

Bach *Christmas Oratorio* BWV 248
(Novello edition ed. N. Jenkins)**HISTORY AND ORIGINS OF THE WORK**

Although Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* (1734) has been as popular a work for choirs and choral societies to perform as his two Passions, it has striven against Handel's *Messiah* as the obvious work to choose for a Christmas performance. Its daunting length when performed uncut, and the need for a work with a less demanding orchestration (such as that found in *Messiah*) has probably meant that it has been chosen less often than it should have been. This may go some way to explain why there has been no new English edition since the original Novello Octavo edition, containing John Troutbeck's translation, of 1874. My researches in the British Library have turned up no other published translation apart from an incomplete version by Helen Johnston - also published in the year 1874. Helen Johnston (1813-87) was the first person to translate any of the major Bach choral works into English, producing her translation of the *St Matthew Passion* for Sir William Sterndale Bennett's 1862 edition. She does not appear to have turned her attention to the *St John Passion*, which was receiving frequent performances in England during the 1870s under the direction of Sir Joseph Barnby, since he used a translation made by a Minor Canon of Westminster Abbey - the Rev. John Troutbeck (1832-99). Troutbeck was an indefatigable translator, not only of all Bach's major choral works, but also of Oratorios by Beethoven, Brahms, Dvorak, Gounod, Liszt, Saint-Saens, Schumann and Weber. He also translated much Opera and compiled several of the standard Hymnals and Psalters of the day. Thus, Helen Johnston must have been very disappointed to find that her work on the *Christmas Oratorio* (for the publisher Lamborn Cock of Bond Street) was in direct competition with Troutbeck's edition for Novello's better known Octavo series. Her translation had been produced for Sterndale Bennett as before, and was first performed by him at the Hanover Square Rooms in 1861. Whether she translated more than just Parts 1 and 2 it will be hard to discover at this late stage. However, suffice it to say that I have studied what remains of her version, in case any of it was to be of assistance to me in preparing this new translation, and I found it less inspired than her *St Matthew* translation. Faced with Troutbeck's infinitely superior work she may simply have abandoned her own task.

So, these are the previous editions which I have been able to consult in my endeavours to produce a new, singable, English edition for the new century. Fortunately I now have the experience of having produced the New Novello Choral Edition of the *St Matthew Passion* (1997) and *St John Passion* (1999) behind me, and I have been able to apply the same rigid set of principles.

These have been : to consult, at every stage, the version printed in the *Neue Bach Ausgabe* (1960), which is the accepted Urtext and replaces the otherwise excellent *Bach Gesellschaft* edition of 1851-99; and to correct the notation, slurring, dynamics etc. of all the parts. As with the *St Matthew* and the *St John* the emphasis of this edition is on

providing a score that will assist singers in rehearsal and performance as much as the previous Novello editions have done.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Over a long period I have consulted many of my fellow singers for their comments and advice on what versions of the text work best in English, and many such variants are used here. I am grateful to the choirs which tried out this edition in performance at Christmas 1998, thus helping me to judge whether it worked or not, and assisting me in eliminating any glitches from the scores and parts. They include the Witham Choral Society, the Windsor and Eton Choral Society, and the Brighton Chamber Choir. Thanks are also due to Hywel Davies for his help in seeing this and the Bach Passions through to publication.

EDITORIAL PROCEDURE

TEXT

The need to respect Bach's vocal lines has led to a complete overhaul of how the English text fits the music.

Biblical text

My concern with the Gospel text has been similar to what I have achieved in the *St Matthew and St John Passions* :

to make the Authorised Version of the King James Bible fit Bach's German notation as nearly as possible - but with a certain flexibility, so that it retains its unmistakable quality yet serves the needs of Bach's music. (There are often more syllables in the German than in the English.) Where extra syllables have been required, I have chosen a language which is consistent with the Authorised Version so that it is not easy to detect what is original and what is not. This is somewhat akin to a picture restorer filling in missing areas of paint in such a sensitive and stylistic way that the whole canvas looks complete and by the same hand. Although Troutbeck's version of the *secco* recitatives gave me an indication of how to approach the problem, this was one area where he treated Bach's original notation very freely: so that anyone who knows and loves the 1874 edition will find these sections to be very different in this new version. But anyone who knows Bach's original, through performing it in German, will recognize that the vocal line now has the same underlay as in the original.

In this present edition the lay-out of the vocal line is written and beamed as for the original German. However, where differences occur, the larger notation refers to the English text, which - being on top of the German - makes it more practical for those performing in English. Care has been taken to ensure that the English underlay is clear, even when the beaming and slurring is not absolutely in accordance with it. The only melisma slurring that is shown is Bach's own in the original German. Otherwise melisma is shown - as is traditional in current Novello house style - by word extension lines.

