

*Georg Philipp Telemann (1681-1767)*  
*The Oratorio-Passions*  
*Matthäus Passion (1746)*

*A Presentation by Joel Schwindt*  
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**Georg Philipp Telemann (1681-1767)**  
**Matthäus Passion (1746)**

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## ***Georg Philipp Telemann (1681-1767)*** ***Matthäus Passion (1746)***

### ***Biography***

Telemann was a true German celebrity during his lifetime (and thereafter, of course). In fact, three biographies on Telemann were written during the composer's lifetime. The first two date from 1718 and 1729. The third is the most comprehensive (dating from around 1740), drawing from the second biography as well as Telemann himself. It was published in 1744 in both German and French in Mattheson's *Grundlage einer Ehren-Pforte*.

- 1681 Born 14 March in Magdeburg, Germany. The Telemann family was an upper middle-class family, mostly university-educated. Though Georg Philipp claimed that he had inherited his musical talent from his mother Maria (the daughter of a Protestant Clergyman), there were very few professional musicians in either his immediate or extended family
- 1685 Georg's father Heinrich Telemann dies.
- 1685-1693 With the financial support of extended family, Maria raises Georg and his older brother Heinrich Matthais. At age 10, Georg begins voice lessons with the Kantor at his school. He briefly studied keyboard with a local organist, and also taught himself recorder, violin and zither. He also learned compositional technique by transcribing scores of his voice teacher as well as other composers. This inspired him to write arias, motets and instrumental pieces. He even wrote an entire opera, entitled *Sigismundus*, at the age of 12. Concerned with her son's growing interest in music, Maria forbade further studies and even confiscated all of Georg's instruments! However, "Georg continued to study in private on borrowed instruments which he would play at night or in secluded places."
- 1694-1700 Zellerfeld: Georg is sent to school, where it was hoped that his interest in music would decrease. However, his instructor, Caspar Calvoer, furthered Georg's interest by teaching him the relationships between music and mathematics. Telemann also taught himself thoroughbass, took up the flute, oboe, chalumeau, viola da gamba, double bass and bass trombone while continuing to compose, writing a motet for almost every Sunday as well as instrumental works. He frequently traveled to Hanover and Brunswick where he was introduced to the latest French and Italian musical styles (especially opera), including the works of Steffani, Rosenmüller, Corelli and Caldara.
- 1701-1705 Leipzig: Telemann enters Leipzig University to study law. One of the biographies claims that Telemann himself, not his mother, was the author of the decision to put aside music in favor of the "more sensible" law

degree. However, this resolution was soon thwarted when Telemann's roommate discovered one of Georg's compositions, which the roommate shared with the other students. The work was performed at the Thomaskirche, which led to a commission by the mayor of Leipzig to write music for the Thomaskirche as well as the Nikolaikirche, assuring Telemann's career as a musician. By 1702, Telemann had become the central musical figure in Leipzig. He later took the directorship of the Neukirche, while continuing to serve as "empressario" for the Thomaskirche and Nikolaikirche. He soon became an active figure at the local opera house, writing both music and libretti for (as well as singing in) many productions. This prominence led to friction between Telemann and Kuhnau, who held the official title of "City Director of Music", as Telemann was more often the one deciding who would be employed where. Despite many petitions to the city council, Kuhnau was never successful in limiting Telemann's influence.

1701 Telemann meets Händel while passing through Halle. The two would have frequent contacts. Telemann claimed that Händel was a great help to him in "melodic matters."

