

Leonardo García Alarcón conducts Bach's St Matthew Passion

Friday, March 19, 2027 · 19:30 · Concertgebouw

Leonardo García Alarcón, conductor · Valerio Contaldo, Evangelist · Andreas Wolf, Christus · Sophie Junker, soprano · Hugh Cutting, countertenor · Laurence Kilsby, tenor · Alex Rosen, bass · Netherlands Chamber Choir, choir · National Children's Choir, choir

approximately 165 minutes

Johann Sebastian Bach

165 minutes

1685–1750

St Matthew Passion, BWV 244

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The opening chorus is a vast lament over a slow, steady tread in the bass. The first choir calls 'Kommt, ihr Töchter, helft mir klagen' (Come, daughters, help me mourn) and the second breaks in with single-word questions: whom? how? what? Above them a line of high voices, here the children's choir, sings the chorale 'O Lamm Gottes, unschuldig' in long notes.

From there the Evangelist, a tenor, tells the story in recitative with only the continuo instruments beneath him. Whenever Jesus speaks, the strings surround his voice with sustained chords, an effect often called a halo. It is withdrawn once, at his last words from the cross, 'Eli, Eli, lama asabthani'.

The chorus plays two parts. As the crowd it is quick and violent: the one-word shout 'Barrabam!', and 'Lass ihn kreuzigen' (Let him be crucified), sung twice. In the chorales it is the congregation. One melody, 'O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden', returns five times with different verses, and its last appearance, just after the death of Jesus, is one of the stillest moments of the evening.

The arias are sung by voices outside the story, each paired with one or a few solo instruments. 'Erbarme dich' (Have mercy), for alto, follows Peter's denial. In the soprano's 'Aus Liebe will mein Heiland sterben' (Out of love my Saviour is willing to die) Bach removes the strings and the bass line altogether, something

very rare in Baroque music, and the voice seems to hang in the air. Near the end the bass sings 'Mache dich, mein Herze, rein' (Make yourself pure, my heart), a calm, rocking aria for the evening of the burial.

The Passion closes without any hint of Easter. The two choirs sit down at the tomb in 'Wir setzen uns mit Tränen nieder' (We sit down in tears) and wish the dead man rest.



CONCERT PROGRAMS

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