



J. S. Bach

St John Passion

Saturday 19 March 2016

King's Church, Amersham

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Welcome from the Chair

A very warm welcome to our first concert in this lovely new church, a Bible-based Church committed to the devotion of Jesus and the kingdom of God. Performing J. S. Bach's *St John Passion* here at this time of the year, Easter, couldn't be more appropriate. Bach based his composition on the Biblical story which culminated in the Crucifixion, one of the most significant events in the Christian calendar.

In Bach's time, most people would have been familiar with the characters and particulars of the story - Judas, Annas, Caiaphas, Pilate, the crown of thorns, casting lots at the foot of the cross etc., but in our more secular age, they have faded from the public consciousness. Whether you believe the story, or view it as an analogy for the injustice and consequences of condemning an innocent man, the story has shaped our social and cultural history for nearly 2,000 years, and inspired composers such as Bach to write the wonderful oratorio we are performing tonight.

Our next concert is on Saturday 25th June at Amersham Free Church. We will be featuring music by Eric Whitacre and the evening will have a Gallic flavour too; a choir from Dardilly, France, will be joining us for the performance. We do hope you can come along.

If you would like to join the choir (we would particularly like to recruit more tenors and basses), or if you would like to become a patron, or go on our mailing list for details of concerts and social events, please get in touch.

Fiona Lean

Chair, Chiltern Choir 0780 325 4760



This Evening's Programme

St John Passion

Johann Sebastian Bach

PART I

PROLOGUE

1. Chorus

Lord and Master, in all lands the gathering nations hail Thee Lord.
Show by Thy Cross and Passion Thou art the true eternal Son, whom still we
know, when in Thy manhood thus brought low, as Master and as Lord.
Lord and Master, in all lands the gathering nations hail Thee Lord.

CHRIST IS BETRAYED

2. Recitative

Evangelist

Jesus went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron, where was a garden,
into which he entered, and his disciples. And Judas, which betrayed him, knew
the place also: for Jesus oft-times 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. Therefore Jesus, knowing
all things that should come upon him, went forth and said unto them:

Jesus

Whom seek ye?

Evangelist

They answered him:

3. Chorus

Jesus of Nazareth

4. Recitative

Evangelist

Jesus saith unto them:

Jesus

I am he.

Evangelist

Judas also, which betrayed him, was standing 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:

5. Chorus

Jesus of Nazareth

6. Recitative

Evangelist

Jesus answered:

Jesus

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

7. Chorale

**O mighty love, O love beyond all measure,
That bids Thee walk this way of sore displeasure!**

**I live my life, with all the world can offer,
And Thou must suffer!**

PETER'S SWORD

8. Recitative

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 out 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 scabbard: shall I not drink the cup which my Father hath given me?

9. Chorale

**Thy will, O God, be alway done
On earth as in the courts of Heaven.
Give us in pain to lean thereon,**

**To welcome joy or sorrow given,
To bid rebellious flesh be still,
Nor move against Thy perfect will.**

CHRIST IS BOUND AND LED TO ANNAS

10. Recitative

Evangelist

Then the band and the chief captain, and the officers of the Jews, took Jesus, and bound him and led him away to Annas first; for he was the 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.

11. Air (Alto)

Chains of bondage that I wrought me
He who has bought me in my stead is wearing.
He, from rankling sores that scourge me
Thoroughly to purge me,
Wounds and death is bearing.

12. Recitative

Evangelist

And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple.

13. Air (Soprano)

I follow in gladness to meet Thee
And hold Thee in sight, My Life and my Light.
Then order my way, And spare not, I pray
Thyself to pursue me, to urge and entreat me.

CHRIST'S EXAMINATION BEFORE ANNAS

14. Recitative

Evangelist

Now that disciple was known unto the high priest and entered in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest. But Peter stood at the door without. Then that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, went out and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought Peter in. Then saith the damsel that kept the door unto Peter:

Maid

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 have spoken openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogues, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret I spake nothing. Why asketh thou me? Ask them that have 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?

15. Chorale

Ah! whence this hatred shown Thee?	'Tis I have done this wounding,
Whose hands are laid upon Thee	By heedless sins abounding
To do Thee this despite?	As sands beside the sea;
Thee, who beyond our telling	These are the blows that bruise Thee,
In man's estate excelling,	In these Thine own refuse Thee,
Hast ordered all Thy ways aright.	And these will nail Thee to the tree.

