

2025–2026 | 126th Season
Marian Anderson Hall

The Philadelphia Orchestra

Friday, December 12, at 7:30
Saturday, December 13, at 8:00
Sunday, December 14, at 2:00

Yannick Nézet-Séguin Conductor
Lucy Crowe Soprano
Jakub Józef Orliński Countertenor
Frédéric Antoun Tenor
Quinn Kelsey Baritone
Philadelphia Symphonic Choir
Joe Miller Director

Handel *Messiah*

Part I

Overture

Tenor Accompanato: “Comfort ye my people”

Tenor Air: “Ev’ry valley shall be exalted”

Chorus: “And the glory of the Lord”

Bass Accompanato: “Thus saith the Lord of Hosts”

Countertenor Air: “But who may abide the day of His coming?”

Chorus: “And He shall purify”

Countertenor Recitative: “Behold, a virgin shall conceive”

Countertenor Air and Chorus: “O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion”

Bass Accompanato: “For behold, darkness shall cover the earth”

Bass Air: “The people that walked in darkness”

Chorus: “For unto us a Child is born”

Pastoral Symphony

Soprano Recitative: “There were shepherds abiding in the field”

Soprano Accompanato: “And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them”

Soprano Recitative: “And the angel said unto them”

Soprano Accompanato: “And suddenly there was with the angel”

Chorus: “Glory to God in the highest”

Soprano Air: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion”

Countertenor Recitative: “Then shall the eyes of the blind be open’d”

Countertenor and Soprano Duet: “He shall feed His flock”

Chorus: “His yoke is easy”

Intermission

Part II

Chorus: "Behold the Lamb of God"

Countertenor Air: "He was despised"

Chorus: "Surely He hath borne our griefs"

Chorus: "And with His stripes we are healed"

Chorus: "All we like sheep have gone astray"

Tenor Accompagnato: "All they that see Him, laugh Him to scorn"

Chorus: "He trusted in God"

Tenor Accompagnato: "Thy rebuke hath broken His heart"

Tenor Arioso: "Behold, and see if there be any sorrow"

Tenor Accompagnato: "He was cut off out of the land of the living"

Tenor Air: "But Thou didst not leave His soul in hell"

Chorus: "Lift up your heads, o ye gates"

Tenor Recitative: "Unto which of the angels said He at any time"

Chorus: "Let all the angels of God worship Him"

Countertenor Air: "Thou art gone up on high"

Chorus: "The Lord gave the word"

Soprano Air: "How beautiful are the feet"

Chorus: "Their sound is gone out into all lands"

Bass Air: "Why do the nations so furiously rage together?"

Chorus: "Let us break their bonds asunder"

Tenor Recitative: "He that dwelleth in heaven"

Tenor Air: "Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron"

Chorus: "Hallelujah"

Part III

Soprano Air: "I know that my Redeemer liveth"

Chorus: "Since by man came death"

Bass Accompagnato: "Behold, I tell you a mystery"

Bass Air: "The trumpet shall sound"

Travis Peterson, trumpet

Soprano Air: "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

Chorus: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain"

Christophe Gauthier, portative organ/harpsichord; Hai-Ye Ni, cello; Joseph Conyers, bass

This program runs approximately 2 hours, 30 minutes.

Philadelphia Orchestra concerts are broadcast on WRTI 90.1 FM on Sunday afternoons at 1 PM and are repeated on Monday evenings at 7 PM on WRTI HD 2. Visit www.wrti.org to listen live or for more details.

PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA / 125

Yannick Nézet-Séguin
Music & Artistic Director

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Photo: PeteCzechchia



The Philadelphia Orchestra

The world-renowned Philadelphia Orchestra strives to share the transformative power of music with the widest possible audience, and to create joy, connection, and excitement through music in the Philadelphia region, across the country, and around the world. Through innovative programming, robust education initiatives, a commitment to its diverse communities, and the embrace of digital outreach, the ensemble is creating an expansive and inclusive future for classical music. In June 2021 the Orchestra and its home, the Kimmel Center, united. Today, The Philadelphia Orchestra and Ensemble Arts brings the greatest performances and most impactful education and community programs to audiences in Philadelphia and beyond.

