



IDEAL WORK OF ART

The St Matthew Passion is a highly complex ideal work of art. All its elements are masterfully interrelated, and each dramatic turn is followed by a commentary full of compassion, be it an aria, chorale or interjection. In the St Matthew Passion, Bach pushes the boundaries of musical expression. He turns the Passion story into a canvas for major themes of humanity such as guilt, suffering, pain and betrayal, yet also repentance, charity, forgiveness and redemption.

The fair copy written out by Bach in 1736 is the authoritative version. He used red ink to highlight the lines of the Evangelist and the chorale 'O Lamm Gottes, unschuldig' ('O Lamb of God, unspotted').

The Passion scenes on the display case are from a Bible by Johann Sebastian Bach. It is exhibited in the chapter „Composing in Faith“.

Moving dialogue

Bach makes us, the listeners, part of the action by using an ingenious dialogue device. In the opening chorus, the 'Daughters of Zion' (Chorus I) respond to the interjections of the 'Faithful' (Chorus II) with a moving lament. According to Philipp Spitta, this creates the magnificent image of a moving, surging crowd.

Everything revolves around the Lamb of God, a symbol of Jesus Christ. A small third chorus made up of several sopranos sings the well-known Passion hymn 'O Lamm Gottes, unschuldig' ('O Lamb of God, unspotted'). Brimming with legato, it floats above the exquisite singing of the two main choruses and evocatively links them together.



1. Opening chorus: Kommt ihr Töchter, helft mir klagen (‘Come, ye daughters, share my mourning’)

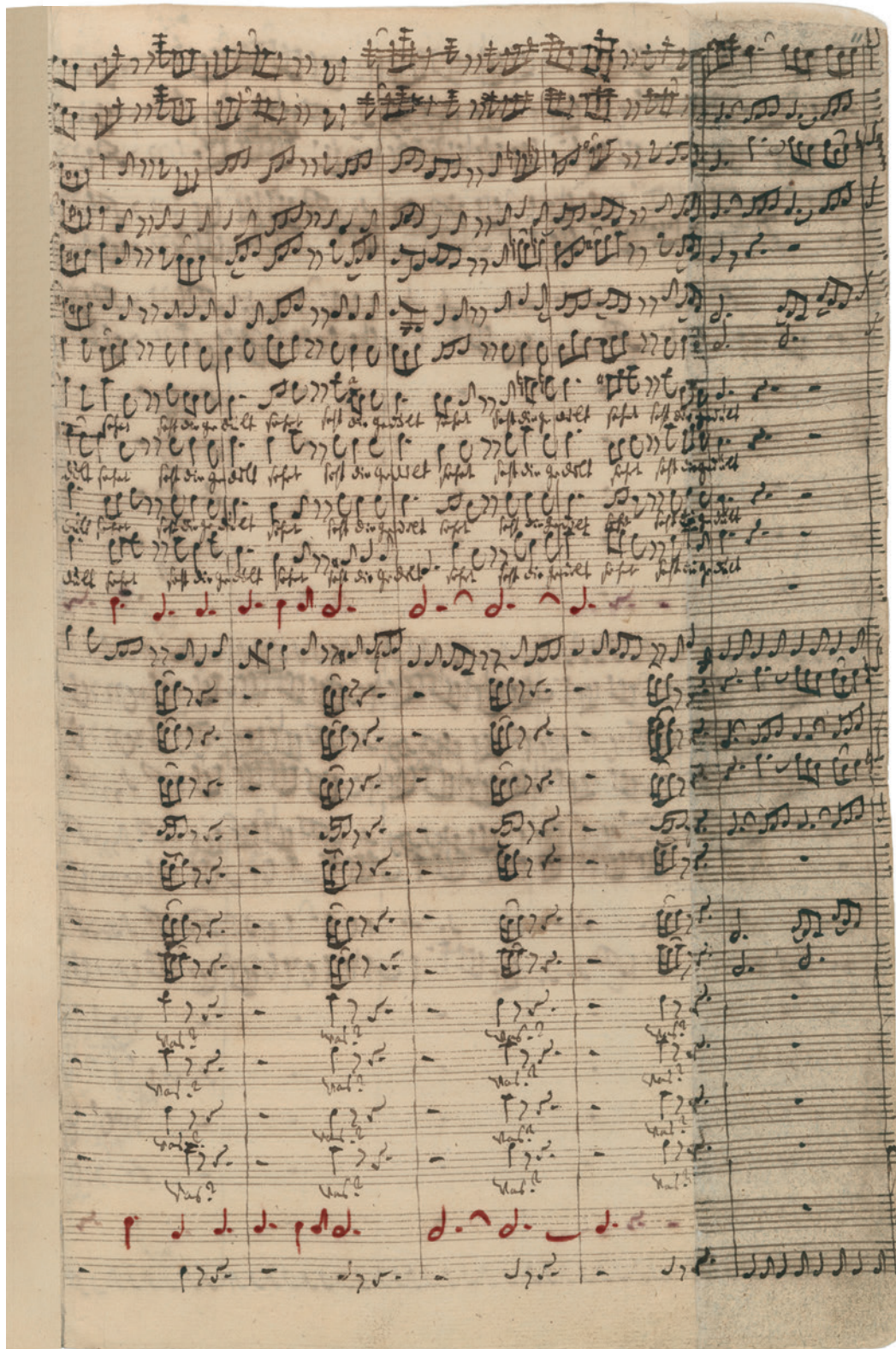
Bach’s score fills the entire page.
He highlighted the passion hymn in red ink.