PETER'S DENIAL

16. Recitative

Evangelist

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

17. Chorus

Art thou not one of his disciples?

18. Recitative

Evangelist

He denied it, and said:

Peter

I am not.

Evangelist

One of the servants of the high priest, being a kinsman of him whose ear Peter cut off, saith:

Servant

Did not I see you in the garden with him?

Evangelist

Peter then denied it again, and immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered the words of Jesus, and he went out and wept bitterly.

19. Air (Tenor)

Ah! my soul, what end awaiteth thee?

Who then will stand beside me?

Shall I stay, shall I wait to see

Rock and mountain fall to hide me?

Nought on earth can help afford;

Heart is failing, shame prevailing;

Mine the deed abhorred:

Yea, the servant hath denied his Lord.

20. Chorale

Peter in forgetfulness

Thrice denied his Master;

One look moved him to confess,

Weeping, his disaster.

Jesus, turn to look on me,

Who persist in sinning;

Set my fettered conscience free,

Free for new beginning.

Interval

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PART II

THE SINLESS SUFFERER

21. Chorale

**He, whose life was as the light,
Grace and truth unshaken,
In the darkness of the night
Like a thief was taken;**

**Judgement of a godless court,
Witness falsely offered,
Scorn and spitting, ribald sport,
As foretold, He suffered.**

CHRIST IS ARRAIGNED BEFORE PILATE

22. Recitative

Evangelist

Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas into the Judgment hall; and it was early; and they themselves entered 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:

23. Chorus

If this man was not a malefactor we had not delivered him to thee.

24. Recitative

Evangelist

Then said Pilate unto them:

Pilate

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

Evangelist

The Jews therefore said unto him:

25. Chorus

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

26. Recitative

Evangelist

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

Pilate

Art thou the King of the Jews?

Evangelist

Jesus answered:

Jesus

Sayest thou this 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.

27. Chorale

**O King of glory, King for time unending,
How can I serve Thee, what for Thee be spending?
No heart may find wherewith due thanks to render
Or service tender.**

**How can I, straining sight and expectation,
Find aught wherewith to measure Thy compassion,
Or how requite Thee, working thus in blindness,
Thy loving kindness?**

BARABBAS

28. Recitative

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. Everyone 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:

29 Chorus

Not this man, not this, but Barabbas.

CHRIST IS SCOURGED

30. Recitative

Evangelist

Now Barabbas was a robber. Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him.

31. Arioso (Bass)

Come, ponder, O my soul, thy burdened heart unbinding,

With trembling hope and anxious rapture finding

Thy chiefest good in Jesu's sorrow.

Those thorns that crown Him, though He suffer,

To thee the flowers of heaven will seem,

To thee the sweetest fruit will His sharp wormwood offer:

Then gaze, forever gaze on Him.

32. Air (Tenor)

Behold Him! See!

His back all torn and bleeding,

For pardon pleading,

Is like the face of Heaven.

Whereon, against the dark oppression

Of clouds that figure man's transgression,

Is set the Bow, by God's concession,

The sign and pledge of sin forgiven.



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32. Air (Tenor)

Behold Him! See!
His back all torn and bleeding,
For pardon pleading,
Is like the face of Heaven.

Whereon, against the dark oppression
Of clouds that figure man's transgression,
Is set the Bow, by God's concession,
The sign and pledge of sin forgiven.

33. Recitative

And the soldiers plaited a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, and they put on him a purple robe, and said

34. Chorus

Hail, thou King of the Jews!

35 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 therefore the chief Priests and officer saw him, they cried out saying:

36. Chorus

Crucify!

CHRIST IS DELIVERED TO THE JEWS

37. Recitative

Evangelist

Pilate saith unto them:

Pilate

Take ye him, and crucify him: for I find no fault in him.

Evangelist

The Jews answered him:

38. Chorus

We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, for he has made himself the Son of God.

39. Recitative

Evangelist

When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more afraid, and went again into the Judgement 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 could'st 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.

40. Chorale

O Christ, Thy fetters mean release

For souls that lie in durance:

Thy dungeon is our house of peace

For refuge and assurance.

Hadst Thou not served as slave before,

Slaves were we now and evermore.

THE KING OF THE JEWS

41. Recitative

Evangelist

But the Jews cried out:

42. Chorus

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

43 Recitative

Evangelist

When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgement 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:

44. Chorus

Away, away with him, crucify him!

