

Donald George Moe—*The St. Mark Passion of Reinhard Keiser: A Practical Edition with an Account of Its Historical Background [with] Volume II: Score.*

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Reinhard Keiser (1674-1739) is remembered today primarily for his operas, which number more than one hundred.² Music historians have consigned him to a position secondary to that of Handel, who arrived in Hamburg in 1703 and enjoyed an immediate popularity with the opera audiences that eclipsed Keiser's fame in that city. Nevertheless, as manager of the Hamburg opera house from 1696 to 1707, Keiser wrote and produced at least twenty-seven full-length operas and numerous shorter works, and many of them enjoyed great success on the stage.

Though not a consummate genius on the order of Bach and Handel, Keiser was an able composer. There was no lack of esteem for him by his contemporaries—Mattheson, Scheibe, Telemann, and Handel, to name but a few, have been quoted as admiring his work. Mattheson referred to him as “the foremost man of the world” and asked, “What kind of musical triumphal arch would it have been, in which Reinhard Keiser had no niche?”³ Handel, a master at taking other composers' ideas and developing them in his own way, borrowed many times from Keiser's operas.⁴ C. P. E. Bach acknowledged to Forkel the influence of Keiser upon his father as follows: “In his last years he esteemed highly: Fux, Caldara, Händel Kayser [sic], Hasse, both Grauns, Telemann, Zelenka, Benda, and, in general, everything that was worthy of esteem in Berlin and Dresden.”⁵

One of the most significant compliments that could be paid Keiser was made by J. S. Bach, who thought enough of the *St. Mark Passion* to copy it out and perform it himself, probably in Weimar and in Leipzig.⁶ Indeed, that the *St. Mark Passion* exists at all today is due in no small way to Bach, for it is only through performance material made by or for Bach that this work has survived.

The *St. Mark Passion* is the last of seven known Passion compositions by Keiser. Most of the earlier works are Passion oratorios, i.e., compositions on a specially written poetic libretto that take the form of an oratorio with recitatives, arias, choruses, and chorales. The *St. Mark Passion*, however, is an oratorio Passion, that is, a composition using a Biblical account of the Passion story as a text, but with the addition of arias, choruses, and chorales on poetic or non-Biblical texts (or occasionally texts from the Prophets, Psalms, etc., but not from the Gospels themselves).

Though not of the monumental proportions of Bach's extant Passions,

Keiser's *St. Mark* is a substantial work. To the Biblical text are added ten arias and four chorale settings, which serve as commentary to appropriate passages of the Gospel. The *Passion* is scored for four-part chorus, soloists, two violins, two violas, and continuo. In addition, one aria has an oboe obbligato marked in the first violin part. In his dissertation on the work Donald Moe considers this a conservative orchestration in comparison with Keiser's opera orchestras (p. 112), and indeed it is. It was typical of Passions at that time, however, to employ a reduced orchestra; trumpets and drums, for example, were not used because they would add an inappropriate festivity to a solemn occasion. Strings formed the core of most Passion orchestras; they accompanied arias and the recitatives of Christ and doubled the voice parts in the chorales. In addition, flutes and oboes were used frequently in arias because their tonal colors suited well the mood of the Passion story. Of course, there is a possibility that winds doubled the violins for some arias, and that bassoons doubled the bass line. Dr. Moe deals only casually with these possibilities and makes no recommendations as to their use. It is not likely that Bach changed Keiser's orchestration, since he used flutes, oboes, and bassoons in his own Passions (1723 and 1729) and presumably would have had the same forces on hand in 1726.

The Deutsche Staatsbibliothek in East Berlin possesses two sets of parts for the Keiser *Passion*,⁷ one a complete set partially in Bach's hand, the other an incomplete set copied entirely by Bach. The Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz in West Berlin has in its possession a score of this work,⁸ with music in the hand of an unknown copyist and text underlaid in red ink by Bach. The parts alone were used by Dr. Moe in preparing his practical edition of the *St. Mark Passion*. Although he was aware of the existence of the score, at the time of his work this manuscript was in the process of being returned to Berlin, along with the remainder of the former possessions of the Prussian State Library, from temporary postwar storage in Marburg, and it was not possible to obtain a microfilm of it.

