

INTRODUCTION

Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach's twenty-one Passions represent the final stage of a long tradition of oratorio Passions in Hamburg, a tradition that can be traced back to 1643.¹ Whereas in many parts of Germany the "traditional" oratorio Passion (with gospel narrative) had already been replaced by the "modern" Passion oratorio (based entirely on poetic verse), the Hamburg clergy adhered to the traditional form; this was abandoned only in 1789 with the reform of Hamburg church music after Bach's death. Therefore, Bach was obliged every year to perform for the main churches a new Passion based on one of the four Gospels. From the late seventeenth century onward, the Hamburg Passions followed a fixed annual sequence of Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Both Georg Philipp Telemann and C.P.E. Bach adopted this sequence as directors of the Hamburg church music; the sequence was interrupted only once, in 1769, when Bach directed his first Passion and presented a St. Matthew Passion instead of a St. John.

Bach's Passions were modeled in scoring, scope, and musical demands on Telemann's works from his last decade. These Passions tell the story of Jesus' suffering and death through one of the Gospel texts, with roles allocated to specific singers. Larger groups of people (the disciples, high priests, or the crowd) are represented by the chorus. Traditionally the gospel narrative was framed by choruses or simple chorales. At high points in the story, arias and choruses interrupted the narration, commenting on and interpreting those passages in order to move the listener to devotion and penitence.

The music director in Hamburg presented the same oratorio Passion during Lent in each of Hamburg's five main churches, as well as in several secondary churches. Performances were given according to a fixed rotational scheme, starting with St. Petri as the oldest parish and ending with St. Michaelis as the newest. The following order of Sundays in Lent (and churches) was prescribed for the Passions: *Invocavit* (St. Petri), *Reminiscere* (St. Nicolai), *Laetare* (St. Catharinen), *Judica* (St. Jacobi), and *Palm Sunday* (St. Michaelis). Further-

1. For historical background see "Preface: Passions" in each volume of CPEB: CW, IV/4–IV/7, upon which the present introduction has been modeled.

more, from the Thursday after Judica until Good Friday, Passion music could be heard almost daily in one of the secondary churches. Normally, this music consisted of the annual oratorio Passion; but in some instances performances of Passion oratorios, including Telemann's *Seliges Erwägen*, TVWV 5:2 and C.P.E. Bach's *Passions-Cantate*, Wq 233 are documented there as well.

In light of the four-year Gospel cycle, it would have seemed natural for works to be revived every few years; yet none of Bach's Passions is identical to its predecessors. The texts for the arias and choruses were newly chosen, and these movements were often inserted in the gospel narrative at different points. The selection and arrangement of these movements, and most likely also of the chorales, was the responsibility of the music director alone, and was not subject to any preliminary censoring by the Hamburg clergy.

The librettos for the Passions were produced in large numbers each Lent. The text books were printed by the respective Ratsbuchdrucker (privileged printer to the city council): up to 1781 by Jeremias Conrad Piscator; from 1782 on by his successor Carl Wilhelm Meyn. The church cantor received a significant fee and a large number of free copies of the librettos from the Ratsbuchdrucker, who entrusted the Amt der Buchbinder (Office of the Bookbinders) with the distribution of the remaining copies. Struggles between the cantor and the Ratsbuchdrucker can be traced back to Bach's predecessors Telemann and Joachim Gerstenbüttel.²

When Meyn took on the position of Ratsbuchdrucker in 1781–82 he negotiated Bach's compensation. A *pro memoria* by Meyn to the syndic Faber, dated 24 January 1782,³ makes it clear that Bach had hitherto received a lump sum of 120 Marks plus 100 free copies, valued at 8 Marks.⁴ Meyn hoped to reduce this sum to 100 Marks, claiming that his share would otherwise not exceed 12 Marks. To lend substance to his claim he put the printing on hold, forcing Bach

2. On the arrangements between the cantor and the printer see Steven Zohn, *Music for a Mixed Taste: Style, Genre, and Meaning in Telemann's Instrumental Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 345.

3. *CPEB-Briefe*, 2:919–20. This letter also indicates that Bach submitted the engraver's copy several months before the Lenten season and expected to be paid immediately.

4. The latter figure is dubious since the price for 100 copies, sold at 2 Schillings each, would have been 12 Marks and 8 Schillings. Perhaps it was expected that the cantor would give away a significant number of copies for free, e.g., to the head pastors and the musicians.

to address the syndic himself, pretending that he could not perform the Passion without printed texts.⁵ The outcome of this controversy remains unknown, but the detailed reckoning that Meyn sent to Faber allows us to make estimates about the number of copies printed. Meyn states that the Amt der Buchbinder sold approximately four reams of Passion librettos; a ream of paper consisted then of 500 sheets. Given the octavo size of the libretto (maximum size 19 x 14 cm, and invariably 16 pages long) two complete copies of the text could be printed on one sheet of paper in super royal or imperial format (no smaller than 78 x 57 cm). Thus a total of approximately 4,000 copies were sold at 2 Schillings each. Since the office paid no more than 160 Marks to the printer, it made a considerable profit of 340 Marks. Counting the 100 free copies for Bach and exactly 258 copies on better paper (*Schreibpapier*) provided to the city council for the members of various committees, some 4,400 Passion librettos were printed annually. Whereas rather cheap paper without watermarks, similar to newsprint, was used for the regular copies, the premium copies were printed on better paper, usually from Dutch paper mills. The premium copies also omit the price indication: "kostet geheftet 2 ß [Schilling]." Otherwise the regular and premium copies are identical; no revisions to any text or its layout have yet been observed.

