

MUSIC AND THE PASSION [Part II]

This article is an historical overview on how the theme of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of the Jesus Christ has been treated in vocal music throughout the ages. It is divided chronologically into two parts. The first part covers music from Middle ages until the end of the Renaissance; and the second part treats vocal music from the early Baroque period until today.

PART II From the early Baroque until today

I Staged works:

1. Jesuit drama
2. *Sacra rappresentazione* (Sacred play)
3. *Sepolcro* (Sepulchre)
4. Passion play at Oberammergau
5. Wagner sacred drama
6. Passion Musicals
7. The Passion Opera

II Unstaged works

1. The St Philpe Nery oratorios
2. The Oratorio
3. Oratorio in Viena, Metastasio's Libretto *Passio*
4. German Passion
5. The Passion Cantatas
6. *Stabat Mater*
7. England
 - a. Haendel and the English oratorio
 - b. Grand Choral Festivals
 - c. The Cathedral choral tradition
8. Germany
9. 20th and 21st Century Passion

PART II From early Baroque until today

In this section the repertoire is divided in two main areas: the first one focus on works that involved stage and acting; the second part on vocal music which was not meant to be acted.

I. Staged works

1. Jesuit drama

As early as the 16th century, dramatic representations were staged at the Jesuit colleges and seminaries all throughout Europe. After 1600, the dramas began borrowing techniques from opera, including stunning stage effects. There were crowd processions, ballet, *intermedi* and chorus. Solo numbers ranged from simple folksongs and aria like lament to hymns. In 1655, a large theatre was built by Ferdinand III for the Jesuits, at the University of Vienna with elaborate stage machinery, a hall accommodating 3000 people and a musician's gallery for instrumentalists. Music and spoken portions were by the end of the century of equal importance. The dramas used same type of music idiom of opera, including recitatives, arias and ensembles. Jesuit involvement with school drama ceased with the suppression of the order by Pope Clement XIV in 1773. The society was restored in 1814 but it didn't recover the dramatics representations

2. *Sacra rappresentazione* (sacred plays)

A pivotal work both for the history of opera and oratorio was the *sacra rappresentazione*, ***Cavalieri Rappresenatione di anima e di corpo (1600)***. It was performed under the oratorians (see Oratorio section) as an elaborate production for carnival season in a Holy year. It was a work acted and sung throughout, and Cavalieri asked the actors to sing in the new Florentine style of recitative 'recitar cantando' (recite singing). Roman *sacra rappresentazione* was specially dominated by the Patronage of the Barberini family, the family of Pope Urban VIII and the librettos of Giulio Rospiglioso, later to become Pope Clement IX.

3. *Sepolcro*

The Vienese *Sepolcro* was performed on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday at the Habsburg courts in Vienna between 1660 and 1705. The text was in Italian, in one section and was performed with scenery, costumes and action. The sources found begin invariably with a replica of the most holy sepulchre of Christ, which is the main element of scenery.

4. *Passion Play at Oberammergau*

<http://www.oberammergau-passion.com/en-gb/home/home.html>

This Passion Play at Oberammergau was first staged in 1634.

The Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) resulted in widespread poverty and disease. Most frightening of all was the plague that killed thousands. Some 80 died in tiny Oberammergau alone. After months of suffering, the Oberammergauers vowed to God, to perform the *Play of the Suffering, Death and Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ* every ten years if God assisted them. The disease halted and at Whitsun in 1634, the villagers fulfilled their promise. The first-ever performance took place on a stage set up in the cemetery above the graves of

recent plague victims. The Passion has been going on since then. In the last Passion play in 2010, 2000 villagers took part and there were 102 performances. Musically, the play included two hours of music, performed by an orchestra of 60 members and a choir. Rochus Dedler, born in Oberammergau in 1779, composed the music for the Passion Play. Whilst there have been several adaptations of his music in the intervening years the music performed during the Passion Play is still based on Dedler's original score.

5. Wagner sacred drama

Wagner treated the sacred themes in various of his operas, most notably in *Parsifal* described by Wagner as a '*Buhnenweihfestspiel*', a 'a stage consecrating festival play'. In *Parsifal* there are specific references to the passion and death of Christ, such as the spear, the wound in the side breast, the grail, the stage enactment of holy Communion, etc. It was considered a truly religious experience and some Wagnerians still today listen to Parsifal at 3pm on Good Friday.