Discrepancies exist between the score and the parts in regard to the actual contents of the *Passion*, and these differences were noted by Richard Petzoldt in a prewar dissertation.⁹ What Dr. Moe has done is to prepare a practical edition that represents the *St. Mark Passion* as it exists in one source alone. In his presentation of the music as it stands in these parts, he has rendered a generally faithful edition which is marred by only a few minor errors and misreadings. A comparison (by this reviewer) of microfilms of both score and parts with the edition under study reveals that, in the case of questionable readings, Dr. Moe made his choice with discretion. By using instrumental and vocal parts that had actually been employed in performance, the editor had the advantage of finding minor corrections made in these parts by the players that might otherwise have gone unnoticed in the score. The editor makes note of his changes in a "List of Revisions" and a "List of Slurs Added by the Editor." This latter list might have been replaced by a more convenient editorial procedure, such as a

vertical slash through added slurs, which would have made it easier for the performer to distinguish Keiser from Moe.

About the same time that Dr. Moe was completing his edition, a commercially published edition of the same piece¹⁰ appeared in Germany. Like Dr. Moe's work, this version is intended as a performance edition, although it also has notes on the sources and *Revisionsbemerkungen*, making it of use to the scholar as well as to the performer. The German editor acknowledges the parts as his preferred source and employs the selection and order of movements or "numbers" found there as the basis of his edition. Having checked details against the score, he has resolved conflicts where necessary. In general, this edition and Dr. Moe's agree in terms of the notes on all but the smallest details.

In judging the merits of the Moe edition as a "practical" one, the first consideration should be its "practicality," i.e., how suitable is it for the performer? (Although a set of instrumental parts was also prepared by the editor, these are not supplied with the print of the dissertation and hence are not under consideration.) To begin with a small but important detail, although the editor's "List of Revisions" refers to specific measure numbers, neither measure numbers nor rehearsal letters appear in the edition. This is an inconvenience not only to the performer but also to one studying the music. It is only a minor inconvenience to have to pencil in such numbers when examining the music on one's own, but in a performance situation the lack of easily seen and located points of reference could cause the loss of much valuable rehearsal time.

The *St. Mark Passion* is eminently worthy of performance today, and to enhance the suitability of his edition for modern American groups, Dr. Moe has provided an English translation of the entire *Passion*. The merits of performance in the original language can be debated at length, but there can be little doubt that an English version of a work such as the *St. Mark Passion* will put it within the grasp of many groups that might otherwise hesitate to attempt a performance in the original German. Mattheson considered Keiser a master in the setting of words to music: "I believe assuredly that in the time he flourished, there was no composer who . . . had set words to music so richly, naturally, flowingly, attractively, or (above all) so distinctly, understandably, and eloquently."¹¹ In weighing the merits of this practical edition of the *St. Mark Passion*, then, one important factor must be the appropriateness and singability of the English version.

It is also obvious that this edition is intended chiefly for performance in English because the table of contents lists pieces only by their English incipits—another inconvenience to anyone other than the performer. The musical examples cited in the "historical account" volume are also given with only English translations underlaid. This is a lamentable tradition that Dr. Moe inherits from a long line of English commentators on the *Passion* in general. Unless one happens to be familiar with the particular edition and translation used by the author, one must do some hunting to

find the passage in question. When translations depart from a literal rendering of the text, as they often do, one can become hopelessly lost—although this latter problem is not severe in Dr. Moe’s edition.

The recitatives have been translated with the help of the King James and German versions of the Bible. The editor’s goal is “to maintain good accentuation of the English words while at the same time retaining the character and shape of Keiser’s line” (p. x). Usually he succeeds, but a few specific passages raise disturbing questions.

