



St. John Passion Study Guide outline

(January 2011)

On the pages that follow is a 45-50 minute course for church-based adult education classes, youth classes or youth group activities, or high school music classes that highlights some of the major musical points of one of the greatest choral music pieces of all time, the *St. John Passion* of Johann Sebastian Bach.

Goals of this study guide:

1. To provide a basic understanding of how J.S. Bach's *St. John Passion* is arranged, using samples of the vocal parts.
2. To encourage individual and especially group attendance at the Bach Society's March 6, 2011 performance of the *St. John Passion*.

Resources we provide:

1. A Leader's Guide with the narrative to carry out the class.
2. A Participants' Guide with the outline of the class, the words in German and English to the parts they listen to, and promotional information about the concert.

Resources you need to provide:

1. A recording of the *St. John Passion* for playing during the class (not provided but suggested for purchase or borrowing). The cuts and times in the Leader's Guide are based on the 2-CD recording by the Munchener Bach-Chor and Orchester led by Karl Richter, DGG 453-007-2. (If you use a different recording, you can identify which cuts to use by matching with the German/English words in the Participants' Guide.)
2. A CD player or computer with speakers to amplify the sound for the room in which the class occurs.

Suggested approach:

1. Invite likely attendees to read the Passion story in John 18-19 prior to coming to the class.
2. Provide each attendee with a copy of the Participants' Guide, which comes later in this Study Guide.

3. Use the Leader's Guide as your "script." Due to the length of the musical excerpts and the explanations in the Leader's Guide, those alone will take a full 45-50 minutes. If you'd like to add more content or allow time for discussion, perhaps plan on a longer class or on two classes to cover the material.

Please contact us for helpful advice or to give us feedback on this resource. We would like to know how and when you use this study guide and how it could be improved. To do that, call or email Larry Hollar of the Bach Society Board, 937-643-3168 or theosguy@aol.com.

To order concert tickets and to inquire about group rates for the *St. John Passion* concert or other Bach Society concerts, please contact the Bach Society directly at 937-294-BACH or see www.bachsocietyofdayton.org.

For additional background on Johann Sebastian Bach, see http://www.bachsocietyofdayton.org/about_j_s_bach/about_j_s_bach.html.

This study guide was prepared by Larry Hollar of the Bach Society of Dayton, who greatly appreciates the insightful comments on his prior drafts from Terry Biers, Lisa Hess, Jackie Nowak, Margaret Karns, John Neely, and Alan Kimbrough. Any errors are entirely the responsibility of Mr. Hollar.

The study guide is being provided in conjunction with the performance of the St. John Passion on March 6, 2011, a major collaboration between the Bach Society of Dayton and Capella, one of the groups associated with the Kettering Children's Choir, which will join the Bach Society for the concert. Major funding support for this concert collaboration has been provided by the Montgomery County Arts and Cultural District, the Monarch/Genesis Fund of The Dayton Foundation, and Dr. and Mrs. Hans Zwart.





Leader's Guide—*St. John Passion*

Background

Many churches observe Lent, the time in the church calendar between Ash Wednesday and Palm Sunday. Lent is a journey leading us toward Holy Week, the cross and Jesus' resurrection. The gospel narratives of Jesus' arrest, trial and crucifixion are powerful readings during Holy Week worship services. They also have been the subject of many composers' settings of instrumental and vocal pieces.

Among the best known of these musical works are Johann Sebastian Bach's settings of the Passion stories from the Gospels according to St. Matthew and St. John. Using soloists, chorus, and orchestra, Bach tells the biblical Passion narrative and also adds songs that reflect emotional and spiritual responses to the story as it goes along.

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) wrote many musical works, some of them now ranked among the greatest musical compositions of all times. Among his vocal works, the B Minor Mass and his two Passions—the St. Matthew and the St. John—are generally considered his finest. Bach composed during what we call the Baroque (pronounced buh-ROKE) period. This was a time when major composers like Henry Purcell (pronounced PER-suhl), George Friderick Handel, and Bach composed oratorios, masses, and other choral works that are still well-known and often performed in our day. Bach was not the only composer who wrote Passions, but his *St. Matthew Passion* and *St. John Passion* are the most renowned. These were composed for Holy Week services in Leipzig, Germany.

