

# The Genesis of Bach's `Great Passion´: 1724-29

by

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In the late spring of 1724, having presented his first original oratorio *Passion According to St. John*, BWV 245, on Good Friday on April 7, Johann Sebastian Bach turned to his next annual Passion presentation. This, as well as annual cycles of church cantatas, was among his primary composing responsibilities as Leipzig Music Director and Cantor of the four principal Lutheran churches. The composition of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* took five years, from 1724 to 1729. In the process, Bach transitioned from composing annual church-year cantata cycles to the Great Passion and the Christological Cycle of major works, primarily sacred oratorios and Latin Mass music.

## Leipzig Passion Tradition

The tradition of presenting annual biblical oratorio Passions at Good Friday Vesper Service had been instituted by Bach's predecessor, Johann Kuhnau (1660-1722), with his *St. Mark Passion*, first presented in 1721. It may have been repeated in 1722 a few months before his death on June 5, or in 1723 shortly before Bach assumed the position on the First Sunday after Trinity on May 30. There is no record, however, of any 1722 or 1723 Passion performances.

Meanwhile, in 1722 George Philipp Telemann, Bach's counterpart in Hamburg, instituted his cycle of four annual oratorio Passion presentations with a now-lost *St. Matthew Passion*. Telemann's cycle then involved the other two synoptic Gospels, Mark and Luke, as well as the evangelist John's setting. This pattern of oratorio Passions according to the four Gospels continued until 1765 when Telemann repeated a *St. Luke Passion* in lieu of John, then a Matthew in 1766 and a Mark in 1767, the year of his death. His successor, C.P.E. Bach, Sebastian's second-oldest son, continued the annual Passion sequence until his death in 1789.

Of the four Gospel treatments of the Passion, Mark's was usually chosen because of its brevity and directness, 119 verses in two chapters, 14 and 15. Matthew is the longest narrative of the four, with 141 verses in two chapters, 26 and 27. His account includes subplots not found elsewhere, such as Judas' death and Pilate's wife's dream. Matthew also contains more commentary apart from the basic narrative, juxtaposes more scenes and has the most crowd participation. Matthew's Passion story was the most popular setting with 16th and 17th Century baroque German composers. These included Sebastiani, Flor, Funcke, Theile, Kühnhausen, Meder, Clajus, Gerstenbüttel and Bruhns, with the theology of atonement in Matthew's Passion, especially influenced by the sermon texts of Heinrich Müller.

## *St. Matthew Passion* Conception

Bach probably conceived of his *St. Matthew Passion* (*SMP*) with a plan of the movements, by type, interspersed between the two-chapter narrative of the oratorio Passion type. Matthew's Gospel enabled him to treat the full Passion story from the omens and Last Supper to Jesus' initial suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane (all not found in John's Gospel) to his trials, Crucifixion and burial. This allowed Bach to produce the most extensive, complex musical treatment, utilizing full narrative with crowd choruses, major opening and closing choruses, and commentary arias and prayerful *ariosi*, or accompanied recitatives, some with dramatic chorus dialogue, as well as instructional congregational hymns.

As part of the process, Bach would secure unifying elements: dramatic treatment with a homogenous libretto supported, eventually, with dual performing forces; familiar, repeated Passion chorales with texts stanzas related to the narrative action; a tonality or musical key structure for overall cohesion using the widest possible expressive palate; and structural patterns to bring unity through the placement of diverse movements, sectional treatment, and milestone musical events.

In his previous, initial *St. John Passion* (*SJP*), Bach had achieved artificial balance or symmetry using the palindrome or mirror form (ABCACBA), called *chiastic* or cross-like. It was used in his first extant cantata, BWV 4 for Easter, with its opening, central and closing *tutti* choral forces flanked by intimate solo complementary arias and *ariosi*. For the more cohesive, organic *St. Matthew Passion* (*SMP*) mosaic narrative, Bach found natural places in the narrative to insert commentary and to emphasize key movements such as the *arioso*, No. 59, "Ah Golgatha," as Christ hung on the cross, introducing the final scene, the meditation on the meaning of Golgatha (Chafe, *Tonal*, 340f).

## Passion Materials

Bach used three core chorales in his *SMP*: "Herzlich tut mich verlangen," (the Passion chorale known as "O sacred head now wounded") with five different settings (15, 17, 44, 54, 62); "Herzliebster Jesu" ("Dearest Jesus") three times (Nos. 3, 25, 46; and "O Welt, ich muss dich lassen" ("O World, I must leave thee") twice (10, 36).

The most challenging task for Bach to compose an oratorio Passion was the selection of lyric, interpretive texts to be set as large, framing opening and closing choruses, as well as interspersed *ariosi* and arias. For his *St. Matthew Passion*, with its great opportunities for drama, teaching and reflection, Bach searched for a single poet to write a unified libretto, as he did with his pending second chorale cantata cycle. In contrast, Bach's initial *St. John* (oratorio) *Passion* had used new texts based upon previous Passion poets such as Brockes, Postel, and Christian Weise. Like the homogeneous chorale cantata cycle, no *St. John* Passion librettist has been found. Bach scholars generally assume that Bach was not the author or assembler of the texts, such as Telemann, Stölzel and other contemporary composers were.

Eventually, Bach utilized the services of the Leipzig poet Picander, real name Christian Friedrich Henrici. He may have used Picander's poetry as early as September 1723, setting a strophic poem for Cantata BWV 148. As Bach search for a librettist for his setting of the *St. Matthew Passion* (*SMP*), BWV 244, Picander in 1724 started to write a Passion libretto, published at Easter 1725 and modeled after the noted poetic, so-called *Brockes Passion* (1712). This type of Passion oratorio contains no Gospel texts, only lyrical paraphrases. Picander's imitation has 250 rhymed lines in 32 movements, with only two chorales. Meanwhile, Bach pursued the composition of the homogenous, challenging chorale cantata cycle, beginning in June 1724, composing new works for every Sunday (excepting Advent) and major holiday festival, totaling some 60.

