Foreword

Like the *Ascension Oratorio* BWV 11, Johann Sebastian Bach's *Easter Oratorio* BWV 249 is entirely and unjustly overshadowed by his two great Passion settings and the *Christmas Oratorio*. It was given its first hearing on 1 April 1725, three days after the second version of the *St. John Passion*. Thereafter Bach performed the work for his Leipzig congregations on at least three Easter Sundays, touching up the composition each time. The starting point for the *Easter Oratorio* was a congratulatory piece composed for a performance on 23 February 1725 for Duke Christian of Saxe-Weissenfels: a pastoral cantata entitled *Entfliehet, entweichet, entschwindet, ihr Sorgen* BWV 249a. From the very outset Bach probably envisioned reusing the piece as a festive composition. The person most likely to have supplied the libretto – a sacred parody of the original congratulatory poem – was Christian Friedrich Henrici (also known as Picander), who not only wrote the words of the original cantata but helped Bach one year later to recast it for the birthday of Count Joachim Friedrich von Flemming, governor of Leipzig and commander of the Pleissenburg, at which time it was given a new text and the title *Verjaget, zerstreuet, zerrüttet ihr Stemme* BWV 249b. As experience has shown that it was easier to compose new recitatives than to underlay existing ones with new words, we may safely assume that the original secular recitatives are lost. In contrast, the arias and choruses can, in principle, be reconstructed from the *Easter Oratorio*.[1]

The recasting of the work as a sacred musical drama necessitated the appearance of several biblical figures (Peter, John, Mary the mother of James, and Mary Magdalene) to sustain the plot, which is taken from Luke 24,1–13. The author records how Peter and John rush to the grave, where they find the women (in our case Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James) who have come to anoint the body of Christ. However, an angel has already informed them of Jesus's resurrection; only his linen clothes remain to recall his earthly existence. In a typically baroque metaphor, Peter draws from the handkerchief the hope that his own death will be but a brief sleep from which he will awaken to eternal life. In contrast the women, especially Mary Magdalene in her aria "Saget, saget mir geschwinde," express their longing for Jesus, the beloved of their souls (an allusion to the Song of Songs). It is John who expresses the conviction that Jesus lives, thereby leading into the final chorus, a hymn of praise to God.

With its eleven movements, not one of which is a chorale setting (unlike Bach's usual practice), the work is no larger in scale than the largest of Bach's Leipzig church cantatas.[2] The opening consists of two movements borrowed from an orchestral work. As both of these movements have been handed down separately, it is possible to reconstruct the underlying work as a three-movement concerto by incorporating the following duet for tenor and bass.[3] It should be borne in mind, however, that a series of three movements in triple meter is unique in Bach's œuvre, the more so as movements 1 and 3 are very similar in affect and character. The movements after no. 3 are laid out in pairs, with the recitatives paraphrasing aspects of the biblical Easter story in dialogue form and the arias personalizing the messages. The latter half of the bipartite final chorus returns to the fanfare themes and triple meter of the opening movements.

First impressions to the contrary, the *Easter Oratorio* is not a compositional makeshift but a work that Bach himself held in particularly high esteem and tried to keep up to date. The high regard he attached to the work as a repertoire piece is most clearly evident in the fact that in 1738, a few years after writing out the fair copy of the revised *St. Matthew Passion* and roughly contemporary with the (unfinished) new version of the *St. John Passion*, Bach prepared a fair copy of the score in his own hand. It was not until this version that the work was first called an "oratorio," although Bach oddly neglected to transfer the names of the vocal figures into his new score. Incidentally, for a work to be labeled an oratorio, it made no difference to the eighteenth-century mind whether the "plot" was taken verbatim from the Bible or, as in our case, was freely paraphrased.

In the course of revising the work Bach made a large number of changes. Of these only four are substantial:

1. Bar 163 was inserted in no. 1 to smooth out the harmonic progression.
2. The solo part of the instrumental *adagio* movement (no. 2) is now given to the transverse flute rather than the oboe.
3. The alto aria "Saget, saget mir geschwinde" (no. 9) was given an improved textual underlay in the middle section and five additional bars at the end to round off its proportions.
4. Instead of the standard oboe, the aria now calls for an oboe d'amore.

Like the abortive revision of the *St. John Passion*, this revision, though originally intended to produce a new version superseding the earlier stages of the work, was abandoned in midstream, for Bach did not take the trouble to adapt the set of parts in every detail to match his freshly written score.

Moreover, the preparation of his fair full score (ca. 1738/39) was not the final step in the work's convoluted history. Some time between 1743 and 1746 Bach subjected the oratorio to yet another revision. This time, as in 1738, he again rescored no. 2 for transverse flute instead of oboe, changed the textual underlay of the soprano part in no. 5, and enlarged the duet "Kommt, eilet and laufet"[4] by adding two more vocal parts. This expansion was his most significant intervention in the score, and it was apparently carried out for purely musical reasons, for turning the duet into a chorus in no way improves the work's dramatic structure. However, from the time of his 1738 revision, Bach no longer felt that a fixed assignment of vocal parts to biblical figures (soprano = Mary the mother of James, alto = Mary Magdalene, tenor = Peter, bass = John) was helpful to an understanding of the work.

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[1] Attempted reconstructions have been published by Friedrich Smend (Leipzig, 1943) and Paul Brainard (NBA ii/7).

[2] See e.g. the cantatas *O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort* BWV 20 or *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis* BWV 21.

[3] See the arrangement by Diethard Hellmann: J. S. Bach, *Concerto D-Dur* after BWV 249, Stuttgarter Bach-Ausgaben, Series C, Supplement. Rekonstruktionen und Vervollständigungen von Werken Johann Sebastian Bachs, Stuttgart, 1994.

