

GLORIA

ANTONIO VIVALDI

&

MESSIAH

GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL



Sunday, December 21, 2014 at 2:30 p.m.
Cathedral of the Assumption



December 21, 2014

Dear Friends,

This afternoon we are pleased to present Christmas at The Cathedral, a program that has become a treasured part of the holiday season for many of you and your families. In addition to Handel's perennially popular *Messiah*, we will perform Vivaldi's wondrous *Gloria* and *Two Carol Fantasies* by Mack Wilburg.

We hope that you will join us again for our remaining concert this season. In March, we present Mendelssohn's *Lobgesang*, an uplifting journey that proceeds from worldly darkness to unbridled joy. The program will also include Ralph Vaughan Williams' *Five Mystical Songs*, an engaging work characterized by serene and meditative melodies that reach exultant closure. We are particularly pleased that this will be our first performance at the Church of the Holy Spirit on Lexington Road, a perfect setting for these wondrous choral works. Please see the inside back cover of this program for more information.

Thank you for letting us share this magnificent music with you at this special time of the year. We appreciate your support as we continue to celebrate outstanding choral works – and we hope to see you again in March.

Warmest regards,

Matt Lindblom
President

Mark Walker
Artistic Director

ANTONIO VIVALDI: *Gloria*
MACK WILBERG: *Two Carol Fantasies*

The First Nowell

Joy to the World

Interval (10 minutes)

GEORGE FREDERIC HANDEL: *Messiah* (Part 1)

Sunday, December 21, 2014

Cathedral of the Assumption

433 S. 5TH STREET, LOUISVILLE, KY

Mark Walker, CONDUCTOR & ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Philip Brisson, ASSOCIATE & ACCOMPANIST

Jack Griffin, CONCERTMASTER & PRODUCTION MANAGER

Selena Walker, SOPRANO

Maggie Schwenker, MEZZO-SOPRANO

Tim King, TENOR

John Whittlesey, BARITONE

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PRE-CONCERT PROGRAM



Dr. John R. Hale is the Director of Liberal Studies and Adjunct Professor of Archaeology at the University of Louisville. Dr. Hale is a graduate of Yale University, with a Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge, and is a distinguished instructor and author. His many awards include the Panhellenic Teacher of the Year Award and the Delphi Center Award.

Many know Dr. Hale for his popular preconcert programs with the Louisville Bach Society before its dissolution in 2011. The Louisville Master Chorale is extremely pleased that he has been able to take time from a very busy schedule to sing in some recent performances and that he is able to present our pre-concert program today. His engaging style and commanding knowledge are respected and appreciated by concertgoers throughout our community.

LIBRETTI

ANTONIO VIVALDI: *Gloria*

I. <i>Gloria in excelsis Deo</i>	Glory to God in the highest
II. <i>Et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis.</i>	And on earth peace to men of good will.
III. <i>Laudamus te. Benedicimus te. Adoramus te. Glorificamus te.</i>	We praise you. We bless you. We adore you. We glorify you.
IV. <i>Gratias agimus tibi</i>	We give you thanks
V. <i>Propter magnum gloriam tuam.</i>	Because of your great glory.
VI. <i>Domine Deus, Rex caelestis, Deus, Pater omnipotens.</i>	Lord God, heavenly King, God, almighty Father.
VII. <i>Domine, Fili unigenite, Jesu Christe,</i>	Lord, only begotten Son, Jesus Christ,
VIII. <i>Domine Deus, Agnus Dei, Filius Patris, Qui tollis peccata mundi, Miserere nobis.</i>	Lord God, Lamb God, Son of the Father, You who take the sins of the world, Have mercy on us.
IX. <i>Qui tollis peccata mundi, Suscipe deprecationem nostram.</i>	You who take the sins of the world Receive our supplication.
X. <i>Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris, Miserere nobis.</i>	You who sit at the right hand of the Father, Have mercy on us.
XI. <i>Quoniam tu solus Sanctus, Tu solus Dominus, Tu solus Altissimus, Jesu Christe.</i>	For you alone are the Holy One, You alone are the Lord, You alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ.
XII. <i>Cum Sancto Spiritu, in Gloria Dei Patris. Amen.</i>	With the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

MACK WILBERG: Two Carol Fantasies

The First Nowell

The first Nowell the angel did say
Was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay:
In fields where they lay a keeping their sheep
On a cold winter's night that was so deep.
Nowell! Born is the King of Israel.