45. Recitative

Evangelist

Pilate saith unto them:

Pilate

Shall I crucify your King?

Evangelist

The chief Priests answer and said:

46 Chorus

We have no king but Caesar.

GOLGOTHA

47. Recitative

Evangelist

Then delivered he him unto them to be crucified: and they took Jesus, and led him away. And he bare his cross, and went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew, Golgotha.

48. Air (Bass) with Chorus

Haste! Haste, poor souls ensnared in treason,

Get you from your noisome prison.

Haste! - *Oh where?* - to Golgatha.

Wings of faith for all are given,

Fly! - *Oh where?* - Yon Cross your haven;

All your hopes are flowering there!

THE CRUCIFIXION

49. Recitative

Evangelist

And there 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 there was written: “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews”. This title then read many of the Jews, for the place was nigh to the city where Jesus was crucified. And it was written in Hebrew, Greek and in Latin. Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate:

50. Chorus

Write thou not The King of the Jews, but that he himself said I am the King of the Jews.

51. Recitative

Evangelist

Pilate answered:

Pilate

What I have written, I have written.

52. Chorale

**Thy Name is shining on me,
Lord Jesu, day and night,
Thy Cross alone hath won me
My inmost heart's delight;**

**For now, by faith depicted,
The saving truth I see,
How Thou, O most afflicted,
Hast shed Thy blood for me.**

53. Recitative

Evangelist

The soldiers therefore, 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 one to another:

54. Chorus

Let us not divide it, but cast lots for it, who shall have it.

55. Recitative

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.

56. Chorale

**See Him now, the Righteous One,
His last hour abiding,
For His Mother, faithful Son,
Faithful care providing.**

**Work, O man, for righteousness
God and man befriending;
Death shall come without distress,
All disquiet ending.**

IT IS FINISHED

57. Recitative

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 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.

58. Air (Alto)

All is fulfilled. O hope to fainting souls extended!
This mournful night shows me Thy day of labour ended.
The Lion of Judah fought the fight, and hath prevailed.
It is finished.

59. Recitative

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

60. Air (Bass) with Chorale

My Lord and Saviour, let me ask Thee,
Exalted in Thy crucifixion
Thou hast avowed: It is fulfilled.
O say, shall Death his captives yield?
Can I, then, through Thy last affliction
The realm of life inherit?
Dost Thou the whole world's ransom pay?
How can Thy parched lips declare it?
But lo, Thy head bowed down replies in silence: Yea.

**Jesu, Thou by toilsome death
Deathless life art earning.
I, in stress of failing breath,
Where shall I be turning**

**But to Thee, my ransom?
Dear my Lord, receive me;!
Give but what Thy wages were,
More Thou could'st not give me.**

THE RENDING OF THE VEIL

61. Recitative

Evangelist

And behold, the veil of the Temple was rent in twain, from the top to the bottom:
and the earth did quake; and the rocks were rent. And the graves were opened,
and many bodies of saints arose.

62. Arioso (Tenor)

My heart, behold the world intent
A share in Jesu's pain to borrow:
The sun in sable shroud of sorrow,
The severed veil, the mountains rent
The quaking earth, the dead returning,
Their Maker cold in death are mourning.
Wilt thou, my heart, do now thy part?

63. Air (Soprano)

O heart, melt in weeping, and pour out thy dolour,
The Highest to honour;
Tell truly to earth and to heaven thy pain:
Thy Jesus is slain.

CHRIST'S PIERCED SIDE

64. Recitative

Evangelist

The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain on the Cross upon the Sabbath day (for that Sabbath was an high day) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, ad 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 pierced his side with a spear, and forthwith came thereout blood and water. And he that saw it, bare record, and his record is true, and he knoweth that he saith true, that he 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".

65. Chorale

**Help us, O Thou Son of God,
By Thy bitter passion,
Still to tread where Thou hast trod,
Armed against temptation;**

**From the Tree of scorn to seek
Fruits of mediation,
Whence to bring, though poor and
weak,
Store of rich oblation**

THE DESCENT FROM THE CROSS

66. Recitative

Evangelist

And after this, Joseph of Arimathæa (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, he who 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: Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus, because of the Jews' preparation day, for the tomb was nigh at hand.

AT THE SEPULCHRE

67. Chorus

Lie still, lie still, O sacred limbs, lie sleeping,

And I will lay aside my weeping;

Lie still, lie still: I too may rest in peace.

