and pray!" you call
out to the troubled disciples
and likewise to all Christians.
Whoever wishes to tread the passion road
as a faithful subject
with you, dearest Jesus,
must equip eyes, heart and soul
with vigilance and prayer.

6. Recitative

EVANGELIST. And while he yet spake, behold a multitude, and he that was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them, and drew near unto Jesus to kiss him. But Jesus said unto him,

JESUS. Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?

EVANGELIST. When they which were about him saw what would follow, they said unto him,

CHORUS. Lord, shall we smite with the sword?

EVANGELIST. And one of them smote the servant of the high priest, and cut off his right ear. And Jesus answered and said,

JESUS. Suffer ye thus far.

EVANGELIST. And he touched his ear, and healed him.

Then Jesus said unto the chief priests, and captains of the temple, and the elders, which were come to him,

JESUS. Be ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and staves? When I was daily with you in the temple, ye stretched forth no hands against me: but this is your hour, and the power of darkness.

EVANGELIST. Then took they him, and led him, and brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed afar off. And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them. But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said,

WOMAN. This man was also with him.

EVANGELIST. And he denied him, saying,

PETER. Woman, I know him not.

EVANGELIST. And after a little while another saw him, and said,

MAN. Thou art also of them.

EVANGELIST. And Peter said,

PETER. Man, I am not.

EVANGELIST. And about the space of one hour after another confidently affirmed, saying,

SECOND MAN. Of a truth this fellow also was with him: for he is a Galilaean.

EVANGELIST. And Peter said,

PETER. Man, I know not what thou sayest.

EVANGELIST. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.

7. Aria

Yes, Peter, go out and weep,
yes, weep, weep bitterly.
And think back on your fall,
yet think too of Jesus's glance.
In the sweet light of this glance
a light of mercy for you is shown.

8. Recitative

EVANGELIST. And the men that held Jesus mocked him, and smote him. And when they had blindfolded him, they struck him on the face, and asked him, saying,

CHORUS. Prophesy, who is it that smote thee?

EVANGELIST. And many other things blasphemously spake they against him.

9. Chorale

When malicious tongues sting,
disparage and disconcert me,
then will I control myself.
The injustice I will bear,
forgive the neighbor his fault
gladly and willingly.

10. Recitative

EVANGELIST. And as soon as it was day, the elders of the people and the chief priests and the scribes came together, and led him into their council, saying,

CHORUS. Art thou the Christ? tell us.

EVANGELIST. And he said unto them,

JESUS. If I tell you, ye will not believe: if I also ask you, ye will not answer me, nor let me go. Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God.

II. Duet

Woe unto you, blasphemous people,
when at last he sits, as strict judge,
on the throne of clouds!
What hill will cover you,
what mountain will hide you,
when his sharp sword of vengeance gleams?

12. Recitative

EVANGELIST. Then said they all,
CHORUS. Art thou then the Son of God?
EVANGELIST. And he said unto them,
JESUS. Ye say that I am.
EVANGELIST. And they said,
CHORUS. What need we any further witness? for we ourselves have heard of his own mouth.
EVANGELIST. And the whole multitude of them arose, and led him unto Pilate. And they began to accuse him, saying,
CHORUS. We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a King.
EVANGELIST. Pilate asked him, saying,
PILATE. Art thou the King of the Jews?
EVANGELIST. And he answered him and said,
JESUS. Thou sayest it.
EVANGELIST. Then said Pilate to the chief priests and to the people,
PILATE. I find no fault in this man.
EVANGELIST. And they were the more fierce, saying,
CHORUS. He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place.
EVANGELIST. When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked whether the man were a Galilaean. And as soon as he knew that he belonged unto Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem at that time. And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad: for he was desirous to see him of a long season, because he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him. Then he questioned with him in many words; but he answered him nothing.

13. Chorale

You have allowed wounds
to rain down on you miserably,
to heal my troubles,
to set me in peace.
Ah, you have, for my blessing,
let yourself be cursed.
Thousand, thousandfold thanks be to you,
dearest Jesus, for it.

14. Recitative

EVANGELIST. And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused him. And Herod with his men of war set him at nought, and mocked him, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him again to Pilate. And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together: for before they were at enmity between themselves. And Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, said unto them,
PILATE. Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people: and, behold, I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him: No, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him; and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him. I will therefore chastise him, and release him.
EVANGELIST. (For of necessity he must release one unto them at the feast.) And they cried out all at once, saying,
CHORUS. Away with this man, and release unto us Barabas:
EVANGELIST. (Who for a certain sedition made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison.) Pilate therefore, willing to release Jesus, spake again to them. But they cried, saying,
CHORUS. Crucify him, crucify him.
EVANGELIST. And he said unto them the third time,
PILATE. Why, what evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him: I will therefore chastise him, and let him go.
EVANGELIST. And they were instant with loud voices, requiring that he might be crucified. And the voices of them and of the chief priests prevailed. And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required. And he released unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison, whom they had desired; but he delivered Jesus to their will.

15. Chorale

The pious one dies, who walked aright and just.
The evil one lives, who trespassed against God.
The man escapes death and has gone free:
God is taken prisoner.

16. Recitative

EVANGELIST. And as they led him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear it after Jesus.

17. Chorale

I will hazard all to glorify you,
mind no cross, complain of no shames,
take to heart no persecution,
no pains of death.

18. Recitative

EVANGELIST. And there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him. But Jesus turning unto them said,
JESUS. Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bear, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?
EVANGELIST. And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death. And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. Then said Jesus,
JESUS. Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.

19. Aria

Is not your love then flickering out,
as about your pale visage
the shadows of death already float?
No, yet before your death, o sun of mercy,
you will radiate from yourself
the glorious sunset of love.

20. Recitative

EVANGELIST. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots. And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying,
CHORUS. He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God.

EVANGELIST. And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, And saying,

CHORUS. If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself.

EVANGELIST. And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, This Is The King Of The Jews. And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying,

FIRST MALEFACTOR. If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.

EVANGELIST. But the other answering rebuked him, saying,

SECOND MALEFACTOR. Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.

EVANGELIST. And he said unto Jesus,

SECOND MALEFACTOR. Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.

EVANGELIST. And Jesus said unto him,

JESUS. Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.

21. Aria—Chorus

When your sins press upon you,
come, the Lord will revive you,
and taste and see, that the Lord is good!

Sing the lofty songs of thanks,
fall down in holy adoration
and taste and see, that the Lord is good!

To you, Savior, we dedicate the most joyful efforts,
we praise the miracles of divine love
and taste and see, how good you are.

22. Recitative

EVANGELIST. And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst. And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said,

JESUS. Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit:

EVANGELIST. and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.

23. Chorus

God is reconciled, he lays down the thunder.
He continues to love the world through his son,
who has now died upon the cross.
Let your thanks reach through to the throne of God!
Heaven rejoices, the hallelujahs resound.
Sing with them in festive song!

24. Chorale

Thus will we praise and thank always
the father and the son and the holy spirit,
and plead, that he should
protect us from danger,
that we may always keep
to his holy word.
Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison.

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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.