Non-Biblical text

In order to understand the movements of the *Christmas Oratorio* with non-Biblical texts it is useful to understand their origins. The great choruses (excepting the Chorales) which open and close each of the six Cantatas, together with the Arias which

comment on the unfolding Biblical narrative, are drawn principally from three secular Cantatas which Bach composed in 1733-4 in praise of various royal members of the House of Saxony, viz: *Herkules auf dem Scheidewege* BWV 213 (1733), *Tönet, ihr Pauken!* BWV 214 (1733) and *Preise den Glücke* BWV 215 (1734). These were written in collaboration with Bach's usual librettist, who also produced the verse for the *St Matthew Passion*, Christian Friedrich Henrici 'Picander' (1700-64). When Bach came to re-use this material some months later it is likely that Picander helped him, since the change is effected in such a fluent way that the new sacred text often uses similar words to the original secular one. For example *Schlafe, mein Liebster, und pflege der Ruh* becomes *Schlafe, mein Liebster, genieße der Ruh*. However, unlike his other verse for Bach, the Christmas Oratorio text does not appear in Picander's published collection "*Ernst-Schertzhafte und Satyrische Gedichte*" (Leipzig 1737), which seems to indicate that it was perhaps a joint effort rather than entirely his own work.

Although Troutbeck's translation tried to respect the original complicated rhyme-scheme of these movements and gave us some memorable lines such as - *Prepare thyself Zion* (no.4), *Mighty Lord* (no. 8), *Lord thy mercy, thy compassion comforts us and sets us free* (no. 29) - there were many areas where his text was beginning to show its age. And so I began my translation afresh, retaining those portions of Troutbeck (including the lines above) which worked well, but determined to be entirely faithful to the German rhyme-scheme and scansion, and taking particular care to provide texts which would break into the same small sections that Bach's frequent musical repetitions demand.

My hope is that today's singers will find several advantages when they are singing the new texts provided by this edition : the 'breathing' and phrasing will now be identical to the German; good 'open' vowels have been chosen for high-lying phrases; and - as all rhymes and internal rhymes have been respected, yet within simple language - the meaning of the texts should come through with more clarity.

The Chorale texts have also been considerably revised, although here and there Troutbeck's voice will still be recognisable. The sections of his 125-year-old version which appear the most stilted to our ears today and which present the greatest challenge to the translator are the Accompanied recitative (*Arioso*) movements which precede each Aria. Here the verse-lines are often of unequal length, and the rhyme-scheme is extremely variable. By retaining the language of the King James Bible and the Book of Common Prayer, and by being careful with the rhyme-words, I hope to have produced a text which will not quickly date; and which, like those two great glories of the English language, will remain both comprehensible and immutable in a world where today's language is composed of ever-changing idiom and slang.

MUSIC

The musical text of this *performing* edition is derived from the *Neuen Bach-Ausgabe* (1960). I have also taken note of the musical text of the original versions of such Arias and Choruses as are derived from BWV 213, 214 & 215. This has occasionally cleared up a notational discrepancy in the manuscript, such as, for example, the question of whether the *d* in no. 15 at bar 101 should still be sharpened the first time it appears: comparison with BWV 214 shows that Bach expected a *d* natural. Other useful comparisons have revealed where Bach might have expected to hear musical decorations, and where he

might have expected his singers to breathe in the longer phrases. For example, the enormously long phrase at the end of Aria no.19, bb. 143-152 originally had a different underlay which presented less of a challenge to the singer's breath-control; and the original underlay of bb. 117-124 of Aria no. 15 allowed easier breaths to be taken than the revised text permits. I have introduced "cut-slurs" in several places where the new translation corresponds more closely to Bach's original (secular) underlay rather than to his revision. Such places can be found, for example, in Aria no.8 bar 83 and Aria no. 15 bar 117. It has been in the interests of textual clarity that Bach's original underlay has been preferred in these few cases.

For those interested in knowing more about Bach's compositional process in producing this so-called *parody* work I include a chart showing his self-borrowings. It appears that the *Ariosos* and *secco Recitativos* are all original compositions, as are those Chorales which have orchestral accompaniment (e.g. nos. 23 & 64) and the Pastoral Symphony (no. 10). He also abandoned the idea of borrowing the last movement of BWV 213 for *Ehre sei dir, Gott gesungen* (no. 43) and composed a fresh chorus, probably because the required pair of horns were not going to be used in the fifth cantata. Similarly, Aria no.31, which Alfred Dürr speculated as being intended for a movement from BWV 215, was composed afresh; and the Aria which he proposed was, in fact, used for Aria no.47 instead. The origins of Terzetto no.51 and the "turba" chorus no.21 have not been established, and so it is possible that these are also new compositions.