## Initial Composition 1724-25

Eric Chafe thinks that the *SMP* closing may have been the first movement Bach realized. He cites the movement's "textual indebtedness" to the 1725 *Picander Passion*, "its musical connections to the final chorus" of the *SJP*, and "a Köthen lute sarabande as the 'original' of the chorus." The original source is from the Lute Suite in C Minor, BWV 997, cited by Chafe, in Terry, and also Steinitz. Bach's main legacy from Köthen were instrumental dances which he utilized in Leipzig cantata vocal settings and orchestral suites (from Chafe's "JSB's *SMP*: Aspects of Planning, Structure and Chronology" (Journal of the American Musicological Assn., 1982).

Chafe demonstrates the evolution of the *SMP* closing chorus with a hypothetical text underlay of the music of "Wir setzen uns," showing the three text variants: a) Picander's 1725 Passion text, BWV Anh. 169; b) the Altnickol score copy text of the original *SMP*, BWV 244b (1727-29); and c) Bach's 1736 text version, BWV 244.

Original dance-influenced choruses and arias are found especially in the *SMP*, the chorale cantata cycle of 1724-25 and in Bach's sacred oratorios. The *SMP* has eleven dance-style movements in its arias and choruses, including three sarabands, three passepied-minuets, and two pastorales, as well as a gigue, siciliano, and gavotte.

As Bach proceeded in early 1725, source-critical studies suggest that Bach may have composed the final aria "Mache dich," No. 65, first pointed out in the early 1970s by Joshua Rifkin, and the dramatic chorus, No. 27b, "Sind Blitze," which leads to the plain chorale originally closing Part 1.

In the foreword to his complete, printed edition of the *SMP* early version, BWV 244b, Andreas Glöckner describes possible predecessors to the *SMP* (NBA KB II/5b, Bärenreiter, 2004) as follows (Thomas Braatz BCW translation, ref. 26):

"The history of J. S. Bach's *SMP* apparently goes back to an even earlier time, perhaps even to a time stretching back before the [established] prehistory that begins with [Holy Week] 1727. Already with the Passion performance of 1726, it remains unclear whether Bach initially had wanted to offer a new work that he had composed (which he had begun composing?), or whether he had originally planned a repeat

performance of the *St. Mark Passion* (previously ascribed to Reinhard Keiser) that he had already performed in Weimar in 1712/13. The reason for considering these possibilities is based upon a fragmentary sketch for the aria, “Mache dich, mein Herze, rein” (No. 65) which appears on a viola part for the D-major Sanctus BWV 232 (III) that had been recently copied out for performance on Easter (April 13), 1727. It cannot be determined with [any degree of] certainty whether this aria, at that time, already belonged to the *SMP* or a different (older) composition. What can at least be determined is offered in Bach's postscript in a letter addressed to one of his students, Christoph Gottlob Wecker, dated March 20, 1729: “In regard to the Passion music that you inquired about, I would gladly allow you to use it if I did not have to use it here myself this year.” Here it becomes clear that the Passion music he refers to, the one for which a planned performance was imminent on Good Friday (April 15) 1729, already existed in some kind of older version [the details of which have not yet been firmly documented].”

Besides the consoling “Mache dich” after Christ's death, originating in older sources, “The same may also be said for the arias ‘Geduld’ (no. 35), ‘Gib mir meinen Jesum wieder’ (no. 42) and ‘Können Tränen meiner Wangen’ (no. 52),” says Glöckner (ref. 29). He repeats the suggestion that the tenor aria (no. 35) “origins might be in an older source.”

Chafe says: “Much more interesting is the musical and textual relationship” between the *SMP* dialogue chorus, “Sind Blitze” (27b) and a passage in the fourth movement bass *scena* of Cantata BWV 127 for the pre-Lenten Sunday of Quinquagesima Estomihi, 11 February 1725 (Chafe *Planning*, p. 107). This connection, says Chafe, was previously cited by Smend (*Church Cantatas* VI, 45) and Whittaker (*Cantatas II*: 449)

Then, Bach probably took up the seven or eight movements from the 1725 Brockes-influenced Picander Passion libretto, ultimately involving in the *SMP* the opening chorus, No. 1, “Kommt, ihr Töchter,” and closing chorus, No. 68, “Wir setzen uns,” and five or six lyric solos, 19, 39, 49, 51, possibly 60, and 67.

In all, Picander adapted as many as seven movements:

## SMP 1725 Picander Passion

1, chorus “Kommt, ihr Töchter”; 19. Chorus (Zion): Come ye daughters (to witness martyrdom)  
25(19), tenor arioso “O Schmerz”; 5. Solioquy (Soul): ...See how the sweat)  
47(39), alto aria “Erbarme dich”; 12. Peter aria, I flee thee (denies Christ)  
58(49), soprano aria “Aus Liebe”; 16 Jesus aria, “For love I endure all things (false witness.)  
60(51), alto arioso “Erbarm es Gott”; 17. Aria (Soul's response)  
70(60), alto aria ““Sehet, Jesus hat die Hand” 27. Aria (Soul): Touch not what is offered thee (vinegar)  
78(68) chorus “Wir setzen uns mit Tränen nieder 32. Believing Souls Chorus “Wir setzen uns bei deinem Grabe nieder”.

