

The Broadway Symphony and Seattle Chamber Singers
George Shangrow, Music Director and Conductor

present

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH
Johannes Passion
The Passion According to St. John

Good Friday, March 29, 1991

Meany Theater

Evangelist ♦ Mukund Marathe
Jesus ♦ Peter Kechley
Pilate ♦ Doug Albertson
Soprano ♦ Danielle Sinclair
Alto ♦ Cynthia Beitmen
Tenor ♦ Stephen Wall
Bass ♦ Brian Box

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Program Notes

by George Shangrow

The Passion story has been presented in Christian churches since the fourth century. These presentations were in dramatic form with several readers handling the different characters: Christ, the Evangelist, the various individuals, and the crowd (turba). As early as the ninth century instructions as to interpretation appear: moving, held back, and to be sung higher. It was around this time that the tradition of the Evangelist be sung by a tenor or higher voice and that the Christ be sung by a bass or lower voice was established. The Passion story was presented between Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday and in Leipzig was used for the Good Friday Vespers service.

The Lutheran church continued the Roman tradition of not allowing elaborate music during the six weeks of Lent. This obviously proved a boon for church composers because it allowed a large amount of time and concentration for the large works needed for Passion and Easter time. With the St. John Passion, Bach presented his first major work during his new job as Cantor of St. Thomaskirche. He probably composed some of the work during his time at Köthen — incorporating many of the techniques he had developed there — but the bulk of the work was composed during the three weeks prior to the presentation.

Of the five Passion settings composed by Bach, only the St. John and the St. Matthew remain intact. Bach himself repeatedly performed only these two works so it would seem that the loss of the works may not be so much a problem. Scholars feel that Bach did not think the other works were as good as the two mentioned and that he probably took the most valuable movements from them and used them in other pieces. The change to a grand setting of the Passion with choruses, arias, different singers, and large instrumental forces came as a result of the creation of opera, oratorio, and cantata forms in the 17th century. The devices of melody accompanied by continuo or orchestra (recitative and *accompagnato*), arias with obbligato instruments, extensive choral movements, and polyphonic arrangements of choral melodies were all adopted for use in the Passion settings.

The recitative obviously advances. In the St. John Passion the Evangelist, Christ, and all of the other individual characters sing only recitative *secco* (only keyboard and cello). The chorus writing is one of the great features of this Passion. The turba choruses (crowd scenes) during the second part of the work provide a dramatic setting in the Judgement Hall unseen in any setting of the Passion before or since. The chorale settings form a rather idealized congregation — in Bach's time it is possible that the congregation sang along on the chorale melody. The texts of the chorales reflect the personal feelings of the listeners as a reaction to the story at any given time.

The arias are musical settings where text and music combine to isolate and explore a single emotional idea in a self-contained form. These works heighten the story in an emotional way that relates directly to the Gospel story but has text from another source. There are a number of librettists that have written text for the Passions, but by far the most well known of these is Barthold Heinrich Brockes. Settings of Brockes' Passion have been composed by Händel, Telemann, Keiser, and Mattheson — all of them famous at the time — and all of them

performed in Hamburg on four different days of Holy Week in 1719!

The musical form of the work does not conform well to that of the Gospel text. It is through the genius of Bach, not Saint John, that the work as a whole has a form and is so well able to convey the emotion inherent in the meaning of the Gospel. The center of the work is the chorale 'Durch dein Gefängnis...' which contains the text central to the understanding and religious meaning of the Passion. Around this chorale the various choruses form a large frame. The music of the surrounding choruses is virtually identical with different texts. The relationships between the texts of the similar choruses is an interesting one from an emotional point of view which the listener should investigate.

The choruses 'Wir haben ein Gesetz' and 'Lasset du diesen los' frame the central chorale. It always feels to me that the height of dramatic irony is displayed here in the inflexibility of humankind. Outside of these two works are the 'crucify' choruses, 'Kreuzige, Kreuzige' and 'Weg, weg mit dem.' Framing these are two sets of pieces. The earlier one starting with 'Nicht diesen, sondern Barrabam!' continues with the beautiful and reflective 'Betrachte' and the amazing tenor aria 'Erwäge.' This first set concludes with the mocking chorus 'Sei gegrüßet' where the soldiers bow and curtsy to Christ, referring to him as 'King of the Jews' in a very nasty way (as represented in the fast wind parts).

The corresponding set after the 'Weg, weg' chorus begins with 'Wir haben kein König' — certainly a musical reflection of the Barrabam chorus and a textual reinforcement. The following aria for bass 'Eilt' with its fascinating interjections by the chorus provides a dramatic directive towards Golgotha — and almost a direct opposite to the aforementioned arias. Finally, the chorus with the identical music to that of 'Sei gegrüßet' is the 'Schreibe nicht' chorus where the crowd instructs Pilate to not put the inscription above the cross. Note the ironic combination with the 'Greetings' chorus depicting the soldiers' earlier mocking. These choruses, and the two framing chorales 'Ach, grosser König' and 'In meines Herzens Grunde,' form the central core of the John Passion. As the framework extends, we see that the outer frames contain most of the arias and other chorales finally leading to the grand opening and closing choruses. Not included is the very last chorale 'Ach Herr, lass dein lieb' Engelein.' This very simple, straightforward statement Bach found to be the best way to contain or sum up the tremendous emotional content of the musical and scriptural work.

In listening to the Passions, as in listening to opera, it is important to follow the text translation. Bach is a master at setting text in recitative and so knowing what each work means as it is being sung can truly heighten the enjoyment of the music as well as giving a greater appreciation for Bach's genius. We perform the work in German because Bach wrote it in German and the individual words do not fit with the musical intention when performed in another language. The Evangelist is a storyteller supreme, and at his command the various personages and crowds make their interjections. As in any good drama, timing of cues is of the essence in conveying the emotional content — Bach's 'lead-ins' to the various choruses are especially fine.