At least three movements from the sixth cantata (nos. 54, 57, 62) may have been taken from a "lost" cantata. Such a work - BWV Anh.. I 10, dating from August 1731 and with a libretto by Picander - has been suggested as a possibility on the grounds of the similar scansion of its text: as the opening lines will show : *So kampfet nur, ihr mintern tone* (Anh. I 10) *Herr, wenn die stolzen Feinde schnauben* (no. 54). A comparison of texts has proved to be one of the most useful ways of detecting likely parodies, and has helped scholars to attempt a reconstruction of the "lost" *St Mark Passion* of 1731 which was known to have been based on such pre-existing works as the *Trauer-Ode*. In fact, the "turba" choruses no. 26 & 45 in the *Christmas Oratorio* may have been taken from similar "turbae" - *Ja nicht auf der Fest* and *Pfui dich* - in the "lost" *St Mark Passion*.

In the composition of the *Christmas Oratorio* some of the following movements were taken over completely unchanged, save for the new text, whilst others were transposed, given to different voices, had their instrumentation changed or were otherwise modified:

<u>Christmas Oratorio BWV 248</u>				<u>Source</u>	
1	Jauchzet, frohlocket	=	BWV 214	1	<i>Tönet, ihr Pauken</i>
4	Bereite dich, Zion	=	BWV 213	9	<i>Ich will dich nicht horen</i>
8	Großer Herr	=	BWV 214	7	<i>Kron und Preis</i>
15	Frohe Hirten	=	BWV 214	5	<i>Fromme Musen!</i>
19	Schlafe, mein Liebster	=	BWV 213	3	<i>Schlafe, mein Liebster</i>
24	Herrscher des Himmels	=	BWV 214	9	<i>Blühet, ihr Linden</i>
29	Herr, dein Mitleid	=	BWV 213	11	<i>Ich bin deine</i>
36	Fallt mit Danken	=	BWV 213	1	<i>Laßt uns sorgen</i>
39	Flößt, mein Heiland	=	BWV 213	5	<i>Treues Echo</i>
41	Ich will nur dir	=	BWV 213	7	<i>Auf meinen Flügeln</i>
47	Erleucht auch meine	=	BWV 215	7	<i>Durch die von Eifer</i>

THE REHEARSAL PIANO ACCOMPANIMENT

This edition is provided with a new rehearsal accompaniment in which the material based on instrumental parts is in normal-size type and editorial realisation of the figured bass is in cue-size. It endeavours to embrace all of the orchestration, although it has not been possible to preserve every part at the correct pitch: but in this I am consistent with every other edition currently available. Figures have been given for all of the chords in the *secco* Recitative sections.

The Continuo Part

In line with present-day performance practice I have realised the Continuo part of the *secco* Recitative sections in short chords (following the example of the original manuscript parts of the *St Matthew Passion*). However, for reasons of scholarship, Bach's original long notation is shown in the vocal score in large type and the editorial short chords are in cue-size type. This is reversed in the instrumental parts, so that they are easier for the performers to read. The editor's experiences in performing from this material prior to its publication has led him to feel confident that this system will be popular with performers, and will save time in rehearsal. Hitherto, continuo players have spent considerable amounts of precious rehearsal time in adapting the long notation given in previous editions into the short chords favoured by Baroque specialists today. The system employed here will be found to be uncontroversial and may be altered or adapted at will. Whenever the narrative becomes reflective (as, for example, in the last bars of nos. 11 or 30) Bach's original long notation is retained, as it also is in the accompaniment to the words of the Prophet in no. 50. Such passages are designated "*sostenuto*".

THE ORCHESTRAL SCORE AND PARTS

The score and parts, available on hire, have been completely newly set and correspond exactly with this vocal score. All movement numbers (which retain the old BWV numberings) and bar-numbers agree with each other. Thus there will be no problem in rehearsal for every performer to identify a given passage. The two Continuo parts (*Keyboard* and *'Cello/Bass/Bassoon*) contain the full text of the Recitativos, whilst the other instrumental parts contain such word-cues as are helpful.

The orchestral parts may be used for both 'period' instrument and 'modern' instrument performances.

Trumpets and Timpani (*Parts 1, 3 & 6 only*) Trumpet 1 requires a virtuoso player. The other two parts are less demanding, but players 2 & 3 often assist Trumpet 1. The timpani are tuned to A and D.