Picander turned to the poetry of his [1725] oratorio . . . for several numbers in the *St. Matthew Passion*: No. 39 “Erbarme dich” was modeled on the second stanza of a strophic aria for Peter, “Erbarme dich, mein Gott, um meiner Zähren willen”; No. 49 “Aus Liebe will mein Heiland sterben” was based on an aria for Jesus, “Aus Liebe will ich alles dulden”; and No. 68 “Wir setzen uns mit Tränen nieder” was adapted from the closing aria with the text “Wir setzen uns bey deinem Grabe nieder” assigned to the “Chor der Gläubigen Seelen.” [Source: Melamed, *Hearing Bach's Passions*, 41]

Picander modeled his 1725 treatment after Brockes, conflating and emphasizing Christ's trials involving the Chief Priests, the false witnesses and Pilate's questioning, found primarily in John's Gospel. Picander's actual Evangelist narration is limited to 12 recitatives of 32 numbers. For example, Recitative No. 18 narrates Jesus' scourging, dressing, crowning, and cloaking in six lines. Like Brockes there are few chorales (two), with the emphasis on character solos. For example, the Soul has the most, six, involving three arias and three soliloquies or *ariosi* (accompanied recitatives). [Sources: Terry, *Bach, The Passions*, 53f; Marrison's *Bach's Oratorios, Passion Synopsis Appendix*, pp. 157-67].

The extensive trial scene in Picander's initial Passion libretto enabled Bach to salvage four of seven movements (Nos. 12, 16, 17, and 19) for the *St. Matthew Passion*. Bach used the original texts to develop the opening chorus and three solos spread across 15 SMP numbers eventually involving two arias (Nos. 39, 42), three chorales (40, 44, 46) and two *ariosi*-aria pairs (48-49, and 51-52).

Interestingly, the same trial scene in the *St. John Passion* also had stirred Bach's creative and interpretive imagination. At the place in the Passion story where Pilate has Jesus scourged, Bach composed an aria-*arioso* combination, Nos. 19-20, in the original *SJP* 1724 version. A year later, unable to present a new Passion, Bach salvaged music from his 1717 Weimar-Gotha Passion. He inserted the tenor aria, “Ach windet euch” (Why writhest thou) before the arioso, No. 19, “Betrachte, meine Seele” (Ponder, my soul), and removed the succeeding aria, No. 20, “Erwäge, wie sein blutgefärbter Rücken” (Consider how his blood-tinged back), thereby reversing the *arioso*-aria order.

## Good Friday 1725

At this point in Lent 1725, time was running out and Bach may have reached an impasse in the composition of his new Passion. In the previous year's Lent season, Bach had been able to compose 39 movements (all new) for his *SJP*. Ultimately, the *SMP* encompass 68 numbers. Bach possibly had on hand the six to nine lyric movements from the Weimar-Gotha Passion: opening and closing chorale chorus, a plain chorale, three arias, and possibly a sequence of *arioso*-aria-chorale. Perhaps he intended originally to use them in the new Passion, along with the projected six/seven Picander revised movements being set to music. Bach had an ample store of lyric numbers and a selection of chorales, but there is no documentation that he had even begun to set the Matthew narrative to recitatives, *ariosi* for Jesus, and *turbae* choruses -- eventually involving 26 movements.

History shows that Bach was unable to premier his *SMP* until Good Friday 1727. Instead, in 1725 he reprised his *St. John Passion*, BWV 245, adding two choruses and three arias from his 1717 so-called Weimar-Gotha Passion, BC D-1. In 1726, Bach repeated a performance of the Bruhns-Keiser *St. Mark* (oratorio) *Passion*, which he had presented in Weimar around 1713.

The season of Lent (February and March) 1725 was a watershed in Bach's composing career. He turned to composing secular works with later, parodied major sacred applications. These included borrowings from the following:

\*Sacred wedding Cantata BWV Anh. I 14, "Sein Segen fließt daher wie ein Strom," February 12; possibly as many as all four arias may have been the basis for the parodied contrafaction versions in the *Great Mass in B Minor*, BWV 232 -- No. 5, "Laudamus te"; No. 10, "Quoniam tu solus sanctus"; No. 18, "Et in spiritum sanctum"; and No. 22, "Benedictus qui venit." Source: William Scheide: "BWV Anh. I 14: A Source for Parodied Arias in the B-Minor Mass?", in "About Bach", *Christoph Wolff Festschrift*; eds. Butler, Stauffer & Greer (Univ. of Illinois Press, 2008), pp. 69-77.

\*Birthday Serenade, "Entfliehet, Verschwindet," BWV 249a, for the Duke of Weißenfels, text by Picander, February 23, 1725; first version of Bach's parodied *Easter Oratorio*, "Kommt, eilet und laufet," BWV 249(c), performed on Easter Sunday, April 1, 1725, text probably by Picander in their documented first active collaboration.

\*Birthday Serenade, BWV 36c, "Schwingt freudig euch empor," Leipzig University professor; text probably by Picander; April 5, 1725; first version of parodied Advent Cantata, BWV 36(d), same title, December 2, 1725 or December 1, 1726, to inaugurate Bach's prolonged, sporadic, fragmented third and final extant cantata cycle.

Chafe (*Planning*) suggests (in a long footnote, p. 112) that Bach at Lent 1725 may have begun to create the *SMP*, along with the first version of the *Easter Oratorio*, as part of a grand scheme involving a "Christological cycle" of oratorios, realized in the 1730s. In that decade, Bach's composed oratorios for Christmas, BWV 248 (1734-35); (completed) the *Easter Oratorio*, BWV 249 (c.1735); *Ascension Oratorio* (1735), *Saint Matthew Passion*, BWV 244 (1736); and *St. John Passion*, BWV 245 (sketch

1735-42). To these could be added a possible *Pentecost Oratorio*, 1735 (Dürr: *Cantatas of JSB*, 2005, p. 44); the lost, parodied *St. Mark Passion* (1731); and the five Kyrie-Gloria Masses, BWV 232I-236 (1733-38). Except for the *SMP* and *SJP*, all the other major works are significant parodies.