The grave that was appointed you

To close the sum of suffering due,

Shall be my path to heaven, from hell my full release.

Lie still, lie still, O sacred limbs, lie sleeping,

And I will lay aside my weeping;

Lie still, lie still: I too may rest in peace..

68. Chorale

Ah! Lord when my last end is come,

Bid angels bear my spirit home

To Abraham's bosom going;

My flesh, laid in the quiet tomb,

Shall sleep until the day of doom,

Nor pain not sorrow knowing.

Then waking from that dark abode,

Mine eyes shall see Thee face to face

In boundless joy, O Son of God,

My Saviour and my Throne of Grace.

Lord Jesu Christ, give ear to me,

Who bring unending praise to Thee.



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Programme Notes

The Passion of Our Lord according to St John BMV 245

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 - 1750)

“...whoever meditates thus upon God’s sufferings for a day, an hour, yea, for a quarter of an hour, we wish to say freely and publicly, that it is better than if he fasts a whole year, prays the Psalter every day, yea, than if he hears a hundred masses. For such a meditation changes a man’s character and almost as in baptism he is born again, anew. Then Christ’s suffering accomplishes its true, natural and noble work, it slays the old Adam, banishes all lust, pleasure and security that one may obtain from God’s creatures; just like Christ was forsaken by all, even by God.” (From “A Good Friday sermon on how to contemplate Christ’s Holy Sufferings”)

Thus, Martin Luther affirmed his conviction that profound contemplation of the sufferings of Christ in his trial and death was the only route into faith, and into a clear conscience. Other forms of religious observance, such as attending mass, were still valuable, but to contemplate the cross was the most important and necessary way for mankind to seek and experience God. Perhaps in consequence, the passion of Christ became a central theme in the devotional art of the German Baroque, in passion plays such as that from Oberammergau, as well as in the rich musical tradition of passion settings for the Good Friday liturgy. This tradition reaches its zenith in the music of J. S. Bach, the supreme Lutheran musician.

On 22nd May 1723, Bach and his family arrived in Leipzig. He was moving from his position of Kapellmeister at the small, provincial court of Anhalt-Cöthen, about 30 miles to the north west, to take up the post of Cantor of the Thomasschule – the school attached to St. Thomas’s church, one of the two main churches in Leipzig. At the time, Leipzig was a city of about 30,000. It was a thriving commercial and cultural centre, and its university was one of the leading intellectual institutions in Germany. As well as teaching music and Latin to the 50 or 60 boys at the school (he normally delegated the Latin teaching to a senior pupil), Bach was responsible for the music at four Leipzig churches: those of St. Nicolas, St. Thomas (to which the school was attached), St. Peter and St. Matthew. Bach’s musical forces included the schoolboys, who were divided into four choirs, a few professional instrumentalists, and a number of university students, some of whom studied music with him privately.

In a much-quoted letter from 15 years earlier, Bach described his life’s goal as the creation of “a well-regulated church music, to the glory of God”. As soon as he arrived in Leipzig he threw himself into this task with extreme energy. In the first year in his new post, Bach composed a complete liturgical cycle of sixty cantatas,

one for each Sunday and major feast day. These were complex, multi-movement works lasting up to half an hour, and were performed between the gospel reading and the sermon in the main Sunday service. They were performed by his principal choir, which alternated week by week between the churches of St. Thomas and St. Nicolas; the second-, third- and fourth-string musicians performed simpler music in the other three churches. Over the next three years Bach completed two further cantata cycles – a barely believable outpouring of musical craftsmanship, which must have made formidable demands on his performers, and probably on his listeners too.

There were two breaks in the annual cantata cycle, in Advent and in Lent, so it seems likely that Bach spent most of Lent in 1724 preparing for what was the biggest musical occasion of the liturgical year, the passion service at Good Friday Vespers. Sung passion settings are an ancient tradition in Christian liturgy – there are accounts of visitors attending them in Jerusalem in the fourth century AD – but they were a novelty in Leipzig, having been introduced by Kuhnau, Bach's immediate predecessor, in 1721. Passion settings came in many forms, but the central element was normally a musical setting of one of the gospel accounts of the trial and crucifixion of Jesus. In Protestant Germany, there would also be chorales – Lutheran hymns. From the mid-seventeenth century onwards, composers started to interpolate arias and choruses employing non-biblical texts, as well as instrumental sinfonias, so a church congregation in a large musical centre would be accustomed to seeing expanded instrumental forces in a Good Friday service, and to hearing music in modern styles alongside the traditional hymns and gospel reciting tones. Against this background, Bach's St. John Passion, which was first performed in St. Nicolas's Church on 7th April 1724, would not have seemed like a radically new type of piece. However, a listener familiar with Good Friday music of the time would probably have noticed the supremely inventive, expressive harmonisations of the hymn tunes, the virtuosity demanded of the soloists and orchestral players, and the highly dramatic musical setting of the gospel text.

