

Nantwich Choral Society

J. S. BACH ST. JOHN PASSION



SATURDAY 23rd MARCH
- 1991 -

The Parish Church of St. Mary, Nantwich
at 7.30 p.m.

NANTWICH CHORAL SOCIETY

NANTWICH SINFONIA
Leader: Christopher Pratt

Robin Green, Evangelist
Philip Ravenscroft, Christ

Catrin Ley, soprano
Stephen Carter, alto
Jeffrey Cresswell, tenor
Kieron McNiff, bass

Joy Roberts, harpsichord

conducted by
Stephen Buckman



THE ST. JOHN PASSION

J.S. Bach (1685-1750)

PART I

BETRAYAL

1. Chorus - Lord and Master in all lands
- 2-6. Gospel narrative
7. Chorale - O mighty love, O love beyond all measure
8. Gospel narrative
9. Chorale - Thy will, O God, be always done

ARREST

10. Gospel narrative
11. Aria (Alto) - Chains of bondage that I wrought me
12. Gospel narrative
13. Aria (Soprano) - I follow in gladness to meet Thee

DENIAL

14. Gospel narrative
15. Chorale - Ah! whence this hatred shown Thee?
- 16-18. Gospel narrative
19. Aria (Tenor) - Ah! my soul, what end awaiteth thee?
20. Chorale - Peter in forgetfulness

INTERVAL

PART II

TRIAL

21. Chorale - He, Whose life was as the light
- 22-26. Gospel narrative
27. Chorale - O King of glory
- 28-30. Gospel narrative
31. Arioso (Bass) - Come ponder, O my soul
32. Aria (Tenor) - Behold Him: See

CONDEMNATION

- 33-39. Gospel narrative
40. Chorale - O Christ, Thy fetters mean release
- 41-47. Gospel narrative
48. Aria (Bass) with Chorus - Haste, poor souls ensnared in treason

CRUCIFIXION

- 49-51. Gospel narrative
52. Chorale - Thy Name is shining on me
- 53-55. Gospel narrative
56. Chorale - See Him now, the Righteous One

DEATH

57. Gospel narrative
58. Aria (Alto) - All is fulfilled

59. Gospel narrative
60. Aria (Bass) - My Lord and Saviour, let me ask Thee
with Chorale - Jesu, Thou by toilsome death
61. Gospel narrative
62. Arioso (Tenor) - My heart, behold the world intent
63. Aria (Soprano) - O heart, melt in weeping

BURIAL

64. Gospel narrative
65. Chorale - Help us, O Thou Son of God
66. Gospel narrative
67. Chorus - Lie still, sacred limbs
68. Chorale - Ah! Lord, when my last end is come

Bach's St. John Passion, written and first performed in 1724 is, by the very nature of its Gospel text, on a more human scale than the monumental St. Matthew Passion which followed a few years later. Similarly, the emphasis in the St. John is much more on the story itself which Bach sets simply and all the more effectively by allowing the Gospel narrative to speak more or less for itself. Consequently there are fewer arias (which provide opportunities for comment and reflection) than in the St. Matthew, but the corollary of this is that the arias in the St. John (though every bit as beautiful) tend to interrupt rather than heighten the drama. The aria "I follow in gladness to meet Thee", for example, is separated from the previous aria by only a single line of Gospel text where it can have little dramatic purpose, but more often arias are placed at the end of a scene where they act as meditative interludes on what has just happened. The chorales, on the other hand, are much more integrated into the story and direct our emotions like a spotlight onto the heart of each event in the Passion. After the most important event of all - the death of Jesus - Bach combines both aria and chorale in a movement whose tranquil beauty expresses the assurance of Man's redemption through Christ. Bach frames St. John's Gospel with two large-scale choruses, the first of which, with its throbbing bass notes and poignant woodwind dissonances, sets a tone of tragic grandeur, but the second is like a serene lullaby for Jesus as he lies in tomb. Unusually, Bach does not end the St. John Passion here but, despite the liturgical requirements of a Good Friday Service, adds a final magnificent chorale which glows with the hope of resurrection.

Colin Bromelow