Yannick Nézet-Séguin is now in his 14th season with The Philadelphia Orchestra, serving as music and artistic director. His connection to the ensemble's musicians has been praised by both concertgoers and critics, and he is esteemed by the musicians of the Orchestra, audiences, and the community. In addition to expanding the repertoire by embracing an ever-growing and diverse group of today's composers, Yannick and the Orchestra are committed to performing and recording the works of previously overlooked composers.

Your Philadelphia Orchestra takes great pride in its hometown, performing for the people of Philadelphia year-round, at the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts, throughout the community, over the airwaves, and online. The Kimmel Center has been the ensemble's home since 2001, and in 2024 Verizon Hall at the Kimmel Center was officially rededicated as Marian Anderson Hall in honor of the legendary

contralto, civil rights icon, and Philadelphian. The Orchestra's award-winning education and community programs connect, uplift, and celebrate nearly 40,000 Philadelphians and 250 schools from diverse communities annually, through inclusive arts education and vibrant engagement that reflect our city's voices and expand access to creative opportunities. Students, families, and other community members can enjoy free and discounted experiences with The Philadelphia Orchestra through programs such as the Jane H. Kesson School Concerts, Family Concerts, Open Rehearsals, PlayINs, and Our City, Your Orchestra community concerts.

Through concerts, tours, residencies, and recordings, the Orchestra is a global ambassador and one of our nation's greatest exports. It performs annually at Carnegie Hall, the Mann Center, the Saratoga Performing Arts Center, and the Bravo! Vail Music Festival. The Orchestra also has a rich touring history, having first performed outside Philadelphia in its earliest days. In 1973 it became the first American orchestra to perform in the People's Republic of China, launching a now-five-decade commitment of people-to-people exchange through music.

Under Yannick's leadership, the Orchestra returned to recording with 15 celebrated releases on the Deutsche Grammophon label, including the GRAMMY[®] Award-winning *Florence Price Symphonies Nos. 1 & 3*. The Orchestra also reaches thousands of radio listeners with weekly broadcasts on WRTI-FM and SiriusXM. For more information, please visit www.philorch.org.

Music and Artistic Director



Landon Nordeman

Canadian-born conductor and pianist **Yannick Nézet-Séguin** is currently in his 14th season with The Philadelphia Orchestra, serving as music and artistic director. An inspired leader, Yannick is both an evolutionary and a revolutionary, developing the mighty “Philadelphia Sound” in new ways. His collaborative style, deeply rooted musical curiosity, and boundless enthusiasm have been heralded by critics and audiences alike. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* has said that under his baton the Orchestra is “at the top of its considerable form”; the Associated Press has called it “a premier orchestra at its peak”; and the *New York Times* wrote, “the ensemble, famous for its glowing strings and homogenous richness, has never sounded better.”

Yannick has established himself as a musical leader of the highest caliber and one of the most thrilling and sought-after talents of his generation. He became the third music director of New York’s Metropolitan Opera in 2018. In addition, he has been artistic director and principal conductor of Montreal’s Orchestre Métropolitain since 2000. In 2017 he became the third-ever honorary member of the Chamber Orchestra of Europe. He served as music director of the Rotterdam Philharmonic from 2008 to 2018 (he is now honorary conductor) and was principal guest conductor of the London Philharmonic from 2008 to 2014. He has made wildly successful appearances with the world’s most revered ensembles and at many of the leading opera houses.