The image displays a page of handwritten musical notation for the opening chorus of the St. Matthew Passion. The score is organized into three main sections, each indicated by a bracket on the left:

- ORCHESTRA I:** Includes parts for Flute 1, Flute 2, Oboe 1, Oboe 2, Violin 1, Violin 2, and Viola.
- CHORUS I:** Includes parts for Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass.
- CHORUS III:** Includes parts for Continuo/organ 1 and Continuo/organ 2.

Additional parts for **ORCHESTRA II** and **CHORUS II** are listed on the left but have no notation on this page. The **cantus firmus** is indicated in red ink for the Continuo/organ parts. The musical notation includes staves with notes, rests, and lyrics in German. The red ink highlights a specific melodic line in the continuo parts.

No. 1, bars 43–47



Passion hymn
'O Lamb of God,
unspotted'
(cantus firmus)

Passion hymn
'O Lamb of God,
unspotted'
(cantus firmus)

No. 1, bars 48-52

Composed halo

Shimmering string chords float above Jesus like a halo as he speaks. They reach a climax with the words of institution of the Last Supper: “Take, eat, this is my body” and “Drink, all of you, from this ...”

Albert Schweitzer, an eminent doctor, organist and Bach expert, declared that hearing these words in any other rhythm would be inconceivable to him.



II. Recitative: Er antwortete und sprach ('He answered thus and said')

The image shows a page of handwritten musical notation for a recitative. The score is organized into four systems, each with a bracket on the left side. The instruments and parts are labeled as follows:

- System 1:** Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, Solo tenor (red ink), Solo bass (green ink), Continuo/organ.
- System 2:** Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, Solo tenor (red ink), Solo bass (green ink), Continuo/organ.
- System 3:** Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, Solo bass / solo tenor (green and red ink), Continuo/organ.
- System 4:** Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, Solo bass (green ink), Continuo/organ.

The notation includes various musical symbols such as clefs, notes, rests, and bar lines. There are also handwritten annotations in blue, red, and green ink, some of which appear to be lyrics or performance instructions. The paper is aged and shows some staining and discoloration.