6. Passion Musicals

In the 20 century there have been Passion Musicals, such as *Jesus Christ Super Star* (1970) by Andrew Lloyd Webber with lyrics by Tim Rice or *Godspell* a by Schwartz based on a book by Tebelak. It premiered in Off-Broadway on May 17th, 1971. The structure of *Godspell* is that of a series of parables, mostly based on the Gospel of Matthew (three of the featured parables are recorded only in the Gospel of Luke). The parables are intertwined with a variety of modern music set primarily to lyrics from traditional hymns, the Passion of Christ is treated towards the end of the performance

7. The Passion opera

The opera *The Passion* (2016), was a fully stage version of the Bach's oratorio *St Matthew Passion*. The cast was made of The Sixteen and performers who have experienced homelessness from Streetwise Opera Manchester. It was a collaboration with HOME, Manchester center for visual art, film and theatre. Penny Woolcock directed it, with multiple performers playing the leading role as a reminder of Jesus's vulnerability and universality. The production featured a new 'resurrection' finale which had been jointly written by Streetwise Opera's performers and composer Sir James MacMillan. Bleak images were followed by glimmers of hope in *The Passion's* joyous closing chorus.
<http://www.streetwiseopera.org/passion>

II. Unstaged works

1. The St Philipe Neri Oratories

St Philipe Neri (1515–95), the founder of the oratorians, started in the 1550s the spiritual exercises where religious matters could be expanded in vernacular, a sermon was given and motets and hymns sung. As the spiritual exercises grew in popularity, larger quarters were necessary, and thus an oratory (from Latin *oratio*, ‘prayer’), or prayer hall, was constructed in a space above the nave of the church. For the rest of Neri's life and until the mid-18th century, the *Congregazione dell'Oratorio* (Congregation of the Oratory) continued to increase in strength and prominence, first in Italy, then throughout Europe and in other parts of the world. Music continued to be important in the oratories, particularly those in Italy. Sung in the 16th century by both the congregation and professionals (later only by professionals), the music functioned as edifying entertainment and was intended to attract people to the spiritual exercises.

The *laude* predominated in the exercises, but the more sophisticated motet and *madrigale spirituale* (spiritual madrigals) were not excluded, particularly for the musically elaborate oratorio vespertino, which took place in the oratory after Vespers on feast days during the winter months. By the 1620s and 1630s there was elaborate music at the oratories. And by 1640s they attracted crowds to Rome, including foreigners. Two main composers were writing the music: Giacomo Carissimi (1605-1674) Carissimi and Luigi Rossi (1597- 1653). Rossi's *Oratorio per la Settimana Santa* (Oratorio for Holy Week) is very operatic. In this oratorio short arias given shape by instrumental *ritornello*, the role of the chorus is large both as a participating character and as commentator, the latter function inspiring some beautiful and huge madrigals.

2. The Oratorio

In the 16th century and the first half of the 17th, the word ‘oratorio’ most commonly referred to the building (the oratory) and the spiritual exercise that took place within it. The meaning of the word was eventually broadened, however, to include the new musical genre used in the services, and the earliest documented use of it to mean a musical composition was in 1640.

By the mid-17th century two closely related types of oratorio had developed, the *oratorio latino* and the *oratorio volgare*, using texts in Latin and Italian respectively. In Rome at this period the *oratorio latino* appears to have been fostered exclusively in the services of the aristocratic Oratorio del Santissimo Crocifisso, not related to, but probably influenced by the oratories at the Chiesa Nuova and S Girolamo della Carità which seem, on the other hand, to have concentrated on the *oratorio volgare*, which aimed at a broader spectrum of the Roman public. Carissimi was the most significant composer of Latin oratorios in the mid-17th century. His reputation and influence as an oratorio composer extended beyond Rome and Italy to northern Europe in his own time.