They looked up and saw a star
Shining in the east beyond them far:
And to the earth it gave great light,
And so it continued both day and night.
Nowell! Born is the King of Israel.

Then let us all with one accord
Sing praises to our heavenly Lord,
That hath made heaven and earth of naught,
And with his blood mankind has bought.
Nowell! Born is the King of Israel.

-anonymous 17th century English carol

Joy to the World

Joy to the World, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room,
And heaven and nature sing.

Joy to the World, the Savior reigns!
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow.
Far as the curse is found,

He rules the world with truth and grace
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love.

- Isaac Watts. 1674-1748

GEORGE FREDERIC HANDEL: Messiah (Part 1) plus Hallelujah Chorus

1. Overture

2. Recitative (Tenor)

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)

3. Air (Tenor)

Every valley shall be exalted, and every 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 it together; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. (Isaiah 40:5)

5. Recitative (Bass)

Thus saith 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 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! (Isaiah 40:9)

Arise, shine, for thy Light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. (Isaiah 60:1)

10. Recitative (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. Pastoral Symphony

14. Recitative (Soprano)

There were shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night. 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 2:8,9)

15. 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)

16. Recitative (Soprano)

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

17. Chorus

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

18. 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)

19. Recitative (Alto)

Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstoppèd; then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing. (Isaiah 35:5,6)

20. 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 and are heavy laden, and He shall 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)

21. Chorus

His yoke is easy and His burthen is light. (Matthew 11:30)

44. 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, hallelujah! (Revelation 19:16)

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ARTISTIC LEADERSHIP



MARK WALKER, Louisville Master Chorale's Conductor and Artistic Director has extensive experience in Choral Conducting, Organ Performance, Choral Music Education, and Liturgical Church Music. He currently serves as Director of Music Ministries at St. Patrick Catholic Church in Louisville, Kentucky. He has served parishes in Kentucky, Tennessee, Texas, and North Carolina and he has taught in schools in Kentucky and North Carolina. Walker most recently served as Assistant Conductor for the Louisville Bach Society. Walker holds a Bachelor's Degree in Music from Western Kentucky University and a Master's Degree in Organ Performance from East Carolina University.

His conducting experience with extended choral-orchestral works includes compositions by Bach, Handel, Mozart, Vivaldi, Pergolesi and contemporary composers Rutter and Lauridsen. As an organ recitalist, Walker has performed extensively throughout the Eastern and Southern U.S. He regularly serves as conductor and organist for various Diocesan events in Louisville, and during the summer of 2011 served as both choral conductor and guest organ recitalist for the National Associations of Pastoral Musicians Conference. He also served as Dean of the Louisville Chapter of the American Guild of Organists in 2011-12.



PHILIP BRISSON, Louisville Master Chorale's Associate and Accompanist, is Director of Music and Organist at the Cathedral of the Assumption in downtown Louisville, the country's oldest inland Catholic cathedral in continuous use. In addition to leading the Cathedral's traditional worship, he manages the Cathedral's Keltie Endowed Concert Series and has led the Cathedral Choirs in this country and on concert tours in Europe. Prior to his work with the LMC, he was Chorusmaster for the Kentucky Opera and

prepared choruses for performances of works ranging from Verdi to Floyd. As a teacher, Dr. Brisson has served on the faculties of Bellarmine University and Indiana University Southeast. Brisson has a BM in Organ Performance from the Aaron Copland School of Music at Queens College, CUNY, a Master's Degree in Sacred Music from Westminster Choir College and a Doctorate in Organ Performance from the Eastman School of Music.

