

St Matthew Passion – J.S. BachNew Novello Choral Edition*PREFACE*

by NEIL JENKINS

Most of the English-speaking choral singers who make up their country's thriving choirs and choral societies will have sung Bach's great Passions in English at some time or another. Once upon a time they would have had a choice of editions to work from, prepared by the leading organists and musicians of the day. Latterly there have been fewer options. Since the last 50 years have seen tremendous advances in the understanding and performance practice of Baroque music, that has left today's performers with a simple choice to make: either - perform the *St. Matthew Passion* in outdated English editions or - opt for the modern scholarship of a German edition and perform it in a language which puts the drama and great spirituality of this masterpiece at one remove from the audience.

Having known this work for all of my singing life I am one of those who believes that a performance in the listener's and performer's native language can have a most compelling effect. Since most Easter performances are, in essence, acts of worship, it makes sense to do the worshipping in the vernacular.

However, in accordance with the recent practice adopted in the new Novello edition of vocal scores, the original German will also be found in this edition, beneath the English text. Thus it will be possible to perform this great work now in either language; - when performing in German the English will stand as a useful point of reference as a translation; - and when performing in English, it will be possible to keep an eye on how closely it conforms to the original German.

I have been very lucky to have been able to consult some eminent colleagues whilst preparing this edition. Firstly I must acknowledge the help given me by *Sir David Willcocks*, conductor of the *Bach Choir* from 1960 to 1998, who loaned me the *Bach Choir* material and kept a watchful eye on the undertaking. This edition is, in fact, dedicated to the *Bach Choir*, whose tradition of annual performances in English goes back a hundred years. They have been extremely helpful in giving me access both to their records and to the working papers relating to their current version of the text. Over a long period of time 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. Singers who have taken an active part in advising me on the biblical text include the leading Evangelists of our day: *Robert Tear* and *Ian Partridge*.

There have been three elements to the preparation of this edition.

1. The need to respect Bach's notes has led to a complete overhaul of how the English text fits the music. When the original translations were produced in the 19th century, their compilers felt that sacred writ was unalterable. Consequently Bach's notation suffered considerably, particularly in those places where the German biblical text had more (or less) syllables than the Authorised Version.

The answer to this problem has been to use the Authorised Version wherever practicable, (although in a way that allows of some latitude in substituting alternative words where necessary), and to utilise the alterations provided by the *Bach Choir* text or those in common usage amongst today's generation of singers. Occasionally there has been the need to rethink a passage totally; but the language used has always been that of the Authorised Version. No anomalies have been allowed to creep in. Each of Bach's notes is now represented, and the lacunae of previous editions have been restored. Some note lengths have been tampered with, but none has ever been altered by more than a half - thus (to be technical for a moment) a crotchet can appear as two quavers, or two crotchets may be sung as a minim. Some slurring has been allowed - but, once again, subject to strict restrictions : only two notes may ever be slurred over one syllable. (In the original German of the Evangelist's part there are several instances of this.) This has allowed the text to proceed at pace without the addition of makeweight words that are included simply to make up enough syllables.

2. The non-biblical text has also been thoroughly overhauled. The *St. Matthew Passion* contains a succession of Arias, Choruses and Chorales which reflect on the story as it unfolds. Apart from the traditional Chorales (the hymns of the Lutheran Church) these are the work of *Christian Friedrich Henrici* 'Picander' (1700-64). The first person to translate the *St. Matthew* into English was *Helen Johnston* (1813-1887) and the translation of Picander's texts provided her with the greatest hurdle. For some reason she frequently abandoned his scansion, and provided texts that only fitted by altering Bach's underlay. Although this was often because of the impossibility of finding enough two-syllable words for rhyming purposes (since the German language is rich in such rhyming possibilities, whereas the English language rhymes best with one-syllable words) yet she occasionally departed from the sense of the original, as Elgar and Atkins noted in their preface. Helen Johnston's version was prepared for Sterndale Bennett's edition of 1862, and remained the only one in use for 32 years until the *Rev. John Troutbeck* (1832-1899) produced his version in 1894. His text utilises variant Biblical readings from the Revised Version and tries to improve on those areas where Johnston was thought to be weakest. But there are several places where he reuses her text without acknowledgement.

