SYMBOLISM OF JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

AS PORTRAYED IN THE PASSION

ACCORDING TO ST. MATTHEW

THESIS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

There has been much discussion of the musical score of Johann Sebastian Bach's composition, The Passion According to St. Matthew. Some authorities on the great composer, such as Albert Schweitzer, take the attitude that Bach intentionally painted tonal pictures in his music through note variations. Others think that too much attention has been given to the tonal pictorial qualities of the composer's works. The purpose of this study is to make an investigation of the musical score of The Passion According to St. Matthew with attention given to the pictorial elements or symbolism in the composition.

Scope of the Study

The study is confined mainly to the one composition, but attention is given to the historical background of the work, and examples of the pictorial technique of sacred music as it had been developed in the Netherlands.

Source of Data

Since the research is based on the Breitkopf and Hartel
editions of the full score and the G. Schirmer edition of the piano-vocal score of *The Passion According to St. Matthew*, this composition is the main source of material. However, the works of various authorities on Bach -- Schweitzer, Spitta, and Dickinson -- are used for background reading and for stylistic analysis of the score. In addition to these, writings of investigators of the development of the Netherland sacred motet are studied.

**Manner of Procedure**

Attention is first given to the nature of symbolism, and to how it originated in music. The development of the sacred motet in the Netherlands is then traced, and the beginnings of the secret chromatic art studied. The main portion of the investigation is an examination of the musical score of the composition, *The Passion According to St. Matthew*. In this attention is given to the way in which Bach used musical sound to portray certain feelings and attitudes. The analyses by the different authorities on the subject are considered, but the writer's own individual interpretation of the musical score is attempted. The conclusion presents the findings of the study.
CHAPTER II

SYMBOLISM IN MUSIC

A symbol, according to Webster, is the "sign or representation of any moral thing by the images or properties of natural things."\(^1\) However, the most common definition of "symbol" in ordinary usage is that it is a sign or picture which stands for something else.

The human race has used three main symbols -- language, mathematics, and music -- for the communication of ideas. Language has used words for its symbols in this respect. Early man used pictures, but words were gradually coined to take the place of these pictures. The words "a howling wind" at once calls up the picture of a great storm, while the words "peace and quiet" indicate the opposite. By the use of words, man is able to communicate his innermost thoughts to persons thousands of miles away.

Mathematicians have used signs as their symbols for communication. In the ancient days of civilization, mathematics was one of the most advanced sciences, and even then signs were used to indicate human actions. There has not been too much change in these signs with the advancement of

\(^1\) Webster's Home and Office Dictionary, p. 987.
civilization. Plus (+) means to add; minus (-) means to subtract; and (x) means to multiply. No explanatory word is necessary for the indicated action when one of these signs is used.

Music, on the other hand, is not and has never been, as concrete as language and mathematics in its use of symbols in portraying ideas. It is true that it has used them; but it has neither a grammar nor a vocabulary. It is inarticulate to the extent that it speaks only in rhythms and harmonies. Yet the sounds of the howl of the wind, the roar of the thunder, the hum of the bees, the tinkle of the waterfall, and the gentle drip, drip of the rain have all been attempted in musical scores and constitute the symbolism of music -- mind pictures.

What medium has music used for painting such pictures? Has it had any well catalogued devices that have been used down through the centuries? Even a cursory examination of the field of music will yield a negative answer to these questions. Music has used ingenuity in the variations of notes -- sounds -- to create its pictures, but it has followed no set pattern. Lowinsky says:

"Musical notation has never done more than to hint at the sounds which the composer had in mind when he wrote down the symbols. This is more true the farther we delve into the past. Every age has its "self-evident" rules of performance, not marked in the notation. One of the major efforts of musicology is directed toward uncovering these unwritten laws and reconstructing the real music merely suggested by the notation, whether we
are dealing with an organum by Perotin, a motet by Orlando di Lasso, or the Well Tempered Clavier by Bach.

Music, too, has been slower in developing a symbolism than either language or mathematics. Ancient Egypt knew the signs of the zodiac and the mathematical vocabulary; Athens perfected language and art symbols, but it was not until the fifteenth century that symbolism began to appear in music to any noticeable degree. Even then, when symbols began to be used in music, there was no mention made of the same, and subsequent developments were likewise unchronicled. A short survey of the development of symbolism in music will be significant.

Bolinger says that, in all probability, language and music were parts of an undistinguishable whole in the beginning. Before man had any language, he had sounds which variously expressed his feelings. A warning cry, for example, was a signal of danger, much like a mother hen’s warning call today -- she can not speak, but she has a call to which the chickens instantly respond. The timbre and pitch of this call indicate the nature of the situation -- a soft cluck radiates quiet and contentment, while a shrill, strident call is one of imminent danger. Man, in his search for a medium of expression, developed his own meanings for different sounds. "Pitch is the natural accompaniment of vocal expres-

sion ... the plaintive whine and the cry of fear are usually high tones, while the sentiment of aggressiveness ... reaches back to the low-toned roar of defiance.\[^4\]

Rhythm is closely associated with motion, but not all motion is music. Variable pitch is the distinguishing feature of motion which is classified as rhythm. Bolinger says:

> Motion is, then, since music partakes of its sensory device of variable pitch, one of the things which music is capable of symbolizing appropriately. And when we trace the many experiences through which motion runs, and their emotional effects, we behold what a complex of feelings music is able here to play upon.\[^5\]

Motion, then, was one of the first things to be symbolized in music. The way in which this was done and the means used are interesting and shed much light upon the study of the symbolism of any musical composition.