As an organ soloist, he has given recitals in 35 states and has appeared with the Louisville Orchestra as guest soloist. Brisson is active in the American Guild of Organists and also founded the concert artist cooperative EastWestOrganists.com, which represents several prominent young American organists.



JACK GRIFFIN is Concertmaster and Production Manager with the Louisville Master Chorale. He has held the Principal Viola position with the Louisville Orchestra since 1984, having joined the Orchestra during high school. He received his Bachelor's Degree from the University of Louisville and has also studied at The Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music and Indiana University.

Griffin owns Commonwealth Musicians which provides ensembles such as string quartets, jazz ensembles and other musicians for functions such as weddings and corporate events.

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SOLOISTS



SELENA WALKER, *soprano*, has sung with orchestras in Florida, Kentucky, and North Carolina, with solo work including Handel's *Messiah*, Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, Mozart's *Mass in C Minor*, and Rutter's *Requiem*. For ten years she has served as the voice model for the Kentucky All-State Children's Chorus. She holds Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Music Education from Western Kentucky University. She has also served as a choir director, arts and humanities instructor, and general music teacher in both the Kentucky and North Carolina public school systems.



MAGGIE SCHWENKER, *mezzo-soprano*, has had extensive solo engagements, from the Mozart *Requiem*, Schubert *Mass in G*, and *Messiah* in the concert hall, to the stage, in *Le Nozze di Figaro* and *The Mikado*. She has also won various vocal competitions. She has performed recently with such companies as the Columbia Chorale, Paducah Symphony, Bourbon Baroque and Kentucky Opera. Maggie received her BA in voice from Murray State University and her Masters of Music in Vocal Performance from the University of North Carolina-Greensboro School of Music.



TIM KING, *tenor*, is making his debut with the Louisville Master Chorale and returning to the Cathedral of the Assumption where he served as soloist and section leader for almost 20 years. With nearly 140 solo appearances with orchestras around the country, Tim's recent engagements include the Chattanooga Symphony, Lafayette Symphony, Las Vegas Philharmonic, The Louisville Orchestra, Orchestra Kentucky and the Richmond Symphony Orchestra. Future engagements for the 2014-15 season include return appearances with the North Charleston Pops and Orchestra Kentucky.



JOHN WHITTLESEY, *baritone*, performs regularly in opera, concert, and recital, having appeared with Boston Lyric Opera, the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, New England Light Opera, Cape Cod Opera, Longwood Opera, the Masterworks Chorale, Wellesley College, Trinity College, and the Salisbury. Recent performances include Handel's *Messiah*, Barber's *Dover Beach*, the Brahms *Requiem*, the Fauré *Requiem*, Dominick Argento's *The Andrée Expedition*, Bach's *Ich habe genug*, and Handel's *Jephtha*. He will be joining the ensemble of Palm Beach Opera for their 2014-15 season.

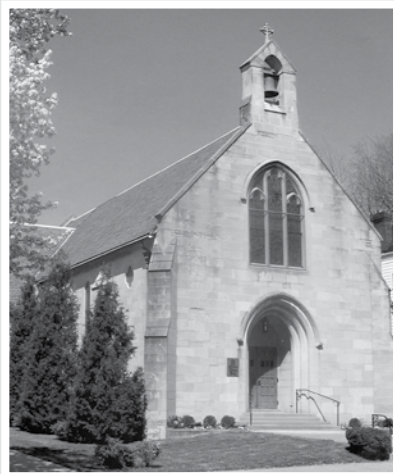
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Ben Ragsdell
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Isabella Christensen
Ray Weaver
Patti Sisson

VIOLA

Josh Mallman
Josquin Larsen

OBOE

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BASS

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CONTINUO

Philip Brisson

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PROGRAM NOTES

ANTONIO VIVALDI: *Gloria*

Antonio Lucio Vivaldi composed this *Gloria* in Venice, probably in 1715, for the choir of the *Ospedale della Pietà*, an orphanage for girls. The Ospedale prided itself on the quality of its musical education and the excellence of its choir and orchestra. Vivaldi, a priest, music teacher and virtuoso violinist, composed many sacred works for the Ospedale, where he spent most of his career, as well as hundreds of instrumental concertos to be played by the girls' orchestra. This, his most famous choral piece, presents the traditional *Gloria* from the Latin Mass in twelve varied cantata-like sections.