1705-1706 Sorau: Telemann leaves Leipzig to serve as Kapellmeister in the court of Count Erdmann II of Promnitz in Sorau (Lower Lusatia, now Poland). The count had frequently traveled through France, where he had developed a great love of French music; Telemann very wisely immersed himself in the music and Lully and Campra, writing over two hundred works in the French style during his tenure. He was also introduced to folk music of the region, whose "true barbaric beauty" fascinated him. During this period, he also met the reformation poet Neumeister, who later served as the godfather of Telemann's first daughter. Early in 1706, Telemann was forced to flee Sorau to escape the invading troops of the Swedish King Charles XII.

c 1707-1711 Eisenach: Around 1707 or 1708, Telemann enters the service of Duke Johann Wilhelm. During this period, Telemann writes four complete jarge, two incomplete jarge, numerous masses, psalms and other sacred works as well as over fifty German and Italian cantatas; along with these vocal works, Telemann also wrote many concerti and sonatae.

Telemann met J.S. Bach during this period through his acquaintance with Johann Bernhard Bach (cousin of J.S.); Telemann later served as the godfather of Carl Philip Emmanuel.

Also during this period, Telemann married Amalie Louise Juliane Eberlin, the lady-in-waiting to the Countess of Promnitz. Amalie died in childbirth just fifteen months later.

1712-1721 Frankfurt: Citing a heavy workload and bad working environment in Eisenach, Telemann accepts the position of Kappelmeister at the Barfässerkirche in Frankfurt, also turning down a lucrative offer from the court at Dresden. This new “relaxing” position included directing music at both the Barfässerkirche and Katharinenkirche, writing music for civic occasions, teaching six to eight schoolboys of his choosing and supervising singing instruction at the Lateinschule. To these duties, Telemann voluntarily added the directorship of the Collegium musicum and the Frauenstein society, also serving as administrator and treasurer of the Haus Braunfels in exchange for a modest salary and free lodgings. He also wrote several more cantata cycles and a handful of passion-oratorios, along with other vocal and instrumental works. By 1718, his annual salary was 1,600 florins (according to Grove, “comparable to the salary of a high-ranking councilman”).

In 1714, Telemann marries sixteen-year-old Maria Catharina Textor, daughter of a city clerk; of their nine children, not one became a professional musician.

Starting in 1715, Telemann began to publish his own music, including many of the cantata cycles and four collections of instrumental music.

1721-1767 Hamburg: Telemann accepts the position as Kantor at the Johanneum Lateinschule as well as musical director of the city’s five main churches. If you can believe it, *this* was Telemann’s most prolific compositional period.

*“Telemann now entered the most productive phase of his career. He was expected to provide two cantatas for each Sunday and a new Passion for Lent. Music was required for induction ceremonies and for church consecrations, and further cantatas had to be written for the city’s numerous civic celebrations. Once a year Telemann provided a sacred oratorio and secular serenata for the celebrations of the Hamburg militia commandant. As Kantor he was responsible for instructing the schoolboys in singing, theory and music history four days a week. Such official duties did not prevent his giving public concerts, many of which included sacred and occasional vocal works. Once again he directed a collegium musicum: on 15 November 1721 he initiated a series of weekly public concerts that ran each winter season from November or December until February or March...In April or May 1722 Telemann assumed the directorship of the Gänsemarktoper, where he performed his own operas as well as those by Händel and Keiser, for which he often provided additional material (Grove).”*

Telemann again used offers from other cities to increase his salary (including Frankfurt and St. Petersburg). However, in this case, his need

may have been more dire as his wife apparently ran up considerable gambling debts, once forcing Telemann to take up a collection from his patrons; the marriage had been dissolved by 1736.

Aside from a long trip to Paris (1737-38), Telemann spent this period almost exclusively in German-speaking cities (there is no evidence that he visited Italy).

By the mid-1740s, Telemann seems to have entered into semi-retirement, composing mostly at his leisure. However, in 1755, inspired by a new generation of German writers, Telemann sets a vigorous pen to sacred oratorio writing.

On 25 June, 1767, Telemann died in his apartment of a “chest ailment.” Eulogies were written across German-speaking Europe; one eulogist wrote “his name is his eulogy.”

### ***Selected Output***

12 complete cantata cycles, several incomplete cycles (over 1000 cantatas!)

