

HANDEL'S MESSIAH

December 9-11, 2022

Co-produced with Richard Eaton Singers

Featuring:

Timothy Shantz, Conductor

Hannah Pagenkopf, Soprano

Sara Staples, Mezzo-Soprano

John Tessier, Tenor

Michael Kurschat, Bass

Richard Eaton Singers

Messiah, HWV 56

(Watkins Shaw edition)

Part I

| | | |
|----|----------------|--|
| 1 | Orchestra | Sinfonia |
| 2 | Tenor recit | Comfort ye my people |
| 3 | Tenor aria | Every valley shall be exalted |
| 4 | Chorus | And the glory |
| 5 | Bass recit | Thus saith the Lord |
| 6 | Alto aria | But who may abide |
| 7 | Chorus | And he shall purify |
| 8 | Alto recit | Behold, a Virgin shall conceive |
| 9 | Alto aria/chor | O Thou that Tellest |
| 10 | Bass recit. | For behold, darkness shall cover the earth |
| 11 | Bass aria | The people that walked in darkness |
| 12 | Chorus | For unto us a child is born |
| 13 | Orchestra | Pifa Sinfonia (Version I) |
| 14 | Sop recit | There were shepherds |
| 15 | Sop recit | And the angel said unto them |
| 16 | Sop recit | And suddenly there was with the angel |
| 17 | Chorus | Glory to God |
| 18 | Soprano aria | Rejoice greatly |
| 19 | Alto recit | Then shall the eyes of the blind |
| 20 | Alto/sop aria | He shall feed his flock |
| 21 | Chorus | His yoke is easy |

INTERMISSION (20 minutes)

Part II

| | | |
|----|-------------|---------------------------------|
| 22 | Chorus | Behold the Lamb of God |
| 23 | Alto aria | He was despised |
| 24 | Chorus | Surely He hath borne our griefs |
| 25 | Chorus | And with His stripes |
| 26 | Chorus | All we like sheep |
| 27 | Tenor recit | All they that see Him |

| | | |
|----|--------------|--|
| 28 | Chorus | He trusted in God |
| 29 | Tenor recit | Thy rebuke hath broken his heart |
| 30 | Tenor recit | Behold, and see if there be any sorrow |
| 31 | Tenor recit | He was cut off from the land of the living |
| 32 | Tenor aria | But thou did'st not leave his soul in hell |
| 33 | Chorus | Lift up your heads |
| 38 | Soprano aria | How beautiful are the feet |
| 39 | Chorus | Their sound is gone out |
| 40 | Bass aria | Why do the nations? |
| 41 | Chorus | Let us break their bonds |
| 42 | Tenor recit | He that dwelleth in heaven |
| 43 | Tenor aria | Thou shalt break them |
| 44 | Chorus | Hallelujah |

Part III

| | | |
|----|------------|--------------------------------|
| 45 | Aria | I know that my Redeemer liveth |
| 46 | Chorus | Since by man came death |
| 47 | Bass recit | Behold I tell you a mystery |
| 48 | Bass aria | The trumpet shall sound |
| 53 | Chorus | Worthy is the Lamb – Amen |

Messiah, HWV 56

George Frideric Handel

(b. Halle, 1685 / d. London, 1759)

First performed: April 13, 1742, in Dublin

Last ESO performance: December 2021

German-born composer George Frideric Handel came to England in 1710 at the invitation of an impresario, to present a new Italian opera for the British public. He had great success with it, so much so that he came back to England for good in 1712. For the next few years, he ruled the British opera scene, winning many admirers, but also attracting a scorn born largely of jealousy by British musicians who regarded him as an imported upstart.

When the taste for opera began to wane, it appeared as if Handel's fortunes had turned for the worse. Fortunately for him, he soon found his way back into public favour through his oratorios. In many ways, oratorios are similar to operas. They often tell a story, through the use of recitatives, solo arias, choruses, and instrumental music. Frequently, the solo singers have roles to play. But oratorios are not acted out, nor are there sets and costumes – rather, they are presented as concert performances. Not only that, but oratorios are (usually) written in the native language of the audience, rather than in what was the principal language of opera at the time: Italian. And often, the subjects chosen for oratorios are religious in nature. Handel wrote his first oratorios long before arriving in England, so when he saw which way the tide was turning for the music-loving English audience, he produced his first sacred work in English, the ode *Alexander's Feast*, in 1736, then the oratorio *Saul* in 1738. It was the latter which brought him in contact with librettist Charles Jennens.

It was Jennens who provided texts taken from scripture to Handel for Messiah. Busy with other works, Handel raced through the music for Messiah, completing it in less than four weeks. Friends describe Handel as working on the music as though possessed, and Jennens at first expressed displeasure that Handel did not spend more time on the composition, as he felt the words deserved.

In 1741, Handel came to Ireland at the invitation of the Duke of Devonshire, who was at that time the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. While Dublin was a major city, it was not London, so Handel was not sure of the exact nature of the musicians who would be available to him. Because of that, in preparation for the first performances of Messiah, Handel scored the work for a modest orchestra – strings, trumpets, and timpani (other instruments would be added later). Handel's presence in the Dublin arts scene was certainly one of the highlights of the season there, and word spread quickly about the new work – so much so that rehearsals were open to the public, and at its first ticketed performances, gentlemen were asked to come without their swords, and ladies without hoops in their dresses, to allow more people to be seated.

The six-performance premiere, presented in a theatre in Fishamble Street, was given as a series of benefit performances, raising funds for prisoners' debt relief, the Mercer's Hospital, and the Charitable Infirmary. The work received glowing reviews in the Irish press – though when the work was first performed in London (at Covent Garden on March 23, 1743), reviews there comparatively tepid. Among the objections stated was the idea that so sacred a text should not be performed in a theatre, but rather a church. Within a few years, however, Messiah established itself as a favourite, a position it has never relinquished since.

Unlike oratorios, which tell a story, Messiah is a reflection on the life and mission of Jesus Christ. Part One begins with excerpts from Old Testament, promising the coming of the saviour. The only real narrative portion of the work is the story of the first Christmas as told in the gospel of Luke. Part Two of Messiah dwells on the suffering of Christ, and what his sacrifice means to the Christian world. Part Two ends with the famous Hallelujah chorus, with words taken from the book of Revelation. Part Three puts the death and resurrection in a more direct message for humanity, that Christ's triumph over death means hope for salvation.

At Jennens' urging, Handel did make some revisions to Messiah before the work was presented in London in 1745. During Handel's lifetime, he continued to change things to suit new performances, taking advantage of particular singers to transpose an aria or two, or even change an aria from one voice part to another. "Their sound has gone out," for example, began as an aria, but is now a chorus. Before the end of the century, Messiah had been presented in one form or another all over Europe, and even in North America. More and more grander orchestrations were made of it, bloating the work out of any proper sense of proportion, though fortunately today, it is rare to hear the work in any guise other than one which Handel himself would have conducted. Messiah is now an established Christmas tradition in many parts of the world, though it was never intended as a Christmas work – its first performances were closer to Easter.

For artist biographies, visit:

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