

# JOHN PASSION

**Johann Sebastian Bach**

Reconstruction of Bach's  
Passion Liturgy

**Dunedin Consort**  
John Butt



# The Leipzig Service of Vespers for Good Friday

## 1 OPENING LITURGY

Organ Chorale Prelude: Da Jesus an dem Kreuze Stund, BWV 621<sup>+</sup>

Congregational Chorale: Da Jesus an dem Kreuze Stund\* †

## 2 JOHANNES-PASSION, PART ONE

Organ Prelude to the Passion: Praeludium in F-sharp minor, BuxWV 146 (extract)<sup>+</sup>

Johannes-Passion, BWV 245, Part One<sup>◊</sup>

## 3 CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE TO PART ONE OF THE PASSION

Organ Chorale Prelude: O Lamm Gottes unschuldig, BWV 618<sup>+</sup>

Congregational Chorale: O Lamm Gottes unschuldig\* †

## 4 SERMON SECTION (ADDITIONAL CONTENT NORMALLY NOT PERFORMED LIVE)

\*\* Sermon Introduction, from Erdmann Neumeister, Epistolische Nachlese 1720<sup>+</sup> Organ

Chorale Prelude: Herr Jesu Christ dich zu uns wend, BWV 632<sup>+</sup> Congregational Chorale:

Herr Jesu Christ dich zu uns wend\* †

Sermon, from Erdmann Neumeister, Epistolische Nachlese 1720, on 2 Timothy, 1, 10<sup>+</sup>

Intercession<sup>‡</sup>

\*\* Additional content is available to download from  
<http://www.linnrecords.com/linn-john-passion.aspx> for free.

## 5 JOHANNES-PASSION, PART TWO

Organ Chorale Prelude: Christus, der uns selig macht, BWV 620<sup>+</sup>  
Johannes-Passion, BWV 245, Part Two<sup>◊</sup>

## 6 CLOSING LITURGY

Motet: Ecce quomodo moritur\* ‡

Responsory, Collect, Blessing, Response to Blessing: Gott sei uns gnädig und barmherzig\* ‡

Organ Chorale Prelude: Nun danket alle Gott, BWV 657<sup>+</sup>

Congregational Chorale: Nun danket alle Gott\* †

<sup>+</sup> John Butt, Director, Harpsichord & Organ Preludes

<sup>†</sup> Dunedin Consort, Congregation

<sup>◊</sup> Dunedin Consort directed by John Butt

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\* From Gottfried Vopelius's *New Leipziger Gesangbuch*, 1682

# Johannes-Passion

Bach first performed his *John Passion (Johannes-Passion)* on Good Friday 1724, during his first year as Cantor of the Thomasschule in Leipzig. Not only would this have been a new musical experience for the congregation, but the very genre of the Oratorio Passion (in which the standard Passion narrative was embellished with reflective arias, choruses and chorales) had only been introduced in the two principal churches two years previously. The forward-looking Neue Kirche had made a similar innovation some five years before this, so it is clear that the tradition must have been embraced with some enthusiasm, perhaps inspired by the collapse of the Leipzig opera shortly before Bach's arrival.

But if the Oratorio Passion had many characteristics in common with opera, its differences are very striking: first of all, it was designed to fit into the Good Friday Vesper liturgy, for which the focal point was the sermon delivered between the two halves of the musical setting. The narrative was taken directly from the chosen Gospel, and is therefore largely in the third person. Only the utterances of specific personages feature direct speech. Jesus's part was naturally delineated by a specific singer, but he, like the narrating Evangelist, also seems to have sung all the other solo and choral material within the same range. Moreover, the arias do not relate directly to characters in the story (as they would invariably do in opera) but are subjective meditations effectively in the present of the performance, and addressed directly to the congregation. Likewise, the chorales inserted within the musical setting of the Passion seem to function as a concerted response to particular aspects of the story, as if sung by the congregation as a whole (the layout of the original parts and the elaborate nature of the harmonizations makes it unlikely that the congregation participated directly in these). Thus, Bach's Oratorio Passions doubled all the essential elements of the service itself: the reading from Scripture; the communal response in the chorales; the more subjective and meditative element of prayer in the arias. The chorales, arias and meditative choruses also drew theological or spiritual points out of the story and thus doubled the role of the sermon. In all then, the dynamic of the Passion was more complex and nuanced than that of opera. If it forsook the visual element, it seems to have been designed to involve the listener much more intensely, both as part of a congregation and individually.