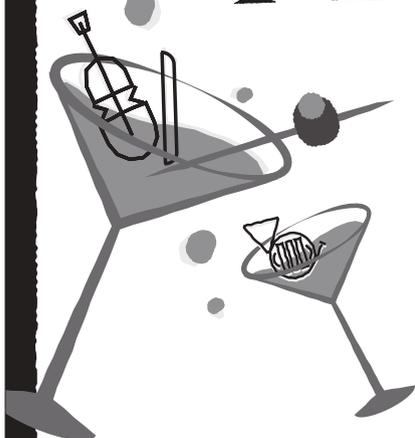
Yannick has shown a deep commitment to expanding the repertoire by embracing an ever-growing and diverse group of today’s composers and by performing and recording the music of underappreciated composers of the past, including Florence Price, Clara Schumann, William Dawson, Lili Boulanger, Louise Farrenc, and William Grant Still. In 2018 he signed an exclusive recording contract with Deutsche Grammophon. Under his leadership The Philadelphia Orchestra returned to recording with 15 releases on that label, including *Florence Price Symphonies Nos. 1 & 3*, which won a GRAMMY® Award for Best Orchestral Performance in 2022.

A native of Montreal, Yannick studied piano, conducting, composition, and chamber music at Montreal’s Conservatory of Music and continued his studies with renowned conductors, most notably Carlo Maria Giulini; he also studied choral conducting with Joseph Flummerfelt at Westminster Choir College. Among Yannick’s honors are an appointment as Companion of the Order of Canada; Companion to the Order of Arts and Letters of Quebec; an Officer of the Order of Quebec; an Officer of the Order of Montreal; an Officier de l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres; *Musical America’s* 2016 Artist of the Year; ECHO KLASSIK’s 2014 Conductor of the Year; a Royal Philharmonic Society Award; Canada’s National Arts Centre Award; the Prix Denise-Pelletier; the Oskar Morawetz Award; and honorary doctorates from the University of Quebec, the Curtis Institute of Music, Westminster Choir College of Rider University, McGill University, the University of Montreal, the University of Pennsylvania, Laval University, and Drexel University.

To read Yannick’s full bio, please visit philorch.org/conductor.

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Soloist

Victoria Calisch



Soprano **Lucy Crowe** made her Philadelphia Orchestra debut in 2011. Widely regarded as one of the most versatile and respected singers of her generation, she was awarded an OBE in the 2023 King's Birthday Honours. Globally renowned for her interpretations of Handel's heroines, she revived the role of *Rodelinda* at the Garsington Festival in 2025; in 2024 she sang the role with the English Concert and Harry Bicket on tour in Asia and the United States, culminating in a concert at Carnegie Hall, as well as staged productions in Madrid,

Frankfurt, and Amsterdam. She will revisit the role at Santa Fe Opera in 2026, making her debut at the festival.

In addition to these current performances, highlights of Ms. Crowe's 2025–26 season include a return to the Royal Opera and Ballet as Pamina in Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, Handel's *Messiah* with Rafael Payare and the Montreal Symphony, and returns to the London Philharmonic for Szymanowski's *Stabat Mater* with Edward Gardner and to the London Symphony for Strauss's *Four Last Songs* and Mahler's *Symphony No. 4* with Simon Rattle.

A prolific recording artist, Ms. Crowe received a GRAMMY nomination in 2021 for Best Opera Recording for Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen* with the London Symphony and Mr. Rattle, in which she sang the title role. She received a *BBC Music Magazine* Award nomination for *Rodelinda* (title role) with the English Concert and Mr. Bicket. She also released her debut recital recording for Linn Records featuring works by Berg, Strauss, and Schoenberg.

Soloist

Laurent Humbert



Countertenor **Jakub Józef Orliński** makes his Philadelphia Orchestra debut with these performances. A beloved and celebrated opera star, he has established himself as one of the world's leading artists, triumphing on stage, in concert, and in recording. His sold-out concerts and recitals throughout Europe, America, and Asia have attracted new followers to the art form. His album *#LetsBaRock* was released in September 2024, following the success of *Beyond*, which was released in October 2023; both albums will continue to tour the world through the 2025–26 season. He is the recipient of many prestigious awards such as the Opus Klassik award for Male Singer of the Year (2023), the Gloria Artis Gold Medal for Merit to Culture in Poland (2024), the *BBC Music Magazine* Award for his performance on *Beyond* (2024), the International Classical Music Award for his album *Anima Aeterna*, as well as two GRAMMY nominations for recordings of Handel's *Agrippina* and Matthew Aucoin's *Eurydice*.