As for the early existence of the “Mache dich” violin theme fragment and the “Sind Blitze” passage, these seem in early 1725 to be incongruous with what I presume are the earliest-composed *SMP* movements related to settings influenced by the concurrent 1725 *Picander Passion* lyrics. I would suggest the possibility that the “Mache dich” aria on the back of the Easter Sunday Sanctus repeat viola part (the original parts were lost) may imply that Bach initially thought about including this aria in his Easter Sunday cantata or oratorio, especially given its affirmative nature and then decided to use it instead as the last aria in the *SMP*. As to the “Sind Blitze,” I think it is possible that the bass Judgement Day *scena* in Cantata BWV 127 for the Sunday before Lent 1725 was composed first, with the text “I break with my mighty scouring hand,” then in the *SMP* was sung, transformed a comfortable major fourth lower, by the chorus bass(es) leading off with the parodied words “Will lightning and thunder in ruin engulf them” (trans. H. Drinker) – a very similar affect!

While we will never know what really happened (we don't have any Bach sketch books), at least I think we can say that as Bach in early 1725 initiates his Christological Cycle odyssey -- that finally ends with the completion of the *Mass in B Minor* in 1749 -- we can see the bigger picture of serendipitous situations, profound patterns of invention, and the affirmation of his calling at this most vital point in his creative life.

During this Lenten hiatus, Bach virtually ceased composition of the remaining 14 chorale cantatas in the second cycle involving elaborate opening chorale fantasias with instrumental *ritornelli*. Probably in March 1725, Bach turned elsewhere to find non-chorale-based lyrics to complete his cycle, from Easter Monday to Trinity Sunday. Bach presented less demanding, more intimate works. Initially, he used four cantata texts of authors unknown, possibly Picander and/or Christian Weiß Sr., Bach's St. Thomas Church pastor. Finally, Bach engaged local poetess Christiane von Ziegler to write his last nine Sunday cantata librettos, beginning with the third Sunday after Easter to Trinity Sunday.

## Remainder of 1725

For the remainder of 1725, beginning with the Sunday After Trinity, June 3, 1725, Bach produced virtually no new church year cantatas for the required some 30 services. Scanty documentation shows that Bach apparently had presented at least four Telemann cantatas (set to Neumeister texts) for consecutive Sundays early in the Trinity season. His only original compositions were possibly two cantatas set to Salomo Franck texts, BWV 168 and 164, for the middle Trinity season. Bach also presented two festive works for special occasions: chorale Cantata BWV 137, “Lobe den Herren, den mächtigen König der Ehren,” for the 12th Sunday After Trinity, and Cantata BWV 79, “Gott der Herr ist Sonn und Schild,” for Reformation Day, October 31.

What did Bach compose during the six-month hiatus, June to November 1725? The record shows that he wrote two secular cantatas, BWV 205 and Anh. 196, and started the *Anna Magdalena Clavier-Büchlein of 1725*. Primarily Bach focused on instrumental music, commencing with the first *Clavier Übung* (published keyboard studies) of harpsichord partitas. He also updated chorale organ works while plumbing existing sinfonias, suites, and concerti for later use in cantatas and with the Leipzig *Collegium musicum*. Bach in the last half of 1725 made two extended visits with family members to Köthen and Dresden. He probably also searched for librettos and librettists for his church vocal works, especially a third cantata cycle.

Meanwhile, Bach probably found nothing else in Picander's 1725 lyric Passion to set to music. He turned to Heinrich Müller's Passion sermons to provoke Picander. The lyric numbers which show Müller's influence are three contemplative dialogues with chorus (Nos. 1, No. 30, "Ach, nun ist"; and No. 60, "Sehet"); as well as the responsory chorus No. 27b, "Sind Blitze"; the aria, No. 35, "Geduld"; the stand-alone aria No. 42, "Gebt mir meinen Jesum wieder"; and the aria No. 52, "Können Tränen meiner Wangen."

Bach expanded three elements introduced in the *SJP*. (1) The two-dimensional *SJP* bass aria, No. 24, with chorus commentary, "Hasten," which commences the *via crucis*, becomes the form, ultimately, for six dramatic *SMP* contemplative dialogues which open, close, and in the middle, divide the two parts: Nos. 1, 19-20, 27a-b, 30, 59-60, and 67-68. (2) The two aria-*ariosi*, commentary combinations, *SJP* Nos. 13-14, and 19-20, after Peter weeps bitterly and Jesus is scourged, are increased to seven *SMP* reflective scenes in the manner of *opera seria* dual commentary-expressive affect solos by the same singer: Nos. 12-13, 25-26, 34-35, 48-49, 51-52, 56-57, and 64-65. (3) The other *SJP* two-dimensional bass aria with chorale, No. 32, "Mein treuer Heiland," at Jesus' death, influences the opening *SMP* chorus where a chorale melody is inserted, and also influences the *SMP* contemplative dialogue aria with chorus, No. 60, "Behold" Jesus on the cross.