The wonderfully sunny nature of the *Gloria*, with its distinctive melodies and rhythms, is characteristic of all of Vivaldi's music, giving it an immediate and universal appeal. The opening movement is a joyous chorus, with trumpet and oboe obligato. The extensive orchestral introduction establishes two simple motives, one of octave leaps, the other a quicker, quaver-semiquaver figure, that function as the ritornello. The choir enters in chorale-like fashion, syllabically declaiming the text in regular rhythms, contrasting with the orchestral ritornello, which contains most of the melodic interest of the movement.

The B minor *Et in terra pax* is in nearly every way a contrast to the first. It is in triple rather than duple time, in a minor key, and rather slower. Its imitative and expressive chromatic texture evokes the motets of the Renaissance era, the so-called "stile antico". *Laudamus te*, a passionate duet for soprano and mezzo-soprano, gives us some hint of the skill of Vivaldi's young singers.

Gratias agimus tibi is a very broad and entirely homophonic prelude to a fugal allegro on *propter magnam gloriam*. The largo *Domine Deus, Rex coelestis* is in the form of duet between the solo soprano and the solo violin, followed by the joyful F major *Domine Fili unigenite* chorus in what Vivaldi and his contemporaries would have regarded as the "French style". It is dominated by the dotted rhythms characteristic of a French overture. *Domine Deus, Agnus Dei* features the alto soloist, with the chorus providing an antiphonal response, *qui tollis peccata mundi*, to each intercession. The bold harmonies of the following section, *Qui tollis*, provide a refreshing change of tone colour, and complement the intercessional alto aria, *Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris*. The string accompaniment contains recollections of the opening movement, and prepares for the following movement, *Quoniam tu solus sanctus*, which takes the shape of a brief reprise of the opening movement's broken octaves.

The powerful "stile antico" double fugue on *Cum Sancto Spiritu* that ends the work is an arrangement by Vivaldi of the ending of a *Gloria per due chori* composed in 1708 by an older contemporary, the now forgotten Veronese composer Giovanni Maria Ruggieri, whom Vivaldi seems to have held in high esteem, as he used a second adaptation of this piece in another, lesser-known D Major *Gloria* setting, RV 588.

Today Vivaldi is one of the most popular of all composers, who during his lifetime enjoyed considerable success and fortune, which he squandered through extravagance, and when he died in Vienna he was buried in a pauper's grave. For two centuries after his death, the *Gloria* lay undiscovered until the late 1920s, when it was found buried among a pile of forgotten Vivaldi manuscripts. However, it was not performed until September 1939 in Siena in an edition by the

composer Alfredo Casella. This was by no means an authentic edition (he described it as an "elaborazione"), as he embellished the original orchestration of trumpet, oboe, strings, and continuo, while reducing the role of the continuo, and cut sections from three movements. It was not until 1957 that the now familiar original version was published and given its first performance at the First Festival of Baroque Choral Music at Brooklyn College, NY.

Program notes: Peter Carey, Royal Free singers

MACK WILBERG: *Two Carol Fantasies*

Mack Wilberg (b. 1955) has served as music director of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir since 2008. Formerly, he was a professor of music at Brigham Young University, and his compositions and arrangements are performed by choral organizations worldwide. In *Two Carol Fantasies*, Wilberg arranges the traditional Christmas carols: *Joy to the World* and *The First Noel*.

The First Noel is a traditional English carol thought to originate in the early 18th century and was first published in *Carols Ancient and Modern* in 1823. The word Noel is from the French word *Noël* (Christmas) which derives from the Latin word *natalis* (birthday). It is also sometimes written as "Nowell" as in the Wilberg arrangement.