In the late 17th and 18 century oratorios began to be increasingly performed elsewhere rather than in the oratory churches, such as in the palaces of noblemen, specially as substitute for opera during lent while the theatres were closed. That was the case of the Palace of Queen Christina of Sweden in Rome, Cardinal Pamphili, Cardinal Ottoboni or the Palazzo Ruspoli were for example was performed Haendel oratorio *La Ressurrezione* on Easter Sunday and

Monday, 1708. The oratorio was staged but not acted, although in late 18 Italy there were occasional presentations of staged performances of oratorios specially in Naples. In *la Rissurrezzione* the emphasis is still on soloists, the chorus acts as a crowd or turba in the conventional way and there are several chorales. There are some fine descriptive recitatives which were to become a feature of Haendel's latest Oratorios.

Oratorio in 1660-80 was close to opera, a flexible alternation of recitative, arioso, and arias inherited from Monteverdi and Cavalli. By the 1700 a more regular alternation between recitative and arias was usual. The arias being to be more extended and in *da capo* form. The chorus was virtually abolished, but all characters joined together at the finale. The libretto for the oratorio at this time is an extended poem of about 350-450 lines, characteristically in two sections, lasting by 1720s around one and half hours to 2 hours. They usually required 3 to 5 voices to sing the solo roles which united in the ensembles, and the sections marked 'coro' or 'madrigale'. There were grand overtures and full accompaniment of the arias.

Alessandro Scarlatti who composed *Passio Secundum Ioannem* (c.1680), using the Latin text of the Bible gospel, was the most famous composer of the form at the time. In this 'oratorio Passion' he mixes mainly three styles: accompanied recitativo, arioso with orchestra and continuo and choirs in four parts. Passion settings of this time followed the oratorio style, many were set after the Metastasio libretto *Passio*.

3. Oratorio in Vienna, Metastasio's libretto *Passio*

Outside Italy the Italian *oratorio* developed especially in Roman Catholic Courts and at the Oratories. Viennese court became the most important centre of sacred dramatic music in the Italian language outside Italy. The main differences between Viennese and native Latin traditions lies in the orchestration, which tends to be more colourful in the North. The chorus tend also to be longer and more contrapuntal. Of special importance for the Italian oratorio of the 18th century are the libretto changes introduced by the court poets Zeno and Metastasio, who wrote both the libretto for the operas and oratorios. Their main addition in the adherence to the Aristotelian unities of action, time and place. Metastasio's best known oratorio libretto is *La passione di Gesù Cristo* (*The Passion of Jesus Christ*), performed at the Holy Sepulchre in the *Hofburgkapelle*, the court chapel in Vienna, for Holy Week on 3 April 1730. The original composer was Antonio Caldara (1670-1736).

This libretto was to have an enormous influence in the 18th century Italian *Passion oratorio*. The Passion oratorio in Italian was prolific, and from 1730 it is represented in Italy and other European cities dominated by Italian music by Metastasio libretto *La passione di Gesù Cristo*. It was set by at least 54 composers, from all over Europe. In Italy alone from 1730-99, there were 35 composers who composed Passion oratorio based on Metastasio libretto including 1749 Jommelli, *La Passione di N S Gesù Cristo*, Venice.

4. German Passion

As an independent form occupying halfway between a biblical reading and oratorio, Passion composition is concentrated after 1600 in German speaking areas. The responsorial and through-composed types of Passion (see Part I) served as models well into the 17th century and even 18th century. The strongest tradition of Passion setting in the first half of 17th century

was that based on the responsorial models of Walter. As in preceding decades the composer was only responsible for the new polyphonic sections, as it was customary to use the traditional recitation tone for the monologues. The contrast between monody and polyphony is enhanced by an increase in rhythmic and harmonic variety in the polyphonic settings. The three *Dresden Passions* by Schütz (*St Mathew, St Luke and St John*, c. 1655) with their very fugued turbae choir belong to this tradition, although he added his own expressive recitation tones instead of using Walter models.

Thomas Strutz wrote a *Passion* (1664) with arias for Jesus himself, pointing to the standard oratorio tradition of Schütz and Carissimi. The practice of using recitative for the Evangelist (rather than plainsong) was a development of court composers in northern Germany, such as Johann Meder and Schütz, and only crept into church compositions at the end of the 17th century. The recitative was used for dramatic expression.

