



Arcadia Players

Handel's Messiah

Libretto

~

Program notes

Libretto

PART THE FIRST

1. Sinfony (Overture)

2. Accompagnato (Tenor)

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplish'd, 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*)

3. Air (Tenor)

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*)

4. Chorus

And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see together; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. (*Isaiah 40 : 5*)

5. Accompagnato (Bass)

Thus saith the Lord, the Lord of Hosts; Yet once a little while and I will shake the heav'ns 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 ye delight in: behold, He shall come, saith the Lord of Hosts. (*Malachi 3 : 1*)

6. Air (Bass)

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*)

7. Chorus

And He shall purify the sons of Levi, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. (*Malachi 3 : 3*)

8. Recitative (Alto)

Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call his name Emmanuel, GOD WITH US. (*Isaiah 7 : 14; Matthew 1 : 23*)

9. Air (Alto) & 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! O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion, Arise, shine, for thy Light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. (*Isaiah 40 : 9; Isaiah 60 : 1*)

10. Accompagnato (Bass)

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*)

11. Air (Bass)

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*)

12. 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. (*Isaiah 9 : 6*)

13. Pifa (Sinfonia pastorale)

14a. Recitative (Soprano)

There were shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night. (*Luke 2 : 8*)

14b. Accompagnato (Soprano)

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*)

14c. Recitative (Soprano)

And the angel said unto them: Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. (*Luke 2 : 10-11*)

14d. Accompagnato (Soprano)

And suddenly there was with the angel, a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying: (*Luke 2 : 13*)

15. Chorus

Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth, good will towards men. (*Luke 2 : 14*)

16. Air (Soprano)

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. (*Zechariah 9 : 9-10*)

17. Recitative (Alto)

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*)

18. Air (Alto & Soprano)

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*)

19. Chorus

His yoke is easy, and his burden is light. (*Matthew 11 : 30*)

INTERMISSION

PART THE SECOND

20. Chorus

Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world. (*John 1 : 29*)

21. Air (Alto)

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. (*Isaiah 50: 6*)

22. 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*)

23. Chorus

And with His stripes we are healed. (*Isaiah 53 : 5*)

24. 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*)

25. Accompagnato (Tenor)

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

(*Psalms 22 : 7*)

26. Chorus

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

(*Psalms 22 : 8*)

27. Accompagnato (Tenor)

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. (*Psalms 69 : 20*)

28. Arioso (Tenor)

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

(*Lamentations 1 : 12*)

29. Accompagnato (Tenor)

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

(*Isaiah 53 : 8*)

30. Air (Tenor)

But Thou didst not leave His soul in hell; nor didst Thou suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption.

(*Psalms 16 : 10*)

31. 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 ... Who is this King of Glory? The Lord of Hosts, He is the King of Glory. (*Psalms 24 : 7-10*)

32. Air (Soprano)

How beautiful are the feet of them: that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things. (*Romans 10 : 15*)

33. Chorus

Their sound is gone out into all lands, and their words unto the ends of the world. (*Romans 10 : 18 / Psalms 19 : 4*)

34. Air (Bass)

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. (*Psalms 2 : 1-2*)

35. Chorus

Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away their yokes from us. (*Psalms 2 : 3*)

36. Recitative (Tenor)

He that dwelleth in heaven shall laugh them to scorn; the Lord shall have them in derision. (*Psalms 2 : 4*)

37. Air (Tenor)

Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. (*Psalms 2 : 9*)

38. 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 THE THIRD

39. Air (Soprano)

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*)

40. 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*)

41. Accompagnato (Bass)

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*)

42. Air (Bass)

The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. (*I Corinthians 15 : 52-53*)

43. 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 : 12-13*)

Program Notes

by Robert Eisenstein

Director, Five College Early Music Program

Member, Arcadia Players Advisory Board

Georg Frideric Handel was born in Halle, Germany, in 1685, and died in London in 1759. During his long career he held positions in Germany, Italy and England. He was undoubtedly one of the greatest composers of the Baroque, and has always been recognized as such. Unlike Bach and other illustrious contemporaries, Handel's reputation (at least in English-speaking countries) never suffered a long decline and subsequent revival. This fact is certainly due to the unbroken tradition of performances of his oratorios, especially *Messiah*.