Mr. Orliński has a global fan base with hundreds of thousands of social media followers. He has worked as a model and influencer with such international brands as Rolex, Netflix, Orange, Louis Vuitton, Levi's, Nike, BMW, Lacoste, and MAC Cosmetics. He is also an accomplished breakdancer; prizes include Fourth Place at the Red Bull BC One Poland Cypher competition and Second Place at both the Stylish Strike–Top Rock Contest and the Style Control competition. Few other opera singers have conquered the stages of the world's greatest concert halls and the covers of *Polish Vogue*, *Esquire*, and *Elle*, but this is a testament to his unique pop star appeal.

In addition to these current performances, highlights of Mr. Orliński's 2025–26 season include two Wigmore Hall recitals in London and a return to the Vienna Konzerthaus with Il Pomo d'Oro for their *Beyond* program. He also embarks on European tour of *#LetsBaRock*, his innovative live project with pianist Aleksander Dębicz. The beginning of 2026 will bring him back onto the opera stage as Athamas in Handel's *Semele* at Dutch National Opera. He also tours Europe performing Handel's *Giulio Cesare* with Il Pomo d'Oro and gives recitals across Japan and South Korea and in Singapore and Shanghai, followed by a European recital tour. In the 2024–25 season, he continued his extensive European tour of his album *Beyond* with Il Pomo d'Oro and debuted *#LetsBaRock* with Mr. Dębicz at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam and at the Chamber Music Hall at the Berlin Philharmonie. He performed the role of Ottone in *Agrippina* in Zurich and appeared in Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater* in Geneva and Handel's *Deborah* in Utrecht, Paris, Vienna, and Bayreuth. Previous season highlights include performances at the Royal Albert Hall in London as part of the BBC Proms, the Opéra Royal in Versailles, the Athens Epidaurus Festival, and the Edinburgh International Festival. He also performed at the Opening Ceremony of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. As an exclusive recording artist for Warner Classics/Erato, he has earned critical acclaim for his recordings of undiscovered early-music gems.

Soloist

Helen Hansley



Internationally lauded Quebec-born tenor **Frédéric Antoun** makes his Philadelphia Orchestra debut with these performances. Other highlights of his 2025–26 season include a return to the Orchestre Métropolitain for Bach’s *Christmas Oratorio* with Yannick Nézet-Séguin and an engagement with the Newfoundland Symphony for Haydn’s *The Creation*. In the 2024–25 season he returned to the Toronto Symphony under the baton of Jukka-Pekka Saraste for Mozart’s Requiem, the Orchestre Métropolitain for Handel’s *Messiah* with Nézet-

Séguin, and the Toronto Mendelssohn Choir for Beethoven’s *Missa solemnis* with Jean-Sébastien Vallée. On the opera stage, he joined Montreal Opera for Puccini’s *La bohème* and Opera West (Vancouver) for Massenet’s *Manon*. Mr. Antoun has long been associated with the operas of Thomas Adès and recent seasons have included appearances in the British composer’s *The Exterminating Angel* at Paris Opera and his signature role of Caliban in *The Tempest* at the Vienna State Opera and Milan’s La Scala. Other recent highlights include Gérard in Delibes’s *Lakmé* and Don José in Bizet’s *Carmen* at Paris’s Opéra-Comique, Narraboth in Strauss’s *Salome* at the Canadian Opera Company, and Mozart’s Requiem at Berlin’s Konzerthaus. In the summer of 2024, he joined the Montreal Symphony and Quebec Opera for a series of concerts.

