

LIBRETTO

Passion according to St. John (1776)

1. Chorale

A lamb goes forth and bears the guilt
of the world and its children.
It goes and bears patiently
the sins of all sinners;
it goes forth, becomes weary and ill,
offers itself up on the sacrificial altar,
forgoes all joys.
It accepts shame, spite and ridicule,
fear, wounds, scourgings, cross and death
and says: I will bear it gladly.

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.

3. Chorale

While we are in life
we are embraced by death.
Whom do we seek, who aids us,
that we might find mercy?
This, God, are you alone.
We are remorseful for our trespass,
which has angered you, Lord.
Holy Lord God,
holy God of strength,
holy compassionate Savior!
You eternal God,
do not let us sink
into the bitter extremity of death!
Kyrie eleison.

4. Recitative

EVANGELIST. 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.

5a. Aria

Now the hour of my suffering arrives.
I praise God that it has come to pass.
The chalice of wrath I drink with all joy;
for my brothers I drink it.

5b. Accompanied Recitative

You see them, God, who surround me.
How cruelly they thirst for my life!
The handful of dust rises against me!
The worm, who created him? — I! —
I could undo them,
they who are all in my hand.
Yet for this you did not send me into the world;
no, I will gladly die for them all.
I do not wish to undo them.
Out of love for their salvation I hasten to the cross,
and am divinely pleased, that I am their proxy.

5c. Aria

I go, that I may suffer death.
God, do not count it against these present!
I make myself a sinner in their stead.
Accept, father, accept my sacrifice!

6. Recitative

EVANGELIST. 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.

7. Chorale

Ah great king, great unto all ages,
how can I sufficiently display such faithfulness?
No mortal heart can conceive
how to repay you.

8. Recitative

EVANGELIST. 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?

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

9. Aria

Who can fathom the wisdom of love?
God does not judge!
He should hate his people;
yet He does not cast them out!
His Christ wishes to depart life.
From his father's bosom he came forth,
remitted a world full of sinners:
Who can fathom the wisdom of love?

10. 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.

11. Aria

Your word is spirit and strength and blessing
and divine contentment.
It leads us on safe paths
into the land of eternal bliss.

If I often torment myself with disturbance;
if the grief of night overcomes me;
then your word creates in my soul
the joy of the world to come.

12. Recitative

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.

13. Chorale

Be not presumptuous! Awaken and fight;
do not think you have done enough good!
Your heart has its weak side,
which the enemy of salvation grasps.
Certitude portends your fall;
Therefore remain awake, watch everywhere!

14. Recitative

EVANGELIST. 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?

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. 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,

SOLDIERS. Hail, King of the Jews!

15. 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!

16. 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!

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.

17. Chorale

You bear the punishment of the wrongdoers
and have not sinned,
you, the righteous, God's son!
Thus it was foretold.
The brazen crowd wants your blood.

Divinely great, you endure the wrath
in order to save souls.
Jesus, I too was your murderer;
for God cast the sin of all upon you,
that we might have peace.

18. Recitative

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, ex-
cept it were given thee from above.

19. Aria

I am the Almighty! The heaven and the spheres,
the entire endless creation is mine!
I will; and before my mighty rebuke
all must tremble, and cower before me!
What are you, you princes, you gods of earth?
I made you; you rule through me!
O, let yourselves be taught to be my servants!
Who is as powerful and mighty as I?

20. Recitative

JESUS. Therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the
greater sin.
EVANGELIST. And from thenceforth Pilate sought to re-
lease 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.

21. Aria

The son shall die, I shall live;
God wishes to give him to take my place,
For God so loved the world!
Now heaven stands open again;
now may I hope for that life
that he gives there to those he has saved:
For God so loved the world!

22. Recitative

EVANGELIST. 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 ei-
ther 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 sol-
dier 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 sol-
diers 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.

23. Chorale

Happy are those that in mercy
take on the cares of others,
show sympathy for the poor,
pray faithfully for them, God!
Those that are helpful with counsel,
also, when possible, with deeds,
shall in kind receive help
and obtain mercy.

24. Recitative

EVANGELIST. 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.

25. Duet

We weep for you and your virtue!
The elder weeps for you; the youth weeps for you.
The angels weep for you!

I cannot fathom the love.
You bear the debts of my sins,
and you forgive me for them.

We weep for you and your virtue!
The elder weeps for you, the youth weeps for you.
The angels weep for you!

The unnameable joys of heaven
you win for me through your suffering.
How do I thank you for it!

We weep for you and your virtue!
The elder weeps for you, the youth weeps for you.
The angels weep for you!

26. Chorale

As long as I live I will not
let you out of my mind.
I wish to hold you constantly,
as you do me, in the arms of love.
You shall be my heart's entire light,
and when my heart breaks into pieces,
you shall remain my heart.
I want, my highest glory,
hereby to pledge myself to you
as yours, in constancy.

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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.*