Joy to the World is among the most published Christmas songs in America. The text is a paraphrase of Psalm 98, written by Isaac Watts (1674-1748) in 1719. It was originally set to the hymn tune *Richmond*, but it was subsequently published set to the hymn tune *Antioch* by the American composer Lowell Mason (1792-1872) and appeared in *The Modern Psalmist* in 1839. Mason indicated that two passages were taken from Handel's *Messiah* as the basis for his own tune. "Joy to the World, the Lord is come!" corresponds to the first passage, "Glory to God in the highest." "And heav'n and nature sing" is similar to the tenor solo recitative, "Comfort ye my people."

Program notes: Paul Shoemaker

GEORGE FREDERIC HANDEL: *Messiah*

George Frideric Handel was born in Germany in February of 1685, just a few weeks before Bach. Like Bach, the young Handel showed substantial musical aptitude; unlike Bach, he did not come from a family of musicians. Handel's elderly father Georg, a practical man, was determined that his son should go to law school, and even resisted providing musical training for the child. Indeed, Handel's first biographer tells us that his father "strictly forbade him to meddle with any musical instrument," so that the boy had to arrange for a clavichord to be smuggled into a top room of the house, where he could practice when his father was asleep. But on a trip to Weissenfels, where one of his relatives was serving Duke Johann Adolf, the duke heard the young Handel play and was so impressed that he commanded Georg to provide the boy with music lessons. Thus the world gained the composer of the *Messiah* at the expense of one more lawyer, a fair trade by most anyone's standards.

Handel's early musical career focused on opera, particularly Italian opera, first in Hamburg, then in Florence. In 1710, he returned to Germany to take up the position of *Kapellmeister* to the Elector of Hanover, Prince George, only to abandon that post after less than two years and move to London,

where his opera *Rinaldo* already had been enthusiastically received. Handel would spend the rest of his life in that city, dying in 1759 only eight days after his final performance of the *Messiah*.

Today, music lovers tend chiefly to associate Handel with his twenty-nine oratorios, particularly the *Messiah*, but for the first decades of his professional life in London, the composer was chiefly a man of the theater. Between 1711 and 1741 he composed nearly forty operas, founded and managed his own opera company (handling hall rental, publicity, and ticket sales), hired Italian singers, and held rehearsals in his own home. By the late 1730s, however, Handel's fortunes were on the wane. Opera was losing its appeal in England, singers were demanding higher fees, and audiences were expecting more expensive stage effects.

By 1741, Handel was deeply in debt, and gave, on April 8th, what he may have considered his farewell concert. His subsequent focus on oratorios, for which he is best known today, thus came in response to these economic realities: his personal debts and his fickle audiences. Unlike his earlier operas, oratorios could employ local rather than imported singers and were performed without costumes or staging; thus, they could be produced at a fraction of the cost. *Messiah*, composed during the following summer, was the first oratorio that Handel composed after that “farewell” concert.

For over two centuries, in England and America, performances of the work have been associated with the Christmas season. In 1791, the Caecilian Society of London began annual Christmas performances, and on Christmas 1818, the Handel and Haydn Society of Boston gave the work's first complete performance in America, establishing a tradition that continues to this day.

Yet the piece itself is not a Christmas piece. Rather, it is a meditation on Christ's entire life – birth, death, and resurrection. Handel's librettist, Charles Jennens, assembled the *Messiah's* collection of Scriptural texts in response to the skepticism of the contemporary Enlightenment. Unlike thinkers such as Thomas Jefferson – who famously cut out of his Bible all miracles, accounts of the resurrection, or claims of Jesus' divinity – Jennens, a conservative Anglican, firmly believed in Jesus as divine fulfillment of the prophesied Savior. His libretto reflects that belief.

Only the first of the work's three parts focuses on Christ's birth: the “Christmas” portion which the LMC performs today; the second and third focus on His death and resurrection. Jennens himself conceived of the work as most suitable for Holy Week (the annual memorial of Jesus' death in the days leading up to Easter). “I hope I shall persuade [Handel]”, Jennens wrote to a friend in July of 1741, “to set another Scripture Collection I have made for him, and perform it for his own benefit in Passion Week. I hope he will lay out his whole genius and skill upon it . . . as the Subject excels every other subject. The subject is Messiah.” The oratorio would have been particularly suitable for the penitential season of Lent, when the performances of opera (being, for the most part, more secular works) were banned.