A new style in the history of the Passion began to develop around 1650, called Oratorio Passion, when musicians in north Germany introduced fundamental and ornamental instruments. Such settings were broken up by the introduction of reflective episodes, sinfonias, parallel biblical texts, new madrigalian verse, hymns, chorale arias, and more. The earliest instrumental accompanied Oratorio Passion in Germany was those of Thomas Selle of Hamburg, the *St Mathew Passion* (1642) and *St John Passion* (1643).

In the 18th century there were basically four different types of Passion setting in Germany:

1. The old type without instruments, by this time usually embellished with hymns.
2. *Oratorio Passion*, which adhered to the biblical text, often called Passions-Music (coupled with the name of the Gospel)
3. *Passion Oratorio* in operatic style with completely original text, sometimes a poetic title is added.
4. Lyrical mediation on the Passion without direct dialogue.

Oratorio Passion was the most commonly found in the early 18th century, this can be seen for instance in the work of Georg Philipp Telemann who between 1716 and 1767, wrote over 40 Oratorio Passions for the churches of Hamburg alone, of which 22 have survived according. He also wrote several other Passion oratorios.

The best known musical settings of the Oratorio Passion are by J. S. Bach, who, wrote five Passions in his lifetime. Two have survived to the present day: The *St John Passion* and the *St Matthew Passion*. Additionally, a libretto for the *St Mark's Passion* survives. The Bach Passions, with their mixture of biblical and free poetic texts, and their elaborate settings in form of choruses, recitatives and arias, with rich orchestral coloring, represents a grand culmination of the Passion genre,

The Passion continued to be very popular in Protestant Germany in the 18th century. As Chapel Master at Hamburg from 1768 to 1788, C. P. E. Bach, Bach's second son, composed 21 settings of the Oratorio Passion. Other major composers of Passions included Keiser, Mattheson and Haydn. Haydn 'Seven Last words of our savior on the Cross' commissioned in 1783 for the good Friday service at Oratorio de la Cueva in Cadiz Spain, was originally written as instrumental work but Haydn transformed it in a oratorio in 1796.

5. The Passion Cantatas

Cantata is a work for one or more voices with instrumental accompaniment. The cantata was the most important form of vocal music of the Baroque period outside opera and oratorio. In early 17th century, cantata often was a dramatic madrigal sung by one voice, with lute accompaniment or basso continuo. The form became very popular in Italy in the late 17th century, being by then performed by several voices, and frequently composed of recitative, a succession of arias including arias *da capo*. The *cantata da camera* was secular, while the *cantata da chiesa*, specially developed by Carissimi was sacred. A prolific exponent of the cantata was Alessandro Scarlatti who wrote 600 for solo voice and continuo, 60 for voice and instruments, and several chamber cantatas for 2 voices. During 18th century, cantatas became more theatrical, comprising a *ritornello*, *aria* on two contrasted themes, concluding *ritornello*, and accompaniment by strings.

In Germany the form was found mainly in the church, written for soloist(s), choir, organ, and orchestra. *Membra Jesu Nostri (The Limb of Our Jesus)*, by Buxtehude (1680) is a cycle of seven cantatas, each one dedicated to a part of the crucified body of Jesus: feet, knees, hands, side, breast, heart and head. Other famous Passion cantatas are *Der Tod Jesu* (1755), a text by Ramler set to music by Telemann, C.P.E Bach and Graun and *Die letzten Leiden des Erlösers* (1770) by C.P Bach.

Bach wrote around 3000 church cantatas and from his model developed the cantata of the 19th century, which was, in effect, a short oratorio.

Franz Liszt *Via Crucis*, (1876-79) for mixed choir, soloist and organ, has 15 sections: an introduction and the 14 pieces, depicting the 14 stations of the Cross. Charles Wood *St Mark Passion* (1920) is divided into 5 sections: Last Supper; Gethsemani and Betrayal; Trial before the High Priest; Trial before Pilates; The crucifixion.

