



Presents

HANDEL
MESSIAH

ESTERHAZY CHAMBER CHOIR

Richard Dawson *conductor*

LA FOLIA

Alison Bury *leader*

Alexandra Kidgell *soprano*

Rebecca Leggett *alto*

Ruairi Bowen *tenor*

Malachy Frame *bass*

Programme

Messiah – Handel

Part I

1. Sinfonia Overture
2. Recit Comfort ye my people
3. Air Ev'ry valley shall be exalted
4. Chorus And the glory of the Lord
5. Recit. Thus saith the Lord
6. Air But who may abide the day of his coming?
7. Chorus And he shall purify
8. Recit. Behold, a virgin shall conceive
9. Air & Chorus O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion
10. Recit. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth
11. Air The people that walked in darkness
12. Chorus For unto us a child is born
13. Pifa 'Pastoral Symphony'
14. a) Recit. There were shepherds abiding in the field
b) Recit. And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them
15. Recit. And the angel said unto them
16. Recit. And suddenly there was with the angel
17. Chorus Glory to God
18. Air Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion
19. Recit. Then shall the eyes of the blind
20. Air He shall feed his flock
21. Chorus His yoke is easy, and his burthen is light

INTERVAL

Part II

22. Chorus Behold the Lamb of God
23. Air He was despised
24. Chorus Surely he hath borne our griefs
25. Chorus And with his stripes we are healed
26. Chorus All we like sheep have gone astray
27. Recit. All they that see him laugh him to scorn
28. Chorus He trusted in God
29. Recit. Thy rebuke hath broken his heart
30. Air Behold, and see if there be any sorrow
31. Recit. He was cut off out of the land of the living
32. Air But thou didst not leave his soul in hell
36. Air Thou art gone up on high
37. Chorus The Lord gave the word
38. Air How beautiful are the feet
40. Air Why do the nations so furiously rage together?
41. Chorus Let us break their bonds asunder
42. Recit. He that dwelleth in heaven
43. Air Thou shalt break them
44. Chorus Hallelujah

Part III

45. Air I know that my redeemer liveth
46. Chorus Since by man came death
47. Recit. Behold, I tell you a mystery
48. Air The trumpet shall sound
53. Chorus Worthy is the lamb that was slain

Programme Notes

Messiah: a Dramatic Oratorio.

“Messiah...I value highly, & he has made a fine Entertainment of it, tho’ not near so good as he might and ought to have done.”

So said *Messiah’s* librettist, the Revd. Dr. Charles Jennens. The Dublin Journal was at the premiere in 1742, given in aid of the Society for Relieving Prisoners, the Charitable Infirmary, and the Mercer’s Hospital. It reported that *Messiah* was

“the most finished piece of Musick...the most Sublime, the Grand and the Tender...”

This is more like it. Whatever Jennens argued, *Messiah* really is one of Handel’s finest works. The libretto was something of a departure from his usual theatrical script. Instead of an Old Testament drama, Jennens based this oratorio on passages from the Bible to describe the life – and afterlife – of Christ. The Dublin Journal described the libretto as “most elevated, majestic and moving”: for Jennens himself, it was a theological statement against what he saw as an attack on his faith. If the words themselves are more abstract than dramatic, Handel nonetheless constructed a work of great dramatic shape and depth, and there is a reason that it is still one of the most performed oratorios of all.

Messiah’s words are a series of typological excerpts from the Bible: passages from the Old Testament which prophesy, and are fulfilled by, events in the New. He whom the prophet Malachi describes as “like a refiner’s fire” is, of course, Christ. Jesus’ betrayal and death is told in words from the Psalms, Jeremiah and Isaiah. This sort of typology was rejected by a particularly Enlightenment branch of Christianity called Deism. Deism sought to demystify Christianity; Jennens, on the other hand, was a high Anglican for whom mystery was an important component of faith. (A similar conflict can be seen in Trollope’s *Barchester Towers* from the following century.) We might think of *Messiah* as a moving and majestic drama, but *Messiah* is also a beautifully crafted theological thesis.