These two English texts are the basis for all later editions. Stanford's 1910 edition ignores *Troutbeck* and uses *Johnston* throughout, improving it here and there. Edward Elgar and Ivor Atkins brought out the first version of their famous edition for Novello in 1911 and carried the revision process one stage further. They looked at both existing translations side by side, and selected a line from one, and then a line from the other, and so on. As they said in their preface "*this edition aims at retaining all that is best in both. Where neither was completely satisfactory, our object has been to replace it by a translation more faithful to the original....*"

Viewed from today, it now appears that the end result of their work often does justice to neither translator, and also wreaks havoc with the original rhyme-scheme (for these parts of the text are written in rhyme).

There have been other versions still : in 1906 the German publishing house of Breitkopf & Hartel brought out an English-only edition edited by Salomon Jadassohn, with a completely new translation by *Claude Aveling* (1869-1943). Other German editions have been issued with a translation printed below the original German text. But, in truth, these are often more of a guide to the meaning of the German, rather than a true alternative, singable, option.

So - there has been little new in the way of an English translation for over 85 years! The only exception has been a revision of the Elgar/Atkins edition in 1938 by Ivor Atkins (Elgar having died four years previously). Although this tried to get nearer to Bach's rhythms and word stresses than the 1911 version, and included completely new translations of some movements as suggested by leading musicians of his day, it was but one step in the direction that such a revision would ultimately have to go.....

My concern has been to restore the rhyme scheme wherever possible and to make sure that each of Bach's syllables has an English syllable of similar stress. Wherever possible, like Elgar and Atkins, I have tried to keep to the translation of either *Johnston* or *Troutbeck* within an individual movement. When they are good they are very good. For example numbers 19, 31, 48, 53, 70 are the work of Helen Johnston who was particularly good at translating the chorales; whilst numbers 28, 33, 44, 47, and 74 are by John Troutbeck who had a way with telling phrases in the arias. In many other places the work is principally by one or the other, with only minor modifications having been made. Where neither Johnston or Troutbeck sound right to our late 20th century ears I have also taken note of *Claude Aveling's* work : in this I am following in the footsteps of the *Bach Choir*, whose text for its annual performances contains several variants from his 1906 version.

The 1911 Elgar/Atkins edition introduced some Chorale texts by well-known Hymn writers of the day. Many of these cannot be improved upon; and so the translation of no. 63 retains *Sir Henry Baker's* magnificent "O sacred head surrounded" (written for the first edition of *Hymns Ancient and Modern* which he compiled in 1861) ; whilst other numbers retain the translations of *Frances Cox*, *Catherine Winkworth* and *James Alexander* which were selected from contemporary German chorale hymnologies by the eminent Bach scholar Charles Sanford Terry (1864-1936).

3. The third element included in this performing edition is an attempt to bring it right up to date in a scholarly sense. I have been enormously helped by having access to Bach's manuscript, as revealed in the pages of the *Urtext der Neuen Bach-Ausgabe* (1972).

By cross-checking every note I have been able to correct a significant number of errors that have always been present in the *Bach-Gesellschaft Edition* of 1856, and which have crept into all subsequent editions, (such as the Elgar/Atkins editions of 1911 and 1938), that were based on it. Differences which have been corrected in line with the *Neuen Bach-Ausgabe* include wrong instrumentation, wrong notes, wrong figures for the figured bass, and wrong phrasing.

The question of the *phrasing* has been one of the knottier problems to solve. Bach's autograph full score does not always correspond with the autograph orchestral parts, necessitating some editorial decision-making. Also, a phrase appearing (say) at the end of a movement does not always have an identical phrasing the first time it appears. Bach presumably made mistakes in such matters, or his pen didn't make an absolutely accurate mark - it is amazing how such things can happen when you are writing at speed (as Bach was)! Also, phrasing of identical music played by different instruments (or voices) often reveals discrepancies. The 19th century editors did their best to tidy this up; but, in an age that had forgotten everything about 18th century performance practice, they did it with 19th century values in mind. It is now possible to look again at what Bach wrote and make a better guess at his intentions. For example, since the growth of the *authentic performance* movement in recent years, we now understand that different instruments need to phrase things differently. These differences may well have been intentional after all!

So, I have attempted to undo the 19th century phrasing, suggesting *hemiolas* with a square bracket above the staff, sorting out such discrepancies as I have encountered, and wherever possible relying on the evidence of the *Neuen Bach-Ausgabe* Urtext.

SOME SPECIAL FEATURES OF THIS EDITION

This vocal score has been produced as a copy to perform from, and not as an Urtext. Therefore there are several features in it that will be of assistance to performers, both in rehearsal and in performance.

