

## Robert Schumann's Performance of St. John's Passion

The five pieces by Händel, that Schumann performed in Düsseldorf, contrast with only three pieces by Bach; but among those only one, that he would campaign for in a special way: the premiere of St. John's Passion, BWV 245. Already while still living in Dresden, Schumann had sent proposals for the musical program for the 1850/51 concert season to the "Düsseldorfer Musikverein": "I thought of maybe studying the St John's Passion by Bach (the smaller, but not less beautiful), the last 3 motets by Mendelssohn and then "Comala" of Gade or the Hermannsschlacht [Battle of Hermann] of Mangold [...]"

Already at the end of January 1851, Schumann begins rehearsing the St. John's Passion; before that, he had contacted the cantor of Leipzig's St. Thomas Church, Moritz Hauptmann, asking about lending him orchestral parts, and for practical advice on the performance. To strengthen the tenors, he engages singers from the neighbouring cities of Cologne and Neuss, also employs an additional 50 children's voices for the choral parts. So, in total, there were probably around 180–200 members of the choir. In addition to the orchestral parts lend to him by Hauptmann, he wrote arrangements for the different parts for the wind section, the drafts of which have been discovered by Gerd Nauhaus in Schumann's sketch material for the oratorium "Der Rose Pilgerfahrt," a few years ago.

For conducting, Schumann did not use the lost piano score used for the Dresden performance this time, but the score published by Trautwein in 1831. Fortunately, this particular score has been preserved as a relic of the performance. Today it is located, despite the clearly visible stamp "Musikverein Düsseldorf" on the cover, in the Schumann House in Zwickau. Notes by Schumann can be found on all of the pages of this score, which give an insight into which parts were skipped, how not available instruments (like the Viola da Gamba) were replaced, which dynamics he used, when he changed tempo, etc. Also, for the manning of the Continuo there are different verbal hints like "String quartet". The aria Nr. 31 "It is fulfilled," originally written for solo Viola da Gamba and Continuo, was replaced by Schumann by a viola as the solo instrument, and an accompaniment by violas and celli. The scores of the latter are in Schumann's handwriting, but, as the letter exchange with Hauptmann reveals, were of his making, maybe explaining a question mark put next to the accompaniment in measure 3 by Schumann.

Schumann's performances of Händel in Düsseldorf were – as has been shown – part of a long tradition, resting on vocal scores acquired or arranged by his predecessors Mendelssohn and Rietz for the Düsseldorfer Musikverein. This also meant, that Händel's oratorios were nothing new for Düsseldorf, but part of the repertoire. The preconditions for Schumann's performance of Bach's St. John's passion were very different. There were only a few predecessors, as especially Bach's protestant church music was relatively unknown in the Prussian, but highly catholic city [Residenzsadt = city with a royal residence]. For Schumann himself, this performance was of even more broad importance. A letter by Schumann to Wolfgang Müller of Königswinter shows that Schumann tried to set a standard with this performance:

"Dear Dr. Müller, on behalf of the significance of the work performed yesterday – a treasure probably buried over 100 years, it would desirable, to make it know in other

circles, too. You had told me once earlier, that you were in contact with the newspapers in Augsburg and Cologne. Could you sponsor an advertisement for one of those papers? Yesterday's performance was the first *larger* one that has ever been done of this work. St. Matthew's Passion has been performed here and there (in Berlin and Leipzig, also in Breslau, I believe), but St. John's Passion only a few times in Leipzig by the St. Thomas' choir, but not complete and generally only with a small group of musicians. Steering the attention of the German art world to this – one of the most profound and perfected works of Bach – is an endeavour that I would like to contribute to, also with your help. I would be happy, if you would answer my plea. [...]

According to this, Schumann was not out to just create a complement [Gegenstück] to the 19<sup>th</sup> century premiere of the St. Matthew's Passion by Mendelssohn, but to do more. It is about the secularization of Bach's sacred music, about removing its fixation to church music alone, and the inclusion into secular concert music. Schumann's performance in April 1851 was surely not the first performance of the St. John's Passion in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but it was the first with the standard, to open the piece as an absolute work of art to all people, not just the protestant churchgoer, that he himself had never been.

- Translated by Karsten Werner from the LaRouche Youth Movement in Dresden from: Matthias Wendt, "*Bach und Händel in der Rezeption Robert Schumanns*," from a resumé of "Tag der mitteldeutschen Barockmusik 2001 in Zwickau," (Düsseldorf: Die Robert-Schumann-Forschungsstelle e.V, 2001) at: <http://www.schumann-ga.de/freie-texte/86-bach-und-haendel-in-der-rezeption-robert-schumanns.html>.