It is as if Bach reversed the mechanism of opera, turning the attention away from the representation ‘on stage’ and back towards the pew.

Bach and his (anonymous) librettist could draw on a rich heritage of devotional writing, some of which was specifically designed to be sung. Among the most celebrated Passion librettos – originally for concert, rather than liturgical, performance – was B.H. Brockes’s *Der für die Sünde der Welt Gemarterte und Sterbende Jesus* (1712), from which Bach’s librettist for the *John Passion* borrowed liberally. Indeed, some would characterize the entire Passion as a Brockes setting (in the tradition of composers such as Handel and Telemann) although the Brockes text was not originally designed to be combined with a specific Gospel. Moreover, the choice and placing of the non-Biblical text imply that both Bach and his librettist were intensely concerned with the theology of the Gospel. John’s Gospel sits somewhat apart from the others, the three so-called ‘Synoptic Gospels’, which are closely interrelated; it provides rather more of a cosmic explanation for the phenomenon of Jesus, one which is clearly influenced by classical philosophic traditions. Accordingly, Jesus, like his father, must exist eternally, standing quite outside human conceptions of time. Jesus’s earthly office is a sign of God’s presence as ‘the Word made flesh’; all his activities are designed to prove his ambassadorial position as the Son of God, all-knowing and coterminous with truth. Within this deterministic scheme, the murder of Jesus is essentially the device by which the Son returns to the Father, his triumph thereby assured. John’s account omits much of the suffering which Jesus must have experienced as a human being; rather, every adverse event is turned into a celebration of the fulfilment of the plan: in death Jesus – who knows everything in advance – triumphantly exclaims ‘Es ist vollbracht!’ (‘It is fulfilled!’). The darker side of John’s account is his view of the Jews as primarily responsible for the death of Jesus: they are placed on a lower level, outside Pilate’s judgement hall, and it is they who coax this seemingly benevolent governor to kill their impostor ‘King’. Many commentators note that John is clearly talking as a Jew himself and therefore only referring to the intransigence of certain factions within orthodoxy; it may also be that he is trying to shift the blame away from the Romans in view of his broader readership at the end of the first century.

The text of the opening chorus establishes the Johannine theme of the work: Jesus is portrayed as the eternal and omnipresent ruler. The poet implores him, as the true son of God, to show how he becomes glorified even in the lowliness of his Passion. The same pairing of opposites (interestingly, also linked with a *da capo* ABA structure, albeit modified) is evident in the lament ‘Es ist vollbracht!’, where the central section portrays Christ as victor. For many, the pivotal point of Bach’s Passion and the most significant distillation of its message is the aria text (set as if it were a chorale) ‘Durch dein Gefängnis’, which again exploits a contradiction: we receive freedom through Christ’s captivity. This develops a theme from John that is not so evident in the Passion narrative itself, namely, the atonement that Jesus’ death performs for believers (Jesus as the Lamb of God sacrificed for human sin).

Many writers have sought elaborate symbolic structures within Bach’s *John Passion*. Certainly such orders are not atypical of the intellectual and religious climate of the time. What does come across in performance is the relentlessness of the events, everything taking place almost with a clockwork precision, in direct and necessary fulfilment of a pre-ordained – indeed prophesied – order. The trial scene is the central point of the Johannine narrative since it is here that Jesus’s kingship is judged by the Jews and Pilate (they miss the point about Jesus’s kingship being of ‘another world’). Whether or not the musical connections between the crowd choruses (especially those derived from the first ‘Jesum von Nazareth’) point to another symbolic dimension, the first listeners must have experienced an increasing sense of inevitability – perhaps of the uncanny – as the piece progressed, since so many choruses would already sound familiar.