46 oratorio-passions (23 extant)

6 passion-oratorios

1 chorale passion

50+ motets and psalm settings (both Latin and German)

30 operas (Telemann claims more than 50)

10 sacred oratorios

4 secular oratorios

100+ solo songs

100+ works for special occasions

100s of instrumental works

## ***Matthäus Passion (1746)***

### **Stat Pack!**

#### ***Story***

Matthew 26:30-27:50 (some slight changes to the text, which are indicated in score).

Beginning immediately after the institution of the Lord’s Supper through the moment of Christ’s death.

One of the 46 Oratorio-Passions written as part of his yearly duties in Hamburg.

All hymns by Johann Rist (1606-1667), whose hymns were used by many of the most popular German composers of the day (J.S. Bach used them for several of his cantatas including the Christmas Oratorio).

### ***Cast/Voicing***

Evangelist	Tenor
Jesus	Bass*
Peter	Tenor*
Judas	Alto
False Witnesses	Alto/Bass
Caiphas	Tenor
2 women	Soprano
Pilate	Bass
Turba	Chorus
	S-A-T Soloists

\*Proto-character arias: Telemann created two arias (Nos. 5 and 36) in which the characters Peter and Jesus (respectively) step out of the Biblical narrative and responds in an aria on a new text. Interestingly, since there is no bass aria soloist, and since Jesus is a bass in the recitatives, his “proto-solo” is sung by the tenor soloist.

### ***Orchestra***

Organ/Cembalo  
Transverse flutes I/II, “Flauto dolce (recorder)”  
Oboe/Oboe d’amore  
Bassoon  
Horn  
Violin I/II  
Viola  
Violincello  
Violine

### ***Salient Style Features***

It can be more difficult to define Telemann’s late style, as he is not only bridging the Baroque and Classic style, but also successfully incorporating the German, French and Italian styles of his day, a style which Quantz termed “vermischte Schreibweise [mixed manner].” In the words of one of his contemporaries:

*“...in his Passion settings as well Telemann is an innovator; he does not hesitate to apply the achievements of musical progress in his day to the field of pure church music.”*

The passion settings of Telemann are also noted for their forward-looking view of the passion drama, emphasizing the exultation of coming redemption rather than anguish of the suffering of Jesus. It is also interesting to note that in Telemann does not always use a tenor for the Evangelist role. His St. Matthew of 1765 and the St. Mark of 1766, for example, uses a bass and an alto, respectively.

Though the passions use a wide variety of styles, there are a handful of broad principles and particular features to be found in each individual work. For the St. Matthew of 1746, some examples would be:

- ❖ Melody: Telemann's melodic style will vary from movement to movement. However, the predominant style in the *Da capo* arias is the Neapolitan-Opera style. This style features virtuosic lines and a relatively large ambitus.
  - Judas, in keeping with his status as a villain, is very chromatic in his melodic statements.
- ❖ Harmony: this work falls very firmly in the realm of tonal functionalism.
  - Rapid modulations are found in the recitatives, often facilitating the need for rapid transition to the key area of the next chorus or aria.
  - *Da capo* arias: Almost without exception, the "B" sections of the arias will be in the relative major or minor, in keeping with the rules of functional-key-area progressions. Telemann provides a decent amount of harmonic interest, however, within the arias themselves.
  - Use of major keys in the turbulent moments of the drama: this is largely seen as an example of Telemann's aforementioned forward-looking attitude.
- ❖ Form: The form of the work is in the most common style of the German Oratorio-Passion. Chorales serve as the basic anchors of the structure, between which the drama is told with interjections of commentary in arias as well as certain choruses.
  - Arias: the form of the arias (with two exceptions mentioned above) is that of the Neapolitan *Da capo* aria.
    - The "A" sections of *Da capo* arias consist of two strophes followed by a contrasting "B" section, rounded out by the *Da capo* repeat of the "A" section. As most composers, Telemann included, use the same introductory material for both strophes in the "A" section, a flavor of *ritornello* style is created.
  - Hymnody: Rist's hymns are, needless to say, German Reformationist; as such, they are in German bar form (*stollen-stollen-abgesang*). They are also principally hymns of exultation (as opposed to the mournful hymns used by J.S. Bach).
    - The final hymn is closed with a choral statement of the *Kyrie eleison*.
- ❖ Textures: As in the French opera of Telemann's day, the textures change without stoppage of the music. So, a *secco* recitative may change to an *accompagnato* recitative which may change into an *arioso*, which may become a chorus without the music ever stopping. The exceptions to this rule are the arias, which Telemann places only after a complete stop in the music.
  - Another common feature of the eighteenth-century solo aria which appears in the solo arias this work is the use of obbligato instrument.
- ❖ Meter: Until Jesus' arrest, the meter changes for each new large section. From the arrest through the trial before the Jewish leaders, the meter changes within