Music, like literature, may tell a story. Any composition worthy of the name has a theme with many variations. However, the syntax of music, as previously stated, did not develop in the ancient ages to the extent that literature and sculpture did. The musical scale was perfected but did not contain a particular pitch or location beyond that necessary to blend or harmonize with other pitches or tones. Notation, of course, was the symbol

\[^4\] Ibid.
\[^5\] Ibid., p. 30.
used by man to denote which tone or tones of the scale was sounded, and the regular notes were those which had been developed for the different tones. Early music, then, contained very little symbolism as far as word-pictures of either motion or emotion was concerned.

In the sixteenth century, though, a change can be discerned in the way in which music was written, or the way in which the notes were written. Chromanticism began in Italy. This is a kind of music that proceeds by semitones or half-tones, instead of using merely the usual scale pitches. It allowed for much more freedom in picturization and made possible a wider creation of word-pictures in music. The Italian composers, however, limited the use of chromanticism to secular music. It remained for the northern European countries to adapt this new way of writing music to motets.

A knowledge of the history of religion in the fifteenth century is necessary for understanding what transpired in the Netherlands at this time. The great struggle between the Roman Catholic Church and the newly-established Protestant was then in progress. Luther had electrified the whole world with his pronouncements against the Roman Catholic Church, and the Church, the most powerful institution of mediaeval times, had sought in every way possible to put down the revolt and extinguish the fires of heresy. Lowinsky paints this picture of the background of the development of
chromaticism in music, and its connection with the church:

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries a tremendous surge of new religious, philosophical, scientific, and artistic ideas clashed with one of the most intolerant systems of intellectual policing which covered every area of human creativeness and interfered with every idea of consequence. The invention of the printing press and the possibility of spreading every new idea to all corners of Europe gave new impetus to the spirit of revolt from Rome and constituted a serious challenge to the firm grip of the Roman Catholic Church on the souls and minds of the faithful. The Church answered with the establishment of the Index, which listed all books considered heretical or dangerous by the Fathers of the Santo Ufficio.

An institution which was as zealous in its observation of all that was printed or said naturally extended its field of policing to the world of music, especially since music was used as a part of the church rituals. Any change in the motets, it is to be expected, met with opposition from the Church.

However, the new spirit of intellectualism, of science, of investigation, and of creative enterprise was abroad in the land. The innovations in the way of writing secular music in Italy spread, and the sacred motets began to feel their influence. In the Netherlands, there were a few Roman Catholic composers of religious music who dared the wrath of the mother Church to employ a novel technique of writing music.

The motets were not without their symbolism in that

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6Ibid., p. 136.
they employed artifices, usually some posed riddle or speculation. The presence of such an artifice was denoted in the title of the work, and not in the musical sounds. A Biblical quotation might furnish the clue to an understanding of the musical text, but the details were not worked out.

Bolinger says:

Ingenious as these allegorical-artistic games are, they remain extraneous, something added to the music. In the secret chromatic art a long-restrained passion breaks forth from the apparent frigidity of Netherlands counterpoint, a religious fervor seeks new paths to living expression. The old 'artifices' are of an allegorical nature, that is, they seek to represent an idea in an intellectual way, by means of arbitrary or conventional associations; the chromatic art creates new sound symbols, which through sound itself and without recourse to rational explanation express what the composer wishes to say.  

It should be remembered in the discussion of these changes that the motets were a part of the regular church liturgy and were used regularly by the people in worshiping. As stated, the conventional motets told the story of the Bible mostly through words which were relied upon in themselves to convey the desired impression or story.

The introduction of the new chromatic art with its emphasis on sounds was something more, though, than merely a change in the way of writing music. It exemplified a different attitude and spirit on the part of the rebelling music composers. It was one of the main contentions of the

7Ibid., p. 83.
Reformation that forgiveness was not to be had from the Church by confession and absolutism, by praying and fasting, or by pontifical rites, ceremonies, or the paying of indulgences. On the contrary, forgiveness was to be achieved only by deep and genuine repentance and by faith in God's unending mercy. It was natural that the dissenting Protestants should desire to put their feelings into the music that they wrote; it was also apparent that the Church would oppose any such change, and use every means to suppress and destroy any such music.

Such a condition, it is coming to be believed by many who have studied the Netherlands chromatic motets, resulted in what is known as the secret chromatic art — the composers through sounds managed to convey their meaning without recourse to words. The Church could not easily detect rebellion in this respect. Perhaps this accounts for the secrecy which surrounds the entire movement and explains why there is no musical dictionary of symbols or explanations from composers of the period as to what they intended to convey. If such an assumption is accepted, then the hidden nature of the new art assumes added importance.

Far from merely indulging in the joy of artful play, these composers attempted to create a technique which would give them new means of expression for a new religious feeling and at the same time protect themselves from suspicion and persecution. Since chromaticism is a child of the Italian Renaissance, the secret chromatic art seems not only a combination
of Italian and Netherlands technique but also a synthesis of the ideas of the Renaissance and the Reformation.

The favorite subject matter of the Netherlands chromatic motets consisted of episodes from the life and sorrows of Jesus Christ and other figures from the Old and New Testaments. Their chromaticism was always devoted to the expression of the strange, the solemn, and the extraordinary. Grief and lamentations were favorite themes. Not only words but variations in the music were sought to enhance the pictorial effects of the entire composition.

What were these musical variations? No detailed study can be made of these due to the limitations of the research, but enough can be said to indicate some of the changes. Lowinsky states that sharps and flats were the first and most conspicuous messengers of a chromatic alteration in the diatonic system. A revolution in the use of accidentals was also disclosed. Some of the motets used dissonances. Frequent interchanges of fundamental notes and chromatic tones, modified progressions of steps of a half-tone, and the chromatic clausula were other changes in technique.

At any rate, the use of notes to indicate word-pictures gradually developed. Where once the spoken word had been

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8 Ibid., p. 1.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., p. 4.
used almost exclusively to explain or convey the desired expression, a whole galaxy of half-notes, accidentals, dissonances, and interchange of notes were used to give the desired effect. Grief or lamentation, favorite Biblical themes, were pictured in the vivid tones of the music as well as in the measured tones of the speakers.

One of the most famous sacred musical compositions of the eighteenth century, *The Passion According to St. Matthew*, is famous not only for its beauty and simplicity but for its tonal pictures. A study of this composition, in the light of the data as developed, should show something of Bach's varied use of notes to create the many pictorial effects, and be significant in the study undertaken.
CHAPTER III

THE SYMBOLISM OF JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH AS PORTRAYED BY THE PASSION ACCORDING TO ST. MATTHEW

The Passion According to St. Matthew is a sacred musical composition written by Johann Sebastian Bach in 1729, when he was forty-four years of age. Bach was "Cantor" from 1723 until his death in 1750 at St. Thomas's Church in Leipzig, and the Passion was written for a performance at Easter time. It is the dramatization of the trial, crucifixion and death of Jesus Christ as told in the book of St. Matthew in the Bible.

Written around this story and woven into it is one of Bach's most beautiful and compelling musical scores. Without exception, this sacred work is one of the deepest expressions of religious emotion which has been portrayed through the art of musical sound. Text and score are closely coordinated to create a series of dramatic pictures which represent a high degree of effectiveness in music symbolism. The old Netherland motet is expanded and changed until a dramatic masterpiece is presented through the medium of both word and music. Such completeness was possible, it

1 J. S. Bach, The Passion According to St. Matthew, Preface, iii.
is believed, because of Bach's skill as a composer and his experience as a Cantor wherein he had learned the presentation of musical dramatizations. He knew how to relate and harmonize words and music until they together created tonal pictures.

However, there is no extant statement made by Bach that he intentionally created tonal pictures in the presentation. According to Schweitzer, an acknowledged authority in the study of Bach, the composer never said anything to his sons or his pupils in regard to pictorial purposes, but his musical language is so clear and makes such a deep impression that it must be judged as deliberate. In view of the recent research and discovery by Lowinsky in the field of the Netherland motet, it now seems possible to attribute this silence of Bach as intentional.

Bach was born in Antwerp, one of the citadels of the Protestant Reformation, and he was Cantor for one of the important churches. The opposition of the Roman Catholic Church, still an important authoritative institution at the time of Bach, to any improvisations in the sacred musical compositions has already been mentioned. The attitude of the Church, and its propensity to suppress anything that savored of opposition to Catholicism, may have well been

\[2\] Albert Schweitzer, *J. S. Bach*, p. 52.
the factor that called for the silence on the manner of presentation of the musical score. Then, too, as already shown, it has been the custom to keep the chromatic art as developed by the Netherland composers in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries a secret, and Bach may have merely been following tradition. The fact remains that no comment was made by Bach, and the student of the work must work out his own deductions.

A study of The Passion According to St. Matthew shows that Bach used a number of characteristic expressions in writing the musical score and that he repeated these expressions at intervals when he wished to convey the same meanings. Schweitzer says:

> These well-defined groups comprise, for example, the already mentioned 'step' motives for the expression of firmness, indecision, or tottering; the syncopated themes of lassitude; the theme that depicts tumult; the graceful wavy lines that depict peaceful rest; the serpentine lines that contort themselves at the mention of the word, Satan; the charming flowing motives that enter when angels are mentioned; the motives of rapturous, naive or passionate joy; the motives of distressful or noble grief.

In this investigation, The Passion According to St. Matthew will be analyzed in the light of the foregoing discussion by Schweitzer. The musical score will be studied to see wherein and how Bach uses his notes to portray tonal pictures.

Bach followed a well-defined plan in the creation of The Passion According to St. Matthew. He based the com-

\[3\] \textit{Ibid.}, p. 51.
position on the Book of St. Matthew in the Bible, but he added chorales and madrigals to the words as written in the Scriptures. No doubt Bach's experience in presenting the music for his Church was a very valuable asset in writing the score, for he knew how to group voices and to build choral effects. For this particular Passion, Bach used two choirs to present the music. Choir I was small and, in the opinion of Terry, represented the inmost circle of the Christian community. Choir II was large, and it is believed that it represented the larger congregation of the faithful. Each chorus had its own orchestra and its own organ accompaniment. Twenty-eight independent poems and fifteen chorales were used to supplement the Scripture readings. The composite result is a consecutive picture of the crucifixion and death of the Lord, and bears out the theory advanced by Schweitzer that Bach intentionally wrote his music in a pictorial, consecutive manner, and that he purposely composed tone pictures or symbols through both word and musical score.

The dramatic plan of the composition is simple, yet ingenious. The story of the Passion is told in the form of a series of incidents, which embrace both dramatic action and pious meditation. At characteristic points, the narration ceases, and a meditation follows. Arias are used to

give this meditative effect, and Bach usually led up to such a situation by using an arioso-like recitative. At minor resting points in the composition, choral verses express the feelings of the Christian spectators.

Bach divided the composition into two parts, but he did not follow the Scripture division into the two chapters, xxvi and xxvii. In the Bible version, the division in chapters was made after Jesus had been taken before Caiaphas for trial, where Peter, one of the disciples, disowned his Saviour. In Bach's composition, the first part ends with the taking of Jesus and the flight of the disciples (xxvi., 56). The second part includes the trial of Jesus before Caiaphas, Peter's denial, the judgment of Pontius Pilate, the death of Judas, the road to Golgotha, the Crucifixion, Death, and the Burial of Christ, while the first part includes only the conspiracy of the High Priests and scribes, the anointing of Christ, the Lord's Supper, the prayer on the Mount of Olives, and the betrayal of Jesus by Peter.

Spitta has this comment:

This division alone proves the judgment exercised in the treatment. In a work planned to represent the most stupendous events, and engaged throughout with none but the saddest emotions, every possible contrast had to be made the utmost use of. The first section is contrasted with the second as a prologue with the crisis; in one a solemn stillness reigns, in the other a passionate stir; in the former the lyric, in the latter the dramatic element.5

5 Phillip Spitta, The Life of Bach, p. 538.
The method used by Bach to present these series of incidents is description. The Choirs themselves tell the story, and the listener follows the action through the interpretations of the speakers and the music. In the introductory chorus, which is one of the largest of the presentation, the two choirs unite in singing:

Come, ye daughters, share my anguish;  
See Him! Whom? The Bridegroom see.  
See Him! How? A Lamb is He.  
See it! What? His innocence.  
Look! Look where? On our offence.  
Look on Him for love intense.  
On the Cross content to languish.  

For the first seventeen bars of the movement, the two orchestras unite in a march-like rhythm which is heard above a steady rhythmic pedal point:

Ex.1

This arrangement of the music symbolizes the weary steps of the Saviour as he staggers on under the heavy load of the Cross. The voices, however, portray the feeling of unrest and tumult that prevailed in the crowd. One chorus sings, then the other, and over all the voice of Zion can be heard. The entire theme is one of sorrow and lament. At bar 17 Zion raises her voice alone, and the music rises a full octave, in counterpoint with the march-like theme

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Thus, in the very beginning, Bach paints a picture with both words and music, and introduces the theme, bitterest woe. The listener senses the unrest from the conflicting voices, he hears the march of the milling crowd, and he senses the bitter grief and agony from the music that rises with the voice of Zion on a wail.

A Scripture reading, called a **recitative** by Bach, followed the introductory chorus. The composer placed the recitative speakers in Choir I, and they were singers who represented the Evangelist, the High Priest, Peter, and Jesus. In the recitative immediately following the first chorale, two voices are heard. The tenor voice says "When Jesus had finished all these sayings, He said to His disciples:

Then the voice of the Christ is Heard: "Ye know that after two days is the Passover."
The arrangement of these words and the accompanying music are typical of the treatment accorded the sayings of Christ and those of his followers. The words spoken by Jesus are distinguished from all the others; when the Evangelist and the others speak it is in "recitative secco;" when Jesus speaks, as in the preceding example, a quartet of stringed instruments is used, and the accompaniment is held to stringed chords. Such an arrangement, according to Spitta, gives a halo-like effect to the words of Jesus. Spitta says:

The accompaniment to the words of Christ are chiefly used to give colour; the 'madrigal' recitatives, on the other hand, have an obligato accompaniment in which a motive is usually worked out, which bears a figurative reference to some important image in the words. The accompaniments are frequently given to wind instruments, so as to produce a distinct contrast to the words of Christ.8

Bach, it appears, concentrated on presenting the words of Christ and of the Evangelist in a reverential manner and with a special sentiment. The regular recurrence of such an arrangement throughout the Passion intensifies the belief that Bach's symbolism was studied and intentional.

The second chorale of the Passion immediately follows the speech of the Saviour:

O blessed Jesus, how hast Thou offended,  
That such a doom on Thee has now descended?

8Spitta, op. cit., p. 541.
Of what misdeed hast Thou to make confession,  
Of what transgression?  

Soprano, alto, tenor and bass join in this presentation.  
The unity of voice and of theme denote the deep feeling of  
the twelve disciples as they begin to realize what is to  
happen to the Christ who is innocent. Actually, twelve  
measures of music may be used to represent the number of  
men. The first measure is not completely filled in which  
might be a way of signifying Judas, the traitor.  

The chorus then paints a picture in song of the inci-  
dents that preceded the seizure of Jesus by the mob. A  
tenor recitative describes the original plot wherein the  
chief priests and the scribes gathered in the palace of the  
High Priest, Caiaphas, to consult together on how to "lay  
hands on Jesus and kill Him." The meeting was described in  
this way -------  

Ex. 4  

\[ \text{\textbackslash n}\]  

It may be noted in this score that the music was written in  
such a way that the relationship of the group was shown. The  
priest was the highest figure-head at that time, and in the  
music the notation for the word "priest" is the highest note  
of the phrase. Then next in power were the scribes; the  

\[ ^{9} \text{Bach, op. cit., p. iv.} \]
notation for the word "scribes" is one tone lower than the note for priests. In the phrase "and kill him" Ex. 5

there is again evidence of stress in the music to emphasize the word "kill" -- the accompaniment for it has a significant sound of the thrust of a knife or sword.

Immediately, as if to show that all the priests, scribes, and elders are in agreement on the plot to kill Jesus, the modulation changes from D to C, and a chorus sings:

Not upon the feast, lest haply an uproar rises among the people. 10

The accompaniment to this chorus portrays the agitated excitement of the people by the rising and falling of the bass notes and fast moving parts of the treble Ex. 6

The whole assemblage of priests was afraid of the people becoming roused, and this fear and confusion is reflected

10 Ibid.
in the music which rises and falls. The effect of the chorus singing in canon or counterpoint shows the confusion which can take place in a short time. No fermatas, ritards, or decrescendos pretend to slow the tempo.

At this point in the Passion the voice of the Evangelist is heard relating the story of how the Saviour had been anointed:

Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, there came to him a woman, who had a cruse of exceeding precious ointment, and poured it on His Head, as He reclined at meat. But when His disciples saw it, they had indignation, and said:

The declamation of the Evangelist, here, is quite plain in character and objective in its painting. In the accompaniment, the notation indicates the action -------

The word "reclining" it is obvious is stressed, and even the "lying-down" motion is indicated by the falling notes.