Although the gospel accounts of the crucifixion are an unchanging constant in Western culture, interpretations of what they mean are far more diverse. Bach does not change the text of John's gospel, although he does add two dramatic episodes from Matthew (Peter weeping after he hears the cock crow, and the veil of the temple being torn in two after Jesus' death). However, he constructs his interpretation of the passion story by his choice of extra texts to insert, and by the positioning of the breaks in the gospel narrative. The textual interpolations come in the form of chorale verses, of which the words and melodies would be familiar to Bach's congregation, and solo arias. Bach's choices of aria and chorale text are often triggered by details in the gospel story. These movements provide points of reflection, and challenge the congregation to respond personally. Thus the whole is

designed as a “meditation [which] changes a person’s character”, after Luther’s enjoinder.

The opening chorus sets the tone. Dissonant oboe and flute parts are woven above constantly undulating strings, setting up the work’s distinctive sonority. The choir offers praises to Christ on behalf of all nations, and asks to be shown, through his passion, that he is the true Son of God. After this, the passion story begins in the garden of Gethsemane with the arrest of Jesus. Most of the gospel text is sung by the Evangelist, or narrator, in a recitative style that gains expressive richness from its wide-ranging harmonies and complex melodic shapes. Dialogue is sung by individual soloists, notably the words of Jesus and of Pilate. The words of the various crowds are sung by the choir, often in complex polyphony with vivid orchestral accompaniment. The account of the arrest is broken up by two chorale verses. Both are prompted by words spoken by Jesus: “Let these go their way”, leads into a chorale which affirms his selfless love, then “Shall I not drink the cup which my Father hath given me”, is followed by a chorale which urges acceptance of God’s will. Longer breaks in the narrative come in the alto and soprano arias, which likewise reflect and elaborate on themes which appear in the gospel text (for example “Simon Peter followed Jesus , and so did another disciple” leads into “I follow in gladness”). Next comes the dramatized account of Peter’s denial of Jesus, which is lamented in an impassioned tenor aria. The chorale which follows this makes clear that all believers should share Peter’s intense shame at their sins.

In the Leipzig Good Friday liturgy, Part One of the Passion setting would be followed by a sermon lasting approximately an hour. Part Two begins with Jesus, abandoned by his disciples, being led by the Jewish leaders to Pilate. The trial before Pilate is depicted dramatically, with the choir singing the part of the baying mob. After the scourging of Jesus, the narrative pauses for a bass arioso and a tenor aria, both of which offer the thought that his sufferings were for the good of all. The narrative resumes, and the mob gradually persuades Pilate to crucify Jesus. As he is led to crucifixion, a bass aria urges all poor souls to follow him there, to Golgotha. The narrative then describes the crucifixion, and finally the death of Jesus. The alto aria “All is fulfilled” , and the bass aria “My Lord and Saviour”, come on either side of a single sentence in which the Evangelist describes Jesus giving up the ghost. Bach’s choice of texts here makes it clear that he regards the crucifixion as a victory of good over evil, and of redemption over sin. However, he is not content with crude theological triumphalism, and the movements for tenor and soprano which follow are full of genuinely human emotions of grief and loss. The final act of the passion story is the burial in the garden tomb, which is related by the Evangelist alone. The concluding chorus and chorale reiterate Bach’s central theme, that the death and sufferings of Jesus are both lifegiving and transforming for all.

Bach sets his interpretation of the story to music of intense expressive depth, and enormous stylistic range. The recitative settings of the gospel, and the polyphonic choral settings of the crowd, lie within the mainstream of Lutheran liturgical music, although the richly complex harmonies and contrapuntal elaboration of Bach's music are exceptional. Similarly, in the chorales Bach's harmonic genius enriches an established tradition of sacred music. The arias are influenced more by modern secular forms and styles, including the Sarabande rhythm of the tenor aria "Ah! my soul", and the Minuet of the closing chorus "Lie still". Bach was under stern instruction to avoid sounding too operatic; it almost seems in places that he had conveniently forgotten this. The original instrumentation is a mixture of the archaic and the avant-garde: new and fashionable instruments like the transverse flute and the oboe d'amore appear side by side with archaic (although secular) ones like the lute and the viola da gamba. Bach uses the solo arias as opportunities to vary the instrumental palette: the vocal soloists are accompanied variously by obbligati for oboes, flute and strings, with the full orchestra accompanying the choral movements.

The *St. John Passion* can be heard as a dramatic story of universal human emotions, as a theological exposition, as a challenge to amend and improve our lives, as a masterpiece of musical craftsmanship and invention, or as any combination of the above. There is no record of the reaction of the first audience in 1724, but they must have had some sense of how extraordinary a composition it is: how the supreme technical accomplishment of Bach's music is allied to an expressive purpose of complete sincerity and enormous profundity, which is still gripping, nearly 300 years on. It is never an easy work to listen to; it demands concentrated engagement from the listener, and was always meant to challenge and disturb. Approached like this, and despite the sometimes stern aspect of its faith, Bach's passion setting comes across as a deeply compassionate and optimistic story, where the crucifixion is an act of redemptive love, and the resurrection is awaited with certainty.

Peter Foster



A small group of Chiltern Choir members – The Chiltern Singers – is now available to sing at functions: weddings, parties, funerals etc.

Proceeds to choir funds.

Contact John Haslam by email (preferred): chilternsingers@chilternchoir.org.uk
or by telephone: 01494 724125 to discuss your requirements

This Evening's Performers

Matthew Pochin, Tenor (Evangelist)

Matthew began his singing career at Hereford Cathedral. While a student at Cardiff University he also studied at the Welsh College of Music and Drama.

He sings with the professional choirs of St. John's Wood Parish Church and Belsize Square synagogue. Matthew is a founder member of the Epiphoni Consort, who recently recorded several movements from Rachmaninov's *All Night Vigil*, with Matthew as soloist, for a BBC4 documentary shown earlier this year. He is a member of bOYbershop, a unique Jewish barbershop quartet, which recently performed in Les Sacrées Journées des Strasbourg, and released an album of traditional Ashkenazi, Sephardi and Ladino melodies. Matthew performs as soloist for choirs and choral societies in London and the South East.



Benjamin Seifert, Bass (Pilate)

Benjamin Seifert read Modern Languages at St Peter's College, Oxford. He then trained on the English National Opera's programme for young opera singers, The Knack, and at the Royal Academy of Music.

In 2004 he performed as a soloist in Orlando Gough's *For the Public Good* at ENO and has since sung at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, the Cadogan Hall, the Purcell Room and the Wigmore Hall. He has worked with the Gilbert and Sullivan Opera Company at Buxton, British Youth Opera, Grange Park Opera, Opera Holland Park, Opera by Definition, Tête à Tête Opera and Arcola Opera. Operatic roles include Colas (*Bastien & Bastienne*), Zaretsky (*Eugene Onegin*) Harlekin (*Ariadne auf Naxos*), Don Giovanni, the Count, (*Le Nozze di Figaro*), Bill Bobstay (*HMS*



Pinafore), the Foreman (*Trial by Jury*) and Marcello (*La bohème*) at the Soho Theatre, winning the Olivier Award for Best New Opera Production.

He was recently seen as the Mayor in Pop Up Opera's *Docteur Miracle* which he performed live on Radio 3's 'In Tune'. Oratorio work includes *Messiah*, Haydn's *Nelson Mass*, Rossini's *Petite Messe Solennelle*, Fauré's *Requiem*, the *St Matthew Passion* and the title role in Mendelssohn's *Elijah*.

Peter Willcock, Bass (Jesus)

Peter Willcock Sings regularly in the Choruses of English National Opera and The Royal Opera House and as a soloist for ROH2, Grange Park Opera, Pimlico Opera, Pavilion Opera and Opera Brava.

He is a Chorister at St John's Wood Church in London and also works a great deal in Music Education for various opera houses and foundations.

He is also in demand around the country as an oratorio singer; works include: Bach's *St John Passion*, *St Matthew Passion*, *B minor Mass* and *Christmas Oratorio*, Handel's *Messiah*, Haydn's *Nelson Mass*, *The Seasons* and *The Creation*, Dvorak's *Stabat Mater*, Mozart's *Requiem*, Faure's *Requiem*, Stainer's *Crucifixion*, and Rossini's *Petite Messe Solennelle*.

Upcoming engagements include Soloist with Street Orchestra London and Purcell's *Come ye sons of Art* in Krakow.



Alexandra McPhee, Soprano

Born and raised in Hertfordshire, Alexandra is a recent graduate of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland where she completed her Post-Graduate vocal studies under the tuition of Helen Lawson. Whilst studying in Glasgow, she was one of a small number of singers chosen to represent the RCS in a performance of Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress* at the Edinburgh International Festival under Sir Andrew Davis.



Alexandra previously gained a Music Degree from the University of Nottingham where she was awarded a scholarship for outstanding achievement in performance for her final year recital. She held a choral scholarship at the Church of St Mary's, under the direction of John Keys, during her three years in Nottingham.

Alexandra sings for many professional choirs in London, including St Martin in the Fields, the Guards' Chapel, St Paul's Cathedral Consort and St John's Wood, as well as with ensembles such as London Voices and the Philharmonia Chorus' Professional singer's scheme.

Recent solo performances have included Bach's *St John Passion* and *St Matthew Passion*, Haydn's *Nelson Mass* and Mozart's *Mass in C minor*. Operatic roles include Despina (*Così fan Tutte*), Kate Pinkerton (*Madam Butterfly*), Belinda (*Dido and Aeneas*) and Emmie (*Albert Herring*).

Alongside performing, Alexandra balances a busy teaching schedule working as a peripatetic singing and piano teacher at two Prep Schools in Hertfordshire, and for the Hertfordshire County Music Service.

Oliver Gerrish, Counter Tenor

Oliver, a versatile English countertenor, began his professional musical training as Alto Choral Scholar at Lichfield Cathedral and from there went on to study at The Guildhall School of Music and Drama.

As an operatic singer, Oliver was critically acclaimed in both Opera and Opera Britannia for his role of Artabano in Hasse's *Artaserse* with Ensemble Serse. He has twice sung the lead male role in Toni Castell's contemporary opera 'Life from Light', most recently in August 2014 for the Teta-a-Tete Festival at Kings Place, and recorded the album of the opera. Oliver will be a lead in Castell's latest opera at Cowdray Park in July.

As a concert soloist Oliver has performed internationally in many countries with, among other ensembles, The Philharmonia. Recent performances include a recital for the Penkhull Festival (chosen by the Patron of the Festival, James Bowman), a concert for the Refugee Crisis at St James's Piccadilly, soloist for the fourth time with The Philharmonia at the Klosters



Christmas Festival, a recital at Kensington Palace and the premier of David Lawrence's 'Ballad of the Lost House' at The Grosvenor Chapel. Future solo engagements include Handel's Israel in Egypt with the Ariel Consort of London, a private performance of Handel for the Royal Family in Luxembourg and Handel's Messiah for the Fiftieth Church Stretton Festival. Oliver also runs the opera company, New Georgian Opera, with soprano Meeta Raval and is one half of popular music series Chelsea Concerts, with soprano Alexandra Kennedy.

In his choral work, Oliver is a Deputy Lay Vicar at Westminster Abbey, a Deputy Lay Clerk at St Paul's Cathedral, and in the choir of St. John's Wood Parish Church.

Oliver is currently a student at Cambridge and is soon to finish his MSt in Building History in Britain.

For more information please go to www.olivergerrish.com.

Michael Cayton, Conductor

After training at Kneller Hall, Michael served with the Grenadier Guards as a trumpeter before studying piano at the Royal College of Music, where he gained his BMus, ARCM and won the Hilda Anderson Deane prize for conducting and improvisation. While completing postgraduate répétiteur studies he was appointed the first Organ Scholar at the Royal Hospital in Chelsea. Since his debut as an organist at the Royal Festival Hall in 1988, Michael has been in demand as a recitalist and accompanist and has appeared all over the country and in Europe, with notable London appearances at St Martin-in-the-Fields and Westminster Abbey.