Belatedly, Bach began his third cantata cycle on Advent Sunday December 2, 1725, the beginning of the church year. He produced nine new works for all the major services of the Christmas season, set to old published texts of Lehms (1711) and Franck. Early in the Epiphany season, however, his interest lagged again. He turned to very early new-style cantata texts, Rudolstadt (1704), set by his Meiningen cousin, Johann Ludwig Bach, in a series of cantatas probably originally composed about 1715, for the Fourth through the Eighth Sundays in Epiphany in Leipzig

At this point in Lent 1726, Bach probably began setting Picander's draft libretto and working with Lutheran Church officials on theologically acceptable texts, including appropriate chorale verses. Bach's earliest extant version of the *SMP*, BWV 244b (1729), ultimately contained 13 chorales, 15 arias, 11 ariosi, and two choruses -- a total of 41 lyric movements. In contrast, the first version of the *SJP* (1724) contained only 20 lyric, non-biblical interpolations. In addition, the *SMP* was scored for a larger ensemble.

## Good Friday 1726

Meanwhile, on Good Friday, April 19, 1726, Bach revived and presented the hour-long Bruhns-Keiser *St. Mark Passion*. For the subsequent Easter Season, Bach presented at least five cantatas of Johann Ludwig and only one original cantata, BWV 43, with a Rudolstadt text, for the Ascension Day festival. No presentations are documented for the Last Sunday in Easter and the three-day Pentecost Festival.

For the 1726 Trinity Season, Bach returned to original composition, using texts from Rudolstadt, Lehms, and possibly Picander for some 20 original, mostly solo cantatas. During 1726, Bach's third cycle involved 29 original cantatas and 20 J.L. Bach cantatas. No cantatas are documented for some 10 church year services.

In November 1726, Bach, while composing Cantata BWV 55 for the 22nd Sunday after Trinity, may have taken three lyric movements from the Weimar Passion, says Alfred Dürr (*Cantatas*, 616), and used the three to close BWV 55. In his discussion of the tenor solo Cantata BWV 55 (librettist unknown, possibly Picander) for the 22nd Sunday After Trinity, 17 November 1726, Dürr says: “movements 3-5 were adapted from an older, lost composition – possibly a Passiontide cantata or the lost Weimar Passion of 1717,” BC D-1. He cites Andreas Glöckner NBA KB I/26, 1995, and “Neue Spuren zu Bach's `Weimarer Passion’”, *Leipziger Beiträge zur Bach-Forschung I* (1995), 33-46. The movements are an aria and *arioso*, both beginning “Erbarme dich,” and the closing chorale “Bin ich gleich von dir gewichen.” The corresponding, remorseful *SMP* movements are the symbolic dialogue, Nos. 39 and 40, alto aria “Erbarme dich, mein Gott,” and chorale, same text, “Bin ich gleich,” which occur just after Mat. 26:75, Peter weeps bitterly. It can be assumed that prior to the 1727 first performance of his *SMP*, Bach chose not to use this available Passion music and was replacing it with a new aria and setting of the same choral text.

For the new church year, beginning with Advent and Christmas 1726, no Bach performances are documented. In 1727, except for three original solo cantatas – BWV 58, 82, and 84 – filling gaps in his third cycle during the Epiphany season, Bach ceased to present church-service cantatas on a regular basis. Instead, he completed the first version of his *SMP* and presented it on Good Friday, April 11, 1727. Robin Leaver (ref. 18) says the central structural point is No. 49, the soprano aria, “Aus Liebe,” at the end of trial before Pilate, and the “emotional and dramatic center” is the brief *turbae* chorus, 63b, “Truly, this was the son of God,” after Christ's death and the earthquake.

Chafe *Planning* (p.110f) even suggests that two 1725 *SJP* substitute tenor arias, “Zerschmettert mich” and “Ach, windet euch,” BWV 245b and c, also appropriate to Matthew's Passion account, could have been removed after the 1725 *SJP* performance and planned at the appropriate places in the 1727 *SMP*. The first aria, No. 13, occurs after Peter weeps bitterly (Matthew insert), and the second, No. 20, after Jesus is scourged. The two corresponding places, respectively, in the *SMP* involve the symbolic dialogue aria-chorale, Nos. 39-40, and the aria-arioso, Nos. 51-52, respectively.

The other 1725 *SJP* substitute, BWV 245a, “Himmel reiße,” No. 15a, bass aria with soprano chorale, “Jesu, deine Passion,” Bach uses after a servant strikes Jesus, occurring only in John's Gospel (18:22), “is closely allied” to an aria in Postel's 1704 *St. John Passion* at the earthquake following Jesus' death and at

the same place in the 1712 Brockes Passion (Steinitz, *Bach's Passions*, 99). The corresponding *SMP* passage is the final Passion chorale, No. 62, after Jesus' death (Matthew 27:50) but before the earthquake, followed by narration. Bach could have followed the lead of Postel and Brockes in the 1727 *SMP* version.

## Good Friday 1727

The “swallow's nest organ” was repaired in 1727, probably for the performance of the chorale *cantus firmus* “O Lamm Gottes unschuldig” in the introductory chorus of the original *SMP*, BWV 244b (NBA II/Vb Supplement, Glöckner preface). Besides “Mache dich,” the three Müller –influenced “arias -- ‘Geduld’ (no. 35), ‘Gebt mir meinen Jesum wieder’ (no. 42) and ‘Können Tränen meiner Wangen’ (no. 52)” may originate in the earliest *SMP* version, says Glöckner

Several “key ideas in the text” of the opening chorale fantasia “are reflected throughout the Passion, particularly Part Two, in (four) individual meditative movements, and approximately in the order of the prologue,” says Chafe (p. 343): Schuld (guilt) and “unschuldig” (guiltless) in chorale verses and the *arioso* “Ah, Golgatha” (No. 59); “Geduld” (be calm) in the aria “Geduld” (No. 35) “Lieb” (love) in the aria “Aus Liebe” (No. 49); and “Kreuz” (cross) in the aria “Komm , süßes Kreuz” (Come, sweetest cross), No. 57). All four are part of *arioso-aria* combinations. Only one of these arias, No. 35, is directly influenced by a Müller Passion sermon.

