

## The text of Howard Goodall's *Invictus: A Passion* compared with Bach's Passions

It's probably worth starting with Howard Goodall's own words on the subject of the Bach Passions with relation to his own: "I was keen to write a contemporary setting of the Passion story. In so doing, in the 21st century, I felt it important to look at its ideas, its format and its message afresh. I couldn't simply rerun the text or the structure of the majestic 18th century Passion settings of Bach and his contemporaries... I wanted to reflect musically on what this story has to tell us, now." Clearly, therefore, that great Baroque inheritance was a factor, albeit in a sidelong sort of way, and it seems significant to me that Goodall's *Invictus* is explicitly called a 'Passion', which it didn't have to be: that designation alone surely invites the comparison.

Bach's *St John Passion* (1724) and *St Matthew Passion* (1727) set the relevant portions of those Gospels without omitting anything (the fact that Bach twice enriched the narrative of his *John Passion* by interpolating portions of text from the *Matthew* is a minor detail). Goodall's *Invictus: A Passion* (2017) uses no Biblical narrative (apart from a small chunk of John's Gospel, deliberately made to feel less immediate by being set in Latin); instead, the story is propelled by excerpts from *Salve Deus Rex Judæorum* (1611) by Æmilia Lanyer – because Goodall sets only 97 out of the poem's 1840 lines, which portions of the narrative he chooses to set or omit becomes an interesting (and, in my view, revealing) topic for examination. Below, I have laid out side-by-side the broad order of events in Bach's two famous Passions and Goodall's; for the purposes of brevity I have assumed that you, the reader, have some knowledge of the Bible story and maybe of Bach's Passions, so that when I say "Simon of Cyrene" you know what I mean. Similarly, I will assume that you have access to the text of the Goodall, so that I don't need to spell out every reference in detail.

Bach <i>St John Passion</i>	Bach <i>St Matthew Passion</i>	Goodall <i>Invictus: A Passion</i>
Gethsemane Judas Prophecy Peter cuts off Malchus' ear Jesus is arrested  Questioning by Annas	Jesus predicts his death Judas offers to betray Jesus Passover preparations Jesus predicts his betrayal Last Supper/first communion Jesus predicts the disciples' desertion Gethsemane Jesus prays The disciples sleep Peter cuts off Malchus' ear Jesus is arrested False witnesses are sought and found Questioning by the High Priest The crowd proclaims Jesus'	Gethsemane Jesus prays  Jesus is arrested Jesus heals Malchus' ear



experience writing musical theatre works), but another key point is that it strips away all references to the Old Testament, a problematic part of the Bible for many humanists and agnostics. Without the complex web of references to scripture, we see the Passion story in its own right: a story of courage, compassion and grief. It would be an over-simplification, and unnecessarily provocative, to say that this makes *Invictus: A Passion* a humanist, rather than religious, fable, but I do believe that the focus is on the human drama even more than it is in Bach's undeniably human and dramatic masterpieces. And the texts that Goodall interpolates heighten this sense, for they owe their presence in the work to their connections to the work's themes: the slave auction (compassion), *Invictus* (courage), Easter Hymn (agnosticism), When I survey (grief) and Innisfree (resurrection) – not all of them are explicitly religious at all.

I'll close by asking a rhetorical question, which touches on what I think makes this a Passion unlike others: for Howard Goodall's *Invictus: A Passion* to be effective and moving as a piece of music, is it in fact necessary for Christ to be divine at all?