Messiah is split into three parts, themselves sub-divided. Part I comprises a) a general prophecy of Christ’s coming, b) the Annunciation, and c) the Nativity. Part II starts with Christ’s Passion, and moves on to His Resurrection and Ascension. Part III concerns death, resurrection and the Last Judgement. (Since everything comes in threes, it’s probably worth noting the symbolism of the Trinity – three-in-one. Coincidentally, Handel composed *Messiah* in three weeks!)

The libretto for *Messiah* may be rather intellectual and plotless, but the work is never static; instead, it takes us on a journey through emotions and events in a similar manner to his more ‘plot-ful’ works. The musicologist Stanley Sadie described *Messiah* as “the work of a theatrical composer with a keen sense of dramatic atmosphere.” Below, we will look at how Handel created that dramatic atmosphere from the libretto, and how he keeps our attention so well throughout. Of course, these programme notes are not an exhaustive account; they are a starting point for further exploration into Handel’s subtleties – the more you listen, the more you notice!

Handel was a man who lived drama. By 1742, when he composed *Messiah*, he had written over 50 stage works (although his oratorios were, strictly speaking, not stage works, as they were performed in Lent, when the stage was supposed not to be used). Consequently, he had a great number of dramatic tricks up his sleeve – including the very basics of composition, like the choice of key. Several of the keys he uses have an immediate effect on us. Who amongst us doesn’t feel like leaping up and dancing to the dainty-but-jaunty A major of ‘And the glory of the Lord’? The tale of King George standing up at the Hallelujah chorus is well known, and, since D major has a rather exciting effect –

especially with a few trumpets and drums – who can blame him? But there is more to Handel's use of keys than first meets the ear. We might nowadays find some of his keys rather surprising. Why, for example, should he choose to write the sorrowful 'He was despised' in a warm and gorgeous E flat major? Such questions bothered some people at the time, too. William Hayes, then Professor of Music at Oxford, remarked that G minor was an inappropriate key for 'Thou art gone up on high', as it was "very ill calculated to convey such triumphant words". But Hayes was wrong.

A contemporary theory called *Affektenlehre*, expounded by several Baroque composers, ascribed various emotional values to the various keys. E minor symbolised hope through sorrow – the underlying theme of *Messiah* – and Handel chose this key to begin the oratorio; he also used it for 'Behold and see'. This aria finishes the section on Christ's passion: its key reminds us of the hope that is to come and that His death was only the beginning. The D major of the Hallelujah chorus signifies triumph: Handel also uses it in 'The trumpet shall sound', the final chorus, and 'Behold, a virgin shall conceive'. Picking up Hayes' comment, we might take a revised look at G minor. Handel's friend Johann Mattheson, who wrote a couple of treatises on *Affektenlehre* (which Handel himself praised), called this "almost the most beautiful key", combining D minor's gravity with "spirited loveliness", and "an uncommon grace...tender as well as refreshing". It seems that Handel agreed – he used it for those arias or choruses needing a sweet solemnity, such as 'How beautiful are the feet', or 'Behold the Lamb of God' (and, of course, 'Thou art gone up on high'). The beautiful aria 'He was despised' fits a description of E flat major as "serious and sad". (Susanna Cibber's rendition of this aria provoked an audience member to say 'Woman, for this, be all thy sins forgiven!'). Without going too far into all this, we can see that Handel carefully chose his keys according to the *Affekten*, or moods, of arias or choruses. Sometimes he adds an extra layer, so that 'I know that my redeemer liveth' reflects 'Comfort ye' by being in the same key, E major.

