

Thank you for attending today's performance

FLC Conducts "Messiah!"

December 2, 3 & 4, 2023

Weill Hall, Green Music Center

Francesco Lecce-Chong, conductor and

harpsichord

Christina Pier, soprano

Abigail Nims, alto

Benjamin Butterfield, tenor

Michael Dean, bass

SSU Symphonic Chorus, Jenny Bent, director

2023-2024 Classical Concert Series underwritten by

Anderman Family Foundation

Running time is approximately 130 minutes with intermission

Today's Program

GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL

“Messiah” for Solo Voices, Orchestra and Chorus, HWV56

PART I

INTERMISSION

PART II & PART 3

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PROGRAM NOTES

George Friedrich Handel

“Messiah” for Solo Voices, Orchestra and Chorus, HWV 56

PART I

Sinfonia (Overture)

Accompagnato

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.

Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned.

The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness; prepare ye the

way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our
God.

(Isaiah 40: 1-3)

Air

Ev'ry valley shall be exalted, and ev'ry mountain and hill made
low; the crooked straight and the rough places plain.

(Isaiah 40: 4)

Chorus

And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see
it together:

for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

(Isaiah 40: 5)

Accompagnato

Thus saith the Lord, the Lord of hosts: Yet once a little while and I will shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land.

And I will shake all nations; and the desire of all nations shall come.

(Haggai 2: 6-7)

The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the messenger of the Covenant, whom you delight in; behold, He shall come, saith the Lord of hosts.

(Malachi 3: 1)

Air

But who may abide the day of His coming, and who shall stand when He appeareth?

For He is like a refiner's fire.

(Malachi 3: 2)

Chorus

And He shall purify the sons of Levi, that they may offer unto the
Lord an offering in righteousness.

(Malachi 3: 3)

Recitative

Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His
name Emmanuel, God with us.

(Isaiah 7: 14; Matthew 1: 23)

Air and Chorus

O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion, get thee up into the high
mountain.

O thou that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up thy voice

with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah,
behold your god!

(Isaiah 40: 9)

Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen
upon thee.

(Isaiah 60: 1)

Chorus

O thou that tellest. . .

Accompagnato

For behold, darkness shall cover the earth,

and gross darkness the people;

but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be
seen upon thee.

And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the
brightness of thy rising.

(Isaiah 60: 2-3)

Air

The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; and
they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them
hath the light shined.

(Isaiah 9: 2)

Chorus

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the
government shall be upon His shoulder; and His name shall be
called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the Everlasting
Father, the Prince of Peace.

Pifa (“Pastoral Symphony”)

(Sometimes called the Pastoral Symphony, this movement is intended to set the scene for the ensuing Sequence from the Christmas story as told in the Gospel According to St. Luke.)

Accompagnato

And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid.

(Luke 2: 9)

Accompagnato

And suddenly there was with the angel, a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying:

(Luke 2: 13)

Chorus

“Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth, goodwill towards men.”

(Luke 2: 14)

Air

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem!

Behold, thy King cometh unto thee; He is the righteous Saviour, and

He shall speak peace unto the heathen.

Rejoice greatly. . .

(Zechariah 9: 9-10)

Recitative

Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the

deaf unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the

tongue of the dumb shall sing.

(Isaiah 35: 5-6)

Air

He shall feed His flock like a shepherd; and He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.

(Isaiah 40: 11)

Come unto Him, all ye that labour, come unto Him that are heavy laden, and He will give you rest.

Take his yoke upon you, and learn of Him, for He is meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

(Matthew 11: 28-29)

Chorus

His yoke is easy, and His burden is light.

(Matthew 11: 30)

INTERMISSION

PART II

Chorus

Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world.

(John 1: 29)

Air

He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

(Isaiah 53: 3)

He gave His back to the smiters, and His cheeks to them that plucked off His hair:

He hid not His face from shame and spitting.

He was despised. . .

(Isaiah 53: 6)

Chorus

Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows!

He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him.

(Isaiah 53: 4-5)

Chorus

And with His stripes we are healed.

(Isaiah 53: 5)

Chorus

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his

own way. And the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

(Isaiah 53: 6)

Accompagnato

All they that see Him laugh Him to scorn; they shoot out their lips,
and shake their heads, saying:

(Psalm 22: 7)

Chorus

“He trusted in God that He would deliver Him; let Him deliver
Him, if He delight in Him.”

