

"About the St. Matthew Passion"

If anyone enjoys detective work, then tracing the origins of the St. Matthew Passion is just the job for you! The existence of a surviving score and parts for Bach's 1736 performance might well suggest to you that this is the year of its public debut, but it has been a long held view that the origins were earlier and so, for the moment, our journey of discovery begins at Leipzig in the 1720s.

The detective work done already that attributes the date of its debut as Leipzig on Good Friday 1727 uses fragments of music that date from 1724 onwards to draw some conclusions, yet keeps an open mind. What also emerges is a valuable picture of Bach's working environment especially in 1727 and 1729, the pressures and how he coped with the expectations of his position. In general we know comparatively little about these¹.

An event in 1729 tells us more. Bach's former Patron Prince Leopold of Arnhalt-Cöthen died in March 1729 and funeral music had to be arranged. With Passiontide approaching, Leopold's death came as Bach was busy preparing for the most important services in the church year, a timescale of just three weeks between the funeral and Good Friday/Easter Sunday. Further evidence emerges that the *'Passionsmusik'* already existed then as revealed in a letter Bach wrote to a pupil at the time declining a request to borrow the material². Bach set about providing the funeral music in a way with which we have become very familiar - by borrowing from his other works. He took two movements from the *'Trauerode'* Cantata BWV 198 (1727) and movements from the St. Matthew to form the now lost *"Klagt, Kinder, klagt es aller Welt"* BWV 244a³. Ever the practical composer!

Why is the early version of the St. Matthew significant?

In the Preface of the vocal score published by Bärenreiter in 2006 the editor and scholar Professor Andreas Glöckner begins by stating *'Many questions concerning the genesis of the St. Matthew Passion (BWV 244) still remain unanswered'*. Briefly, Glöckner tell us that the score of the early version has only survived in the hand of a copyist, Johann Christoph Farlau, and was produced after Bach's death i.e. post 1750. Furthermore, he goes on to say that Farlau did not copy from Bach's surviving score of 1736, but had to use an older one - now lost - attributed to the 1729 Passion performance. From

Farlau's copy the differences between Bach's early version and the version with which we are most familiar today are revealed. Notably there is only one continuo section; the setting of the Passion chorale (No. 17) has different words. No recorders are present for the tenor recitative (No 19). It is a simple chorale *"Jesum laß ich nicht von mir"* that closes Part I, not "O Mensch beweine..."⁴. The opening aria in Part II is allocated to the Bass in Chorus I, not the Alto; there are significant differences in the vocal line of the tenor aria (No 35) "Geduld, geduld..." and a lute replaces the viola da gamba. In rehearsals we have had to be alert to the changes in phrasing and slurring in this version to those in the more familiar 1736 score and in our preparations we have also noticed that Farlau might have been *thinking* contemporarily while copying the recitative with recorders (No 19) using the 1729 score. These instruments were out of fashion after 1750, so is their omission a mistake?

We are intrigued by this early version because we are curious to know the full story. It also provides our audience with the chance to think afresh about the St. Matthew Passion and its journey into our lives. From the work's origins to Mendelssohn's historic revival at Berlin 1829 (drastically cut) and its restoration to Leipzig (1841 - most of the cuts restored); in the UK, the gargantuan performances of the late 19th century Victorian England to Paul Steinitz's historic performance on 22 March 1952, the beginning of his quest to *'get back to Bach in its original form'* that presaged the period style presentations we greatly enjoy today. The story of the St. Matthew is still not complete, we are sure.

Margaret Steinitz



"Using the slimline forces suggested by the sources and surviving evidence from the time of Bach, our performance hopes to restore a fresh and vital St Matthew, in keeping with the pioneering spirit of the London Bach Society. Be prepared to be intrigued and delighted."

Anthony Robson

Anthony Robson guest director for the performance

¹Bach's letters & documents are published in the New Bach Reader ed. Mendel & David, rev. Wolff, 1998 WW Norton & Co.

²Preface to vocal score BWV 244b/Andreas Glöckner, publ. Bärenreiter 2006

³Köthener Trauermusik

⁴See also Orgel-Büchlein BWV 622

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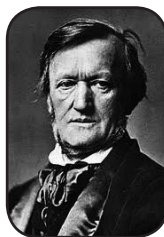
Bach expert John Butt directing Steinitz Bach Players at the RCO London Organ Forum, November 2012 (part of 22nd Bachfest 2012-13)



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Bach Notelets



Richard Wagner,
controversial,
enigmatic and Bach
follower

WAGNER 200th

Richard Wagner on Bach

...the most stupendous miracle in all music!

Richard Wagner was born at Leipzig on 22 May 1813, and baptised at the Thomaskirche. He studied composition with Christian Weinlig *Thomaskantor* and at Leipzig University. A portrait of Bach hung on the wall in Wagner's study at Bayreuth.

The city will celebrate the bi-centenary with productions of Wagner's creations at the Leipzig Opera.

More on our website www.bachlive.co.uk

BRITTEN 100th



Benjamin Britten
1913-1976

It was during the 1960s in particular that Benjamin Britten turned his attention to the study and performance of Bach. When Peter Pears appeared at the London Bach Society's annual performances of the St. Matthew Passion, Britten was in the audience and he shared series of Bach Cantata programmes recorded for the BBC Third Programme (now BBC Radio 3) with Paul Steinitz, a few of which were featured in the famous 9.30am Bach cantata slot on Sunday mornings. Britten's legacy of Bach recordings is best represented by the disc he made for Decca of Bach's St. John Passion, with Pears (Evangelist) and Wandsworth School Boys Choir. There is more about Britten on our website including the composer's work for the community.

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