Some critics maintain that the *John Passion* lacks the refinement of its more illustrious sister, the *Matthew Passion*. Certainly it is not so evenly paced, lacking the almost doctrinaire successions of narrative-arioso-aria, which accord to the latter the flavour of a spiritual exercise. But the central trial scene would lose its impact if it were punctuated with arias. Both the intense musical colouring of the recitatives (Peter’s lament and the scourging of Christ are far more vivid than their counterparts in the *Matthew Passion*) and the incisive figuration of the choruses (almost a latter-day adaptation of Monteverdi’s ‘warlike’ style) recall the idioms of the late seventeenth century, when Lutheran music tended to wring every nuance it could from the grain of the text.

Only the arias, together with the opening and closing choruses, display the more luscious, affective style of Bach's mature writing. These show an astonishing range of style and mood: the opening chorus 'Herr, unser Herrscher' (which Bach used in all but his second, 1725, version of this Passion) is arguably the most turbulent piece he wrote, in which the triumphal text is entirely transformed by the grinding dissonance of the music; if Jesus is indeed to be shown as the true Son of God, the means by which this is achieved are truly agonizing. The first two arias both demonstrate the voice as almost entirely bound into the world of the music, the first ('Von den Strikken meiner Sünder') vividly alluding to the bondage of sin and the second ('Ich folge dir gleichfalls') to the notion of following Jesus directly, in musical imitation of Simon Peter and the beloved disciple. Most extraordinarily of all in Part One, is the final aria, 'Ach, mein Sinn' (replaced in the 1725 version), by which one of the tautest and most ordered of musical structures is virtually ignored by the solo tenor, who cannot escape the confusion brought by the human's sinful state (just so graphically demonstrated by Peter's denial).

As the drama becomes more intense at the outset of Part Two, we hear by contrast the most extensive aria, 'Erwäge', which with its accompanying arioso lays out the atoning purpose of the Passion, likening Jesus's bloodstained back to the rainbow signifying peace with God after the flood. This rather lurid language was replaced in Bach's last version of this Passion, but the rainbow imagery, together with the soothing swirls of the musical idiom, work particularly well in delineating the apex of the Passion setting as a whole, a moment of repose that so beautifully complements the savageness of the narrative music. Two arias feature dialogue between the soloist and other members of the vocal complement, almost as if Bach were trying out a texture that he was to exploit more extensively in his next Passion. 'Eilt, ihr angefochtenen Seelen' addresses the believers who are repeatedly asking whence they should hurry: their salvation lies at Golgatha, to which they should fly with the wings of faith. In other words, key theological notions of faith and atonement, to be sought in the present of the performance, are dramatized in one of the liveliest settings in the work. 'Mein teurer Heiland' is gentler, but no less compelling, with the solo bass (apparently sung by the same singer who sang Jesus's words in Bach's performances) asking if he is now freed from death. In a verse from the chorale 'Jesus, deine Passion', the other singers exclaim that Jesus, who has just died, now lives for evermore (and, in performance, this is just the illusion we gain, since the singer who represented Jesus continues to sing, now as a believer seeking salvation).

If the two dialogue arias point towards hope for the believer, the remaining two arias that occur in the latter part of the Passion return to the double emotion of sorrow and triumph as articulated in the opening chorus. 'Es ist vollbracht' (heard just before 'Mein teurer Heiland') takes up Jesus's last words, showing both their sorrowful import and their articulation of triumph (in the central section); 'Zerfließe, mein Herze' emphasizes the deep sorrow at Jesus's death, as if to compensate for the overall cosmic confidence of John's account. Yet, even in this most intensely sad piece of music there remains the remarkable confidence of the musical construction, the four interlocking lines and the recurrence of the segments seeming to sustain the sympathetic listener.

