

Passion by Heart
Sir John Eliot Gardiner, the Monteverdi Choir and
English Baroque Soloists present
Bach's masterpiece the *St Matthew Passion*
from memory on tour for Lent, Easter and beyond



**11 - 26 March: Valencia, Pamplona, Barcelona, Lucerne,
Amsterdam, Brussels, Paris, London**
15 - 18 June: Braunschweig, Leipzig, Aldeburgh
5 - 6 August: San Sebastian, Santander
18 - 22 September: Wroclaw, Pisa

Sir John Eliot Gardiner, who has dedicated his career to the performances of Bach's choral repertoire, takes his multi-award winning **Monteverdi Choir** and the **English Baroque Soloists** on tour across Europe in the lead up to Easter to perform Bach's crowning masterpiece – the ***St Matthew Passion***. Starting in Spain during the Lenten season and continuing to Belgium and Switzerland, they reach Paris on Good Friday, 25 March, and London's Barbican Centre the following day, the Saturday before Easter. **Mark Padmore** takes the role of the Evangelist, **Stephan Loges** Christ, and **Hannah Morrison** the soprano, joining further soloists from the Monteverdi Choir including **Reginald Mobley, Jonathan Sells, Alex Ashworth** and **Clare Wilkinson**. In a true choral tour de force, the entire choir will sing the *St Matthew Passion* from memory. A different children's choir is joining them in almost every city. The tour continues to Germany, Braunschweig and Leipzig, followed by a return to Spain and Poland, and finishing in Italy later in the year.

It took more than twenty years with the Monteverdi Choir for Gardiner finally to "pluck up the courage" to conduct the *St Matthew Passion* for the first time in 1987. The concert was in East Berlin in front of an audience which included several GDR soldiers who began to weep openly during the performance, much to Gardiner's amazement. As he explains, "*Perhaps on that side of the border this most universal of music had become fossilized in some prescribed local tradition. By approaching it afresh, free of ritualized clichés, we were unwittingly opening the floodgates for an emotional response to it.*"

Even today in a mostly secular society, this masterpiece of the Lutheran church tradition can have an overwhelming effect on audiences, which far exceeds the expectations of religious dogma. This is partly because it is essentially a human drama of immense struggle, betrayal and forgiveness, love and sacrifice, compassion and pity. Even when not approached as a religious experience, the immersion of listening for nearly 3 hours creates space and time away from the restless fidget of 21st Century life, constantly disrupted by noise and interruptions.

Making time stop in its tracks, Bach's breathtaking alto solo "Erbarme Dich" has such a hauntingly hypnotic quality, a lament that echoes in the inner ear way after the Passion ends. Opening with a heartbreaking violin solo, the alto attempts to pick up the melody but breaks off, only managing just segments of the vocal line (as it lies outside the vocalist's range). *"It is an audible symbol of human frailty – a falling short. The emotional tug of this most beautiful of melodies on the listener springs from a recognition of those dashed dreams and failed endeavours to live up to a Godlike ideal,"* Gardiner says.

Bach's dramatic portrayal of Christ's trial and his silence in response to the false accusations, as Gardiner further explains in his book, *"has a resonance for beleaguered humanity at all times and in all places – from instances of false accusation in private or domestic life to the outrages under regimes of torture"*.

Bach's *St Matthew Passion* was composed for Good Friday and it is assumed that it was first performed on Good Friday 11 April 1727 in Leipzig where he was Kantor at the Thomaskirche. It is based on the Gospel according to Matthew in the German translation by Martin Luther.

NOTES TO EDITORS

FULL LISTINGS

J.S. BACH *St Matthew Passion*, BWV 244

Monteverdi Choir

English Baroque Soloists

Sir John Eliot Gardiner *conductor*

Kati Debretzeni *leader*

Mark Padmore *Evangelist, tenor*

Stephan Loges *Christ, baritone*

Hannah Morrison *soprano*

Further soloists from the Monteverdi Choir: Eleanor Minney, Reginald Mobley, Richard Wilberforce, Clare Wilkinson, Alex Ashworth, Nicholas Mogg, Jonathan Sells, Ashley Riches.

Children's Choir: Escolania del Orfeon Pamplones in Pamplona, Cor Infantil de l'Orfeo Català in Barcelona, Luzerner Sängerknaben in Lucerne, Netherlands Youth Choir in Amsterdam and Brussels, Les Pages du Centre de musique baroque de Versailles in Paris, Trinity Boy's Choir in London.

March

11 – 19:00 Valencia - Palau de la Musica
13 – 19:00 Pamplona – Baluarte de Pamplona
15 – 20:30 Barcelona – Palau de la Musica
17 – 19:30 Lucerne – KKL
22 – 19:30 Amsterdam – Concertgebouw
23 – 20:00 Brussels – Bozar
25 – 19:30 Paris – Philharmonie
26 – 18:30 London – Barbican

June

15 – 20:00 Braunschweig - Kaiserdom Königslutter
16 – 20:00 Leipzig - Thomaskirche
18 – 19:00 Aldeburgh Festival

August

5 – San Sebastien
6 – Santander

September

18 – Wroclaw
22 – Pisa

Further dates are to be announced.

About Sir John Eliot Gardiner, the Monteverdi Choir & English Baroque Soloists



From his farm in Dorset, conductor Gardiner has devoted more than 50 years to the study of period instrument performance practice from the baroque to romantic repertoire. He created the Monteverdi Choir in 1964 for a groundbreaking performance at King's College Chapel, Cambridge, of Monteverdi's *Vespers*. For the past half a century, the Monteverdi Choir and the English Baroque Soloists have set new standards, shaped opinions and breathed fresh energy into both forgotten and established repertoire. A major highlight was a performance of Monteverdi's *Vespers* at St Mark's Basilica in Venice.

A towering achievement was marking Bach's 250th anniversary in 2000 by performing and recording all 198 of JS Bach's sacred cantatas on the appropriate feast day in more than 60 churches across Europe. The Gardiners subsequently set up the company's record label, Soli Deo Gloria to release the entire cycle which was hailed as "one of the most ambitious musical projects of all time" by Gramophone

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magazine. In 2014, Sir John Eliot Gardiner brought out a new biography on Bach entitled "Music in the Castle of Heaven".

The ensembles have also been a fertile training ground for generations of performers who have gone on to shine internationally. In 2007, Gardiner established the **Monteverdi Apprenticeship Programme** to further develop future generations. The choir and orchestra have over 150 recordings to their name and have won numerous prizes. The Financial Times described their most recent album together, Bach's B Minor Mass, as "*Bach at its most glorious and uplifting*".

Sir John Eliot Gardiner was appointed President of the Bach Archive in Leipzig in 2014 and has recently received the Concertgebouw Award in Amsterdam.



<http://www.monteverdi.co.uk>

[Twitter: @mco_london](https://twitter.com/mco_london)

The Monteverdi Choir and English Baroque Soloists are under the grateful patronage of HRH the Prince of Wales.

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