Example 1, below, shows that the editor has chosen the reading of the King James version over that of the German; he substitutes the phrase “with the palms of their hands” for the words “*ins Angesicht.*” Not only does this give a different shade of meaning to the phrase, but it also creates a particularly awkward moment at the cadential figure. Instead of following the syllabic accent of the word “*Angesicht,*” the figure gives undue prominence to the word “palms.” In following the shape of Keiser’s phrase, the editor has created an instance of weak word accentuation.

EXAMPLE 1*

(No. 12, mm. 1-2)

Evangelist

Und die Knechte schlugen ihn ins An- ge- sicht;
And the servants did strike him with the palms of their hands;

* In the edition, only one staff is used, with opposing stems and cue-size notes for the alternate version. For the sake of comparison, the English version has been placed here on a separate staff.

Example 2 offers a similar point at which King James is favored over Luther. The German “Und er hub an zu weinen,” translates simply as, “And he began to weep,” and indeed this version would seem to fit the music fairly well. Yet by trying to accommodate the traditional English version, “And when he thought thereon, he wept,” the editor destroys the simple

EXAMPLE 2

(No. 14, mm. 11-12)

Evangelist

Und er hub an zu wei- nen.
When he thought of this, he began to weep.

beauty of Keiser's phrase. By using ten syllables instead of seven, he has had to add extra notes. In the first part of the phrase, there is not much difficulty, but in the second part the extra syllables get in the way of the cadence and shift the emphasis from "weep" to "began". Not only is the accentuation poor, but the falling fourth, so characteristically used as a motive of weeping or sighing, is robbed of all its pictorialism.

The third example is a bit different—it points out a translation that is outright clumsy. "Sepulchre" is the word given in King James, but the monosyllable "tomb" would certainly do as well. The word order of the phrase "which was from a great rock hewn" is certainly not good English, even in poetic usage, and the break in the next phrase after "unto" only further befuddles the mind of the listener.

EXAMPLE 3:

(No. 46, mm. 4-8)

Evangelist

Und legte ihn in ein Grab, das war in ein-en
 And laid him in a sepulchre, which was from a

Fel-sen ge-hauen, und wäl-zet ein-en Stein
 great rock hewn, and rolled a stone un-to the

vor des Grabes Thür.
 door of the se-pul-chre.

It appears, then, that the editor prefers to fit the King James translation to the music of Keiser rather than to attempt an appropriate rendering of what Keiser has written. This makes little sense from a scholarly or practical

point of view. To alter the music deliberately in order to accommodate an entirely different text from the one the composer had in mind is a distortion of the purposes of an editor. This is not editing—it is more like arranging and should be acknowledged as such.

Problems such as these create perhaps the weakest link in Dr. Moe's edition; however, there are compensations in the treatment of the arias, choruses, and chorales. The editor's procedure with regard to the arias was to create a literal translation first and then to work out a rhymed metrical version that fits the music, a sound practice with historical precedent. He succeeds for the most part in choosing words that sing well and fit the musical notes closely without departing from the meaning of the original text.

Dr. Moe occasionally decides that a particular line is overly sentimental or excessive and alters it. For example, he finds the following lines offensive because of their implied anti-Semitism: "So wirst du Adams Schaugerichten/ Und Gosens Zwiebelpeise gram."¹² He substitutes the lines, "Reject the lust that flesh engenders, O child of earth in Christ reborn" (No. 28, pp. 107–15). This phrase may sing well, but it distorts what the composer intended. Keiser was not embarrassed by such Pietistic poetry; he welcomed it, as evidenced by the praise (quoted by Dr. Moe himself on p. 101) which Keiser lavished upon Brockes for his famous Passion poem *Der für die Sünden der Welt gemarterte und sterbende Jesu*.

For the chorales the editor has used standard translations from sources such as the Lutheran hymnal in the case of all but one, for which he could not find a translation. So long as the standard translations are reasonably accurate (and these are), this practice is commendable. In addition to simplifying the editions the selection of such a translation is an advantage to the congregation, which can then sing a familiar set of words to a familiar tune when one presents the Passion as it was originally sung, i.e., with the congregation participating in the chorales.