The arias thus provide a range of individual responses, some modelling the likely emotions of the listener, others exhorting the listener towards a particular resolution or action. The chorales perform a similar role for the listeners as a group, the body constituting the church. The use of several verses from some of the chorales binds the overall experience together in much the same way as the repetitions of the music within the choruses. Like the arias, the chorale verses are chosen to fit the specific point in the narrative. The first is taken from 'Herzliebster Jesu' (interestingly also the first chorale that Bach employed in the *Matthæw Passion*, bar the opening chorus), a text emphasizing Jesus's love at the point when he tells the arresting party to leave the disciples alone. The same chorale is used later at the point when Jesus's kingship is being questioned by Pilate; here the opening of the chorale verse fortuitously concerns Jesus's kingship, great throughout all ages. Perhaps most striking of all are the multiple uses of 'Jesu, deine Passion': first the verse that closes Part One, which concerns Peter's denial ('Petrus, der nicht denkt zurücker'); thinking 'backwards', which Peter so signally failed to do, is what so much of this music encourages us to do, with its nested repetitions. The second occurrence comes at the point where Jesus commends his mother to his friend, again with an apposite verse ('Er nahm alles wohl in acht'), and finally, there is the remarkable setting in 'Mein teurer Heiland' where the chorale points towards the resurrection.

The interlocking nature of the musical components and the juxtaposition of several textural layers mean that Bach's *John Passion* is potentially one of the most intense religious works he wrote, interpreting itself almost before it has presented the prescribed text. The range of interpretation is potentially infinite, which may well account for the way the work



still brings rich meanings and resonances even to those unsympathetic to its religious implications. Indeed, it may be that the Leipzig town council found Bach's compositional attitude overbearing: the very first performance in 1724 was coloured by a dispute about the venue. Bach seems to have prepared the libretto for the Thomaskirche rather than the Nikolaikirche, as expected, and only agreed to the latter venue when its harpsichord was mended and more room was provided for the performers. The following year Bach, unexpectedly, presented the *John Passion* again (quite possibly he had planned another work, one that for some reason could not be presented). Presumably to avoid direct repetition he modified the piece considerably, adding several chorale-based movements that perhaps rendered the Passion closer to the chorale cycle of cantatas performed that year. A third version, in the early 1730s, returned largely to the first, excising two insertions from Matthew's (or Mark's) Gospel but also containing movements that have since been lost. Towards the end of the 1730s Bach began to prepare a neat score of the work, presumably as a definitive version. Yet he broke off after some twenty pages and the score was finished a decade later by a copyist (mostly copying literally from earlier sources). There may have been some dispute behind this change of plan, since there is a report in the council minutes on 17 March 1739 where it was reported that a clerk had been dispatched to prohibit the Good Friday performance until permission had been granted. Bach's reported response was frosty: *'he did not care, for he got nothing out of it anyway, and it was only a burden; he would notify the Superintendent that it had been forbidden; if an objection were made on account of the text, it had already been performed several times'*. Certainly, several aspects of the text were modified ten years later when Bach returned to the work for the fourth time; perhaps the early enlightenment mood of the mid-century was no longer in sympathy with the imagery of arias such as 'Erwäge'. It may also be that the view of Jesus as victor in a battle with death was becoming old-fashioned, in an age where the human qualities of Jesus seemed more relevant. Nevertheless, Bach clearly put some effort in preparing his final performance (despite ignoring the refinements he had made in his incomplete score of 1739), and it is even possible that he performed the work again in 1750, just months before his death. Despite the various hiatuses and his almost constant tinkering with the details, it seems that Bach never lost his interest in this Passion, a work of restless beauty that never quite divulges all its secrets.