The displeasure of the disciples at the action of the woman -- at that time a cruse of ointment was very difficult to obtain, and required almost a year's preparation -- is very vividly pictured by the note variations. The tenor voice, in a tone of acerbity, asked, "To What Purpose is

11 Ibid.
This Waste
Ex. 8

Complaint is registered here as to such a waste. The Gospel of John says that Judas Iscariot said, "Why Was Not the Ointment Sold?" and that the disciples and others joined in the remonstrance. Because of the greed of Judas, it is easy to believe that he said it. In Bach's portrayal -----
Ex. 9

there is remonstrance expressed in an actual waste of the notes as the movement begins. As the movement progresses, the notes vary with a scampering movement which might easily be the registering of disapproval -----
Ex. 10

Jesus then rebuked the disciples for their lack of appreciation of the women's offering. The Evangelist and Jesus are the speakers in this recital. Bach's use of the pictorial
is evident strongly in one place 

Ex. 11

The descending notes indicate a falling of tone which naturally might accompany any mention of the word "burial." The notes, too, for the word "Burial" jump a fourth, indicating an empty place. The words "Wherever in time to come" 

Ex. 12

follow quite noticeably the ticking of a clock. "This gospel is preached" 

Ex. 13

has in the treble accompaniment a definite touch of sacred, hymn-like piousness that one associates with the church. Because these half-notes spread over more space than the
other notes, it is easy to anticipate the universal spread of Christ's teachings and influence. The last four notes of this recitative

Ex. 14

\[\text{Music notation}\]

convey a touch of honest, sincere, appreciation of the deed of Mary. The intervals are clear-cut, equal in rhythmic duration and contain no figurations, which in this case would suggest insincerity.

At this point there is a break in the narrative, and a recitative followed by an aria lends a reflective mood. The disciples, rebuked for their unbelief and mistrust, are abased and plead, "O blessed Saviour, grant"

Ex. 15

\[\text{Music notation}\]

The arrangement here of the notes carries out the theme of sorrow, and the grief of the disciples; the device of accenting the last notes of quadruplets instead of the first is used. Such a motif to portray tears and great grief had been previously used by Bach, and its repetition here could
hardly be called accidental or unintentional.

The reflective aria following this recitative is almost a wail of woe in itself. The words are:

Grief and pain, grief and pain
Rend repeating hearts in twain.
May the Anguish of my spirit
In Thy sight acceptance gain.
Lord, Thy favour I would merit. 12

In this strong appeal for mercy based on the repentance of the disciples is found the whole spirit of the Protestant Reformation. Forgiveness was asked not for offered alms, but on the basis of repentance. The accompanying music as written by Bach only accentuates this spirit. A motif is employed which Schweitzer says was one that portrayed the dropping of tears ——

Ex. 16

Even a superficial study of the phrasing here will show the extent to which Bach had expanded the old sacred motet of early Biblical times.

The narrative here resumes its way with a recitative depicting the offer of Judas to betray his Lord for thirty pieces of silver. Here an E major chord is sounded by the accompaniment which is a peculiar chord on which to begin a
recitative --------

Ex. 17

Usually some inversion of the tonic or dominant chord would be used. It is significant because it denotes the infidelity of Judas. The absence of any sustaining accompaniment in the measure in which the words "Judas Iscariot" appear, portray his selfish greed. The notation in the bass accompaniment show the scales fluctuating up and down, up and down as the thirty pieces of silver are being piled on the scales --------

Ex. 18

After the incident of the betrayal is finished, another lament follows in the form of an aria. The words here suggest the deepest sorrow and woe.

Bleed and break, Thou loving heart.
Ah! a child whom Thou didst nourish,
Ah! a friend whom Thou didst cherish.
He doth gather foes around Thee,
He doth like a serpent wound Thee. 13

Ibid.
The accompanying music accentuates the sorrow of the spoken word. In the phrase "Bleed and break, Thou loving heart" -------

Ex. 19

The accent marking of the rhythmic pattern suggests the dropping of blood from the heart. There is a moment of slurred notes -- the blood falling through the air, then the accents -- the drops splash on hitting the ground. The melodic line in the 34th measure for the word "around" ----

Ex. 20

suggest something being wrapped around something else so as to bind it. In the last three measures -------

Ex. 21
the notation actually resembles a snake or serpent so much that it twists as one gazes upon it. These are the "serpentine lines" that Schweitzer mentions.\textsuperscript{14}

The action once more resumes with a recitative wherein the disciples come before their Lord. Then the Chorus asks the question as to where the Lord would have them prepare for Him to "eat the passover." In the musical accompaniment, the word "Where" has only one moving part --

\[ E_k.22 \]

and which is clearly marked "not legato" to prevent spoiling the question. A suspension in the treble of the accompaniment from the preceding measure to the last measure, then to a passing tone and resolution gives the effect of a "passover" -- actually the musical thought passes over the bar line reminiscent of passing from one location to another.

Jesus answered the disciples in a recitative, and described what they were to do -- go into a city to a certain man and tell him to make ready the feast of the Passover. In the bass solo part where Jesus instructed the disciples

\textsuperscript{14} Schweitzer, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 51.
to prepare a place for the last supper, the notation "Go ye into the city" -------

very definitely indicated that the city (Jerusalem) was either geographically situated on a hill, or that because of its size and importance, it was more important than the small suburban place, Bethany, where they were at this particular time. This is accomplished through the melodic line of the vocal notation.