Handel was the son of a respected barber-surgeon. He received excellent training in the German Kapellmeister tradition, studying organ, harpsichord, and violin, as well as learning composition and counterpoint. Throughout his life, Handel was known for his intelligence, humor, integrity, and generosity, which contributed to his popularity wherever he lived.

From 1706 to 1710 Handel lived in Italy, the font of opera, oratorio, cantatas, concerti, and sonatas. During those years, he met and worked with great Italian musicians, including Corelli, Vivaldi, and the Scarlatti. From his years in Italy Handel learned to incorporate the wonderful Italian melodic freedom and inventiveness that was to enrich all of his subsequent composition.

In 1711 Handel visited London, the city that eventually became his permanent home. His opera *Rinaldo* was a great success. During that period, Handel composed much instrumental and sacred music as well. His cathedral music shows a thorough assimilation of the English choral tradition, and especially the music of Purcell, which aided him greatly in the creation of his oratorios, including *Messiah*.

Handel's English oratorios were a real innovation in terms of musical form. With the exception of *Israel in Egypt* and *Messiah*, Handel's oratorios are dramatic, with real plots. The oratorios were never intended to be staged, were sung in English, and included a major choral component. The struggles of the biblical heroes and fates of their people portrayed in librettos found a national resonance with the subjects of King George I.

During the summer of 1741 Handel received an invitation from the Lord Lieutenant in Dublin to compose a new sacred oratorio. The commissioned work, on a biblical libretto devised by Charles Jennens, was *Messiah*. Handel wrote the oratorio at a furious clip - the entire project was completed in three weeks, between the 22nd of August and the 14th of September, 1741. Its first Dublin performance in April 1742 (which included a charity preview) was an unqualified success.

Some of the first soloists were Handel's singers from London, including the dramatic contralto Mrs. Cibber (a cleric who heard her that night sing "He was despised" reportedly cried out "Woman, for this thy sins be forgiven thee!"). Seven hundred people heard this first of the unbroken string of performances of the oratorio, a tradition that shows no sign of ending.

However, *Messiah* and other sacred oratorios met with some opposition in London - it was felt to be inappropriate to hear Scripture sung by singers (some of whom were Italian!) of uncertain morals in a theatre, instead of a church. This puritan strain prevented Handel from mounting a *Messiah* production in London until 1743, and opinion was mixed. It wasn't until 1750 that annual performances occurred, they being on behalf of London's Foundling Hospital. This charitable institution became inextricably linked with *Messiah*, with annual charity performances until Handel's death and beyond.

Messiah represents a departure for oratorio. It has no plot to speak of, but unfolds through a series of Scripture excerpts:

- (Part the First) The prophecy and realization of God's Plan to redeem mankind by the coming of the Messiah;
- (Part the Second) The accomplishment of redemption by the sacrifice of Jesus, mankind's rejection of God's offer, and mankind's utter defeat when trying to oppose the power of the Almighty;
- (Part the Third) A Hymn of Thanksgiving for the final overthrow of Death.

Messiah is a superbly balanced work, drawing on Italian aria and dramatic recitative style, learned fugues in the German tradition, the English choral anthem, plus all the considerable resources at Handel's disposal. Instruments besides the strings are used sparingly, and with great effect. For the Manger scene in Part the First, we hear a *Pifa*, a pastoral lullaby reminiscent of those played by shepherds Handel heard in Italy. There are no trumpets until "Glory to God" near the end of Part the First, and no kettle-drums at all until the "Hallelujah" chorus at the end of Part the Second. The oboes and bassoons perform the important function of adding color to the basic string sound. And the text settings are magnificent, and wonderfully sensitive.

Handel's work has remained incredibly popular. It seems pointless to deny the judgment of those who feel like Benjamin Victor, who in 1752 declared his willingness to "ride forty miles in the wind and rain to be present at a performance of the *Messiah* in London."