George Frideric Handel

MESSIAH

Mack Wilberg, conductor
Thursday and Friday, March 22–23, 2018
Salt Lake Tabernacle

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

MORMON TABERNACLE CHOIR
ORCHESTRA AT TEMPLE SQUARE
### 2018 Mormon Tabernacle Choir Organization

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Join the conversation now with #MessiahLive and in the future with #MoTab.
Two Amazing “Hallelujah” Videos

A video tribute to Jesus Christ, the Messiah of the world, produced by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, can be viewed at followhim.mormon.org or motab.org/messiah. This video was shot on location in Israel and other venues around the world. It is a fitting companion to Handel’s brilliant score, capturing the essence of the ministry of the Savior for us today.

A second video produced by the Church in cooperation with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir features the Choir and Orchestra at Temple Square in a large virtual choir. Singers from all over the world submitted videos with their vocal part of Handel’s “Hallelujah” chorus. These were then electronically added to a performance of the Choir and Orchestra to make an amazing virtual choir. See this video at followhim.mormon.org or motab.org/messiah.

NEW CD FEATURING MACK WILBERG SACRED MUSIC COMING MAY 2018

Tree of Life: Sacred Music of Mack Wilberg is the next recording by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir and Orchestra at Temple Square. The album features premiere recordings of two larger-scale choral works with New Testament themes. The Prodigal retells the parable of the prodigal son found in Luke, and A Cloud of Witnesses weaves multiple witnessing stories of Christ’s Resurrection into a tapestry drawing on accounts from all four Gospel writers. In addition, the recording’s repertoire includes six Wilberg compositions and three hymn arrangements—all previously unrecorded. The recordings in both physical and digital formats will be available for purchase worldwide through a variety of outlets, including iTunes, Amazon.com, store.lds.org, Deseret Book, and other retailers. Please visit motab.org/treeoflife for complete information. The release date is Friday, May 4, 2018.

Easter Concert

George Frideric Handel

MESSIAH

Thursday and Friday, March 22–23, 2018
7:30 p.m.
Salt Lake Tabernacle
HALLELUJAH! MORE WAYS TO ENJOY MESSIAH!

A Landmark Recording of Handel’s Messiah

In 2016, the Mormon Tabernacle Choir and Orchestra at Temple Square released a new recording of Handel’s beloved oratorio in an edition by Mack Wilberg for large choir and orchestra that retains the baroque aesthetics and sound of Handel’s original masterpiece. Two versions are available: the complete oratorio with the full work on two CDs with a bonus DVD, and highlights, containing some of the best-loved choruses with featured selections by each of the soloists. A multinational assemblage of soloists appears on both versions—Sonya Yoncheva (Bulgaria), Tamara Mumford (United States), Rolando Villazón (Mexico), and Bryn Terfel (Wales)—which hearkens back to Handel’s practice of employing soloists from continental Europe for performances of the work in his own day. For further details please go to motab.org/messiah.

Live Stream of the Messiah Concert

This performance will be available online for on-demand viewing at motab.org/messiah through Monday, April 9, 2018, at midnight mountain daylight time. You can relive those dramatic and soul-stirring moments at home with your family. Or send the link to your friends through social media using #MessiahLive with the announcement “I was there!”

Worldwide Messiah Sing Events

Many churches and other organizations around the world are using either the live stream or the on-demand video to host a Messiah Sing in their locality. We pass along our best wishes to all of you and thank you for joining us in this special way. We invite you to share pictures of your event and your thoughts using #MessiahLive. After your event, please go to motab.org/messiah to download your Messiah Sing participation certificate.
PROGRAM

George Frideric Handel

MESSIAH

Mack Wilberg

conductor

Richard Elliott, Clay Christiansen, Andrew Unsworth

organists

PART I

1. Sinfonia Overture

2. Recitative Comfort Ye My People ................................ Tenor

3. Aria Ev’ry Valley Shall Be Exalted........................... Tenor

4. Chorus And the Glory of the Lord

5. Recitative Thus Saith the Lord ................................... Bass

6. Aria But Who May Abide the Day of His Coming? ........ Mezzo-Soprano

7. Chorus And He Shall Purify

8. Recitative Behold, a Virgin Shall Conceive ....................... Mezzo-Soprano

9.  Aria and  O Thou That Tellest Good Tidings to Zion ............ Mezzo-Soprano

10. Recitative For Behold, Darkness Shall Cover the Earth ......... Bass

11. Aria The People That Walked in Darkness ................. Bass

12. Chorus For unto Us a Child Is Born

13. Pifa Pastoral Symphony

14a. Recitative There Were Shepherds Abiding in the Field ............ Soprano

14b. Recitative And Lo, the Angel of the Lord Came upon Them .... Soprano

15. Recitative And the Angel Said unto Them ....................... Soprano

16. Recitative And Suddenly There Was with the Angel............. Soprano

17. Chorus Glory to God

18. Aria Rejoice Greatly, O Daughter of Zion!.................... