

NANTWICH CHORAL SOCIETY

FORTHCOMING CONCERT

Saturday 29th June 1996 at 7.30pm
DVORAK - MASS IN D MINOR
VAUGHAN WILLIAMS - TOWARD THE
UNKNOWN REGION
PARRY - BLEST PAIR OF SIRENS

Nantwich Choral Society is supported by
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Nantwich Choral Society

J. S. BACH

ST. MATTHEW PASSION



SATURDAY 30th MARCH
1996

The Parish Church of St. Mary, Nantwich
at 6.00pm.

NANTWICH CHORAL SOCIETY

HORSHAM CHAMBER CHOIR

NEWCASTLE UNDER LYME SCHOOL CHAMBER CHOIR

(Director: Geoffrey Walker)

NANTWICH SINFONIA

(Leader: Emily Davis)

Robin Green ~ *Evangelist*

Philip Ravenscroft ~ *Jesus*

Diane Charlesworth ~ *Soprano*

Georgina West ~ *Contralto*

Paul Phoenix ~ *Tenor*

Andrew Tinkler ~ *Bass*

Patrick Larley ~ *Continuo*

Conducted by
Stephen Buckman

NATIONAL FEDERATION
OF MUSIC SOCIETIES



ST. MATTHEW PASSION, BWV 244

J. S. Bach (1685 - 1750)

It is easy to forget that unlike Handel's oratorios, for example, Bach's Passion settings were always meant to form part of a church service, being first heard during Good Friday Vespers at one of the Lutheran churches in Leipzig, where Bach was the Director of Music. The two parts of the Passion would have been separated by a no-doubt quite lengthy sermon (the whole service lasted four or five hours) and the congregation then would not have had the pleasant distraction of being able to watch the performers, who were placed in the organ loft above and behind them, or leaf through a handy and informative programme, because they were taking their usual part in an act of worship and would have understood the music as forming only part of a highly elaborate Gospel reading.

In the St. Matthew Passion (whose libretto was prepared by Friedrich Henrici, a local official and amateur poet who wrote under the name of Picander and with whom Bach collaborated on a number of works during his years in Leipzig) the Gospel text is articulated by a total of 26 "pauses" in the narration, each one carefully placed so that we can reflect on the implications of what we have just heard. These pauses which are all in verse either specially composed by Picander or drawn from a small number of the chorales (congregational hymns) most familiar in Leipzig at that time, are not, however, "scene changes" in a dramatic sense (although they do often correspond with a change of scene), but rather "scene changers", amplifying the emotion of a particular situation and thus drawing us into an increasingly personal involvement in Christ's Passion.

To try and keep any musical appreciation of the St. Matthew Passion within the limits of this concert programme would be impossible, so I shall have to leave Bach's music to speak for itself, as, in any case, the composer would no doubt prefer. On the other hand, Bach would certainly not want us to listen to this music - beautiful as it is - without keeping in mind what the music is actually for; namely to illustrate St. Matthew's Gospel narrative, to illuminate Picander's poetic meditations upon it and to intensify the words and melodies of the several chorales.

As we shall be hearing the Passion in English, the familiarity of the story should enable us to follow the course of events without too much difficulty, but the synopsis below may help to clarify the structure of the work, showing as it does what each "pause" in the story is a reaction to.

If we can then let the passions expressed in Bach's music guide our emotions as we consider our own responses to the unfolding drama, we can perhaps come closer to an understanding of the St. Matthew Passion that Bach would have expected for us - one that is both personal and contemporary.

PART 1

Prologue Mt. 26: 1-16

<i>Chorus with Chorale</i>	(Double choir and ripieno choir)
Gospel I	(Evangelist [Tenor], Jesus [Bass]): Jesus foretells his crucifixion.
<i>Chorale</i>	(Choir)
Gospel II	(Evangelist, Chief Priests, Scribes and Elders [Double Choir], Disciples [Choir II], Jesus): The woman anoints Jesus with ointment, in preparation, he tells his disciples for his burial.

Recitative and Aria (Contralto)

Gospel III (Evangelist, Disciples, Jesus):
Judas agrees to betray Jesus.

Aria (Soprano)

The Last Supper

Gospel IV (Evangelist, Jesus):
The disciples all ask "Lord is it I?"
who will betray Jesus.