So much for keys. Now for pace. As any cricketer will agree, pace must be varied. Throughout *Messiah*, fast juxtaposes slow, sorrow is next to joy, and so on. We can see this even within arias. The beautiful largo A section in 'He was despised' is contrasted shockingly with the smiting B section; in 'But who may abide', we have slow-fast-slow-fast. To move the drama on in the sequence 'Behold and see', Handel re-moulds the standard ABA *da capo* form in a very interesting way: the aria goes straight into recitative, and then another aria. On a larger scale, the pace of an oratorio is largely governed by the use in turn of chorus and arias. Let's take an exciting bit in the Passion section. After 'He was despised', the chorus has three pieces in succession ('Surely'/'And with his stripes'/'All we like sheep'). Then the tenor interrupts with news that 'they laugh him to scorn'; whereupon the chorus becomes the vicious, mocking crowd in 'He trusted in God'. There's another good illustration of pace before that. The angels appearing to the shepherds is a rare dramatic moment, and Handel revels in it. He alternates ordinary recitative with that accompanied by strings acting as angels' wings. He changes keys rapidly and effectively, so when the angels appear, we are suddenly pitched into D. Finally, the angels erupt into a chorus, which ends rather unexpectedly, as they flutteringly zoom off.

Pacing is aided by certain motifs, like the angelic strings. The violins suggest the break in 'Thou shalt break them' by enormous leaps. They are the scourge in the B section of 'He was despised', a motif Bach uses in his Passions. In 'Ev'ry valley', the notes go up on 'exalted', and down on 'low'. And we can hear perfectly well that the bass soloist 'will shake all nations'! Speaking of the bass, the recitative 'For behold, darkness shall cover' is particularly inspired. Here, the voice emerges slowly out of a fog of strings to declare the glory of God (which takes the music from B minor into triumphant D major). The scoring of 'Behold and see' is simple but so effective: the trudging bass really does suggest the weight of sorrow. A couple more bits of word-play before we finish. In 'Glory to God', the high voices represent heaven; things suddenly get low when the men proclaim peace on earth. The men come into their own again in 'And the glory', when they boom 'for the mouth of the Lord'; a similar effect is wrought in 'The Lord gave the word'. All these motifs contribute to the pace and drama of the whole, and ensure we are captivated from first to last.

Handel's music is brimming with delights – of which these are only a few. Not only did he write great tunes, but he composed music which increases in interest the closer one grows with it. May many more morsels manifest themselves tonight!

Programme notes © Katie Hawks 2021

Biographies

Alexandra Kidgell (soprano) read music at Cambridge and completed post-graduate studies at the Royal Academy of Music, from which she graduated with distinction, and was awarded the DipRAM for an outstanding final recital. She was a finalist in the LBS Bach Singers' Prize, and in the Royal Overseas League Music Competition.

Alexandra has appeared as a concert and oratorio soloist throughout the UK and Europe, and enjoys performing a wide variety of repertoire. Recent and forthcoming appearances include Vivaldi *Gloria* with the choir of King's College, Cambridge and The Academy of Ancient Music; *St John Passion* in Norwich Cathedral and for Leicester Philharmonic Choir; *Messiah* in the Royal Concert Hall, Nottingham; Handel *Dixit Dominus* and Vivaldi *Gloria* in Bridgewater Hall, Manchester; Mozart *Requiem* in Worcester Cathedral; Vaughan Williams *Serenade to Music* in Glyndebourne opera house; Bach *Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen* in Christchurch Priory; and *Creation* in Chelmsford Cathedral.

Alexandra is a member of The Sixteen, with whom she has appeared in concert across the globe. She lives in rural Sussex with her husband and two boys. alexandrakidgell.com

Rebecca Leggett (alto) is a recent masters graduate of the Royal College of Music where she was an Ian Evans Lombe Scholar and studies with Alison Wells. Prior to this, Rebecca completed her undergraduate degree at Trinity Laban Conservatoire graduating with First Class Honours, and the TCM Trust Silver Medal for Voice.

Rebecca was the recipient of the Coro Nuovo Young Musician of the Year 2018 and winner of the 2020 RCM Brooks-van der Pump English Song Competition. At Trinity Laban she was awarded the Wilfred Greenhouse Allt Prize for Oratorio & Cantata and first prize in the Elisabeth Schumann Lieder Competition. In 2019, she received the Audience Prize at the 2019 Maureen Lehane Vocal Awards at Wigmore Hall.

Rebecca made her operatic debut in the role of Flora (*Turn of the Screw*, Britten) for the Florence opera house (Opera di Firenze) in Italy, and understudied the role on the Glyndebourne Tour. Her most recent role was playing Cupid in John Blow's *Venus and Adonis* with Blackheath Halls Opera.