The importance of the opening chorale fantasia in the scope of the *St. Matthew Passion* could be the key to Bach mastering the substance, structure, and performing forces. Could it be that the whole work in its ultimate form was contingent upon its evolutionary process? It is even possible that Bach used the 1725 opening chorale chorus, “O Mensch, bewein dein Sünde gross”, to open the 1727 initial version of the *SMP*.

At this point, I would suggest that the 1727 possible single-chorus *SMP* version may not have contained all of the two types of movements which could have been found “theatrical” by the Pietist element in Leipzig: the six contemplative dialogues with their chorus commentaries and the *opera seria*-style *arioso-aria* combinations. It should be pointed out that the *SJP* has only one contemplative dialogue, No. 48(24), bass aria with chorus, “Haste ye,” while Bach's *St. Mark Passion* of 1731, BWV 147, has none; and that while the *SJP* has two *arioso-aria* combinations, Nos. 19-20 and 34-35, the *St. Mark Passion* also contains none, although the parodied core music from the *Funeral Ode*, BWV 198, includes three companion *ariosi* (SAT) not found in Picander's complete published text of 1732.

Based upon various source-critical studies shown above, it is possible to assemble a conjectural 1727 “proto” single-chorus *SMP* version. Further research could involve the source critical Agricola “incomplete” manuscript of BWV 244b, found with BWV 244 score and parts in C.P. E. Bach's estate. Still to be determined is Bach's Good Friday 1728 Passion performance, which the *New Bach Reader* (p. 115) suggests may have been the *SJP*. These questions would entail a greater examination of the “inner dialogue of the compositional process,” “To a stage, as it were, ‘before genesis’,” as Robert L Marshall says in “The Origin of the Magnificat,” pp. 161-66, from *The Music of JSB: The Sources, the Style, the Significance*.

## Post 1727

Joshua Rifkin in BCW points out six areas of *SMP* textual connections between narrative and commentary:

The elements of the libretto interrelate in a number of ways. For example, their confrontation creates symbolic dialogues like the exchange “Herr, bin ich's? Ich bin's, sollte büßen” produced by the juxtaposition of the chorus of the disciples (No. 15/9c) and the succeeding chorale, or the reply to Pilate's question “Was hat er denn Übels getan?” (No. 56/47) with the recitative “Er hat uns allen wohlgetan” (No. 57/48). This movement and the following aria, “Aus Liebe will mein Heiland sterben (No. 58/49),” momentarily relax the tension of the scene; but commentary can intensify the action as well: immediately before Pilate speaks, the chorale “Wie wunderbarlich ist doch diese Strafe!” (No. 55/46) heightens and transforms the savage emotions unleashed by the crowd screaming “Laß ihn kreuzigen!” (No. 54/54a). Other interpolated movements expand emotions and ideas latent in the biblical text. Peter's remorse, succinctly described by the Evangelist with the words “Und ging heraus, und weinete bitterlich” (No. 46/38c), underlies the aria “Erbarme dich” (No. 47/39) and the chorale “Bin ich gleich von dir gewichen” (No.48/40), while the recitative “O Schmerz!” (No. 25/19) and the following aria, “Ich will bei meinem Jesum wachen,” deepen, then radiantly dispel, the atmosphere of gloom that enshrouds Christ in Gethsemane.

Chafe suggests that the *SMP*'s third and final scene, called the Golgatha dialogue (NB: also called the via crucis, via dolorosa, or the 14 dramatic Stations of the Cross) enabled Bach to develop “the idea for a double-chorus Passion from these very movements” during 1727-29, as well as what Wolff calls one of the six “contemplations in dialogue form,” which was “presumably inspired by the appearance in the Keiser Passion of an aria, ‘O Golgatha’ “at the same crucial place” in the Passion story, says Chafe (p. 340)

Keiser's dramatic *turbae* choruses also influenced Bach. Melamed's *Hearing Bach's Passions* has a table (No. 4) categorizing them by single- and double-chorus types. Glöckner in the 244b *SMP* early version, NBA KB V/IIb supplementary preface, says this version could have been for single chorus and that all the double-choir *turbae*-choruses “can easily be reduced with insignificant minor changes to a single choir version.”

For many years it was thought that Bach's fifth Passion was a single-chorus setting of St. Matthew, possibly as the 1717 Gotha-Weimar Passion, where only lyrical movements are accepted in the Bach Compendium, D-1. The other evidence, of single *turbae* choruses, could have originated later in a 1727 single-chorus initial version of the *SMP*. Melamed's findings show clearly that the final usage of the choruses in 1729, with doubled, antiphonal effect, is primarily for added dramatic emphasis. Single, four-part choruses are primarily sung by Christ's protagonists such as his disciples and casual bystanders; the antiphonal choruses are sung primarily by Christ's adversaries, the High Priests; the unison or unified choruses, what might be called *tutti*, include both the people's shouts of “Crucify him” (45b and 50b) as well as the heart of the *SMP*, the recognition that “Truly, this man is the son of God” (63b).