## Reconstructing the Original Vesper Liturgy

Of all the early reformers, Luther adhered most closely to the notion of liturgy as an effective way of organising worship. Yet, as is clear from his *Deutsche Messe* of 1526, flexibility was key: different approaches to the language, shape and musical setting of the liturgy were appropriate according to the needs of each locality and congregation. His liturgical prescriptions, and those that came from most of his successors, were all designed as a ground plan that could be modified in its details at any time. In Bach's time there is a reasonable amount of evidence for the general shape of the Leipzig services, and while these adhere quite closely to the overall form of the traditional Lutheran liturgies it is clear that each continued to be a living organism, drawing from a range of historical possibilities.

First, there are the church orders for Leipzig, which give the outlines for the standard services, the most important from a musical standpoint being the morning Eucharistic service on Sundays and other feast days, and the Vespers in the afternoon. Then there are some very useful notes by Bach himself from the beginning of his first two years in Leipzig – among many details, the use of the organ to 'prelude' the chorales and the main musical pieces is very clear, as is also the role of traditional motets in the liturgy. Finally, there is the sequence of detailed notes by Johann Christoph Rost, sexton of the Thomaskirche, from 1716-39, which were continued by his successors. This provides much useful information, showing the ways the liturgies developed over the years. Rost's notes on the Good Friday Vesper service, at which the large oratorio-style Passions were performed, probably date from around the first time these were introduced in the two main churches (1721) and this form seems to have persisted for the whole of Bach's Leipzig career.

It is impossible to recreate the precise Passion liturgy for a specific year, but there is certainly enough material to create an 'ideal' liturgy out of the range of possibilities, so this seems a good opportunity to present this with an 'ideal' version of Bach's *John Passion*, one cobbled from the revision that the composer began, but soon abandoned in 1739, and some of the modifications he made in the last performances of 1749-50. Just such an 'ideal' version is, in fact, what most of us have heard as the *John Passion* over the last few decades, since this is what Arthur Mendel constructed for his authoritative edition in the *Neue Bach-Ausgabe*. This is an amalgamation that has drawn considerable scholarly disapproval, but

it seems eminently appropriate for a liturgical reconstruction that is likewise cobbled from various sources. We can therefore confidently state that this project is a reconstruction of the 1739 performance, one that never actually took place. We do not adopt the textual changes made in the very latest version, but use the muted violins and organ for 'Betrachte, meine Seele' and 'Erwäge', since Bach did not use the violas d'amore and lute for these numbers beyond the first, 1724, version. Given that bassoons are mentioned at the opening of the 1739 manuscript, it seems reasonable to adopt the indications for a 'bassono grosso' from the 1749 version. 'Zerfließe, mein Herze' seems to have involved a violin in the last version and it is only here that the staccato marks are found; all woodwind parts are marked with slurs at these points. Here we therefore adopt the woodwind version without the staccato markings.

What is the point in putting together the *John Passion* with its original Vesper liturgy? First, it is clear that the components of the liturgy provide a very interesting window into the context in which Bach was working when he composed his Passions. These had to be designed in two parts to surround the sermon – arguably the most important part of any Lutheran liturgy – since it was here that the pastor sought to bring Scripture to life and persuade the congregation of the priceless value of Jesus's sacrifice. Not only was it important to cultivate faith, as the only human action that was completely non-negotiable, but it was also important to maintain this as a continual, regenerating state of mind lest the believer be struck down at precisely the moment faith wavered. Therefore, traditional liturgical shapes were adapted to provide this focus, and the hymns were placed as pillars around the liturgy, drawing out enduring theological points. Following the Roman tradition, psalms were sung in the early part of the service (replaced by a cantata on special occasions), and the principal Vesper canticle, the Magnificat, was sung after the sermon. On Good Friday both the psalms and Magnificat were simply replaced by the two halves of the Passion. Also removed at Passiontide were the sequence of prayers and long intercessions. This makes the role of the meditative, poetic aspects of Bach's Passions (mainly arias, but also the opening and closing choruses) especially important as substitutes for the prayers – subjective, personal, utterances that belong more to the worshipper than to characters within the Passion story.