Rebecca is a keen concert soloist, regularly performing Bach's oratorios and other major early music works. Concert highlights include Bach's *Magnificat* at Cadogan Hall (Royal Philharmonic Orchestra), Copland's *In the Beginning* (St. Martin-in-the-Fields), Elgar's *Sea Pictures* (Trowbridge Symphony Orchestra) and Handel's *Israel in Egypt* (St. Johns Smith Square). In the 2019 festival season, Rebecca joined The Grange Festival Chorus for a rare staging of Handel's *Belshazzar* in collaboration with The Sixteen. Rebecca has taken part in concerts for Nevill Holt Opera and gave a solo recital for the London Song Festival in 2020. rebeccaleggett.com

Ruairi Bowen (tenor) was a finalist in the International Handel Singing Competition in 2020, and is in demand as an interpreter of Baroque repertoire in the UK and abroad, collaborating with some of the leading conductors in the field including Stephen Layton, Emmanuelle Haïm and Sir John Eliot

Gardiner. Equally at home with larger-scale symphonic works, he sang in the world premiere and recording of Stanford's *Mass Via Victrix* with the BBC National Orchestra & Chorus of Wales and Adrian Partington, while other engagements have included Mendelssohn's *Elijah* in Worcester Cathedral, Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* with Ben Palmer/Covent Garden Sinfonia and Vaughan Williams' *A Cotswold Romance* with the Lebanese Philharmonic Orchestra. He will sing Verdi's *Messa da Requiem* for the first time next year.

A choral scholar at King's College, Cambridge under the late Sir Stephen Cleobury, Ruairi was invited to sing on *Proud Songsters*, an album of English Solo Song recorded with pianist Simon Lepper, featuring distinguished former members of the choir.

During the live music hiatus in 2020/21, Ruairi was a Support Worker for the Children's Section of the British Refugee Council, and formed part of The Hampstead Collective, an ensemble dedicated to performing Handel Oratorio and Bach's sacred works. Where time allows, he returns to Herefordshire to play cricket for Brockhampton CC, and continues his studies with Nicky Spence & Caroline Dowdle.
ruairibowen.com

Malachy Frame (bass) was born in Belfast and was Northern Ireland Opera's 'Voice of 2016', having won the competition at the company's annual *Festival of Voice* in August. Since then, operatic roles have included Figaro in Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Slook in Rossini's *La Cambiale di Matrimonio*, Leporello and Masetto in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, Guglielmo in Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, Count Ceprano in Verdi's *Rigoletto*, Labarta in the UK premiere of Juan Durán's *O Arame* for XOGA, and Aeneas in Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*. Malachy was a Garsington Opera Alvarez Young Artist in 2018. He was a finalist in the Oxford Lieder Young Artist Platform 2018, a finalist in the Maureen Lehane Vocal Awards 2016 at the Wigmore Hall, and won the Song Prize at the inaugural Charles Wood Singing Competition in 2019.

As a concert soloist, recent performances have included Britten's *War Requiem*, Orff's *Carmina burana*, Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*, *Magnificat*, *St John Passion*, and *St Matthew Passion*, Brahms' *Ein Deutsches Requiem*, Handel's *Messiah* and *Alexander's Feast*, Vaughan-Williams' *Five Mystical Songs*. Malachy has performed throughout the country with ensembles such as the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the Allegri String Quartet, and the Dunedin Consort.

Malachy completed a Masters at the Royal Academy of Music in London, studying with Mark Wildman and Iain Ledingham and graduating with Distinction and a DipRAM for an outstanding final recital. Prior to this he graduated from the University of Cambridge, where he read music and was a choral scholar at Gonville and Caius College.
malachyframe.com

Richard Dawson (conductor) is a Choral Conductor, Organist and Teacher based in the North East of the United Kingdom. He is currently the Director of Music at Barnard Castle School where he conducts the Chapel Choir, Chamber Choir and Choral Society.