6. Stabat Mater

The sequence *Stabat Mater* was one of the Passion themes much explored in the cantata. A splendid example is Domenico Scarlatti *Stabat Mater* composed between 1715-1719, a ten-part setting. Pergolesi *Stabat Mater* (1736) was intended to replace Alessandro Scarlatti's which had been performed annually at Naples during Lent. Both works are for soprano, alto, two violins and continuo. Scarlatti setting is the longest one with 18 sections of which five are duets. The most typical of 18th century thought were settings with orchestral accompaniment in which chorus alternate with solo arias and duets. A good example is Antonio Caldara *Stabat Mater* (c. 1725) that adds to the standard vocal and orchestral forces of SATB soloists, chorus, strings, continuo the sepulchral tone of two trombones. These usually merely double the altos and tenors of the chorus, but in the tenor solo 'Tu nati vulnerati' they are given independent parts. Bitter is his book *Eine Studie zum Stabat Mater* (Leipzig, 1883), lists 100 settings of the *Stabat Mater* composed between 1700 and 1883. Among these are those of Mozart (which got lost), Haydn (1767), Schubert (1815), Rossini (1841), Liszt setting part of oratorio *Christus* (1862-7) uses part of the plainchant melody and uses a large orchestra. Considered the greatest in 19th century is that of Verdi which example was followed by most 20th century composers. Specially beautiful are those of Szymanowski (1925-6), Bekerley (1947), Poulenc (1950), or that of Penderecki's *Stabat Mater* (1962) for three unaccompanied choirs, which he later incorporated in his St Luke Passion.

6. England

6.1 Haendel and the English Oratorio

When Haendel arrived to England there was no oratorio. The nearest example were the grand festivals given on St Cecilia day at Westminster Abbey. The choral repertoire was largely made of anthems and services like the *Te Deum* and Odes.

Handel oratorio were created from these elements: the Italian operatic style with arias and recitative; the German Passion with its chorus as character; and the English anthem and ceremonial ode. There was also some influence of the French classical drama with its choral comments and tragic outcomes, instead of the happy ending of the 18th century *opera seria*. Many of his oratorios have stage directions, which set the scene. It is known that initially he intended to perform his works as operas, (there was an initial private performance of *Esther*), but the Bishop of London objected to the representation of sacred works on stage.

6.2 Grand choral festivals

In England, Haendel's works were given on an increasingly large scale at choral festivals, culminating in the huge events with up to a thousand performers at Westminster Abbey 1784-91. Thanks to these the work began to be seen largely choral work.

Provincial music festivals in England were the chief institutions to cultivate oratorio composition and performance. The Three Choirs Festivals that began presenting Haendel oratorios during his lifetime became virtually a Haendel festival in the late 18th century. At this festival and elsewhere, the Haendel's *Messiah* was the favoured oratorio. The Festivals of Birmingham and Leeds were also of special importance. In the first half of 19th century Passions of foreign composers were performed in those Festivals. Spohrer's *Calvary (Des Heilands letzte Studen)* was performed in London in 1837. Clarke-Whitfield oratorio pair *Crucifixion* and *Ressurrection* (1822, 1825) are musically among the best Handelian works of the time. From the 1880s the models of Handel and Mendelssohn tended to be abandoned. Wagnerian principles were increasingly adopted, with inclusion of reminiscent motives and occasionally even leitmotifs (leading motives like in Wagner's opera). The *Crucifixion* (1887) by John Stainer became the stereotypical battlehorse for the huge choirs of amateur choral societies.

6.3 Cathedral choral tradition

In the early 19th century new liturgical impetus came from the Oxford Movement and the Tractarians. Its musical impact was strongest seen in parish churches with the establishment of robed choirs and the singing of Holy Communion, most often to the chants published by Merbecke in 1550 (five editions appeared between 1843 and 1853).

In 1856 Sir Frederick Ouseley who was a Professor of Music at Oxford, both founded and endowed with his own funds St Michael's College on the outskirts of Tenbury Wells, a choir school intended to serve as a model for Anglican church music, where cathedral singers were trained. The influence of his new mode of choral services has lasted until today at the main Cathedrals and colleges at Oxford and Cambridge Universities. Sir John Stainer, also Professor of Music at Oxford University who had been organist at St Michael's College, St Magdalen Oxford and later became the organist of at the S. Paul's Cathedral, from 1870 with

his work as choir trainer and organist set standards for Anglican church music that are still influential today.