No. II, bars 13-29

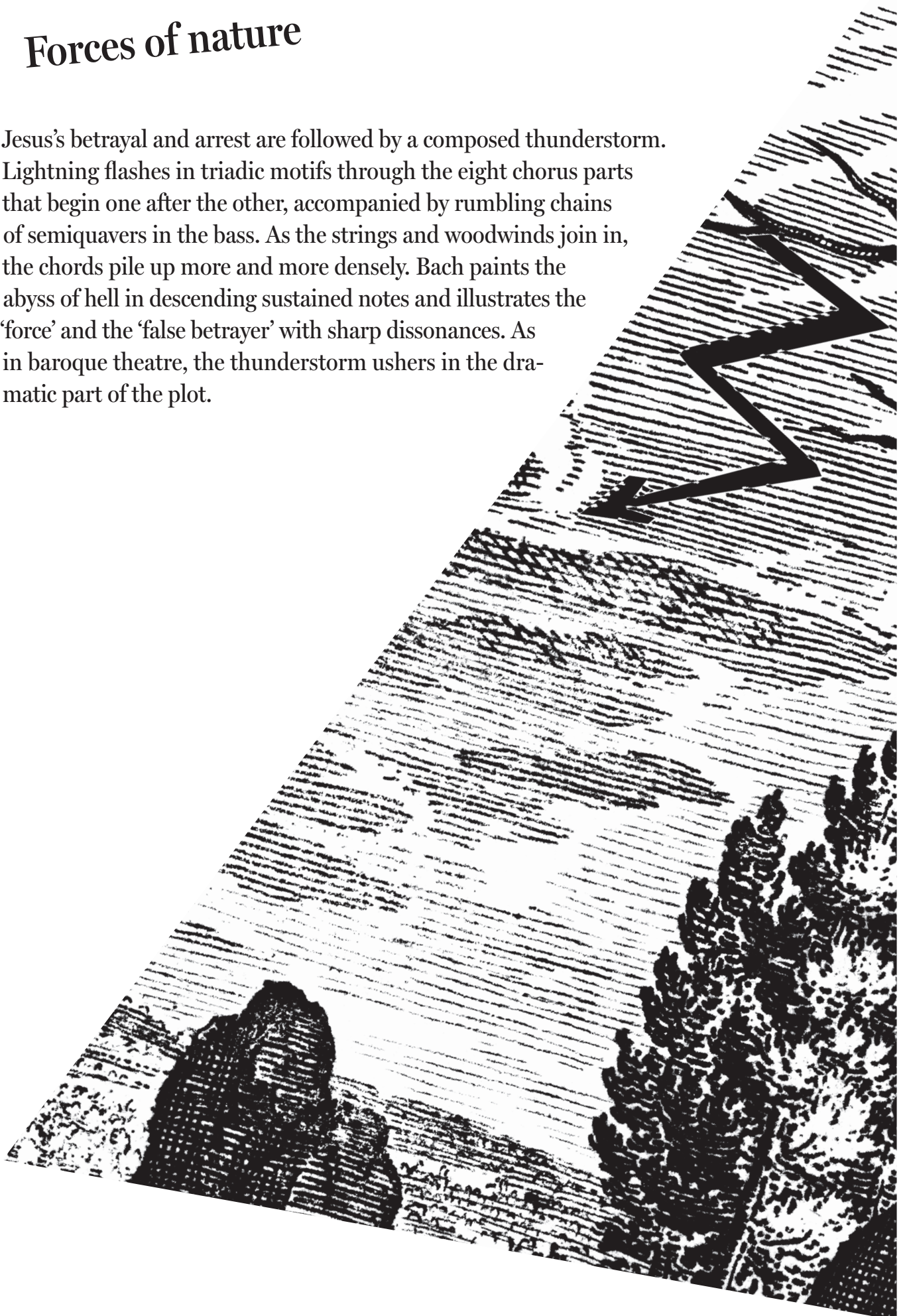
Handwritten musical score for No. II, bars 29-39. The score is written on aged paper and includes multiple staves of musical notation. The top section (bars 29-39) is annotated with instrument labels on the right: Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, Solo bass, Continuo/organ, Violine 1, Violine 2, Viola, Solo bass, and Continuo/organ. The bottom section (bars 40-49) contains lyrics in German, including: "mein Gott, in diesem Augenblick", "von mir ab, für mich so wunderbar, dich so wunderbar, dich so wunderbar", and "Viel, wunderbar, wir in unsern Händen".

Violin 1
Violin 2
Viola
Solo bass
Continuo/organ
Violine 1
Violine 2
Viola
Solo bass
Continuo/organ

No. II, bars 29-39

Forces of nature

Jesus's betrayal and arrest are followed by a composed thunderstorm. Lightning flashes in triadic motifs through the eight chorus parts that begin one after the other, accompanied by rumbling chains of semiquavers in the bass. As the strings and woodwinds join in, the chords pile up more and more densely. Bach paints the abyss of hell in descending sustained notes and illustrates the 'force' and the 'false betrayer' with sharp dissonances. As in baroque theatre, the thunderstorm ushers in the dramatic part of the plot.



27b. Chorus: Sind Blitze, sind Donner in Wolken verschwunden?
 ('Hath lightning, hath thunder in clouds fully vanished?')