(Psalm 22: 8)

Accompagnato

Thy rebuke hath broken His heart: He is full of heaviness. He
looked for some to have pity on Him, but there was no man,

neither found He any

to comfort him.

(Psalm 69: 20)

Arioso

Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto His sorrow.

(Lamentations 1: 12)

Accompagnato

He was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgressions
of Thy people was

He stricken.

(Isaiah 53: 8)

Air

But Thou didst not leave His soul in hell; nor didst Thou suffer

Thy Holy One to see corruption.

(Psalm 16: 10)

Chorus

Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in.

Who is this King of Glory? The Lord strong and mighty, The Lord mighty in battle.

Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in.

Who is this King of Glory?

The Lord of Hosts, He is the King of Glory.

(Psalm 24: 7-10)

Air

Why do the nations so furiously rage together, and why do the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth rise up, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and against His anointed.

(Psalm 2: 1-2)

Chorus

Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away their yokes from us.

(Psalm 2: 3)

Recitative

He that dwelleth in Heav'n shall laugh them to scorn; The Lord shall have them in derision.

(Psalm 2: 4)

Air

Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

(Psalm 2: 9)

Chorus

Hallelujah: for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth.

(Revelation 19: 6)

The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever.

(Revelation 11: 15)

King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.

(Revelation 19: 16)

Hallelujah!

PART III

Air

I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth.

And though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.

(Job 19: 25-26)

For now is Christ risen from the dead, the first fruits of them that sleep.

(I Corinthians 15: 20)

Chorus

Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

(I Corinthians 15: 21-22)

Accompagnato

Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.

(I Corinthians 15: 51-52)

Air

The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

For this corruptible must put on incorruption and this mortal must put on immortality.

The trumpet. . .

(I Corinthians 15: 52-53)

Chorus

Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God
by His blood, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and
strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.

Blessing and honour, glory and power, be unto Him that sitteth
upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever.

Amen.

(Revelation 5: 12-14)

“Libretto by Charles Jennens”

GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL

“Messiah” for Solo Voices, Orchestra and Chorus, HWV

George Frideric Handel was perhaps the first international music star. Born in Germany, he studied music in Italy before moving to England, where he remained for the rest of his life. Handel’s mature music, particularly his choral works, reflects a skillful blend of these three national styles.

For over 260 years, “Messiah” has been Handel’s most popular and beloved oratorio, and continues to give pleasure to audiences around the world, whether in mammoth Cecil B. DeMille-type extravaganzas with 3,000+ singers; ever-popular “Messiah sing-alongs;” gospel and country versions; or performed in Baroque style with small choruses and chamber orchestras playing period instruments.

Today “Messiah” is considered Handel’s greatest musical achievement, but its popularity was not immediate. Written during a three-week span in the summer of 1741 and premiered in Dublin the following spring, Handel composed it for a charity

benefit “For the relief of the Prisoners in the several Gaols” and several other worthy causes. “Messiah” received warm reviews at its premiere, but its enduring popularity did not begin until after Handel’s death. During his lifetime it was regarded as simply one of his many successful oratorios.

While “Messiah” concerts have become a Christmas tradition in North America, the oratorio was originally written for performance during Passion Week, the holiest week of the Christian year leading up to Easter Sunday.

COMPOSER: born February 23, 1685, Halle; died April 14, 1759, London

WORK COMPOSED: Summer 1741

WORLD PREMIERE: April 13, 1742, in Dublin, at a charity benefit concert “For the relief of the Prisoners in the several Gaols.”

INSTRUMENTATION: soprano, mezzo-soprano, tenor, and bass soloists, SATB chorus, 2 oboes, 2 bassoons , 2 trumpets, timpani,

continuo (harpsichord and bass), and strings

ESTIMATED DURATION: 2.5 hours

ABOUT THE MUSIC

The years immediately preceding the composition and premiere of “Messiah” were artistically and financially disastrous for George Frideric Handel. In 1737, he suffered a debilitating stroke, although he eventually recovered enough to resume work. The grandiose style of Italian “opera seria” for which Handel was best known was dwindling in popularity, so much so that after 1741 Handel stopped composing opera altogether. In the 1730s, Handel himself had experienced the bankruptcy and failure of two of his own opera companies, and by 1740, the city of London could not support its remaining two opera companies vying for an ever-shrinking audience weary of foreign language in its entertainments. Both shrewd and practical, Handel accepted the public’s waning interest in opera seria, and started composing something new – oratorios in English – that he hoped audiences would prefer.