The orchestral accompaniment for the *choruses* is difficult to render as a playable keyboard part, and generations of rehearsal pianists must have cursed the piano accompaniments based upon the work of Adolph Bernhard Marx (1795-1866), used in most standard editions, for including too much peripheral detail. For the accompaniment to the choral sections of this edition I have, therefore, revised the work of Salomon Jadassohn (1831-1902). This is very supportive of the vocal lines, and is to my mind a good rehearsal accompaniment. It certainly does not reflect all that is going on in the orchestra; but then, I do not expect this part to deputise for the orchestra, except in the rehearsal room.

The accompaniment to the *accompanied recitatives* and *arias* endeavours to embrace the orchestral writing, although it has not always been possible to preserve every part at the correct pitch : but in this I am consistent with every other edition currently available.

Regarding the accompaniment to the *secco recitative* : figures have been given for everything except the string accompaniments to the words of Jesus. It is expected that a keyboard player will prefer to use the *Organ continuo part* in performance, - where all the figures will be found. In this vocal score, as in all the Continuo parts, use is made of a broken tie projecting from a Bass note if, before the next Bass note is reached there should be a left-hand chord. This allows the 'cello continuo player to know that such a chord (not shown in their part) is coming; it also allows important decisions to be made regarding lengthening the note that has the tie. In some circumstances it may be agreed to support the left-hand change of harmony by keeping the tied note going for the duration shown. It has not always been the fashion to perform the *secco recitatives* with short

chords for organ and 'cello, and performing practice may yet change again. Indeed, Bach's fair copy of the manuscript (of the later version) and Altnickol's manuscript (of the first version) both show the continuo accompaniment in long held notes. It appears likely that one of the reasons for notating it in short chords in the manuscript parts was to differentiate more clearly between the accompaniment of *Jesus* (long held chords) and the rest of the accompaniment. Therefore it is not categorically wrong to play sustained notes at moments of quiet introspection, or on those occasions where the harmony shifts in the left hand only. The inclusion of the broken tie is merely a helpful device included for the benefit of the performer.

EDITORIAL MARKINGS

DYNAMICS

Bach used very few dynamics in the St. Matthew Passion. His *forte* and *piano* markings often imply something other than a strict understanding of loud and soft. For example, in chorus no. 33 it implies the difference between a sostenuto melody and loud choral interjections; and in choruses no. 1 and no. 78. it clarifies the echo effect.

In the recitative sections *Jesus'* utterances are always marked *piano*, and the *Evangelist* always recommences thereafter *forte*. These should not be taken too literally : there will be occasions when the singer taking the part of *Jesus* needs to commence loudly and when the *Evangelist* will want to proceed with a quiet phrase. Once again, these original dynamics look more as though they were conceived to differentiate (in the continuo single-line part) between the role of *Jesus* and the role of the *Evangelist*.

- q Editorial dynamics are included within square brackets, to differentiate them from Bach's own markings which are given in bold. In agreement with the *Neuen Bach-Ausgabe*, no editorial tempi indications have been given. Such that appear (as in no. 20) are Bach's original markings.
- q Where an appoggiatura appears in an instrumental line, but not in the corresponding vocal line, this has been indicated (in accordance with current practice) as an **x** within brackets. Editorial appoggiaturas are similarly indicated.
- q The lay-out of the vocal lines is written and beamed as for the original German. However, where differences occur, the larger notation refers to the English text. 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.
- q Where the editor has felt that two versions of text are equally possible, the one that conforms most closely to the German has been used, and the other put in a footnote.

CUTS

A complete performance of the St. Matthew Passion contains very nearly three and a half hours of music. Even at fast baroque tempi it is safest to estimate a duration of three and a quarter hours. Many performances, therefore, will perforce be abridged. The editor has included details of how to do so with the minimum disruption to the narrative. After the first chorus, this involves cutting to the events leading directly to the last supper (at no. 13) and thereafter making such slight cuts as are indicated in the score.

By this means Part 1 can be reduced to 1 hour, and Part 2 to 1 hour 30 minutes (all timings are approximate). At a total of 2 hours 30 minutes, this fits conveniently into the usual 3-hour concert span which includes an interval.

The short Chorale (no. 35a) which originally closed Part 1 has been included in an Appendix, in case it is needed to abbreviate Part 1 further by substituting this in the place of no. 35, (which had originally seen service in 1725 as the opening chorus of the *St. John Passion*, played a semitone lower).

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