Sustained notes on the word
 'Hölle' ('hell') form sharp dissonances

Lightning flashes alternately in Chorus I/
 Orchestra I and Chorus II / Orchestra II

The image shows a page of handwritten musical notation for No. 11, bars 118-129. The score is organized into four main sections: ORCHESTRA I (top), CHORUS I (middle), ORCHESTRA II (lower middle), and CHORUS II (bottom). Each section contains staves for various instruments and voices. The notation is in black ink on aged paper, with some parts in red and blue ink. Blue lines and boxes are drawn over the score to highlight specific musical features. A vertical blue line runs through the center of the page, connecting the two choruses and the two orchestras. A blue box highlights a section of the score in the upper right, and another blue box highlights a section in the lower right. The page number '63' is visible in the top right corner.

Chains of semiquavers
 in the strings illustrate
 the thunderstorm

Rumbling chains of
 semiquavers in the bass
 accompaniment

No. 11, bars 118-129

Deep feelings

In the poignant aria, Bach expresses bitter weeping and deep compassion. The melodies of the voice and the solo violin are characterized by a distinctive upward leap. [This is called an exclamatio figure (Latin for exclamation) and comes from Baroque affect theory.] The flowing of tears is depicted by string pads gliding from key to key as well as evenly pulsating basses.



39. Aria: Erbarme dich ('Have mercy')

The image shows a page of handwritten musical notation for the aria 'Erbarme dich' from the St. Matthew Passion. The score is divided into three systems, each with a bracket on the left side grouping the parts. The parts are: Solo Violin, Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, Solo alto, and Continuo/organ. The notation is in black ink on aged paper. The Solo alto part is written in blue ink. The Continuo/organ part is written in green ink. The lyrics 'Erbarme dich' are written below the Solo alto part. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and clefs.

Exclamatio:
The upward leap spans a minor sixth (six tones) on 'Er-bar[me]' ('Have mercy')

The stationary notes on the strings create pads

Pulsating repetitions in the bass accompaniment

No. 39, bars 6-16

Timbre symbolism

Above the strains of a flute and two oboes da caccia, the soprano sings like an angel. Bach pauses the low bass line, which hands over its role to the second oboe in a higher register. The pure key of A minor (with no accidentals) symbolizes Jesus's heavenly love and innocence.



49. Aria: Aus Liebe will mein Heiland sterben ('For Love now would my Saviour perish')

Traverso solo - Solo Organo

Solo flute

Oboe da caccia 1

Oboe da caccia 2

Solo soprano

Solo flute

Oboe da caccia 1

Oboe da caccia 2

Solo soprano

Solo flute

Oboe da caccia 1

Oboe da caccia 2

Solo soprano

Solo flute

Oboe da caccia 1

Oboe da caccia 2

Solo soprano

Solo flute

Oboe da caccia 1

Oboe da caccia 2

Solo soprano

Aus Liebe will mein Heiland sterben

Aus Liebe will mein Heiland sterben

Aus Liebe will mein Heiland sterben

Aus Liebe will mein Heiland sterben

Uniform repetitions of notes by the oboes form a transparent carpet of sound with the solo flute floating above it

No. 49, bars 1-29

Remarkable soundscapes

The aria follows the account of Christ carrying the cross. Just as Simon of Cyrene bore the cross for Jesus, he will bear the suffering of those who follow him. Accompanied by the richly ornamented gamba part in dotted rhythm, the exquisite bass performs cantabile legato slurs. The two parts vividly interlock and 'carry' each other.



57. Aria: Komm, süßes Kreuz ('Come, O sweet cross')

- Solo viola da gamba
- Solo bass
- Continuo / organ
- Solo viola da gamba
- Solo bass
- Continuo / organ
- Solo viola da gamba
- Solo bass
- Continuo / organ
- Solo viola da gamba
- Solo bass
- Continuo / organ
- Solo viola da gamba
- Solo bass
- Continuo / organ
- Solo viola da gamba
- Solo bass
- Continuo / organ

Dotted semiquaver figures on the viola da gamba

The viola da gamba vividly intrudes in the vocal part with ascending semiquaver figures, as if to help bear the suffering that has become too heavy

The viola da gamba augments the vocal part with ornate demisemi-quavers

Bach illustrates the word 'Tragen' ('to bear') with slowly ascending notes

No. 57, bars 14-32

Eye music

“Have him crucified!” cries the mob. Bach blends the two choruses into four staggered parts. Expressively, he takes them through remote keys with several sharp accidentals. The first four notes of the word ‘Crucify’ always appear to form an x-shaped cross and are an example of a phenomenon known as ‘eye music’.