During today's class we will hear excerpts from Bach's Passion based on the Gospel of St. John. We hope this class gives you a basic understanding of how Bach tells the Passion story musically. We also hope it makes you want to hear the entire *St. John Passion*. The good news is that we can all hear that entire work in a live concert by the Bach Society of Dayton that will be presented on Sunday, March 6, in Kettering. A little later we'll hear more about that concert—but first, let's listen to some recorded excerpts from Bach's *St. John Passion*. The singing is in German, but in your handout you have both a general summary of the excerpts and the more detailed German/English translation if you'd like to follow along. The translation is also available at the concert.

The Music of the St. John Passion

Bach's work begins with a beautiful, lengthy orchestral and choral introduction that asks Jesus, as Son of God, to show how he has been glorified even in his humiliation and death.

Garden and Judas' betrayal

Then the Bible story itself begins with Jesus and his disciples praying in the garden, followed by Judas' betrayal. Because this first part shows you the basic way Bach arranges the Passion, we will listen to an excerpt of this garden scene. You can use your handout, where the summary and the German and English words are given, if you'd like to follow the narrative. We will hear first the voice of the Evangelist—a tenor who sings often during the narrative parts of the Passion story. Then a separate male soloist sings Jesus' part, and the chorus enters in the first of its many roles—this time they play the surrounding crowd that has come to the garden looking for Jesus. Listen carefully as the Evangelist sings—hear how he changes the mood by the very sharp way he sings the words “lanterns and torches and weapons” and the much sweeter way he sings when Jesus is about to speak. This portion of the *St. John Passion* tells the story using the actual Scriptural text, and Bach employs a singing form called a **recitative** (pronounced reh-sih-tuh-TEEV), which is speech-like singing, usual by a single voice, with free rhythms and without a structured melody. Let's listen.

[Listen to cuts 2-6, 3:24 mins.] (first excerpt on Participants' Guide)

Chorale reflection

Now, right after this the chorus steps into a new role. No longer are they the crowd shouting to capture Jesus. Now they are people like us, looking with amazement at the love Jesus shows in accepting the Passion. While we have joy and pleasure in our lives, Jesus suffers wrath for our sake. This music is different from what we just heard in the earlier section—here the choir sings in four part harmony in the form of a **chorale** (pronounced “core-AL”). This may remind you of some hymns we sing in church. Many of our hymns are based on chorale tunes from the centuries around when Bach lived. The words the chorus sings here are not in the biblical story—they are a commentary on it.

[Listen to cut 7, 1:15] (second excerpt in Participants' Guide)

Two reflective arias

As the story continues, Bach intersperses the biblical narrative not only with chorales like we just heard, but also with **arias** (pronounced “AH-ree-uhs”). These are melodic solos for individual voices (very different from the recitative we heard earlier) that reflect on the story—they are not part of the bible text itself, but they show the human response to the story as it unfolds. We'll listen now to an aria sung by the alto—again you can follow in your handout. Note that the Bach Society concert in March will feature this aria sung by a man, not by a woman as it is in this recording. A man who sings in the alto voice

range is called a **countertenor**. Hearing a man sing this will be very interesting experience for many of us! Following an excerpt from the alto aria, we'll listen to a portion of a soprano aria.

[Listen to cut 11—cut it off at the 2:50 mark] (third excerpt in Participants' Guide)

Now we'll listen to a brief excerpt from the soprano aria:

[Listen to cut 13—cut it off at the 1:30 mark] (fourth excerpt in Participants' Guide)

Peter's Betrayal

The biblical story resumes and we find ourselves with the disciple Peter. Jesus has been arrested and taken to the high priest while Peter is warming himself by the fire nearby. And, as you know the story, when questioned by those around him about whether he knows Jesus, Peter denies it—and the cock crows three times, as Jesus had predicted. Listen to the masterful way Bach uses the Evangelist's emotionally-charged singing to illustrate how Peter weeps bitterly when he realizes he has betrayed his Master. Is there any doubt about the depth of Peter's despair in that moment?