Mr. Antoun’s other recent appearances include Belmonte in Mozart’s *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, Thespis in Rameau’s *Platée*, Ferrando in Mozart’s *Così fan tutte*, and François in Bernstein’s *A Quiet Place* (Paris Opera); Don Ottavio in Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* (Royal Opera House, Covent Garden); Tonio in Donizetti’s *The Daughter of the Regiment* (Lausanne Opera, Toulon Opera, and Royal Opera House); Raúl in multiple premieres of *The Exterminating Angel* (Metropolitan Opera, Royal Opera House, and Salzburg Festival); Pylade in Gluck’s *Iphigénie en Tauride* and Nadir in Bizet’s *The Pearl Fishers* (Zurich Opera); Prince Charmant in Massenet’s *Cendrillon* (La Monnaie in Brussels); and Laërte in Thomas’s *Hamlet* (Theater an der Wien). He works regularly with esteemed stage directors, including Calixto Bieito, Robert Carsen, Atom Egoyan, Olivier Py, Laurent Pelly, Amy Lane, Robert Lepage, and Barrie Kosky. He has sung Fenton in Verdi’s *Falstaff*, Tamino in Mozart’s *The Magic Flute*, and the Chevalier de la Force in Poulenc’s *Dialogues of the Carmelites* with the Canadian Opera Company and Edgardo in Donizetti’s *Lucia di Lammermoor* at Montreal Opera.

An accomplished concert artist, Mr. Antoun’s repertoire includes Schumann’s *Das Paradies und die Peri*, Berlioz’s *L’Enfance du Christ* and Requiem, Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9, Orff’s *Carmina burana*, and Bach’s Magnificat, St. Matthew Passion, and St. John Passion. He has appeared with the New York Philharmonic; the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment; the London, San Francisco, Shanghai, Toronto, and Colorado symphonies; the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra; and the Orchestre de Paris.

Soloist

Chris Gray



Baritone **Quinn Kelsey** makes his Philadelphia Orchestra debut with these performances. Known for his commanding stage presence, emotional depth, and rich, velvety voice, the native of Honolulu, Hawaii, has risen to prominence for his interpretations of opera's most demanding roles. His 2025–26 season began in London at the Royal Ballet and Opera with Verdi's *Les Vêpres siciliennes*, reprising the role of Guy de Montfort. He returns to the Lyric Opera of Chicago as Alfio/Tonio in a double bill of Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana* and

Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci* and will bring his acclaimed portrayal of the title role in Verdi's *Rigoletto* to the Canadian Opera Company and the Baltimore Symphony later this season. He also returns to the Metropolitan Opera as Sharpless in Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*. He makes his debut at the Royal Danish Opera, singing the title role in Verdi's *Macbeth* in concert under the baton of Antonio Pappano, and appears at the Hessisches Staatstheater Wiesbaden as Germont in Verdi's *La traviata*.

Mr. Kelsey will appear with his hometown opera company, Hawaii Opera Theatre, in May for the world premiere of Herb Mahelona's *Kamalehua: The Sheltering Tree*. Set in the mid-19th century, the opera tells the story of the Hawaiian kingdom's early struggles to maintain independence, told through the eyes of Royal Secretary Timoteo Ha'alilio. Charged with a mission to secure treaties that recognized Hawaiian sovereignty, Ha'alilio traveled the world to advocate for the Kingdom of Hawai'i, bringing important attention to the cause. On the concert stage, in addition to these current performances, Mr. Kelsey will appear in recital with pianist Craig Ketter at the Cleveland Chamber Music Society and the Vocal Arts DC at the Kennedy Center, presenting a program that includes selections from Vaughan Williams's *Songs of Travel*, Copland's *Old American Songs*, and Finzi's *Let Us Garlands Bring*.