Although Bach made several changes to the St. John

Passion, he ultimately returned to the original as he had composed it in 1723. This is unusual for Bach as most of the time he absolutely stuck with any revisions he had made. The work was done repeatedly by Bach in Leipzig over the next 27 years, as was the St. Matthew Passion. For the John Passion, both Bach's score and the Leipzig performance materials have come down to us intact so scholars have the sources needed for accurate study of the work.

For tonight's performance we are using a chorus that would be perhaps one and one-half to two times the size of Bach's forces, and accordingly, the orchestra is correspondingly larger. This decision is based partly on the musical demands of the work which make me think that if larger forces had been available to Bach, he would have used them, and partly because of the fact that our hall is much larger and has much drier acoustics than the St. Nicholas Church in Leipzig (where the work was first presented).

We use the Bärenreiter edition for tonight's performance. This is taken directly from the Neue Bach Gesellschaft.

Soloists

Tenor **Mukund Marathe** is making his fourth appearance as Evangelist with the Broadway Symphony/Seattle Chamber Singers. Marathe was born and raised in New York City and received his degree at Columbia University. He has won praise for his virtuosity and versatility in concert repertoire ranging from early music to modern jazz, with special acclaim for his interpretations of Bach and Handel. He made his Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center debuts with the National Chorale in Handel's *Messiah* and recently toured Spain with the Liria Chamber Orchestra singing *Messiah* and the Brahms *Zigeunerlieder*. With Amor Artis, he has sung Handel's *Alexander's Feast*, Honegger's *King David* and the American premiere of Donizetti's *Miserere*. He has performed in the Bach *St. John Passion*, the Schuetz *Musicalische Exequien* and a Bach Cantata Series with Musica Sacra. Other recent activities include *Judas Macabaeus* with the Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra, the Haydn *Theresienmesse*, Kurt Weill's *Kiddush* Bach's *Ascension Oratorio* with the National Chorale, Monteverdi Arias with the Long Island Baroque Ensemble and Stravinsky's *Reynard* with Robert Kraft.

Peter Kechley has been a featured soloist with the Seattle Chamber Singers for over twenty years, and has done solo work for several Seattle area churches and synagogues. Peter's operatic credits include performances in the world premieres of operas by Carol Sams and Huntley Beyer and extensive work with the University of Washington Opera Theatre, as well as being a preview artist for Seattle Opera. He also played an instrumental role in the BS/SCS Bach Year (1985), having programmed all twelve of the Cantata Sundays and performed as a soloist in many of the cantatas and major works.

Danielle Sinclair is a native of Kentucky and a graduate of Indiana University in Bloomington and the University of Northern Iowa. She has appeared with the Seattle Symphony as soprano soloist in Bach's *Magnificat* and Handel's *Dixit Dominus*, and performed Bach's Cantata 140, *Wachet Auf*, on the opening concert of the Seattle Symphony's 1990-91 Basically Baroque series. In March she performed the soprano solo in Brahms' *Ein Deutsches Requiem* with the Port Angeles Symphony. Miss Sinclair has been a Preview Artist for many Seattle Opera productions and has been a frequent soloist with Opera Northwest. She has been awarded study grants in the San Francisco Opera Merola Program auditions and was the 1990 winner of the 200+1 Vocal Competition.

Cynthia Beitmen, mezzo soprano, originally pursued an operatic career in the Baltimore-Washington, DC area, singing major roles in *Hansel and Gretel*, *Carmen*, *L'Ormino*, *Così fan Tutte* and *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. She then spent six years performing and teaching in Vienna, Austria, appearing as soloist in works by Buxtehude, Bach, Handel, Vivaldi, Pergolesi, and Mozart. Since her arrival, Ms. Beitmen has specialized in music of the medieval and baroque periods, most recently performing works by Guillaume de Machaut for the Early Music Society of the Islands in Victoria, BC.

Tenor **Stephen P. Wall** has appeared many times with the BS/SCS. He was the tenor soloist in this fall's opening concert, *Earthmakers*, Beethoven's *Symphony #9* as well as appearing in the title role in *The Return of Ulysses*. His credits with Seattle Opera include *Tannhauser* and *Die Meistersinger* and *War and Peace*. Mr. Wall has been a featured soloist with the Seattle, Spokane, Vancouver (B.C.) and Sapporo (Japan) Symphonies.

Baritone **Brian Box** is a native of Washington and received his Master of Music degree in vocal performance from Western Washington University. Mr. Box has appeared frequently with the BS/SCS as a soloist in cantatas and oratorios and with the Broadway Symphony in Mahler's *Songs of a Wayfarer*. Among his credits are performances of Brahms' *Four Last Songs* with the Western Washington University Orchestra and the leading role in Dominic Argento's opera *Postcard from Morocco* at the University of British Columbia. He is a regular performer with Northwest Opera in Schools, Etc. and Seattle Opera's education program and recently made his Seattle Opera debut as the Corporal in *The Daughter of the Regiment*.

Doug Albertson is presently a graduate teaching assistant at Portland State University working towards a Masters degree in Choral Conducting. Doug recently returned to the Pacific Northwest from a stint in California, where he led the music program at Santa Rosa First Methodist Church, as well as directing a select a cappella group called the Santa Rosa Chamber Singers. Mr. Albertson recently sang the role of Pilate in the *John Passion* under Robert Shaw. Other credits include the Alaska Bach Festival, the Anchorage Civic Opera, the Santa Rosa Symphony, the Sonoma County Chorus, and during the 1979-80 concert season he was a member of the Seattle Chamber singers.

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George Shangrow, conductor

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