

LIBRETTO

Passion according to St. John (1772)

1. Chorale

Examine me, sound out my heart
and see, Lord, my intentions!
I think of the pain of your suffering,
of your love, and I weep.
May your cross be blessed to me!
What a miracle of mercy
have you shown the world!
When have I adequately considered this
and with all my might
praised you enough for it?

2. Recitative

EVANGELIST. When Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron, where was a garden, into the which he entered, and his disciples. And Judas also, which betrayed him, knew the place: for Jesus oftentimes resorted thither with his disciples. Judas then, having received a band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons. Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth, and said unto them,

JESUS. Whom seek ye?

EVANGELIST. They answered him,

CHORUS. Jesus of Nazareth.

EVANGELIST. Jesus saith unto them,

JESUS. I am he.

EVANGELIST. And Judas also, which betrayed him, stood with them. As soon then as he had said unto them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground. Then asked he them again,

JESUS. Whom seek ye?

EVANGELIST. And they said,

CHORUS. Jesus of Nazareth.

EVANGELIST. Jesus answered,

JESUS. I have told you that I am he: if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way:

EVANGELIST. That the saying might be fulfilled, which he spake, Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none. Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. Then said Jesus unto Peter,
JESUS. Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?

3. Chorale

What God does, that is well done.
He will surely be mindful of me;
he, as my doctor and worker of miracles,
will give me no poison
for medicine.
God is steadfast:
Thus will I rely upon him
and trust in his goodness.

What God does, that is well done.
Even if I must drink the cup,
that is bitter according to my illusions,
let me not fear it,
for indeed at the end
I will be gladdened
with sweet consolation in my heart;
thus all pains subside.

4. Recitative

EVANGELIST. Then the band and the captain and officers of the Jews took Jesus, and bound him, and led him away to Annas first; for he was father in law to Caiaphas, which was the high priest that same year.

5. Aria

Dearest hand, I kiss you,
for you allow yourself
to be held fast in bonds for me too.

And I too would belong eternally
for my misdeeds
in the torture chamber of hell;
yet you take me out from it.

6. Recitative

EVANGELIST. Now Caiaphas was he, which gave counsel to the Jews, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people.

7. Chorale

But how wondrous is this punishment!
The good shepherd suffers for his sheep;
for his servants' debts
the Lord, the Righteous pays.

8. Recitative

EVANGELIST. And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple: that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest. But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter. Then saith the damsel that kept the door unto Peter, WOMAN. Art not thou also one of this man's disciples?

EVANGELIST. He saith,

PETER. I am not.

EVANGELIST. And the servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of coals; for it was cold: and they warmed themselves: and Peter stood with them, and warmed himself. The high priest then asked Jesus of his disciples, and of his doctrine. Jesus answered him,

JESUS. I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said.

EVANGELIST. And when he had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying,

OFFICER. Answerest thou the high priest so?

EVANGELIST. Jesus answered him,

JESUS. If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?

EVANGELIST. Now Annas had sent him bound unto Caiaphas the high priest. And Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. They said therefore unto him,

CHORUS. Art not thou also one of his disciples?

EVANGELIST. He denied it, and said,

PETER. I am not.

EVANGELIST. One of the servants of the high priest, being his kinsman whose ear Peter cut off, saith,

SERVANT. Did not I see thee in the garden with him?

EVANGELIST. Peter then denied again: and immediately the cock crew. Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover. Pilate then went out unto them, and said,

PILATE. What accusation bring ye against this man?

EVANGELIST. They answered and said unto him,

CHORUS. If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee.

EVANGELIST. Then said Pilate unto them,

PILATE. Take ye him, and judge him according to your law.

EVANGELIST. The Jews therefore said unto him,

CHORUS. It is not lawful for us to put any man to death:

EVANGELIST. That the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spake, signifying what death he should die. Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto him,

PILATE. Art thou the King of the Jews?

EVANGELIST. Jesus answered him,

JESUS. Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?

EVANGELIST. Pilate answered,

PILATE. Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me: what hast thou done?

EVANGELIST. Jesus answered,

JESUS. My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.

EVANGELIST. Pilate therefore said unto him,

PILATE. Art thou a king then?

EVANGELIST. Jesus answered,

JESUS. Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.

EVANGELIST. Pilate saith unto him,

PILATE. What is truth?