Last season Mr. Kelsey appeared at the Metropolitan Opera in three roles: Rigoletto, Scarpia in Puccini's *Tosca*, and Amonasro in Michael Mayer's new production of Verdi's *Aida*. He was seen as Filippo Visconti in Bellini's *Beatrice di Tenda* at Paris Opera and joined Zurich Opera as Guido di Monforte in Verdi's *I vespri siciliani* and as Rigoletto, the latter of which he also performed for LA Opera. He also traveled to Japan for Germont with the Seiji Ozawa Music Academy. Central to his artistic identity is his portrayal of Rigoletto, which has earned him praise from critics and audiences alike. He has performed this signature role on some of the world's most prestigious stages, including a performance at the Met that appeared as part of *The Met: Live in HD* series and which is preserved on the 2022 Apple Music–exclusive live recording. His artistry has earned him numerous accolades, including the Metropolitan Opera's Beverly Sills Artist Award in 2015 and the prestigious *Opera News* Award in 2022. He was a finalist of the Operalia Competition in 2004 and represented the United States in the BBC Cardiff Singer of the World Competition in 2005.

Choir

Jeff Fusco



The Philadelphia Symphonic Choir made its debut in December 2016, performing in three programs with The Philadelphia Orchestra that season. Consisting of talented vocalists auditioned from around the country, the ensemble was created to marry gifted and unique voices of Philadelphia and beyond with the legendary “Philadelphia Sound.” Performance highlights with the Orchestra include the world premiere of the concert version of Kevin Puts’s opera *The Hours* and Beethoven’s *Missa solemnis* in Philadelphia and at Carnegie Hall. The ensemble has also sung in performances of Haydn’s *The Seasons*, Puccini’s *Tosca*, Bernstein’s Symphony No. 3 (“Kaddish”), Rossini’s *Stabat Mater*, Bruckner’s “Christus factus est” and *Te Deum*, Brahms’s *A German Requiem*, and Mozart’s *Requiem*, as well as holiday performances of Menotti’s *Amahl and the Night Visitors* and multiple season performances of Handel’s *Messiah*.

The Philadelphia Symphonic Choir is directed by Joe Miller, professor of conducting and director of choral studies at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music (CCM). He has served as artistic director of choral activities for the Spoleto Festival USA in Charleston, South Carolina, a role he concluded in June after a 19-year tenure. This year marks his inaugural season as music director of the Vocal Arts Ensemble of Cincinnati. He has served as conductor of the Philadelphia Symphonic Choir since 2016 and made his conducting debut with The Philadelphia Orchestra in 2021 leading *Messiah*. In addition to these current performances, featured concerts with the Philadelphia Symphonic Choir in the 2025–26 season include Mahler’s Symphony No. 2 (“Resurrection”) under the baton of Yanick Nézet-Séguin with performances in Philadelphia and at Carnegie Hall in March, and Mozart’s *Requiem* conducted by Jane Glover in April.

In the 2024–25 season, the Philadelphia Symphonic Choir joined The Philadelphia Orchestra for performances of Handel’s *Messiah*, Mahler’s Symphony No. 3, Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9, and Wagner’s *Tristan and Isolde* with Yannick Nézet-Séguin; Verdi’s *Requiem* with Riccardo Muti; and Holst’s *The Planets* with Daniele Rustioni. The 2023–24 season marked the premiere of the film *Maestro*, a collaboration with Bradley Cooper and Netflix featuring the Philadelphia Symphonic Choir and the music of Leonard Bernstein. The movie received a Best Picture nomination for the Academy Awards. Music from the film has been released on Deutsche Grammophon. The American Guild of Musical Artists, AFL-CIO, the union of professional singers, dancers, and production personnel in opera, ballet, and concert, represents the choral artists in these performances.