The service begins with the congregational chorale set in the archaic Phrygian mode, 'Da Jesus an dem Kreuze stund'. This is almost a meditation in its own right, since it is a

Lutheran paraphrase of the ‘Seven Last Words’ of Jesus, long a vehicle for musical expression and often heard in its own devotional setting in both Lutheran and Roman Catholic traditions. This is essentially the collection of all Jesus’s last sayings, drawn from all four Gospels and thus recalling for the informed listener the different characters and emphases of each account. This leads into the specific Gospel chosen for the year concerned, which covers the first half of the story (in this case, quite short, since John’s account begins with Jesus’s arrest, and runs up to Peter’s denial). Then comes the next congregational ‘pillar’, ‘O Lamm Gottes’, which is an early Lutheran paraphrase of the Agnus dei, which emphasizes the central message of Jesus’s sacrifice redeeming the sins of the world.

Now comes the sermon, preached on a specific text, relevant to the service. The announcement of the chosen text is preceded by the single verse of the sermon hymn, ‘Herr Jesu Christ dich zu uns wend’. While we possess no Passion sermons directly connected with Bach’s services in Leipzig, there are several appropriate ones from his environment. For this reconstruction we have chosen Erdmann Neumeister’s sermon (published in a collection from 1720) on 2 Timothy 1, 10, about Jesus overcoming death and bringing life and immortality through the Gospel\*. Neumeister is a particularly appropriate choice since it was he who so trenchantly supported the notion of the operatic aria-recitative structure as the musical vehicle for meditative texts (Bach set some of his libretti in cantatas). He was also associated with the Weissenfels court, for which he wrote this collection of sermons (and where Bach occasionally worked, met his second wife, and also acquired an honorary title of Kapellmeister), and he commented ruefully on Bach’s failure to obtain a job in Hamburg on account of his not being able to pay the customary sum required for the privilege. Not only was he therefore exceptionally supportive of music in the liturgy but, in this particular sermon, chose as his secondary text verses from the chorale ‘Jesu, deine Passion’, one of the most important chorales employed in Bach’s *John Passion* setting (the verse, ‘Jesu, der du warest tot’, is therefore heard in both the sermon and in Bach’s aria, ‘Mein teurer Heiland’).

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\* The sermon and intercession are part of the additional content which is available for download from <http://www.linnrecords.com/linn-john-passion.aspx> for free.

The sermon is followed by a short intercession, bringing to a conclusion the only spoken section of the service, and this is followed by Part Two of the Passion (introduced with another traditional chorale for Passiontide ‘Christus, der uns selig macht’, set in the Phrygian mode and thus complementing the very opening of the service). This – much longer – half contains the long and dramatic trial scene in John’s account: Jesus’s crucifixion, death and burial. While concert performances of this Passion end on a wonderful note of hope and joy, with the chorale ‘Ach Herr, laß dein lieb Engelein’, in the Passion service this would have been followed immediately by the traditional funeral motet by Jacob Händl Gallus, ‘Ecce quomodo moritur’. Thus Bach’s chorus of lament, ‘Ruht wohl, ihr heiligen Gebeine’, is balanced by this motet, with the uplifting chorale as the centre point of what is essentially a triptych.