Handel’s oratorios represent some of the best examples of the

genre. He wrote many of them; “Messiah” was his ninth. Although other composers had written oratorios, and the oratorio as a genre dates back to the early 1600s, Handel’s innovations established the oratorio format we know best today.

Handel regarded the oratorio as an unstaged opera with a sacred plot, juxtaposing the drama of opera with the profundity of sacred themes; this combination appealed to both theatre lovers and those of a more religious inclination. Like opera, oratorios were written in several parts that focused on the dramatic elements of the libretto. In cities where opera was banned, and during the Lenten season, when opera houses were closed, oratorio satisfied the public’s desire for dramatic musical works.

An oratorio’s text, particularly a sacred oratorio, was of equal importance to the music. For “Messiah,” Handel teamed up with Charles Jennens, a collaborator as gifted with words as Handel was with music. One does not need to be either a musical or Biblical expert to appreciate the care with which Jennens chose and arranged the texts of “Messiah’s” libretto. Jennens’ selection of

texts is masterful, drawing on both well-known and obscure passages from the Bible.

Jennens' libretto contains almost no direct narrative; it is a contemplative rather than dramatic portrayal of the life, Passion, and resurrection of Christ. Jennens outlined the three parts of "Messiah" accordingly: Part I presents the biblical prophecies of the Messiah, who would offer salvation; this section also presents prophecies of the Virgin birth and Christ's many miraculous and benevolent acts. Part II recounts Jesus' suffering and the rejection of his teachings by the people, his agony on the cross and subsequent resurrection, the knowledge spread among the populace of His true identity as the Son of God, and the spreading of the Gospel. In Part III, the texts deal with the promise of bodily resurrection after the Day of Judgment, Jesus' victory over death, and his ultimate deification.

"Messiah's" lasting reputation is also due to Handel's skillful rendering of Biblical texts, which would have been as familiar to the audiences of his day as commercial jingles and pop song lyrics are to today's listeners. Handel was a master of

“Affektenlehre,” the Baroque aesthetic also known as text painting, which, as it suggests, audibly portrays words using musical devices. A few examples: the chorus, “All We Like Sheep,” features a melismatic (setting one syllable with many notes) ending on the word “astray” in the line “All we like sheep have gone astray,” with the word itself going astray from the phrase. In the opening tenor aria “Ev’ry Valley,” Handel sets the word “crooked” with a variety of bouncy dotted rhythmic figures, and the word “straight” with strong single beats. In the bass aria “The People that Walked in Darkness,” the opening phrase “The people that walked in darkness” meanders as if lost through a dark minor key, which abruptly changes into a triumphant major with the words “have seen a great light.” This same technique of juxtaposing minor with major can be heard in the chorus, “Since by man came death.” The opening lines begin in a somber minor key, which then bursts into the joyous relative major on the words “By man came also the resurrection of the dead.”

A number of myths regarding “Messiah” have persisted over the years. Some accounts describe Handel refusing food and drink as he wrote “Messiah” in a white-hot religious fever. Others describe

the composer's emotional state, weeping or gazing raptly into the distance, lost in an ecstasy of pious thought. The fact that Handel wrote "Messiah" in just 24 days has been taken as proof of his religious inspiration, but in fact Handel often composed quickly, especially during the summer months when he was readying operas for the upcoming theatrical season. Handel completed Part I in six days, Part II in nine, and Part III in another six, with three more days for fleshing out the orchestration. Although a sincere Christian, the speed at which Handel produced such transcendent and enduring music owes more to his gifts as a composer rather than to the passion of his religious beliefs.

"Messiah" received warm reviews in the Dublin newspapers even before its premiere. One reviewer, after attending a rehearsal, wrote "Yesterday Morning, at the Musick Hall ... there was a public Rehearsal of the "Messiah," Mr. Handel's new sacred Oratorio, which in the opinion of the best Judges, far surpasses anything of that Nature, which has been performed in this or any other Kingdom." Another review said of the actual performance, "Words are wanting to express the exquisite Delight it afforded to the admiring crouded Audience. The Sublime, the Grand, and the

Tender, adapted to the most elevated, majestic and moving
Words, conspired to transport and charm the ravished Heart and
Ear.”

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Elizabeth Schwartz is a writer and music historian based in the
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