The Philadelphia Symphonic Choir
Joe Miller Director

Sopranos

Elise Brancheau
Katharine Burns
Lily Carmichael
Lauren Cohen
Maria Palombo Costa
Marisa Curcio
Jina Jang
Rachael Lipson
Sophia Santiago
Pei Ying Wang

Altos

Serafina Belletini
Katie Brown
Marissa Chalker
Alyson Harvey
John Irving
Jessica Kerler
Natasha Nelson
Rebecca Roy
Kathryn Whitaker
Liyao Yu

Tenors

Brendan Barker
Nathaniel Bear
Joshua Michael John
Thomas Leighton
Michael Martin
Timothy Morrow
Francisco Luis Ortiz
Kev Schneider
Royce Strider
Shane Thomas, Jr.

Basses

Maxwell Brey
Sam Duffey
Loren Greer
Daniel Laverriere
Matthew Marinelli
Erik Potteiger
Scott Purcell
Sam Scheibe
John T.K. Scherch
Kirby Traylor

The Music

Messiah

George Frideric Handel

Born in Halle, Germany, February 23, 1685

Died in London, April 14, 1759



To enter the National Portrait Gallery in London is to take a stroll through the annals of British history, art, drama, and music. Upon reaching the galleries devoted to 18th-century worthies, visitors are often drawn to the large portrait of George Frideric Handel (left) by the great British artist Thomas Hudson (1701–79). Hudson painted Handel dressed in elaborate finery with a copy of his famous oratorio *Messiah*. Viewers who are familiar with other paintings of the composer will notice a marked difference between those

portrayals and this one, however. Earlier portraits invariably emphasize the expressiveness of his eyes, but in Hudson’s grand portrait Handel’s eyes are staring, blank, and inert. Beneath the grandeur of this painting lies a poignant tragedy. Upon closer inspection, it dawns gradually upon the viewer that Hudson has painted a subject the lavishness of whose attire cannot distract from his blindness. Commissioned by Handel’s librettist Charles Jennens (1700–73), this “court portrait” was painted after 1753, by which time Handel’s eyesight had been extinguished completely after he had endured a fruitless series of unsuccessful operations.

Drawing upon a remarkable reserve of inner courage, Handel continued to play the organ in public despite his blindness, most notably at the annual benefit performances of *Messiah* that took place in the chapel of the Foundling Hospital, a London orphanage. These concerts, which had begun in 1750, decisively altered the way in which *Messiah* was received by the public, the press, and, especially, the Anglican clergy. During this period, oratorios were advertised as “entertainments,” and their presentation was usually restricted to theaters. Indeed, the performances of *Messiah* at the Foundling Hospital’s chapel were considered exceptions to the rule, exempt from criticism only because of their charitable purpose.

Initial Controversy Indeed, the first London appearance of *Messiah* in 1743 was highly controversial. An article appeared in the *Universal Spectator* that sharply queried the propriety of taking Christ’s life as the subject for a musical “entertainment.” At that time, Jennens, the wealthy High Church Anglican clergyman who had compiled the text of *Messiah*, reported “a clamour about Town, said to arise from the B[isho]ps, against performing it.” To avoid further protests, *Messiah* was advertised simply as “A New Sacred Oratorio.” Jennens was well aware that he risked charges of blasphemy by creating an oratorio text based on the life and ministry of the Christian Savior. He sought to deflect

such pious opprobrium by intermingling passages drawn from 14 books of the King James Version of the Bible with selections from the Book of Common Prayer, the principal service book of the Church of England. Through his selections, Jennens cunningly unfolded the narrative in a manner at once oblique and reverent. Despite his caution and Handel's sublime music, *Messiah* ran for only three performances, a chilly reception that one contemporary writer attributed to "Scruples, some Persons had entertained, against carrying on such a Performance in a Play House."

No such finicky scruples had been evident the year before, however, when *Messiah* was premiered to enormous success in Dublin on April 13. Indeed, a member of the audience in the "New Musick-Hall in Fishamble-street" on that occasion was Edward Synge, the Anglican Bishop of Elphin, who wrote approvingly that the listeners "Seemed indeed thoroughly engag'd from one end to the other. ... Many, I hope were instructed by it and Proper Sentiments inspir'd in a Stronger manner in their Minds." Handel himself may have echoed Synge's comments in his reported reply to Lord Kinnoull, who had complimented him on *Messiah* as a "noble entertainment": "My lord," replied the composer, "I should be sorry if I only entertained them, I wish to make them better."