[Listen to cuts 16-18, 2:32] (fifth excerpt in Participants' Guide)

Tenor reflective aria

Just following that scene is a tenor aria—this is your chance to hear the soloist in that voice range sing of his feelings about the ways we too, in our own way, might betray Jesus.

[Listen to cut 19, 3:06] (sixth excerpt in Participants' Guide)

Jesus and Pilate

One of the most striking scenes in the Passion comes when Jesus is on trial before Pilate. The soldiers and the crowd mock Jesus. Pilate seeks a way to avoid responsibility, but the crowd demands Jesus' crucifixion. Then Pilate and Jesus talk to each other. Listen as Bach paints this picture with the intensity of the chorus's voices and the calmness of Jesus' response to Pilate.

[Listen to cuts 33-39, 7:00] (seventh excerpt in Participants' Guide)

Jesus' Crucifixion and Death

In many ways the culmination of the Passion comes as Jesus, now crucified, speaks to his mother and to the disciple he loves, and says his final words. Let's listen.

[Listen to cuts 53-57, and then cut 59, 8:30] (eighth excerpt in Participants' Guide)

As we end our class today, I'll play softly the poignant closing chorus [cut 67] that invites Jesus to "Rest Well." I hope this walk through Bach's *St. John Passion* has given you a sense of what a profound musical and spiritual experience this monumental musical work offers us. But we have just heard a portion of this work today—about 30 minutes of music out of a two hour performance. In its entirety it is a truly profound experience, and the Bach Society of Dayton offers us the chance to hear the entire Passion in a live performance on March 6 at the Kettering Adventist Church at 4:00 p.m. A group of 10 or more attendees will entitle us to a special discount price of \$15 per adult ticket or \$7 per ticket for students age 13 and up. We hope you'll consider joining us as part of a group. Please let me know soon if you'd like to attend.

As the Lenten season begins this year, may we too reflect on Jesus' journey, as Bach's music invites us to do. Amen.

[Ruht Wohl (cut 67) plays as the class ends.]

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Details on the concert:

- **Sunday, March 6, 2011, 4:00 p.m., at the Kettering Adventist Church, 3939 Stonebridge Road, Kettering, OH.**
- **Concert preview at 3:00 p.m. with Rev. John F. Koepke III and Rev. Dr. Rodney W. Kennedy.**
- **Individual adult tickets are \$25; students ages 13 and up \$10; ages 12 and under free.**
- **Groups rates for 10 or more attendees: adults \$15 each, students \$7 each.**
- **For more information, see www.bachsocietyofdayton.org.**



Participants' Guide—*St. John Passion*

Introduction

Today you have the chance to hear portions of one of the finest choral music pieces ever written—the *St. John Passion* of Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750). This work tells the biblical story of Christ's arrest, trial, and crucifixion, and provides commentary and perspective on what is occurring using soloists and chorus, accompanied by orchestra and other instruments. Bach employs many voices, moods, and vocal approaches that bring this powerful story to life. All the singing is in German.

During this class you will learn some background on the overall *St. John Passion* and then hear eight recorded excerpts that illustrate the different types of vocal expression Bach uses.

You have two choices for how you experience this class. You may use the brief outline below and simply listen to the beauty and power of the music. If you like detail and want to follow along with the German text as it is sung and see a side-by-side English translation, use the text that begins on the following pages and is marked for each excerpt. You choose the approach that works for you.

After hearing these excerpts, we hope you will come to the live performance of the entire *St. John Passion* by the Bach Society of Dayton on Sunday, March 6, 2011, at 4:00 p.m. at the Kettering Adventist Church. Concert details are below.