[4] The earliest version of the performance material originally contained the rather unconvincing textual opening "Kommt, gehet und eilet," which may well have been changed to "Kommt, eilet und laufet" before the first performance took place.

Owing to the multi-level process of revision, the source situation for the *Easter Oratorio* is extraordinarily complex. The fair full score, as already mentioned, was completed roughly fifteen years later than the bulk of the performance material. We may assume that the performance on Easter of 1725 made use of a draft score of the congratulatory cantata in which Bach entered the new textual underlay and wrote out the sacred recitatives on loose leaves. It is conceivable that the projected new version of no. 7, which would have required a third text to be underlaid in addition to the two existing ones, prompted the composer to write out the score afresh. This fair copy, one of Bach's most beautiful musical manuscripts, will be published for the first time in facsimile by Carus, edited by Martin Petzoldt. The title page of the manuscript reads: *Oratorium / Festo Paschali / a / 4 Voci / 3 Trombe / Tamburi / 2 Hautbois / 2 Violini / Viola / Bassono / e / Continuo / di Joh: Seb: Bach.* No mention is made of the transverse flute as a possible alternative instrument in nos. 2 and 5, or of the *colla parte* recorders in no. 7.

The surviving parts capture four different stages in the work's genesis and performance history:

1. A complete set of fourteen parts belongs to the earliest layer of 1725. The instrumental parts (except for the new continuo part necessitated by the altered recitatives) were probably taken from the Weissenfels congratulatory cantata. This theory is based on the fact that the recorder parts for no. 7 are entered in the oboe parts, i.e. the Flauto I/Oboe I and Flauto II/Oboe II parts were each meant to be taken by a single player. In Leipzig, where Bach could draw on separate players for his recorder parts, he regularly had parts specifically written out for the recorder players.
2. Additional copies of the two violin parts were prepared around 1738 in connection with the revision, as was a new part for bassoon. The "pizzicato" instruction in no. 4 makes it clear that the part was also used by a cellist. The question thus arises whether the bassoon should really play along in all movements or only in those scored for oboe. Bach made a significant change in the original alto part by inserting a new version of the middle section of no. 7.
3. Bach wrote out a fresh set of vocal parts for a revival dating from the first half of the 1740s, when no. 3 was expanded from a duet to a chorus. At the same time, and in his own hand, he entered no. 2 in the earlier transverse flute part, thereby carrying out the alternative scoring for this movement as noted in his revised score.
4. In the final years of his life Bach prepared a new *principale* part, probably to replace a lost part for third trumpet. The new part bears witness to a performance held on 6 April 1749, when, as in 1725, the oratorio was preceded by a performance of the *St. John Passion* on Good Friday.

Our new edition is the first to reproduce the musical text of the fair full score dating from the late 1730s – the text that Bach regarded as the repertoire version. This score is unusually rich in expression marks; the only items that Bach did not enter in his autograph are, as customary, the thoroughbass figures. Because they convey important information on performance practice, we have included the figures from the continuo part of 1725 not only in the continuo realization in the performance material, but also in the score itself. Where the performance parts of 1725 differ from Bach's autograph score with regard to articulation and dynamics, we have given preference to the latter throughout and we mention important alternative readings in the Critical Report (see especially no. 7). As a whole, the original score is sparing in its use of appoggiaturas; as singers were expected to execute their own appoggiaturas, Bach could afford to dispense with such signs in his score. As a document on contemporary performance practice, our edition also includes those appoggiaturas handed down solely in the parts and their provenance is indicated in the Critical Report.

The edition is accompanied by three appendices. The original middle section of the alto aria "Saget, saget mir geschwinde" makes its possible not only to perform the earlier version of this work, but also to study Bach's process of revision, which extended even to the layout of the compositional fabric. As an option for today's performers, no. 3 is reproduced in its choral version of 1743–46. Finally, the changes in declamation and melodic writing in no. 5 are so radical that it seemed warranted to include the final version of this aria.

Special attention should be given to Bach's notation of the second section of the final chorus: whereas the voices are written in regular 3/8 meter, Bach's original score brings out the paired grouping of the bars by writing the music in larger measures in which only every second bar line is drawn completely through the staves. This manner of notation, which is also found in other Bach works (e.g. Cantata BWV 43), has been incorporated in our edition, although we number the bars in the standard manner by counting the large measures as two bars each.

The *Easter Oratorio* appeared for the first time in print in volume 21.1 of the Bach Society Edition (1874). This volume presented the final version of the work in what was, for its time, an exemplary text-critical edition by Wilhelm Rust.[5] A new edition based on the sources was undertaken in 1962 by Diethard Hellmann (Neuhausen-Stuttgart). This edition is hereby replaced by the present volume.[6] In 1977 the *Easter Oratorio* was published in the Neue Bach-Ausgabe (NBA II/7) in an edition by Paul Brainard. This volume reproduces the final version as its principal text (pp. 1–90) along with the version of 1725, without the recitatives and with additional text underlaid from the secular original (pp. 97–184). It does not take into account the version found in the autograph score.

Leipzig, summer 2003 Ulrich Leisinger
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[5] The preface is dated Berlin, September 1874. The critical report appears on pp. v–viii.

[6] In deference to modern performers, Hellmann follows Rust's example by reproducing no. 3 in a version with the da capo of the A section given to a full chorus – a version Bach never intended. He also altered the textual underlay in nos. 6 and 7 and added what he considered to be a "missing" final chorale by borrowing a movement from Cantata 130 for the Feast of St. Michael.