Table 4 Gospel Choruses in the *St. Matthew Passion*

Chorus No. / Speakers / Text

A. One choir only

- 1 4d Disciples “Wozu dienet dieser Unrat?”
- 1 9b Disciples “Wo willst du, daß wir dir bereiten”
- 1 9e Disciples “Herr, bin ich's?”
- 2 38b Bystanders “Wahrlich, du bist auch einer von denen”
- 1 61b Some bystanders “Der rufet dem Elias”
- 2 61d Bystanders “Halt! laß sehen”

B. Unison/unison

- 1/2 45a The people “Barrabam” [8-part homophony]
- 1/2 45b The people “Laß ihn kreuzigen” [distinct &#64258;utes]
- 1/2 50b The people “Laß ihn kreuzigen” [distinct &#64258;utes]
- 1/2 50d Whole people “Sein Blut komme über uns”
- 1/2 63b Captain and those with him “Wahrlich, dieser ist Gottes Sohn gewesen”

C. Antiphonal/eight-part > four-part

- 1/2 58b Passersby “Der du den Tempel Gottes zerbrichst”
- 1/2 58d High priests/learned/elders “Andern hat er geholfen”
- 1/2 66b High priests/Pharisees “Herr, wir haben gedacht”

D. Antiphonal/double chorus

- 1/2 4b High priests/learned/elders “Ja nicht auf das Fest”
- 1/2 36b High priests/learned/elders “Er ist des Todes schuldig”
- 1/2 36d High priests/learned/elders “Weissage uns, Christe”
- 1/2 41b High priests/elders “Was gehet uns das an?”
- 1/2 53b Soldiers “Gegrüßet seist du”

Bach had abandoned regular weekly cantata-writing at the end of the Trinity season 1726 and instead pursued major Passion-related music. After the Good Friday 1727 premiere of his *SMP*, in the fall he composed his third and final major mourning tribute to a beloved ruler, the *Funeral Ode*, Cantata BWV 198, “Laß, Fürstin, laß noch einen Strahl” (Let us, Princess, let us yet a beam), for the Dresden monarch Christaine Eberhardine, faithful Lutheran consort of August the Strong. It was presented at the University Church on August 17, 1727. For Good Friday 1728, Bach probably repeated his *SJP* at the Nikolas Church. He then resumed the completion of his *SMP*.

In 1728-29, Bach did present nine new church cantatas set to published texts written by Picander, the only surviving works from a projected fourth annual cantata cycle. One of those cantatas, BWV 159, has serendipitous Passion connections. It was presented on the pre-Passion Sunday, Quinquagesima estomihi, just before Lent and is one of four Bach wrote at crucial times for that Sunday as he prepared to compose Passions during the Lent season. The four are Cantatas BWV 22, BWV 23, BWV 127 & BWV 159, ref. BCW [www.bach-cantatas.com/Rec/Rec-2009-02.htm](http://www.bach-cantatas.com/Rec/Rec-2009-02.htm) (No. 11). Cantatas BWV 22 and 23 were composed for Bach's successful probe to gain the Leipzig post and were repeated in succeeding years; BWV 127 was the last chorale cantata in the cycle to be composed in 1725; and BWV 159 was premiered on Feb. 27, 1729, as Bach put the finishing touches on his Köthen Funeral Music and his *SMP*, BWV 244b. The second performance of the *SMP* took place on April 15, 1729.

Bach was able to present at least 12 madrigalian movements in his parody Funeral Music for Köthen Prince Leopold, BWV 244a, BC B-23, March 24, 1727, just three weeks before the second performance of the *SMP*. The opening and closing choruses of *Funeral Ode*, Cantata BWV 198, were used in the first of four parts. The remaining 11 movements, entire text by Picander, involve a chorus and 10 *ariosi* introductions (marked *Recitativo*) to the arias and could have been a radical parody of comparable movements from the *SMP* and the *Funeral Ode* (my suggestions). While none has been authenticated on the basis of parodied new text underlay, a study of the related voice-type and the key signature suggests a strong concurrence. It is assumed that Bach did not transpose any of the original *SMP* movements in the funeral parody.

Meanwhile, Joshua Rifkin in his BCW early 1970s article on the *SMP* suggests the following nine *ariosi* were parodied from the *SMP*: BWV 244b, Nos. 5, 12, 19, 22, 34, 48, 56, 59, and 64. We can safely assume that Rifkin links eight *ariosi* to their adjacent arias – 5-6, 12-13, 19-20, 22-23, 48-49, 57-59, 64-65 – also affirming voice-type and tonality. The tenor *arioso* in d minor, No. 34, “Mein Jesus schweigt” could have been parodied as BWV 244a/9. Thus, Rifkin does not suggest sources for Nos. 4 and 6, as well as the *dictum* chorus, Nos. 8 and 14 (repeat). I gave suggested four numbers from the *Funeral Ode* for BWV 244a, Nos. 4, 6, 8, and 9.

## Part 1

1. Aria [Tutti] "Klagt, Kinder, klagt es aller Welt" = BWV 198/1 "Laß, Fürstin," Chorus/b minor
2. [Recitativo] "O Land! bestürztes Land!" = ?BWV 244/5 "Du lieber" Alto/b-f# minor
3. Aria "Weh und Ach" = BWV 244/6 "Buß und Reu" Alto/f# minor
4. [Recitativo] "Wie, wenn der Blitze" = ?BWV 198/2 "Dein Sachen," Soprano/b minor
5. Aria "Zage nur, du treues Land" = BWV 244/8 "Blute nur, du liebes Herz" Soprano/G-b minor
6. [Recitativo] "Ach ja! dein Scheiden" = ?BWV 198/9b "So weit der Himmel" Bass/A-b minor
7. Aria [Tutti] "Komm wieder," = BWV 198/10 "Doch Königin!" Chorus/b minor