With the libretto in hand, Handel began composition on August 22nd and finished the entire work in 24 days. Nineteenth-century biographers made much of this rapidity, seeing in it a sign of divine inspiration. They recorded stories of how Handel would leave his meals untouched, and of how a servant found him in tears while composing the Hallelujah Chorus. In truth, such rapidity, while impressive, was not unparalleled. Handel already had spent thirty years churning out compositions amid the exigencies of a busy professional life, and would go on, shortly after composing *Messiah*, to write the enormous oratorio *Samson* in only six weeks.

Nevertheless, such speed is still impressive, particularly given the work's relatively modest amount of recycled music, its unusual libretto (structured more as a series of theological meditations than a conventional “story”), and the brilliance of the final product. Nor can one doubt Handel's religious sincerity: after its first London performance, when complimented on the production, he replied “I should be sorry if I only entertained them; I wished to make them better.”

Messiah received its premier not in London, but in Dublin. Ever a generous man, giving to the poor even when his own finances were strained, Handel first presented the work on April 13, 1742, as part of a concert series produced to support charities in that city. A few days later, the *Dublin Journal*, in the first-ever review of *Messiah*, reported: “The Sublime, the Grand, and the Tender, adapted to the most elevated, majestick and moving Words, conspired to transport and charm the ravished Heart and Ear.”

The work's reception in London, however, proved more uncertain. Handel delayed the London premier until March 23rd of the following year (during Lent). Even before its performance, some already were questioning whether such a sacred subject was appropriate for a secular venue. A letter to the editor, printed in the *Universal Spectator*, opines: “An Oratorio either is an Act of Religion or it is not; if it is, I ask if the Playhouse is a fit Temple to perform it in, or a Company of Players fit Ministers of God's Word.” One contemporary reports that its first performance, at Covent Garden, “was but indifferently relish'd.” Perhaps because of such concerns, the piece was reprised only a few times during the rest of that decade.

Messiah's fortunes changed, however, in 1750. The previous year, Handel had begun an association with the Foundling Hospital, offering to arrange concerts to benefit that charity. On May 1st, Handel performed the *Messiah* to a sell-out crowd: 1387 tickets sold for a chapel that could seat only about a thousand. A repeat performance was required, and, from then on, Handel mounted an annual presentation of the work in support of the hospital. With this charitable association came a huge upswing in the oratorio's popularity.

The most popular movement of this most popular of oratorios is, of course, the *Hallelujah Chorus*, with which today's selections conclude. Legend holds that the king of England, George II, was present at the work's 1743 performance and was so moved by the chorus that, mimicked by the rest of the audience, he rose to his feet. (And stood, by the by, not at the opening of the piece – when most modern audiences rise – but a good half-minute later, when the trumpets first enter with a reprise of the initial “Hallelujah” theme.) Yet, if this be the case, the historical record is curiously silent about his attendance. Indeed, the first known mention of the story comes 37 years later, recounted second-hand in a letter by the Scottish poet James Beattie: “The King (who happened to be present), started up, and remained standing . . . and hence it became the fashion.” Moreover, contemporary accounts describe audiences standing at other portions of both *Messiah* and, indeed, for favored passages in other oratorios as well. So they might well have risen for that chorus, even without royal provocation.

Whatever the origin of the tradition, however, its continuation to the present day certainly shows history's approbation of both the oratorio and its composer. So, if you join today in rising at this final chorus, do so, perhaps, not just to observe that tradition of two centuries' standing, but also in respect for the life, the piety, the genius, and the charity of its composer.

Program notes: Laurence Pittenger

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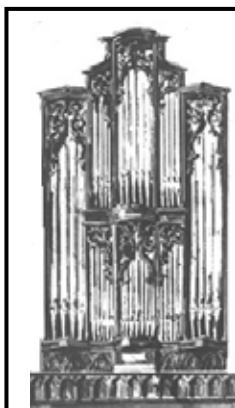
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