Whilst at Oxford University, Richard founded and directed the Henry Ley Singers, a chamber choir comprised of 8-16 young singers. Under Richard, the choir performed several concerts in Keble College Chapel, including a concert for the Britten in Oxford festival in 2013. They also sang for services in Ely Cathedral, and recorded their first CD, 'The Leaves of Life', which featured music by Benjamin Britten and Clive Russell. Whilst at Oxford, Richard was also Conductor and Manager of the Oxford University Student Chorus (the largest student choir in Oxford), and regularly conducted the Chapel Choir at Keble College for their three weekly services.

During his time in Brighton, Richard was the Musical Director of the Esterházy Chamber Choir and

Director of Music and Organist at St Paul's Church, Brighton, where he conducted the choir for the weekly Sunday Mass. Recent conducting highlights include Bach's *St John Passion* and Haydn's *The Creation* with the London Mozart Players.

Richard has studied conducting with Paul Spicer, Edward Higginbottom and Ralph Allwood. He is also in demand as an organ recitalist, liturgical organist, piano accompanist, and tutor of organ, piano and music theory. richardjdawson.co.uk

La Folia is a music charity and production company that brings together instrumentalists, singers, actors, dancers, visual artists and writers to create new music, original projects and ground-breaking performances under the artistic directorship of Howard Moody. lafoliamusic.org

Violins	Alison Bury (<i>leader</i>), Julia Bishop, Alice Poppleton, Rebecca Bell, Domenika Fehér, Abigail Brown
Violas	Annette Isserlis, Hannah Gardiner
Cellos	Catherine Rimer (<i>continuo</i>), Pablo Gutiérrez
Double Bass	Jan Zahourek
Trumpets	Neil Brough, Paul Sharp
Timpani	Scott Byewater
Chamber Organ	Howard Moody (<i>continuo</i>)

Future La Folia concert:

Stone Songs by Howard Moody

Opening concert in the Salisbury International Arts Festival 2022

Saturday 27th May 2022 7pm and 9pm
Salisbury Cathedral

The world première of **Stone Songs** composed by **Howard Moody** and featuring the Festival Chorus and **La Folia** musicians, in a performance inspired by the Medieval chants that have resonated from the Cathedral's stones since the 13th century.

Tickets on sale from 15 March 2022 at: wiltshirecreative.co.uk/whats-on/festival/siaf2022

Esterházy Chamber Choir was founded in 1993 and is based in Lewes, East Sussex. Comprising around thirty experienced singers from a variety of backgrounds, the choir aims to perform a broad and exciting repertoire to the highest standard. Recent concerts have included Haydn's *Die Schöpfung (The Creation)* with the London Mozart Players, Rachmaninov's *All Night Vigil (Vespers)*, Bach's *St John Passion*, Handel's *Dixit Dominus*, Duruflé's *Requiem*, Poulenc's *Eight Chansons Françaises*, and Palestrina's *Missa Papae Marcelli*.

The choir is currently seeking a new Musical Director. Since September 2021, we have been in the capable hands of guest directors Tim Carpenter, Sebastian Charlesworth and Derek Froud, whom we would like to thank for taking such enjoyable rehearsals.

To receive choir updates and concert announcements, subscribe to our mailing list at esterhazychoir.org/contact

Soprano

Jan Berger
Jo Clarke
Cesca Eaton
Dandy Freeman
Annie Lorys
Karen Smith
Diana Uprichard
Kate Yarrow

Alto

Claire Champness
Denise Jones
Serena Kynaston
Grainne Sinclair
Sue Thomas
Naomi Warman

Tenor

Michael Bulman
John Carroll
Maurice Shorten
John Torry

Bass

John Astbury
Chris Dixon
George Fitzsimons
Derek Froud
John Gillies
Andrew Leach
Matthew Spencer
Will Walshe-Grey

Future Esterházy Chamber Choir concert:



Esterházy Chamber Choir

CAROLS BY CANDLELIGHT

St Anne's Church, High Street, Lewes

Saturday 18 December, 6pm

Free Admission

The perfect antidote to the Christmas rush

Come and join us for some festive carols, mince pies and a raffle.