9. Aria

Do not mistake him, the God of Gods!
His wrath erupts, go, kiss the Son!
A terrible, a fatal storm He
one day gives the sinner in repayment.
You scoff and call yourself Christians
and slavishly dedicate yourself to vices?
He will smash you like pottery;
and He will be great and glorious.

10. Recitative

EVANGELIST. And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them,
PILATE. I find in him no fault at all. But ye have a custom, that I should release unto you one at the passover: will ye therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews?
EVANGELIST. Then cried they all again, saying,
CHORUS. Not this man, but Barabbas.
EVANGELIST. Now Barabbas was a robber.

11. Aria

Immaculate lamb of God!
Not alone Barrabas,
the heinous sinner,
do you free from death.
For you die on the stem of the cross
so that the rebellion, which I
began there in Adam,
and the general murder,
which I committed with him,
shall now through you, oh traitor of serpents,
be completely atoned for.

12. Recitative

EVANGELIST. Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him. And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, and they put on him a purple robe, and said,
CHORUS. Hail, King of the Jews!

13. 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!

14. Recitative

EVANGELIST. And they smote him with their hands. Pilate therefore went forth again, and saith unto them,
PILATE. Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him.
EVANGELIST. Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them,
PILATE. Behold the man!

15. Aria

So willingly, without complaint,
the Holy One bears the humiliation,
he whose gaze in better days
burst into tears for Jerusalem!
The judge himself feels deeply the magnitude
of this silent reproach;
Feels his own shame and nakedness,
cries out, Behold the man!

16. Recitative

EVANGELIST. When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying,
CHORUS. Crucify him, crucify him.
EVANGELIST. Pilate saith unto them,
PILATE. Take ye him, and crucify him: for I find no fault in him.
EVANGELIST. The Jews answered him,
CHORUS. We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God.
EVANGELIST. When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more afraid; and went again into the judgment hall, and saith unto Jesus,
PILATE. Whence art thou?
EVANGELIST. But Jesus gave him no answer. Then saith Pilate unto him,
PILATE. Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?
EVANGELIST. Jesus answered,
JESUS. Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.

EVANGELIST. And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying,

CHORUS. If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar.

EVANGELIST. When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha. And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews,

PILATE. Behold your King!

EVANGELIST. But they cried out,

CHORUS. Away with him, away with him, crucify him.

EVANGELIST. Pilate saith unto them,

PILATE. Shall I crucify your King?

EVANGELIST. The chief priest answered,

CHORUS. We have no king but Caesar.

EVANGELIST. Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led him away. And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha: where they crucified him, and two other with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst. And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS. This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin. Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate,

CHORUS. Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews.

EVANGELIST. Pilate answered,

PILATE. What I have written I have written.

EVANGELIST. Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also his coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. They said therefore among themselves,

CHORUS. Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be:

EVANGELIST. that the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots. These things therefore the soldiers did. Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother,

JESUS. Woman, behold thy son!

EVANGELIST. Then saith he to the disciple,

JESUS. Behold thy mother!

EVANGELIST. And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home. After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith,

JESUS. I thirst.

EVANGELIST. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said,

JESUS. It is finished:

EVANGELIST. and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.

17. Chorus

O, a terrible event of death!

Jesus ceases to live.

Tremble, entire ball of earth!

Break asunder, you rocky chasms!

Open up, you graves of the dead!

with a thundering roar

far and wide, yes everywhere,

to send out harbingers of death!

18. Recitative

EVANGELIST. The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: but one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced.

19. Chorale

Shelter me and enclose me
in the opening in your side;
here let me be quiet and safe,
here warm my soul,
when cold death befalls me,
and when the hellish lion lurks
in wait for me and my spirit:
then let me in your steadfastness
take rest quite peacefully.

20. Recitative

EVANGELIST. And after this Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus. And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight. Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury.

21. Duet

God-reconciler! gently in slumber
you rest, with suffering ended,
in the quiet night of death.
Now can I, freed from mourning,
depart full of faith, and gently.
Through you I can hope for salvation,
you show me heaven open:
Death, where is your power now?

22. Recitative

EVANGELIST. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand.

23. Chorus

Rest well, you holy limbs,
for which I no longer weep disconsolately.
I know death one day will give me peace.
Not for ever does the grave enclose me;
one day when God, my Redeemer, calls me,
then I too will hasten transfigured to God's heaven.

24. Chorale

Therefore shall we praise and thank eternally
the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit;
and ask that He protect us well from danger,
that we may constantly abide in 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.