Since 2003 he has simultaneously held the posts of Director of Music at St John's Wood Church, organist at Belsize Square Synagogue and conductor of the Chiltern Choir. He has worked with many leading choruses including Vasari Singers and Goldsmiths Choral Union. In 2014 he was invited to be guest conductor for Watford Philharmonic Society's performance of Britten's War Requiem and has now taken up the appointment as the society's new Principal Conductor.



Michael has given many radio broadcasts for the BBC; he was the organist for a live broadcast from St Martin in the Fields following the death of Nelson Mandela. He has also appeared on BBC's Songs of praise. His church music is published by Redemptorist Publications, the responsorial psalms now a staple of parish churches up and down the country. With broad musical tastes, a hunger to learn new styles and a particular talent for improvisation, he may often be found performing jazz, German cabaret and Judeo-Spanish Ladino music as well as fusion and funk.

The Wallace Ensemble

The Wallace Ensemble is a versatile professional chamber orchestra. Its repertoire ranges from Baroque to Modern; from well-known classics to new commissions, and includes both sacred and secular music. It has performed at many of London's major venues, including the Queen Elizabeth Hall, the Purcell Room and St John's, Smith Square.

Choir members singing this evening

Soprano

Caroline Bartlett, Sarah Brameld*, Hilary Broadbent, Marian Bryan, Mary Bungard, Lu Chadder, Anni Facer, Gabrielle Fisher, Jenny Gorsuch, Beverley Grayley, Jill Haslam, Diane Hunt, Barbara Johnson, Sue Kesteven, Sue Lloyd, Janet Lowndes, Gillian Proctor, Merriss Ratliff, Beverley Small, Hilary Walmsley, Lyndsay Ward, Gillian Watson and Anne Wilson.

Alto

Cathy Amos, Roy Cottrell, Ana De'Ath, Liz Dobson, Cathrien Dyas, Rita Fryer, Philippa Goss, Anne Keyworth, Charlotte Kohnhorst, Sylvia Lawman, Fiona Lean, Gillian Pugh, Maggie Shrive, Jill Swainson, Rhona Taylor, Brenda Tomsett, Sue Treanor, Marian Wax and Beryl Whittaker

Tenor

Gijs Crone*, Mike Currey, Andy Etchells, Paul Jenkins, Colin Parkes, Tim Swanwick, Isabel Walker and Peter Wells.

Bass

Henry Bell, Simon Boulcott, Paul Davies, Steven Frank, John Haslam, Stuart Marshall, Keith Pulford and Richard Watson*.

*singing solo parts - maid and servant (Sarah), officer (Gijs) and Peter (Richard)

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If you have enjoyed this evening's concert and would like to have a closer involvement with the Chiltern Choir, then you might like to consider becoming a Patron. For a modest annual fee, we offer you:

- Complimentary tickets to our concerts during the season
- Advance publicity
- Inclusion on the mailing list for our occasional newsletter, 'Chorus Lines'
- Invitations to social and other special events
- Your name in concert programmes.

If you would like to continue your support in this way, please contact John Facer on 01923 283250. He will be delighted to hear from you.

Our current Patrons are:

Mrs Patricia Parkes (President)

Mrs M. Bramall	Mrs J. Double	Mrs H. Hall
Mr N. B. Kingon	Mrs W. M. Kingon	Dr R. MacLaurin
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Mr A. Osborne	Mrs F. Sanderson	Mr A. G. Sharp
Mrs J. Sharp		

The following people have been made honorary members in recognition of their extended service to the choir:

Mrs K. Darby	Mr J. Facer	Mr M. Gaudie
Mr D. Lloyd	Dame G. Pugh	Mrs A. Sedgwick
Mr D. Treanor	Mr N. Wax	



Forthcoming concerts

Summer Concert

Saturday 25 June 2016

Amersham Free Church

(with our visitors from Dardilly, France)

To include choral music by Eric Whitacre: *Lux Aurumque*, *Sleep*,
Animal Crackers 1 and 2, *Hebrew Love Songs*, *Seal lullaby*
plus pieces sung by the *Choeur de Dardilly* and joint items.

Next Season, 2016-17

Concerts to include a Family Christmas Celebration and
'Vivaldi by Candlelight'

Details of events can be found on our website www.chilternchoir.org.uk

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Have you enjoyed this evening's concert? Would you be interested in receiving details of our concerts in the future?

Please fill in an information slip (available at the door before the concert, during the interval or at the end of the evening) or email sing@chilternchoir.org.uk with "email list" in the subject line and giving your name and contact details.

We will do the rest!