A Closer Look Following Jennens's text, Handel divided his oratorio into three parts. After a dignified Overture, Part I presents prophecies of the coming of the Messiah and the birth and ministry of Jesus Christ. Part II deals with His passion, death, resurrection, and ascension, concluding with a jubilant chorus, the stirring "Hallelujah." Part III looks forward to the second coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. As Christopher Hogwood observes, "Most important of all is the clarity and confidence with which Jennens displays the divine scheme, a coherent progress from Prophecy, through Nativity, Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension to the promise of Redemption (Part III is based largely on the Anglican Burial Service)." Although now a regular feature of the Christmas season, *Messiah* encompasses all of the festivals of the Christian liturgical year. (Both Jennens and Handel associated *Messiah* with Holy Week and Eastertide.)

To express the sacred text fully, Handel drew upon a wide range of European musical styles for *Messiah*. The severe dotted rhythms of the opening measures proclaim an overture in the French style. The gentle swaying of the siciliana, a dance that originated among Sicilian shepherds, permeates both the radiant Pastoral Symphony and "He shall feed his flock." In Part II the tenor soloist becomes a narrator in a manner reminiscent of the Evangelists—also sung by tenors—that play a crucial role in the Lutheran Passions, most famously in Johann Sebastian Bach's St. Matthew Passion.

Given its iconic status, it is not surprising that legends have accrued around *Messiah*, such as the unsubstantiated tale of an inspired King George II leaping to his feet at the beginning of the "Hallelujah" Chorus. Equally dubious is the story that Handel once exclaimed, "I did think I did see all Heaven before me, and the great God Himself," words which, in Hogwood's trenchant phrase, "ring so false." What is miraculous, however, is the speed with which Handel composed *Messiah*—24 days in August and September of 1741. As

was his practice, he drew upon his own works, as well as “borrowing” themes from such contemporaries as Georg Philipp Telemann, Giovanni Porta, and Arcangelo Corelli, to enable him to complete his task on time. In the case of *Messiah*, however, Handel surely made such “borrowings” in the service of a larger purpose: “I wish to make them better.”

—Byron Adams

Byron Adams is emeritus distinguished professor of musicology at the University of California, Riverside. Both composer and musicologist, he specializes in French and British music of the 19th and 20th centuries. Among his publications are two edited volumes, Edward Elgar and His World (2007) and Vaughan Williams and His World (2023), which he co-edited with Daniel M. Grimley.

Handel composed Messiah in 1741.

Eugene Ormandy conducted the first official Philadelphia Orchestra performances of Messiah, in October and November of 1958; the soloists were Leontyne Price, Martha Lipton, Davis Cunningham, William Warfield, and the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. The series opened on Halloween (!) and was so popular the first year that an extra performance was added. (Actually the Orchestra had performed Messiah much earlier, as far back as 1902, with the now-defunct Choral Society of Philadelphia, but not on its own concert series.) Since 1961, the Orchestra has performed Messiah every year except 2020 because of the COVID pandemic.

The Philadelphians recorded Messiah in 1958 for CBS with the above forces, except Eileen Farrell replaced Ms. Price. This recording earned the Orchestra one of its three gold records. The Orchestra also recorded excerpts from the work twice: the Pastoral Symphony was recorded in 1929 for RCA with Leopold Stokowski, and “For unto us a Child is born” and the “Hallelujah” Chorus were recorded in 1964 for CBS with Ormandy and the Temple University Concert Choir.

The instrumentation in this performance calls for two oboes, bassoon, two trumpets, timpani, harpsichord, organ, strings, mixed chorus, and four vocal soloists.

These performances of Messiah run approximately 2 hours and 30 minutes.

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