In describing the feast of the Passover, Bach was clever to give the word "Passover" (special holiday for the people of the time commemorating the escape from Egyptian bondage) an especial musical significance by -------

having the singer's notes for the word written in a triplet. The melodic line drops as the shadows approaching night on the word "evening" -------
At the last supper, Jesus told his disciples that one of them would betray him. The exciting picture that followed is depicted by the chorus. As Chorus I begins to sing the question, "Lord, is it I?" each voice enters separately and each on a higher pitch. This indicates the growing inquisitiveness of each disciple as he jumps up and runs to Jesus. It is interesting to note that when the word "one" or "first" is mentioned ———

that a quick interval involving one step is in the notation of the vocal scores. It is interesting to note, also, that the chorus, which represented the disciples, only asked the question fully eleven times -- Judas asked the same question later in the Passion.

In the Chorale that follows the questions of the disciples, another lamentation occurs. Here again the disciples are represented by twelve measures. Judas Iscariot has not
yet openly betrayed his Lord, thus twelve full measures.

Again the figure of the serpent --------

Ex. 27

\[ \text{Music notation} \]

as a tortuous symbol is interwoven into each voice through the melodic lines.

A tenor and bass recitative then presents the story of the "Last Supper" where the Lord answered the question asked by his disciples. His words were: "He that his hand with me in the dish hath dipped, even he shall betray me." In the musical accompaniment, the word "dipped" drops a fifth picturing the actual dipping into the dish --------

Ex. 28

\[ \text{Music notation} \]

The accompaniment for the word "betray" has a marked dissonance --------

Ex. 29

\[ \text{Music notation} \]
\( E^b \) in the bass and \( F \) in the treble, which is an undisputed symbol to emphasize the meaning of the word, are used. Also to emphasize the sign even more, the dissonance occurs on the syncopated beat. As the note from the word "go" in the phrase "The Son of Man is about to go" -------

Ex. 30

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{\( \hat{b} \) in the bass and \( F \) in the treble, which is an undisputed symbol to emphasize the meaning of the word, are used. Also to emphasize the sign even more, the dissonance occurs on the syncopated beat. As the note from the word "go" in the phrase "The Son of Man is about to go" ------- Ex. 30}
\end{array}
\]

is approached from a sixth below, it is assumed that the Lord had reference to His own ascension and not crucifixion. An inversion of the \( B^b \) chord for the word "woe" in the phrase "woe unto that man" -------

Ex. 31

\[
\begin{array}{c}
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\end{array}
\]

emphasized the dreadfulness of the betrayal. A notable symbol is found in this same picture where Judas asked the question: "Lord, is it I?" -------

Ex. 32

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{emphasized the dreadfulness of the betrayal. A notable symbol is found in this same picture where Judas asked the question: "Lord, is it I?" ------- Ex. 32}
\end{array}
\]
The untrue Judas does not sing the same notes or intervals used by the other disciples. This conveys the thought of the old Jewish courts that witnesses had to tell exactly the same story or it was entirely false.

The second portion of the recitative describes the "breaking" of the bread by Jesus and his giving His advice to His disciples. In the musical accompaniment for the word "brake" a quarter note is used with an eighth rest immediately following. This makes the action of breaking bread more realistic. An unusual symbol is observed in the changing of the time signature. The extended time portrays the Christ breaking bread to each disciple.

In the action where Jesus poured the wine from the cup, a melodic line paints a picture similar to the flow of liquid running from a cup to a person's mouth ---

Ex. 33

Though the strings have surrounded the direct words spoken by the Lord to form a sort of halo up to this point, they seem to especially emphasize the utterance: "I will henceforth not drink of the fruit of this vine, until that day when I shall drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."
A recitative and an aria follow which are hymns of praise from the disciples. No new outstanding symbol is found in them, but in the recitative depicting the march to the Mount of Olives the musical symbols are both outstanding and beautiful. Heavy steps in the bass ———

Ex. 34

symbolize the Saviour setting out on His sorrowful way to the Mount of Olives. By way of contrast, quite the opposite effect is achieved by the music in the same recitative wherein Jesus prophesied "I will go before you into Galilee." This journey was to be triumphant after Jesus had been "Raised again," and his tread was buoyant ———

Ex. 35

In the treble, the ascension is quite clearly accomplished by legato thirds rising in pitch.

A plea for protection and forgiveness is voiced in a chorale which follows the Mount Olive episode. In the recitative after this, Peter affirms his allegiance to the
Lord, and Jesus answering, said: "Ere yet the cock croweth, even thou shalt thrice deny me." The melodic line for voice --------

\[ \text{Ex. 36} \]

on the words "cock croweth" impresses one as a cock actually crowing. The staunch, powerful strength of the faith of Peter is emphasized through the solo line by an even rhythm of eighth notes.

The solo and chorus following the recitative suggests symbolic tone pictures. In the passage, "I would beside my Lord be watching" --------

\[ \text{Ex. 37} \]

the staunch, firm treatment of the notation suggests calm strength and fidelity. There is agreement and support of the Lord.

A tenor and bass recitative then presents the scene in Gethsemane. Jesus spoke to his disciples: "Sit ye here while I go yonder and pray." In the musical accompaniment ---
an interval drop of a 6th depicts "sit ye here." It is interesting to note in connection with this that when Jesus is portrayed as praying or blessing anything, as in the word "prayed" No. 17

Ex. 39

the presence of the grace note accompanies the places where He might be talking with God. The interval of a fourth on the end of the word "prays" slurs down to portray the Christ kneeling.

Another symbolic picture appears again in the same recitative. The melodic lines accompanying the phrase, "and began to be sorrowful and very heavy," again make use of the serpentine, waving movement of notation previously employed by Bach to portray evil or burdensome sorrow. In the accompaniment for the word "watch," where Jesus asks his disciples
to "watch with me" -------

Ex. 40

Both treble and bass have an eighth rest, then a quarter rest, which give meaning to the word. "Tarry here" substantiates the idea that Jesus had brought the three disciples to some point removed from the other eight.