50b. Chorus: Lass ihn kreuzigen ('Have him crucified')

ORCHESTRA I

- Flutes 1 and 2
- Oboe 1
- Oboe 2
- Violin 1
- Violin 2
- Viola

CHORUS I

- Soprano
- Alto
- Tenor
- Bass

ORCHESTRA II

- Flutes 1 and 2
- Oboe 1, 2
- Violin 1
- Violin 2
- Viola

CHORUS II

- Soprano
- Alto
- Tenor
- Bass

Continuo / both organs

The first four notes of the word 'Crucify' always appear to form an x-shaped cross

Bach takes the parts through remote keys with several sharp accidentals

No. 50b, bars 1-6

Elaborate chorale settings

The St Matthew Passion includes twelve settings of well-known hymns. Full of expressive harmony, they provide passionate commentaries on the events of the Passion. The chorus 'Gegrüßet seist du, Jüdenkönig!' ('All hail now to thee, King of the Jews!') is followed by the hymn 'O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden' ('O head of blood and wounding'). Bach's unadorned setting articulates deep compassion for Jesus as he's given a crown of thorns and mocked. Other stanzas of 'O Haupt' are used in movements 15 and 62.



54. Chorale: O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden ('O head of blood and wounding')

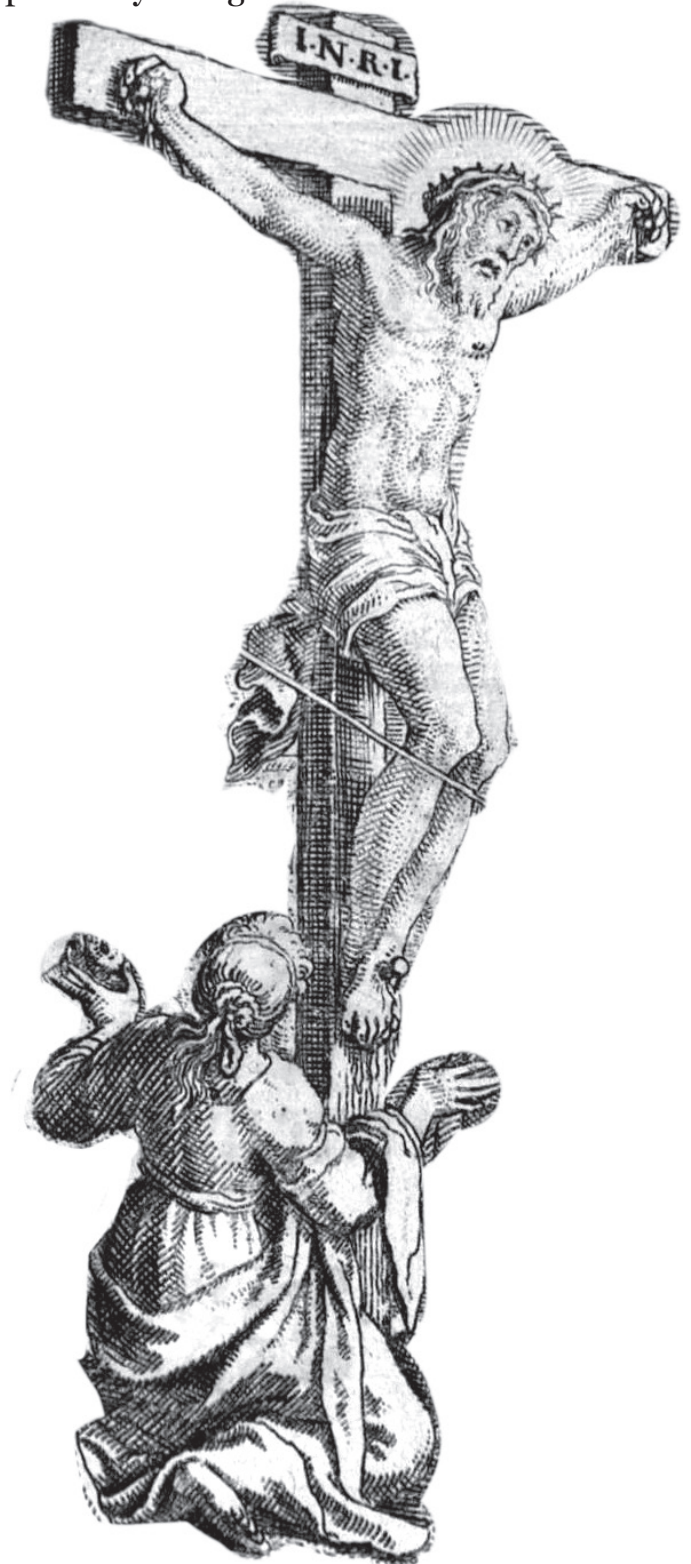
The image shows a page of handwritten musical notation for a chorale. The top system is labeled 'Choral 2. Verse' and the number '123' is written in the upper right corner. The notation includes staves for Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass, and Continuo/organ. The second system also includes parts for Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass, and Continuo/organ. The word 'Evangelium' is written in the center of the page. The bottom of the page features a section labeled 'Rezit.' (recitative) with various performance instructions and musical notation.