The editor's continuo realization is adequate for anyone not inclined to use his own for performance. However, in the recitatives one may question the use of a slanted or broken line to separate the common V-I cadential chords from the cadential figure in the voice part, in order to indicate that these chords are to be performed after the voice has sung its line. If the editor goes this far in aiding the one performer, why not also add *ossia* appoggiaturas at cadences for the singers? Dr. Moe cites Donington¹³: "There are few rules so unambiguous as this rule concerning appoggiaturas in recitative, and its consistent application is very strongly to be recommended" (p. xvi). Yet after acknowledging that most feminine cadences on a falling fourth in the *St. Mark Passion* have the appoggiatura written out, Dr. Moe gives a few examples from Telemann of other types of cadences and turns the problem back to the performer with the words, "It is recommended that the singer apply these general principles" (p. xv). The question of ornamentation is covered in one paragraph. After brief references

to C. P. E. Bach and Donington, the editor states: "Trills and ornaments have not been written into this edition by the editor, but the performer is again urged to apply these principles" (p. xvi). Again the performer is left to his own discretion, supplied only with inadequate generalizations and anachronistic sources that he may not understand how to interpret.

One may well ask what a performing edition prepared by a scholar should be. The problems of transcribing notes from 18th-century manuscript sources are minimal; any musicologist should be able to handle such a problem, but this is more in the line of homework, not the substance of scholarly research. One expects that a scholar well versed in matters of 18th-century performance practice will share the knowledge he has gained from his experience by suggesting appropriate details throughout his edition; the performer may then choose to follow them or not at his own discretion. Yet to ignore these problems entirely, or worse, to leave them completely in the hands of the performer, is to suggest that the editor, despite his supposed expertise, knows no more about such things than the casual performer. To imply that the performer can instantly become an expert in 18th-century practice by reading a few lines from Donington is an indefensible position for a musicologist to take.

In addition to the edition, Dr. Moe has provided a volume of historical background on Passion composition up to the time of Keiser. His bibliography is somewhat general in nature—witness works such as Grout's *History of Western Music* and Reese's *Music in the Renaissance*—and overlooks a few important works, such as Otto Kade's *Die ältere Passionskomposition bis zum Jahre 1631*.¹⁴ In reading through this account one gets the distinct impression that Dr. Moe has done little besides quote from secondary sources. It is not even a matter of collecting microfilms of original material; his text does not show much indication that he studied seriously even the available printed editions of early Passions to any degree. Consider the following paragraphs (pp. 20–22):

One of the last German responsorial Passions is the St. Mark Passion by Ambrosius Beber, which appeared between 1610 and 1620.* This Passion uses two choruses—a five-voiced chorus for the *turbæ* and introductory and closing choruses, and a small choir of soloists who sing the parts of the soliloquents.** The voicing for the various persons is dependent on what is being said as well as on who is speaking. For example, characters who do harm by their words to Jesus have an AT voicing, and those who do direct harm to Jesus have an ATB voicing. The words of Christ are always SATB. This voicing is used only two other times: when Pilate gives serious consideration to Jesus as "King of the Jews," and when the centurion says, "Truly he is the Son of God."***

The evangelist's part has historical value because it represents a transition from the traditional Protestant responsorial Passion to the freely composed type. This is shown in two important characteristics: (1) the Passion tone surpasses earlier and contemporary works in

“rhythmic differentiation” and shows the beginning of monodic declamation, and (2) it deviates completely from the traditional F tonality.****

* Ambrosius Beber, *Markus-Passion*, ed. Simone Wallon, Vol. 66 of *Das Chorwerk*, ed. Friedrich Blume (Wolfenbüttel: Mösseler Verlag, 1958).

** Simone Wallon, “Vorwort,” *Ibid.*, iii.

*** Elwyn Wienandt, *Choral Music of the Church* (New York: The Free Press, 1965), 291.

**** Peter Epstein, “Zur Geschichte der deutschen Choralpassion,” *Jahrbuch der Musikbibliothek Peters* XXXVI (1929), 36–46.