The chorale that follows this scene "I would beside my Lord be watching" is built around the thoughts of the three disciples who are watching and praying with Christ at the moment. The deity of the Christ is accomplished through making the word "Lord" a half-note highest in pitch and longest in duration of any in the phrase -------

Ex. 41

The melodic symbol of the serpent is again presented by the tenor soloist just before the words "that evil draw me not astray" are added by the chorus, and the serpent idea is mingled in each voice throughout the remainder of No. 26.

Heavy, dark chords are used to accompany the recitative
describing Jesus's further withdrawal for prayer. Then in the bass recitative, a very clear picture of "The Saviour, low before his Father bending" is painted -------

Ex. 42

by the motif here built with a series of triads -- three 16th notes triads are tied together and precede an eighth note triad. The pitch direction is invariably downward, which suggests a bowing body. Rests between the symbols make them quite prominent. When Christ commends the love of God to man on the word "commending," signifying that when the love of God is present that man is raised up, the direction of the symbol is upward -------

Ex. 43

The former Bowed symbol of Christ is continued to the end of this movement as the bitterness of the Lord's further ordeal is described.

When Jesus returned to the disciples he had left behind him when he went into Gethsemane, he found them asleep.
Seeing them, thus he went away twice more to pray by Himself, and on his third return merely said "Sleep on now and take your rest." The resolved Lord is pictured in a melodic phrase line ———

Ex. 44

that begins with a D and weaves downward more than an octave. He obviously looks up for the accompaniment in the treble in arpeggio manner follows the use of one who looks up and immediately sees something which he has been expecting. This occurs as the Lord speaks "Lo!" He sees Judas approaching and says, "The hour is at hand." Trembles in the accompaniment convey ———

Ex. 45

the human side of Jesus's life on earth, as it portrays the nervousness and the actual trembling of the Lord as he sees the multitude approach.

No. 33 presents a meditation upon the Saviour as He is taken and bound by his captors:
"Behold, my Saviour now is taken" presents an obvious example of staggering and stumbling rhythm patterns to reveal the condition of Jesus when the men took him and bound Him. Such rhythm patterns convey the idea of one trying to walk with his legs and hands tied. Syncopation and contrast of note values accomplish this effect.

In the duet for soprano and alto in this same passage, a sad picture of the moon and stars going down or "forsaking" the night is created in descending minor thirds, the last note for the lower voice dropping to a fourth to give the idea of dropping below the horizon as both voices sing their lowest notes.

Ex. 47

As the chorus opens with the words "Leave Him," Bach could see, according to Schweitzer, the crowd moving about under the gloomy trees of Gethsemane with Jesus being driven
before it in bonds. Bach imagines a number of the faithful following the Lord, and he hears their cries of lament, "Leave Him, bind Him not."

The two chief motives here are so constructed that their cooperation gives a tense, unrestful rhythm. This is realized by having the short, quick notes, the eight notes, representing the people in the upper treble register, and the slow-sustained quarter notes representing the gloomy trees ---

\[ \begin{align*}
\text{\quad} & F F F F F F F F \\
\text{\quad} & E E E E E E E E
\end{align*} \]

In the vivace movement for Chorus I and II a great storm occurs. Spitta describes what happens here:

Then both choirs burst out in a vivace, and with righteous indignation call upon Heaven to hurl down thunder and lightning on the traitor and his accomplices. The music wars and raves like the wind and the storm; nevertheless the form is very simple ... And how miserably do the undignified excreations, which in other Passion settings have to be sung by a solo voice in this place, compare with this picture, traced as it were in flames of fire.16

In the accompaniment to the music thus described, the staccato of the flutes and oboes ----

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15 Schweitzer, op. cit., p. 222.
16 Phillip Spitta, The Life of Bach, p. 556.
gives a definite, pictorial view of physical lighting. This is accomplished by having the particular phrase symbol to begin at a low pitch in the bass clef and to continue in the tenor in canon form. This same procedure is continued in the alto and soprano voices which create a decided flicker of lightning racing across the sky both in movement and sound.

In the 44th measure of this particular movement, a tumultuous climax is accomplished in the vocal score on the words, "Let hell with its manifold terrors affright them." In the instrumentation to this climax, the rhythm pattern is changed from 16th notes to 32nd notes, and this adds frenzy to the earth-quake-like condition.

A recitative at this point by the tenor and bass depicts the dramatic scene wherein Simon Peter, one of Christ's disciples, cuts off an ear of the serpent of the high priest with his sword. In the Scripture version, however, Simon Peter's name was not mentioned because this was a very serious offense, and evidently it was feared that Simon Peter would be punished. Some of the other gospels did mention Peter's name in connection with the incident,
but they were written after the death of Simon Peter. Jesus did prevent any immediate action against Peter after rebuking him by quickly healing the ear of the servant by miraculous touch. The drama of this particular scene is accomplished primarily through note-action of the Evangelist as he narrates in special recitative voice

\[ Ex. 50 \]

Quick-changing 16th notes on the words "stretched out his hand" and "struck off his hear" denote the fast actions and also the direction of the sword of Peter as he struck at the ear of the servant of the high priest. Peter was an expert swordsman and the direction of the melodic line of the Evangelist is very descriptive of the slashes and back-hand strokes of one skilled in the art.

In measures 19 and 20 of this particular passage, the chord structure for the words, "Robber, with swords and with staves" are dissonant, unrestful musical sounds which lend anything but pleasant and peaceful resolutions

\[ Ex. 51 \]
In the next score downward, the very opposite effect is obvious in the words "and have been teaching in the temple" 

Ex. 52

The undesirable effect is executed by unusual, irregular resolution. The second, the sort of "religiosio" is effected by more smooth chordal change and final resolution.