Key facts about the *St. John Passion*:

- It is one of J.S. Bach's most famous choral works, composed during the Baroque period.
- It includes the biblical Passion story (primarily from John 18-19) as well as commentary on the story.
- There are vocal parts for soloists and chorus, who change roles during the piece.

Excerpts summary (use this or the detailed German/English text on the following pages):

First excerpt: Narrative: Jesus in the garden with his disciples, the shouting crowd, and Judas' betrayal.

Second excerpt: The chorus comments on Jesus' love and suffering. Does this music sound like a church hymn to you?

Third excerpt: The alto soloist points out that Jesus removes the bonds of sin and the wounds of vice.

Fourth excerpt: The soprano soloist commits to follow Jesus as his path moves on.

Fifth excerpt: Peter's betrayal. Listen as Bach's music highlights Peter's lament.

Sixth excerpt: The tenor soloist reflects on Peter's betrayal, and our capacity to do so as well.

Seventh excerpt: Narrative—Jesus, Pilate and the crowd.

Eighth excerpt: Narrative--Jesus' crucifixion and death.

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We hope you will join us for the *St. John* Passion concert. Details on the concert follow:

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- **Concert preview at 3:00 p.m. with Rev. John F. Koepke III and Rev. Dr. Rodney W. Kennedy.**
- **Individual adult tickets are \$25; students ages 13 and up \$10; ages 12 and under free.**
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St. John Passion Text Excerpts

First excerpt:

Recitative

Evangelist: *Jesus ging mit seinen Jüngern über den Bach Kidron, da war ein Garten, darein ging Jesus und seine Jünger. Judas aber, der ihn verriet, wußte den Ort auch, denn Jesus versammelte sich oft daselbst mit seinen Jüngern. Da nun Judas zu sich hatte genommen die Schar und der Hohenpriester und Pharisäer Diener, kommt er dahin mit Fackeln, Lampen und mit Waffen. Als nun Jesus wußte alles, was ihm begegnen sollte, ging er hinaus und sprach zu ihnen:*

Jesus: *Wen suchet ihr?*

Evangelist: *Sie antworteten ihm:*

Chorus: *Jesum von Nazareth.*

Evangelist: *Jesus spricht zu ihnen:*

Jesus: *Ich bin's.*

Evangelist: *Judas aber, der ihn verriet, stund auch bei ihnen. Als nun Jesus zu ihnen sprach: "Ich bin's," wichen sie zurücke und fielen zu Boden. Da fragete er sie abermal:*

Jesus: *Wen suchet ihr?*

Evangelist: *Sie aber sprachen:*

Chorus: *Jesum von Nazareth.*

Evangelist: *Jesus antwortete:*

Jesus: *Ich hab euch gesagt, daß ichs sei, suchet ihr denn mich, so lasset diese gehen!*

Jesus went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, "Whom are you looking for?"

They answered,

"Jesus of Nazareth."

Jesus replied,

"I am he."

Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they stepped back and fell to the ground.

Again he asked them,

"Whom are you looking for?"

And they said,

"Jesus of Nazareth."

Jesus answered,

"I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go."

Second excerpt:

Chorale

*O große Lieb, o Lieb ohn alle Maße,
Die dich gebracht auf diese Marterstraße!
Ich lebte mit der Welt in Lust und Freuden,
Und du mußt leiden!*

O great love, o love without measure,
Which has brought you to this martyr's path!
I lived with the world in delight and joy,
And you must suffer!

Third excerpt:

Alto Aria

*Von den Strikken meiner Sünden
Mich zu entbinden
Wird mein Heil gebunden.
Mich von allen Lasterbeulen
Völlig zu heilen,
Läßt er sich verwunden.*

From the binding ropes of my sins
To unbind me,
My Saviour is being bound.
From all the running sores of vice
Fully to heal me,
He lets himself be wounded.