These sentences constitute Dr. Moe’s discussion of the Beber Passion. The content is accurate, but his methods are subject to question. For example, is it necessary to credit someone for making the simple observation that the composer has used two choruses in a work? Might not the author have noted this fact himself by examining the score?

This volume of historical background does not go beyond what is already known about the history of Passion composition up to the time of Keiser. It reads well and represents its sources accurately, but is it an original contribution to scholarly knowledge? As literature it can hardly compare with Basil Smallman’s *The Background of Passion Music*,¹⁵ one of Dr. Moe’s chief sources and still the best treatment of the subject, despite its brevity.

What exactly has been accomplished by Dr. Moe’s edition of the *St. Mark Passion*? It is not a scholarly edition, nor does it pretend to be. It is not a practical edition, either, for it lets the performer down when he most needs help and leaves him alone to face the important questions related to the performance of an early 18th-century oratorio. One is left with a simple diplomatic rendering of the work, to which is added an English translation of limited musical or historical value. For most performers, the Schroeder edition is more suitable because it offers more help. For those who would like an edition with an English translation, an adequate one remains to be prepared.

NOTES

¹ The reviewer is grateful to Professors Neal Zaslaw and Donald Jay Grout for their thoughtful comments and suggestions concerning this review.

² See the report by Mary Peckham on the “First American Performance of Reinhard Keiser’s *Croesus*,” *Current Musicology* 6 (1968): 81–83.

³ Johann Mattheson, *Grundlage einer Ehrenpforte* (Hamburg, 1740), ed. Max Schneider (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1969), p. 129; p. 128. Translations by the reviewer.

⁴ For a list of ten borrowings from Keiser’s *Octavia* alone, see the preface to the Händelgesellschaft edition, supplements, vol. 6, ed. Friedrich Chrysander (Leipzig: Händelgesellschaft, 1902). See also Winton Dean, “Handel and Keiser: Further Borrowings,” *Current Musicology* 9 (1969): 73–80.

⁵ Hans T. David and Arthur Mendel, eds., *The Bach Reader* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1966), p. 279.

⁶ It is known that the *St. Mark Passion* was performed in Leipzig on 19 April 1726 (compare with the *Bach-Dokumente*, ed. Werner Neumann and Hans-Joachim Schulze [Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1969], p. 141). Dr. Moe also cites Spitta's opinion that one set of parts for this Passion dates from Bach's Weimar period (ca. 1717) on the basis of watermarks and handwriting (vol. 1, p. 110). But he neglects the more recent research of Georg Dadelsen (*Beiträge zur Chronologie der Werke Johann Sebastian Bachs*, Tübinger Bach-Studien, vols. 4/5 [Trossingen: Hohner, 1958], pp. 73–74), which suggests that Bach performed the *St. Mark Passion* on Good Friday of 1713 or earlier. See also Alfred Dürr, "Zu den verschollenen Passionen Bachs," *Bach-Jahrbuch* 38 (1949/50): 88ff.

⁷ Berlin, Deutsches Staatsbibliothek, Sign.: Mus. ms. $\frac{11471}{1}$.

⁸ Berlin, Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Sign.: Mus. ms. 11471.

⁹ Richard Petzoldt, *Die Kirchenkompositionen und weltlichen Kantaten Reinhard Keisers* (Düsseldorf: Dissertations-Verlag G. H. Nolte, 1935), pp. 30–31.

¹⁰ Reinhard Keiser, *Passion nach dem Evangelisten Markus*, Die Kantate, vol. 152, ed. Felix Schroeder (Stuttgart-Hohenheim, n.d.).

¹¹ Donald Jay Grout, *A Short History of Opera* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), p. 154.

¹² Translated as "That you may bear a grudge against Adam's showfeast and Goshen's onion-food."

¹³ Robert Donington, *The Interpretation of Early Music* (London: Faber & Faber, 1963), p. 519.

¹⁴ Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1893.

¹⁵ New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1957/1970.