

*The PASSION of our LORD
according to ST. John*

Setting For Organ, Choir And
Optional Solo Instruments

by

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Performance Notes

One of the great solemn moments of the liturgical year occurs on Good Friday with the celebration of our Lord's Passion and death on the cross. At this time the Church focuses on Jesus' trial and crucifixion recorded in the Gospel of John. This musical setting of the Passion according to St. John is meant to enhance the dramatic and emotional quality of this moving account. This is therefore, first and foremost, a liturgical composition for use during the Good Friday liturgy, as part of a dramatic presentation of the Passion story. The music here should challenge us and deepen our prayerful experience of God's sacrifice of love. A constant awareness of this role should form the underpinning of the entire performance, enabling all present to enter into that deeper prayer.

In preparing for this performance, adequate time must be set aside for practice and rehearsal. In addition to musical rehearsal a practice session should also be set up with the Narrator to ensure good timing. Therefore, some practical suggestions for the preparation of this score are offered below.

First, be sure to follow the tempo indications closely. A great many difficulties can be avoided, for example, if the opening section is performed exactly at the tempo indicated. This may seem a bit slow at first, but it will set the mood and contrast well with the faster sections later on. Special attention should also be paid to all dynamic markings.

The instrumentation is set up so that the organ can play the solo instrument melodies on a solo stop, if a solo instrument is not available. The organ left hand can be played by the right hand if a solo instrument is used, or by a combination of hands. Solo C-instruments suggested are flute, oboe or violin. For those groups with a synthesizer the organ accompaniment may be doubled tastefully with strings in certain places (*i.e.*, the opening parts of Sections I, II, and IV).

In Section IV, at measures 27-29 and 38-46, the score provides parts for two solo instruments. If only one is available have it play part I and the organ play part II on a solo stop. Of course, the two parts are set up for the organist to play with the right hand if so desired.

Since the Narrator plays a key role in this performance it is essential that this part be well rehearsed, both individually and in ensemble with the musicians. The Narrator should enunciate clearly and use a normal speaking tempo. Special "reference" measure numbers are given for many of the Narrator's entrances. Those parts shown with brackets (*i.e.*, "He said . . ." or "They answered . . .") may be omitted to enhance the dramatic effect if the visual placement of the relevant soloists and choir is clear to the assembly.

The parts of Jesus and Pilate must be specially assigned to Baritone and Bass soloists, respectively. The other solo "bit parts" (*i.e.*, maid, Peter, guard, slave) can be performed by members selected from the choir. Pitch cues for solo and choral entrances are usually present in the instrumental accompaniment leading up to those entrances. These cues should be located and noted in practice to assure good strong entrances.

The optional extensions in Section II (measures 93-99 and 103-105) may be performed to enhance the drama of those moments. However, they can be omitted if desired by following the relevant markings in the score.

The texts of the two hymns used in this Passion ("O Sacred Head Surrounded" and "Were You There") are printed in the back of this book and may be reprinted without charge for the assembly to use during the performance. In preparation for Good Friday be sure to advise the assembly of its role in this performance and to cue them clearly when it is time for them to sing. A moment or two of silence is needed after each section, as well as at measure 47 in Section IV, to allow for the release of built-up tension, before moving on.

Although the preparation considered above will demand a certain amount of rehearsal time for Good Friday, it should be worth it. The emotional depths inherent in St. John's Passion account cry out for musical treatment and composers throughout the centuries have tried to express some of those depths. It is hoped that this attempt will not only be an expressive rendering of the Passion story, but will be useful in the Good Friday liturgy itself in support of the community's prayer.