Fourth excerpt:

Soprano Aria

*Ich folge dir gleichfalls
Mit freudigen Schritten,
Und lasse dich nicht,
Mein Leben, mein Licht.
Befördre den Lauf
Und höre nicht auf,
Selbst an mir zu ziehen,
Zu schieben, zu bitten.*

I follow you also
With joyful steps
And will not let you go,
My life, my light.
Speed the way
And do not cease
To draw me yourself,
To push me, to entreat me.

Fifth excerpt:

Recitative

Evangelist: *Und Hannas sandte ihn gebunden
zu dem Hohenpriester Kaiphas. Simon Petrus
stund und wärmte sich, da sprachen sie zu ihm:*
Chorus: *Bist du nicht seiner Jünger einer?*
Evangelist: *Er leugnete aber und sprach:*
Peter: *Ich bins nicht.*
Evangelist: *Spricht des Hohenpriesters Knecht'
einer, ein Gefreundter des, dem Petrus das Ohr
abgehauen hatte:*
Servant: *Sah ich dich nicht im Garten bei ihm?*
Evangelist: *Da verleugnete Petrus abermal,
und alsobald krähete der Hahn. Da gedachte
Petrus an die Worte Jesu und ging hinaus
und weinete bitterlich.*

Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest. Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, "You are not also one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not." One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?" Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed. [Then Peter remembered the words of Jesus and went out and wept bitterly.]

Sixth excerpt:

Tenor Aria

*Ach, mein Sinn,
Wo willst du endlich hin,
Wo soll ich mich erquicken?
Bleib ich hier
Oder wünsch ich mir
Berg und Hügel auf den Rücken?
Bei der Welt ist gar kein Rat,
Und im Herzen
Stehn die Schmerzen
Meiner Missetat,
Weil der Knecht den Herrn verleugnet hat.*

O, my soul,
Where do you at last want to go,
Where shall I refresh myself?
Shall I stay here
Or should I wish
Mountains and hills to fall on my back?
In the world there is no counsel at all,
And in the heart
The agonies remain
Of my misdeeds,
For the servant has denied the Lord.

Seventh excerpt:

Recitative

Evangelist: *Und die Kriegsknechte flochten
eine Krone von Dornen und satzten sie auf*

And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns
and put it on his head, and they dressed him

*sein Haupt und legten ihm ein Purpurkleid an
und sprachen:*

Chorus: *Sei gegrüßet, lieber Jüdenkönig!*

Evangelist: *Und gaben ihm Bakkenstreiche.*

*Da ging Pilatus wieder heraus und sprach
zu ihnen:*

Pilate: *Sehet, ich führe ihn heraus zu euch, daß
ihr erkennet, daß ich keine Schuld an ihm finde.*

Evangelist: *Also ging Jesus heraus und trug
eine Dornenkrone und Purpurkleid.*

Und er sprach zu ihnen:

Pilate: *Sehet, welch ein Mensch!*

Evangelist: *Da ihn die Hohenpriester und die
Diener sahen, schrieten sie und sprachen:*

Chorus: *Kreuzige, kreuzige!*

Evangelist: *Pilatus sprach zu ihnen:*

Pilate: *Nehmet ihr ihn hin und kreuziget ihn;
denn ich finde keine Schuld an ihm!*

Evangelist: *Die Jüden antworteten ihm:*

Chorus: *Wir haben ein Gesetz, und nach dem
Gesetz soll er sterben, denn er hat sich selbst
zu Gottes Sohn gemacht.*

Evangelist: *Da Pilatus das Wort hörte,
fürchtet' er sich noch mehr und ging wieder
hinein in das Richthaus, und spricht zu Jesu:*

Pilate: *Von wannen bist du?*

Evangelist: *Aber Jesus gab ihm keine Antwort.
Da sprach Pilatus zu ihm:*

Pilate: *Redest du nicht mit mir? Weißest du
nicht, daß ich Macht habe, dich zu kreuzigen,
und Macht habe, dich loszugeben?*

Evangelist: *Jesus antwortete:*

Jesus: *Du hättest keine Macht über mich, wenn
sie dir nicht wäre von oben herab gegeben;
darum, der mich dir überantwortet hat,
der hat's größte Sünde.*

Evangelist: *Von dem an trachtete Pilatus,
wie er ihn losließe.*

in a purple robe. They kept coming up to him,
saying,

"Hail, King of the Jews!"

and striking him on the face.