A final chorale ends the first part of The Passion According to St. Matthew. It is a dirge of grief and sorrow and these motives are accentuated by the fading away of both the chorus and the orchestra

Ex. 53

The second portion of The Passion According to St. Matthew relates the tragedy of the crucifixion. Many of the symbolic pictures found in the music are repetitions of those found in the first part of The Passion. For this reason, many of the symbolisms are omitted from this portion of the study. Only the outstanding ones will be given attention.
One of the important symbolic pictures of the entire presentation is the one where Peter denied knowing his Lord. After the disciples had all deserted the Master and He had been led away to the High Priest Caiaphas, Peter followed and sat outside in the courtyard. When he was called inside by a maid, Peter denied that he knew the Lord. Previously, the Lord had told Peter that he would betray Him before the cock "croweth." Immediately after Peter denied that he knew Jesus, the cock crew. At the words of the Evangelist "Ere the cock croweth" ------

Ex. 54

![Musical notation]

a sound is produced in the vocal score which resembles the crowing of a cock. The notes rise, then fall, then quicken much as the tones of a rooster's voice. Peter, hearing the cock crow, realized what he had done and went out and wept bitterly ------

Ex. 55

![Musical notation]
The music here weeps with Peter in a most realistic fashion. The intense sobbing of man who has betrayed his dearest friend is heard. The theme of the next aria "Have mercy, Lord, on me" is derived from this preceding recitative regarding Peter, and the contemplative words are sung to music which further carries out the weeping motif.

Ex. 56

The story of the crucifixion of Christ moves on in a series of pictures woven into the music. Judas, who betrayed the Christ, hangs himself, and Christ was carried before Pilate and put on trial for his life. Pilate saw that the people were determined to take the life of Jesus and he released Him to the multitude with the words that "His blood would be upon them and their children." Jesus was scourged before He was released. In No. 60 the notes of the orchestra--

Ex. 57
portray the falling of the scourge. There is first a repetition of the notes, then a step downward. The aria which follows, "If my tears be unavailing" -------

Ex. 59

also depicts the falling of the blows. The melisma of sound which occurs on the word "wailing" represents the cry of the faithful soul weeping over the fate of Jesus -------

Ex. 59

After Jesus was scourged, He was taken into a hall and stripped and then dressed in a scarlet robe and a crown of thorns was placed upon His head. Then they "spat upon Him," took away the garments and led Him away to be crucified. In No. 65 the music paints the picture of Jesus laboring under the cross. The notes rise, pause, rise, pause again, then lower -------

Ex. 60
Uncertainty, dejection, stumbling -- all are depicted. Simon Peter, however, was strong and energetic and he was given the cross to carry. His heavy measured walk under the burden of the cross is symbolized in No. 66 --

Ex. 61

The continuo accompaniment gives the music a march-like character. An active steady bass portrays the unfailing and confident tread of Simoh, while the upper part played by the viola in an unsteady figure gives the picture of the stumbling and falling Saviour.

In No. 67 a recitative and a chorus are used, and again a definite picture is painted by the music. The words "Then descend from the cross" are very effectively illustrated --

Ex. 62

The falling notes of the bass indicate the descent from the cross. An interesting picture is noted in this same part in that on the word "destroyest" the motion of the chordal structure is downward and not firmly connected.
On the word "buildest" the very opposite symbol is employed and a firm melodic and chordal basis is realized.

The mob has departed in No. 69 and the silence of immediate death is descending. There is hushed silence. Plucked cello strings represent the tolling of a bell, an omen of death, or the last pulsations of the heart -------

Ex. 64

A great darkness falls upon the earth. All is still. And then a ray of sunlight breaks forth from a cloud. "A radiance of love and pity streams from the dying Redeemer." The believing soul sings, "Look ye, Jesus waiting stands, stretching forth sustaining hands." The funeral bells cease to toll, and the clear glad sound of the bells of salvation spread over the earth. The music descends from the lowest to the highest notes -------
Here is symbolized the ascension of the spirit of the Lord, and also the only way for man to be drawn from the dregs of sin to the heights of Christian love. The repetition of this theme occurs four times which gives added stress to the pictorial element.

The final chorus is conceived as a piece of burial music. Here the peculiar falling motives determine the nature of the movement. The notes descend slowly and the whole arrangement is symbolic of a body being lowered into its grave. The music peals softly yet clearly ————
CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS

There is ample evidence in the study of *The Passion According to St. Matthew* that Bach intentionally painted tonal pictures through variations of the musical score.

He did not use a single dynamic-marking symbol, but he brought to a high degree of perfection the secret chromatic art of the Netherlands motet. The fact that Bach did not ever mention to any of his closest friends or relatives the fact that he intentionally created tone pictures has been a source of puzzlement to those who have studied his life. Recent research, however, has disclosed that there had been a gradual development in the Netherlands, Bach's birthplace, of a secret chromatic art in the way in which motets were written. A study of the period and of the opposition of the Roman Catholic Church to any innovations, political or religious, intensifies the belief that perhaps Bach was motivated by the same forces to conceal his efforts to write a new feeling into the sacred music of the day.

At any rate, it is evident from the study of *The Passion According to St. Matthew* that Bach worked out certain patterns or variations in notes and that he repeated these in like passages. For example, whenever the word "serpent" was
spoken, the music undulated in rhythm. Step-motives are apparent, and they occurred with frequent repetition. The use of stringed chords always accompanied the recitatives in which Jesus spoke. These gave a special feeling of reverence and sentiment for the Lord's words. The note variations, too, are significant. In instance after instance the notes descend when any downward movement is indicated. High notes signify a rising movement. Fast action in the drama is accompanied by fast-moving notes.

The outstanding conclusion of the study is that Bach used his notes deliberately to portray tonal pictures. Such a practice appears to be a continuation and a perfection of an art already established in the Netherlands and which, due to the nature of the political, social, and religious life of the times, had to be concealed.
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