Horns (*Part 4 only*) Although designated *corn da caccia 1 & 2* these may be played on the French Horn. They are only required in nos. 36 and 42.

Flutes (*Parts 1, 2 & 3 only*) There are two parts, and no. 8 is included in the Flute 2 part in case any doubling is required in an Aria where one Flute can get lost in the string / solo trumpet texture.

Oboes Bach's requirements are for 2 *oboes*, 2 *oboi d'amore* and 2 *oboi da caccia*. However, the workload can be undertaken by 4 players, as the 2 d'amores interchange with the 2 normal oboes and can be played by the same players. This leaves two further

players required for the 2 da caccias required in movements 10, 12, 14, 17, 18, 19, 21 & 23 of Cantata 2.

However, there is a common practice among wind players to distribute the workload more evenly, and so the 2 *oboe da caccia* parts also contain all the oboe music, making it possible for 2 players to concentrate solely on the oboe d'amore music, and leaving the other two to play both oboe and (in Cantata 2 only) oboe da caccia. The *Cor Anglais* may be substituted for the oboe da caccia.

The two *oboe / oboe d'amore* parts contain transpositions of the d'amore music for those occasions when no oboi d'amore are available. This permits the music to be played throughout on 2 oboes, and only very occasional notes which lie outside the oboe's compass will have to be omitted or played an octave higher.

Strings The string parts contain all the solo vocal lines and text in movements where it will be helpful, such as the accompanied Recitatives nos. 13, 38, 40, 45, 49, and 56. Care has been taken over the positioning of page-turns.

Cello / Bassoon / Double Bass (Violone) A single part is provided which is also used by the '*cello continuo*' player. It will be left to the individual performer or conductor to decide in which movements the Bassoon and Bass (Violone) will play. In arias and choruses where it is decided to include them in the Ritornelli only, clear indications are given as to where they should play and where they should be *tacet*. In the *secco* recitatives it is clearly marked where the '*cello continuo*' plays alone.

Keyboard Continuo This is the part from which the continuo should be played. The vocal score, though furnished with figures in the Recitativos, is no adequate substitute since the rest of its keyboard part is a piano reduction for rehearsal purposes. The *Keyboard Continuo* part contains the figured bass throughout, and a new realisation which will be of enormous assistance to those not used to improvising from the figured bass.

EDITORIAL MARKINGS

All editorial markings are shown in brackets, with the exception of the short continuo chords described above (in *The Continuo Part*) and editorial slurs which have a line through them (cut-slurs).

Dynamics Bach used dynamics sparingly in the *Christmas Oratorio*. Although they can mean what we expect them to mean - as in Chorus no. 21 bars 25 - 31 & 57 - 61 where they indicate a sudden change of dynamic to *piano* followed by a resounding *forte*, and Aria no. 39 where the frequent changes of dynamic represent an echo effect - in the Arias they can indicate the difference between an orchestral ritornello and an accompanying passage - viz. Aria no.31 bars 25, 61, 73, 99,103, 134 etc. Editorial dynamics have been included in square brackets where they will be of assistance. For example: in choruses such as no.1, 24, 43, 54 (and elsewhere) they assist the contrapuntal vocal entries, and in orchestrated chorales such as no.9 & 64 they help to give these powerful movements an overall shape which builds to a climax.

No dynamics have been included in the 4-part harmonized chorales. In the editor's experience every conductor has a different way of performing them, which can range

from the 'matter-of-fact' to the 'intense and emotional'. Ivor Atkins, in the preface to his 1929 edition of the *St John Passion*, probably caught the mood right when he said "no attempt has been made to suggest any particular expression for the Chorales. Such expression should be simple, and should spring forth naturally....."

Appoggiaturas Editorial appoggiaturas in the Recitativo sections are marked, as is the current custom, by an [x] over the note. When they appear in the choral parts they have usually been introduced to make that line conform to a doubling instrumental part, as in Chorus no.1 bar 122 and no.36 bars 43 & 171/172 where the sopranos are doubled by Flutes or Horns, Oboe and Violin. In such cases the note is in cue-size, within brackets.

CUTS

Because of its length the *Christmas Oratorio* is often performed with cuts. Despite the fact that Bach himself performed it over six different feastdays between Christmas and Epiphany 1734-5 the evidence of the manuscript's title page, where he calls it an *Oratorium*, shows that he considered the six cantatas to form a single coherent cycle. So there is no reason why choirs should not continue performing it as an entity, in the manner of Handel's *Messiah*. However, cutting it down to an acceptable length for a modern-day performance is not a straightforward task.