The three levels of the Passion texts are clearly distinguished by their typography. The texts of the chorales were printed in full, although in a fairly small font, along with the corresponding chorale numbers from the Hamburg hymnal. Thus, the congregation was apparently meant to sing along during the chorales. The biblical text, set in prose, identifies the roles, but no verse numbers referring to contemporary Bibles are given. Arias, ariosos, accompanied recitatives, and choruses are rendered in a large font and preceded by German headings; usually information is provided if the aria is in *da capo* form, but neither the vocal range nor instrumentations are indicated. Occasionally references to the Bible are given if a chorus was based on or incorporated a dictum. The printed texts do not give any clues whether the Passions were performed in one or in two parts during the church services. From 1770 on, the title page of each libretto was standardized as follows:⁶

5. *CPEB-Briefe*, 2:925–27.

6. The wording follows that of Telemann's Passion according to St. Mark (1763), a work that CPEB evidently knew; see NV 1790, p. 87: "Eine Paßion von Ao. 1763. von Telemann, in Partitur."

Passions=Musik=Text, nach Anleitung des Evangelisten Matthäi [Marcus, Lucas, Johannes]; in den Hamburgischen Kirchen 1770 [etc.] aufzuführen von Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, des Musik=Chors Director.

Except for insignificant details, the printed texts exactly correspond with the musical settings. Minor divergences can be observed in the biblical narrative where—without an obvious method—historic or poetic forms (e.g., “steckete”) are found rather than more modern or prosaic ones (“steckte”). Because annotated copies of older Passions apparently served as the printer’s model for later Passions according to the same Gospel, these divergences were never corrected.

Up to four copies of each Passion libretto are currently known, mainly in Hamburg libraries and in the Berlin Staatsbibliothek (where they form part of the collection of Georg Poelchau, who probably acquired them in Hamburg before 1813 when he left for Berlin). Some of the text books from Poelchau’s collection reveal entries in Bach’s hand, and thus originally may have been preserved with the manuscripts of Bach Passions that Poelchau acquired in 1805 but later sold to Abraham Mendelssohn, who in turn donated them to the Berlin Sing-Akademie in 1811.

Two copies in D-B definitely stem from Bach’s personal library: copies of the 1770 and 1772 Passions (Tb 93 R, 1 and 3 respectively), which were annotated to indicate the organization of the text for the 1774 and 1776 Passions; entries such as “Chor” or “Acc” indicate the insertion of a chorus or an accompanied recitative. These annotations, however, were not destined for the printer, since the revision does not extend to the entire Passion and the replacement texts are not entered *in toto*. Several other copies from Tb 93 R contain a few annotations to the biblical narrative, in the form of slashes with dark ink.⁷ These usually correspond with a different division of movements, four years later, in the subsequent Passion according to the same Gospel. Although it remains unclear whether these annotations stem from Bach, they are found also in the text prints for the 1786 and 1787 Passions; this would indicate a planning period of several years for some of the Passions. The copy of the 1789 Passion from Tb 93 R was later annotated in an unidentified hand. A knowledgeable owner

7. The following fascicles in Tb 93 R have such annotations: 4 (1773 Passion), 6 (1777 Passion), 7 (1778 Passion), 10 (1781 Passion), 14 (1785 Passion), 15 (1786 Passion), 16 (1787 Passion).

of this print, possibly Bach's daughter Anna Carolina Philippina, wrote "J. S. B." several times in the margin to identify the true author of some of the turba choruses of the Passion. The owner erred, however, when attributing the aria no. 25, "Verachtete, verdammte Sünder" to "Carl [Philipp Emanuel] Bach" because, in reality, this aria had been borrowed from Gottfried August Homilius (see CPEB: CW, IV/4.6).

An almost complete set of printed librettos survives for the period 1676 to 1811, thus documenting the unique history and development of Passion performances in the Hamburg main churches during the tenures of four cantors: Gerstenbüttel, Telemann, Bach, and Schwencke.⁸ The librettos to the twenty-one Passions that Bach performed during his tenure in Hamburg are edited in the separate volumes of CPEB: CW, IV/4–IV/7, with variants between the text underlay of the musical sources and the printed librettos reported in footnotes.

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8. Less than half of the musical settings have been preserved, among them all twenty-one Passions by Bach and twenty-two by Telemann.