## Part 2

8. [Tutti] "Wir haben einen Gott" (Psalm 68:21) = ?198/7 "An dir, du Fürbild" Chorus/b minor
9. [Recitativo] "Betäubter Anblick" = ?BWV 198/4 "Der Glocken bebendes" Alto/D-f# minor
10. Aria "Erhalte mich, Gott," = BWV 244/39 "Erbarme dich, mein Gott," Alto/b minor
11. [Recitativo] "Jedoch der schwache" = ?BWV 244/48 "Er hat uns allen" Soprano/e minor- C
12. Aria "Mit Freuden sei" = BWV 244/49 "Aus Liebe will" Soprano/a minor
13. [Recitativo] "Wohl also dir," = ?BWV 244/56 "Ja, freilich" Bass/d minor
14. „Repetatur Dictum“= Repeat of Mvt. 8 (Psalm)

## Part 3

15. Aria "Laß, Leopold, dich nicht" = BWV 244/57 "Komm, süßes Kreuz," Bass/d minor
16. [Recitativo] "Wie könnt es" = ?BWV 244/22 "Der Heiland fällt" Bass/d minor-Bb major
17. Aria "Wird auch gleich" = BWV 244/23 "Gerne will ich" Bass/g minor
18. [Recitativo] "Und, Herr," = ?BWV 244/19 "O Schmerz" Tenor/f minor
19. Aria a 2. Chören [Tutti] "Geh, Leopold, zu deiner Ruh" = BWV 244/20 "Ich will bei meinem Jesu wachen" Tenor-Chorus/c minor

## Part 4

20. Aria "Bleibet nun in eurer Ruh" = BWV 244/65 "Mache dich, mein Herze, rein" Bass/Bb
21. [Recitativo] "Und du, betrübtes" = ?BWV 244/12 "Wiewohl, mein Herz Soprano/C
22. Aria "Hemme dein gequältes" = BWV 244/13 "Ich will dir mein Herze" Soprano/G
23. [Recitativo] "Nun scheiden wir" = ?BWV 244/64 "Am Abend" Bass/g minor
24. „Aria, Tutti "Die Augen sehn nach deiner Leiche" = BWV 244/68 "Wir setzen uns mit Tränen nieder" Chorus/C minor

Bach's plan shows that he alternates recitatives (*ariosi*) and arias, and chooses the order of particular parodied numbers on the basis of tonality. The first two parts are centered in sharp keys, with the emphasis in the first on B minor, the key of Cantata BWV 198, and in the second two parts on flat keys, which is the tonal area of the closing of the *SMP*. It is assumed that the memorial sermon was preached on the *dictum (exordium)* text of Psalm 68:21, "We have here now a God who doth help, and have a Lord, Lord, who from death redeemeth" (trans. Z. Phillip Ambrose). This movement, which opens Part 2 and is repeated at the close, is a chorus.

Thus Bach during Lent 1729 was able to give a substantial portion of the *St. Matthew Passion* an out-of-town trial in the manner of a Broadway show. At that point, three weeks before Good Friday, Bach probably had virtually no changes in mind and may even have used the same instrumental parts, which no longer survive. Forkel owned the BWV 244a score, (he apparently had no idea of its connection to the *SMP*) listed in his estate but subsequently lost.

The performance of the Köthen Funeral Music on March 24 must have been quite an event. Smend in *Bach in Köthen* devotes two chapters to a detailed accounting, including the libretto with the order of the evening funeral sermon service. Besides the four-part funeral music by Bach, four congregational chorales were sung in the Reformed Municipal Church: "Alle Menschen müssen sterben," "Freu dich sehr, o meine Seele," "Herr Jesu Christ, wahr'r Mensch und Gott" and "Herzlich tut mich verlangen," the last set in the *SMP* five times as the core chorale.

Smend also relates at length three versions of Picander's BWV 244a parodied libretto, beginning with Picander's initial, partial submission on November 27, 1728, nine days after Prince Leopold died and the commission was undertaken. The first draft lacked the final four numbers in the first part (Nos. 4-7) and subsequently Picander extensively revised the wording in Nos. 6, 7, and 17.

The Köthen Funeral work, BWV 244a/BC B-22, "Cry, Children, Cry to All the World," presented on March 24, 1727, enabled Bach to parody funeral music for two Bach beloved sovereigns: Prince Leopold of Köthen, and Queen Christiane of Dresden. In addition Bach may have had an opportunity the previous day to parody his third work funeral work, "Was ist, das wir Leben nennen?" ("What is this that we call life?"), BC B-19, originally presented on 2 April 1716 for Weimar Prince Johann Ernst. On March 23, the so-called First Köthen Funeral Music, BC B-21, was presented. While music from neither BC B-19 nor B-21 survives, the libretto possibly by Salomo Franck for the Weimar Prince tribute survives, as does the libretto for the Second Köthen Funeral Music. The music composed in Weimar involves 22 numbers: three choruses, six recitatives, four chorales, seven arias, and two *ariosi*. The chorales are "Ach wie flüchtig," "Herzlich tut mich verlangen," and "Christus, der ist mein Leben" (two settings).

The next documented performance of the *SMP* is 1736, with the definitive version. Besides the insertion of another chorale stanza of “Herzlich tut” and closing Part 1 with the chorale fantasia “O Mensch bewein,” Bach added a separate basso continuo to the second orchestra, thereby adding dramatic, antiphonal emphasis for static dramatic purposes. Thus Bach's Great Passion odyssey was virtually completed, a journey which took more than a decade, with most of the activity focused on the first half decade. At this point in 1736, Bach's great Christological cycle of major oratorios for Good Friday and Major Feast Day parodies was complete and he turned his creative energies to major Latin music parodies of the Mass to secure fully his “well-regulated church music, to the glory of God.”

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Citations otherwise not found above can be located in the BCW *SMP Early History: A Selective, Annotated Bibliography*: See: <http://www.bach-cantatas.com/Articles/SMP-Biblio-Hoffman.htm>

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