The ideal scenario is to perform the whole work uncut. Whereas a rule of thumb used to be that each cantata lasted approximately 30 minutes and that the total work was therefore three hours in duration, this is no longer the case. Sprightly baroque rhythms are now the norm, reducing the length of each cantata to between 24 and 29 minutes. On a recent recording by one of leading baroque specialist groups the complete performance is achieved in 2 hours 20 minutes, - but this would be longer in public performance, with added time needed for entrances and exits, tuning etc.

UNCUT VERSION

The whole work could be performed within a 3-hour concert span (just) as long as the interval was kept short (to say 20 minutes maximum): viz.

Parts 1, 2 & 3 - 7.30pm - 8.55pm; *Parts 4, 5 & 6* - 9.15pm - 10.30pm. An alternative way of performing the complete work is to select an earlier starting time and make a feature of the longer interval.

CUT VERSION "A" : THE 5 CANTATA OPTION - OMITTING CANTATA 4

One important consideration when cutting this work is the instrumentation. Only Cantata 4 requires 2 Horns. Apart from the Oboi da Caccia (see above) the other wind or brass instruments are required in at least 3 of the cantatas, and the strings and continuo are present throughout. That makes cutting the entire cantata a very real, and practical proposal. Another consideration is the biblical narrative. Cantatas 1-3 tell the familiar nativity story from St Luke's Gospel and end with the angels returning to heaven and the shepherds going on their way praising God. Cantatas 5-6 tell the story as it appears in St Matthew's Gospel, and introduce Herod and the Wise Men. But Cantata 4 has only one portion of biblical narrative : the Presentation in the Temple and naming of the infant Jesus (no.37). To cut this whole cantata, therefore would do little damage to the unfolding of the narrative. On the debit side are the loss of a familiar and much-loved chorus *Fallt*

mit Danken (no.36) and two fine arias. On the credit side are the retention of all of St Luke's story (Cantatas 1-3) before the interval and all of St Matthew's (Cantatas 5-6) after the Interval, with the added bonus that the second half is shorter than the first: viz.

Parts 1, 2 & 3 - 7.30pm - 8.55pm; *Parts 5 & 6* - 9.25pm - 10.15pm (allowing a 30-minute interval.)

CUT VERSION "B" : SELECTIVE CUTS

If instrumentation is not a problem, and the 2 Horns are available, then the work must be cut selectively. Since the choir will want to sing all of their choruses in view of the fact that they are not kept as busy as they are in the two Passions, then the axe must fall on the arias. As it is a good idea to have the second half shorter than the first (as in "A" above) then these should be principally dropped from the last 3 cantatas. Also, in fairness to the solo singers, it should be done evenhandedly.

Cutting the following arias will reduce the overall length of the Concert by the same amount as "A" without any soloist feeling that their part has been cut to ribbons. In fact, each still has either 2 Arias (Alto & Tenor) or 1 Aria and 1 Duet (Soprano & Bass) in addition to sundry recitatives: viz.

omit nos. 31, 47, 51, 57, 61 & 62 (this necessitates finishing no.60 after 5 complete bars with a full-close in F sharp minor). In addition two further arias may be shortened by reducing their *da capos* to a minimum: viz. no.19 - perform all up to *da capo* and then repeat bars 97-112; no.29 - perform all up to *da capo* and then repeat bars 98-114.

Making these cuts does no harm to the key-structure, preserves all of the biblical narrative and speeds up the pace of each cantata as the second half of the concert progresses. On the credit side 3 slowish numbers (31, 47, 51) are lost which can seem to hold up the flow of events; but on the debit side two very spry and rhythmically interesting arias (57, 62) are also lost.

CUT VERSION "C" : THE 4 CANTATA OPTION - OMITTING 2 CANTATAS

There will always be occasions when, for reasons of time, performing four of the six cantatas will seem a sensible option. The editor has known of performances when only Parts 1-4 were performed, with an interval after Part 2. Although omitting the story of the Magi this retains all of St Luke's Gospel; but the closing chorus (no. 42 with 2 Horns) does not make a particularly exhilarating finale. To cope with this problem there have also been performances of Parts 1, 2, 3 & 6 with the interval also after Part 2. However, in this scenario Herod appears to address the three Wise Men in no. 55 whilst being unaware of their arrival or their motive for it (in "cut" no. 44). It is for this reason that selective cutting, as in Cut Version "B", is preferable.

In the editor's opinion no cut version is ideal, but where such a decision has to be made Versions "A" and "B" represent the "least-worst" options!

Neil Jenkins
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