Soprano
Alto
Tenor
Bass
Continuo/organ

Soprano
Alto
Tenor
Bass
Continuo/organ

Jesus's last words

The Evangelist gives a harrowing account of the period of darkness lasting three hours. Finally, Jesus cries out in his native Aramaic: “Eli, Eli, lama asabthani?” (“My God, my God, wherefore hast thou me forsaken?”). Jesus’s words are accompanied solely by the organ, emphasizing his feelings of abandonment; in all the other recitatives, they’re always accompanied by strings.



61a. Recitative: Und von der sechsten Stunde an ('And from the sixth hour on')

The image shows a page of handwritten musical notation for a recitative piece. The notation is in German Kurrent script. The page is divided into two main sections. The top section is for the Evangelist, and the bottom section is for Jesus. Each section contains vocal lines and continuo/organ accompaniment. The text is written in Latin and German Kurrent script. The bottom section includes the Aramaic phrase 'Eli lama lama sabachani?' written in red ink.

Evangelist

Jesus

Evangelist

Solo tenor

Continuo/organ

Solo tenor

Continuo/organ

Solo bass / Solo tenor

Continuo/organ

Solo tenor

Continuo/organ

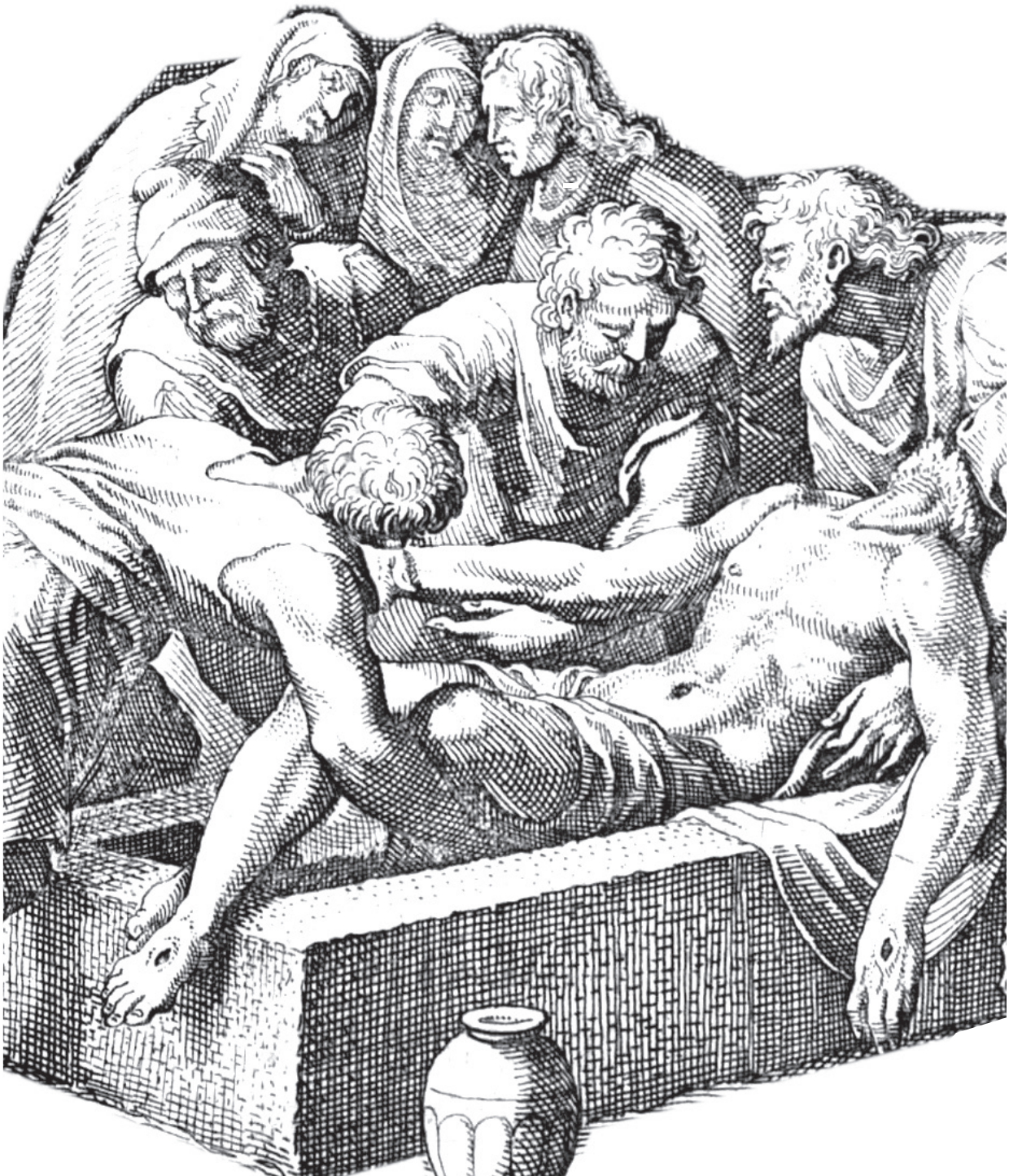
Bach wrote Jesus's Aramaic words in Latin letters (instead of German Kurrent script like the rest of the text).