- sections, changing both beat count and division of the mensural. From the trial with Pilate through the end of the passion, all drama is in common time.
- ❖ Tempo: All tempo indications are in German. Tempo indications in the drama are far and few between; most appear in the soloists' arias. However, most of them are not indicative of pacing, but of characterization (“mobile”, “obstinate”, “comfortable”).
  - ❖ Orchestral Characterizations:
    - Evangelist/named characters: almost without exception, the evangelist as well as other named characters will be accompanied by the organ and a single cello.
    - Jesus: almost without exception, the violone will be added to the continuo group, along with the rest of the string section and winds.

### *Performance Considerations*

- ❖ Period instruments
  - The string instruments used in the mid-1700s were the first generation of the modern violin family. Though they were not generally capable of the volume of sound of the modern violin family, they certainly do not present the disparity of sound of the viol family.
  - The oboe d’amore: if this period instrument is not available, the English horn can substitute.
  - Though the flutes indicated in the score are transverse flutes (not the older recorders, or “flauto dolce”), Theobald Boehm’s innovations which lay the foundation of the modern flute are still about a half-century away. At this point, flutes are still wooden, with a warmer sound which is fuller in the lower ranges.
- ❖ Vocestration
  - Character voicings: Many of the passion conventions are followed in this rendition (Jesus is a bass, the Evangelist is a tenor), but be aware that Judas being a treble voice is no coincidence. Some musicologists contend that it was the tradition from opera to cast male villains as treble voices (such as the mezzo-soprano Nero in Monteverdi’s *L’incoronazione di Poppea*). If you have a male alto, this would probably be most dramatically effective.
  - Proto-character arias: Though Jesus’ proto-solo cannot be sung by the “recitative Jesus” soloist, the conductor may choose to use the “recitative Peter” soloist for the character’s proto-solo.
- ❖ Performer aptitudes
  - Evangelist/Jesus: the ideal soloists for these roles will be intimately familiar with the German-Protestant Oratorio-Passion tradition. The recitatives for these roles are basically identical in style to the style of the passion settings of Bach.
  - Aria soloists: the ideal soloists will be experienced in the style of Baroque opera. A strong sense of German-Protestant musical style is not necessarily required, as the solo arias are all in the Italian style. A word of warning: when

contracting the aria soloists, don't go with singers fresh off of their apprenticeship at the Met, as a lighter voice with greater agility will serve the arias much better.

- Named roles: As a matter of practicality, the smaller named roles are often cast from within the ranks of the chorus. This practice can also serve the dramatic aspect of the presentation, as the "character voices" come from within the "turba/crowd."
- Chorus: the choruses require musical skill akin to that needed for Bach or Händel in terms of aural acuity as well as facility for rhythm, counterpoint and articulation.
  - If one wished to use a separate chorus for the chorales, a more amateur chorus would suffice. This simple harmonic texture was the direct result of local decree that the chorales should appear in a simple form with which the congregation could sing.

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### ***Recordings***

*Georg Philipp Telemann: Matthäus Passion*. Barock Orchester La Stravaganza, Ulrich Stötzel, director. *The Joel Schwindt collection* (please call for appointment)

### ***Scores***

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