7. Germany

Similarly in Germany Grand music festivals were prolific, with compositions making a great use of chorale and emphasis on the chorus. Composers with a festival performance in mind could expect several hundred voices in his chorus.

For this public was composed Beethoven's *Christus am Ölberge* (1803). About the middle of the century there was a great revival of interest in history of church and several Passions such as the newly rediscovered Bach *St Mathew Passion* were revived and performed in concert halls.

Regarding new compositions non biblical settings of the Passion were widely cultivated, with basing their work in works of great historical figures such as Schütz or Bach. Some composers returned to the original composition of Passion for liturgical use such as Eberhard Wenzel's *Passion* of 1968, but the greater majority composed for the concert hall.

Fine example of 19 century Passions composed for the concert hall are: Menselsohn, *Christus* (Op.97, 1848); Cesar Franck and Cesar Gounod *Les sept paroles du Christ* (The seven last words of Christ), (1859); and Draeseke *Christus, Mysterium in a Prelude and Three Oratorios* (op 70-73, 1899).

8. 20th and 21th Century Passions:

Martin *Golgotha* (1945-8) is an example of the interest in sacred composition on Baroque models that grew between the wars. *Golgotha* uses more conventional forces in a quite original form: the Gospel narrative is unfolded in seven 'pictures' separated by settings of contemplative texts by St Augustine.

The *Passionsmusik nach dem Lukasevangelium* (1947) by Mauersberger and *St. Luke Passion* (1965) by Penderecki use musical devices such as incantation, heterophony, microtones, glissandos and chord clusters to add intensity of expression to the suffering, sacrifice and redemption of Christ.

Passion and Resurrection by Jonathan Harvey (1981).

<http://www.jonathanharveycomposer.com/passion-and-resurrection-performed-intended-festival/>

The original production of this liturgical for choir, ensemble, organs and congregation, was commissioned to be performed at the Passiontide in Winchester Cathedral and performed by local singers for a local congregation who joined in the singing of several plainchant hymns in the course of the work. The work is divided into 12 pieces, 11 portraying the Passion of Jesus and the finale extended scene the Resurrection.

Passio Domini Nostri Jesu Christi secundum Joannem (1982) by Arvo Pärt is a through-composed setting of St John Gospel chapter 18 and 19 with a short introduction (*introductio*) and conclu). It is a culmination of *tininnabuli* style inspired by medieval music. It uses a SATB choir, 5 instruments violin, oboe, cello, bassoon and organ, a solo baritone (Jesus), a solo tenor (Pilates) and a solo vocal quartet (Evangelist).

Peter Gabriel, *Passion (Music for the last temptation of Christ)*, 1989, which has movements such as 'Gethsemani', 'Stigmata', 'Passion', 'It is accomplished', etc. It served as the soundtrack for the movie by Martin Scorsese *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988). The score is mostly instrumental.

The Passion According to St. Matthew (1997), by Mark Alburger, opus 55 for voice and instruments

<http://markalburgerworks.blogspot.com.es/1997/04/passion-according-to-st-matthew-op-55.html>

Good Friday (1998) is an opera oratorio by John Caldwell, in which the Passion story is presented, with powerful orchestral support, on three separate but closed interlinked levels: as narrative from St John's Gospel, sung in Latin by three 'deacons'; as vivid drama, delivered in concurrently English; and as supporting commentary, drawn largely from the Latin Good Friday liturgy including *Improperia* and the hymn *Pange Lingua*.

In 2000 The International Bach Academy commissioned 4 Passions based on each of the gospels: Gubaidulina *St John Passion*; Rhim Deus Passus (after St Luke Gospel); Golijoc *La Pasion Según San Marcos*; Dun *Water Passion* (based in St Mathew gospel).

The oratorio *The Passion and death of Jesus Christ, according to the Gospels*, (2006) with music by Scott King and lyrics by Scott King and Christopher St John.

'My music is mostly original and includes quotations from many musical pieces used in liturgies at St. Gregory's Church in San Francisco. The piece took five years to write, starting with four soloists singing parallel chants of the passions, and gradually growing through the addition of choir chorales and a chamber orchestra, and arias for the soloists.'

<http://www.passionanddeathofjesus.org/index.php>