The service closes with a short sung responsory, collect and blessing, which lead to the final congregational chorale, ‘Nun danket alle Gott’, a famous hymn that provides a remarkable sense of joy in the atonement achieved through the Passion. One might almost come away with the idea that Easter is an afterthought; certainly, in the Lutheran tradition, Passion music always seems to be far more intense and significant than anything produced for Easter itself. In all, we get a sense of a largely symmetrical, formal event, into which Bach’s music is woven rather than imposed. It unfolds with something of the same sense of inevitability as does John’s story, which of all the Gospels renders the Passion virtually as a timeless event, established at the beginning of time and recurring on an annual basis. The congregation participates only in the four main chorales that in themselves almost constitute a complete Good Friday sequence. The communal aspect of the devotion is recalled by Bach’s own settings of chorales within the Passion narrative, and models for prayer, played out over the course of the complete musical setting, occur in the arias. Each component in the entire event provides a means of interpreting the others, so there is the potential for the experience of renewal and deepening understanding within a formalized frame of time.

As with the 1739 performance of the *John Passion*, we can be confident that the service presented here never took place. After all, we do not have a guide to the precise version of the melodies used for the chorales. The principal source of hymns is the *Neu Leipziger Gesangbuch*, compiled by Gottfried Vopelius in 1682. This is essentially a ‘cantional’, a

collection of the complete service music with nearly 500 pieces (largely chorales, but also including motets and chanted components of the service). Although it was reprinted several times and supplemented by other books, the first edition is the only one to contain music (much of it in several voices), so it is an indispensable source of service music for Bach's time in Leipzig. However, we have no idea of how the melodies might have changed over time, and the repertory of Bach's own harmonised chorales and chorale preludes shows that he encountered, perhaps even instigated, a number of variants.

Traditionally, chorales were sung in unison without accompaniment, the organ's main role being to provide the so-called 'chorale prelude' that set the mood, mode and melody of each hymn. However, towards the end of the seventeenth century, many institutions began to introduce organ accompaniment, and it is interesting to see the appearance of figured bass in the bass lines of Vopelius's settings. Some of Bach's early Arnstadt chorale preludes are written in the style of elaborate accompaniments, so these might be representative of the sort of practice in a small church. Whatever practice was adopted in Leipzig, Rost's notes tell us that the organ was not used in Lent (does this include Passiontide?), so stark, unaccompanied singing seems appropriate. But does this mean that the organ also did not provide the customary preludes? Given that Bach left such a rich collection of chorale preludes it seems clear that he must have expected these for Passiontide, at least at certain stages of his career. In Leipzig these would almost certainly have been improvised by the church's own organist (and not by the cantor, or director of music, Bach himself), so his own settings (drawn here from the Weimar collections, particularly the 'Orgelbüchlein') would not have been used.

Vopelius provides us with simple harmonizations, for use in places 'wo die Music im Schwange'. Settings such as these would have been very common in school singing practice and traditionally these could be sung in alternation with the congregation's unison. While it is likely that the *alternatim* practice had died out by Bach's time, it is worth hearing it applied here, not least to show how extraordinary and elaborate are Bach's settings within the Passion itself, compared with the 'norm'. Finally, this recording sets out to demonstrate the different levels of singing cultivated in the church and school environments of Bach's time: at the most basic level, all pupils were taught to sing chorales so that they could perform these not only in school but also lead the singing in the associated churches;

more advanced pupils learned to sing chorales in parts and also began to cultivate motets in the traditional Renaissance style (which were generally sung with several singers to each part). Only the very advanced pupils proceeded to the soloistic performance of the elaborate music composed by Bach himself. In all, then, there is a sense that all singers are accommodated in the liturgy of Bach's time; what we hear in concert performance is only the tip of a much larger iceberg, a culture of singing and participation that can only be fleetingly evoked in a modern reconstruction.

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This reconstructed liturgy, together with its sermon, would have been entirely impossible without the help of Prof. Robin Leaver who has done so much to promote the understanding of Bach's liturgical practice and the associated theological concerns. He has been extraordinarily generous in providing information on the liturgical sources, congregational chorales and their performing practice, and the Neumeister sermon, which was also his suggestion.

*To read a translation of these notes, please visit [www.linnrecords.com/recording-john-passion.aspx](http://www.linnrecords.com/recording-john-passion.aspx). A bibliography on the sources used is also provided on the Linn website.*