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A live performance of Bach's St Matthew Passion is an intense journey for participants and listeners alike – and it's a journey which I like to make every year.

The work demands the highest musicianship, intellectual engagement, technical brilliance and commitment. On Saturday evening (March 9), the Birmingham Bach Choir provided these in abundance and I found myself thoroughly caught up in the Passion narrative. In fact, I heard that powerful story told through the medium of Bach's sublime music as though for the first time, so engrossing and compelling was the performance.

The choir was on top form, conveying (eg) drama ("Barabbas!") and pathos ("Mein Jesu, gute Nacht") with sensitivity throughout. The team of soloists was uniformly excellent, with Thomas Hobbs carrying the burden of the narrative with consummate ease. There were also confident solo contributions from members of the choir and special mention should go to Philip Bellshaw whose voice is impressively powerful. The players of the Musical and Amicable Society provided stylish accompaniments and obbligati – congratulations especially to the violinists and gamba player.

True, there were occasional moments of ragged ensemble but the success of the event is all the more remarkable given the indisposition of Paul Spicer, the choir's musical director, who had rehearsed them right up to the last rehearsal. Adrian Lucas stepped in at two day's notice and deserves the highest compliments for making it all work so wonderfully. And the performance was also a remarkable testament to Paul's great work and preparation. I'm so glad he was able to be present and I hope he permitted himself to feel proud.