Chorale

Gospel V (Evangelist, Jesus, Judas):
With the institution of the Eucharist
Jesus promises his disciples that they will be
reunited in his Father's Kingdom.

Recitative and Aria (Soprano)

The Mount of Olives Mt. 26: 30-35

Gospel VI (Evangelist, Jesus):
Jesus warns his disciples that tonight
they will desert him.

Chorale

Gospel VII (Evangelist, Peter [Bass], Jesus):
Peter and all the disciples swear that
they will not deny Jesus.

Chorale

Gethsemane Mt. 26: 36-56

Gospel VIII (Evangelist, Jesus):
Jesus asks Peter, James and John to
stay awake with him while he prays.

*Recitative with Chorale
& Aria with Chorus*

(Tenor, Chorus)

Gospel IX (Evangelist, Jesus):
Jesus prays to be spared, but accepts God's will.

Recitative and Aria (Bass)

Gospel X (Evangelist, Jesus):
Jesus prays a second time.

Chorale

Gospel XI (Evangelist, Jesus, Judas):
Jesus is betrayed and arrested.

*Aria with Chorus
and Chorus* (Soprano and Contralto duet, Choir II)
(Double Choir)

Gospel XII (Evangelist, Jesus):
The disciples desert Jesus and run away

Chorale

INTERVAL

PART II

Aria with Chorus (Contralto, Choir II)

Trial before the High Priest Mt. 26: 57-75

Gospel XIII (Evangelist):
The Chief priests try to find a charge against Jesus.

Chorale

Gospel XIV (Evangelist, Witnesses [Alto and Tenor],
High Priest [Bass]):
Jesus makes no answer to
the false witnesses testimony.

Recitative and Aria (Tenor)

Gospel XV (Evangelist, High Priest, Jesus, Scribes and Elders [Double Choir]):
The scribes and elders call for Jesus' death, mocking and hitting him.

Chorale

Gospel XVI (Evangelist, First Maid [Soprano], Peter, Second Maid [Contralto], Bystanders [Choir II]):
Realising that he has, after all, denied Jesus, Peter weeps.

Aria (Contralto)

Chorale

Judas in the Temple Mt. 27: 1-6

Gospel XVII (Evangelist, Judas, Chief Priests and Elders [Double Choir], Two Priests [Bass and Tenor Duet]):
The Guilt stricken Judas throws his blood money down before the priests.

Aria (Bass)

Trial before Pilate Mt. 27: 7-30

Gospel XVIII (Evangelist, Jesus, Pilate [Bass]):
Pilate is astonished by Jesus' patient silence.

Chorale

Gospel XIX (Evangelist, Pilate, Pilate's Wife [Soprano], The Crowd [Double Choir]):
The crowd call for Jesus to be crucified.

Chorale

Gospel XX (Evangelist, Pilate):
Pilate asks the people what wrong Jesus has done.

Recitative and Aria (Soprano)

Gospel XXI (Evangelist, The Crowd, Pilate):
Jesus is scourged.

Recitative and Aria (Contralto)

Gospel XXII (Evangelist, Pilate's Soldiers [Double Choir]):
The soldiers mock Jesus and crown his head with thorns.

Chorale

Crucifixion Mt. 27: 31-50

Gospel XXIII (Evangelist):
Jesus is taken to be crucified, his cross is carried by Simon of Cyrene.

Recitative and Aria (Bass)

Gospel XXIV (Evangelist, Passers-by [Double Choir], Chief Priests, Scribes and Elders [Double Choir]):
Jesus is put on the cross.

Recitative and Aria with Chorus (Contralto, Choir II)

Gospel XXV (Evangelist, Jesus, Bystanders [Choir I, Choir II]):
Jesus cries out and dies.

Chorus

Burial Mt. 27: 51-66

Gospel XXVI (Evangelist, Centurion's Men [Choir]):
When evening comes, Joseph of Arimathea asks for the body of Jesus to be taken down from the cross.

Recitative and Aria (Bass)

Gospel XXVII (Evangelist, Chief Priests and Pharisees [Double Choir], Pilate):
Jesus is laid in the tomb.

Recitative and Chorus & Chorus (Soloists, Chorus) (Double Choir)

Programme Notes by Colin Bromelow

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