No. 61a (bottom half of the page)

Expressive narration

The recitatives tell the dramatic events with unsurpassed expressiveness. The Evangelist describes the earthquake after Jesus's death in notes that dash to the highest and lowest registers. Agitated demisemiquavers and rapid repetitions in the bass symbolize the ground shaking.

This contrasts sharply with the ensuing chorus, whose sudden clarity conveys the certainty that Jesus was indeed the Son of God.



63a. Recitative: Und siehe da, der Vorhang im Tempel zerriss
 ('And lo, behold: the curtain of the temple was rent')

The Evangelist (tenor)
 rushes to the highest
 and lowest register

Excited
 demisemiquavers

Solo tenor
 Continuo/organ

Solo tenor
 Continuo/organ

Solo tenor
 Continuo/organ

Solo tenor
 Continuo/organ

Tremoli (rapid
 repetitions of notes)

The image shows a page of handwritten musical notation. The top section contains a vocal line for the Evangelist (tenor) and a continuo/organ line. The bottom section is labeled 'Recitative' and features a vocal line with red ink and a continuo/organ line with blue ink. The music includes various rhythmic patterns, including excited demisemiquavers and tremoli (rapid repetitions of notes).

No. 63a (beginning)

63b. Chorus: Wahrlich, dieser ist Gottes Sohn gewesen
 (“Truly, this man was God’s own Son most truly”)

The image shows a page of handwritten musical notation from a manuscript. The score is organized into systems. The top system includes a Solo tenor part and a Continuo/organ part. The second system also features a Solo tenor and Continuo/organ. The third system includes a Solo tenor and Continuo/organ. The fourth system is a vocal part with lyrics in German: "Wahrlich, dieser ist Gottes Sohn gewesen". This system is followed by instrumental parts for Oboe 1, Oboe 2, Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass, and Continuo/organ. The bottom system shows the Chorus part with the lyrics: "Chorus: 'Truly, this man was God's own Son most truly'".

Solo tenor

Continuo/organ

Solo tenor

Continuo/organ

Solo tenor

Continuo/organ

Oboe 1

Oboe 2

Violin 1

Violin 2

Viola

Soprano

Alto

Tenor

Bass

Continuo/organ

Chorus: ‘Truly, this man was God’s own Son most truly’

No. 63a (end) and No. 63b

Music to the exhibition on Spotify:

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/72BluaFOLKLpMGHLFherMF?si=93396020dc4943aa>

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Written by Henrike Rucker and Kerstin Wiese | Exhibition designed by Leila Tabassomi and Jens Volz | Photos by Gert Mothes