Pilate went out again and said to them,

"Look, I am bringing him out to you to let
you know that I find no case against him."

So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of
thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them,

"Here is the man!"

When the chief priests and the police saw him,
they shouted,

"Crucify him! Crucify him!"

Pilate said to them,

"Take him yourselves and crucify him;
I find no case against him."

The Jews answered him,

"We have a law, and according to that law
he ought to die because he has claimed to be
the Son of God."

Now when Pilate heard this, he was more
afraid than ever. He entered his headquarters
again and asked Jesus,

"Where are you from?"

But Jesus gave him no answer.

Pilate therefore said to him,

"Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not
know that I have power to release you, and
power to crucify you?"

Jesus answered him,

"You would have no power over me unless it
had been given you from above; therefore the
one who handed me over to you is guilty of a
greater sin."

From then on Pilate tried to release him.

Eighth excerpt:

Recitative

Evangelist: *Die Kriegsknechte aber, da sie
Jesum gekreuziget hatten, nahmen seine Kleider
und machten vier Teile, einem jeglichen Krieges-
knechte sein Teil, dazu auch den Rock. Der Rock
aber war ungenähet, von oben an gewürket durch*

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they
took his clothes and divided them into four parts,
one for each soldier. They also took his tunic;
now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece
from the top. So they said to one another,

und durch. Da sprachen sie untereinander:

Chorus: *Lasset uns den nicht zerteilen, sondern darum lösen, wes er sein soll.*

Evangelist: *Auf daß erfüllet würde die Schrift, die da saget: "Sie haben meine Kleider unter sich geteilet und haben über meinen Rock das Los geworfen." Solches taten die Kriegesknechte.*

Es stund aber bei dem Kreuze Jesu seine Mutter und seiner Mutter Schwester, Maria, Kleophas Weib, und Maria Magdalena. Da nun Jesus seine Mutter sahe und den Jünger dabei stehen, den er lieb hatte, spricht er zu seiner Mutter:

Jesus: *Weib, siehe, das ist dein Sohn!*

Evangelist: *Darnach spricht er zu dem Jünger:*

Jesus: *Siehe, das ist deine Mutter!*

"Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it."

This was to fulfill what the scripture says:

"They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots."

And that is what the soldiers did.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son."

Then he said to the disciple,

"Here is your mother."

Chorale

*Er nahm alles wohl in acht
In der letzten Stunde,
Seine Mutter noch bedacht,
Setzt ihr ein' Vormunde.
O Mensch, mache Richtigkeit,
Gott und Menschen liebe,
Stirb darauf ohn alles Leid,
Und dich nicht betrübe!*

He took care of everything
Even at his last hour;
Thinking of his mother,
He gave her a guardian.
O humankind, set everything in order,
Love both God and humankind;
Die afterwards without any pain
And be untroubled!

Recitative

Evangelist: *Und von Stund an nahm sie der Jünger zu sich.*

Darnach, als Jesus wußte, daß schon alles vollbracht war, daß die Schrift erfüllet würde, spricht er:

Jesus: *Mich dürstet!*

Evangelist: *Da stund ein Gefäße voll Essigs. Sie fülleten aber einen Schwamm mit Essig und legten ihn um einen Isopen, und hielten es ihm dar zum Munde. Da nun Jesus den Essig genommen hatte, sprach er:*

Jesus: *Es ist vollbracht!*

And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture),

"I am thirsty."

A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said,

"It is finished."

Recitative

Evangelist: *Und neiget das Haupt und verschied.*

Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit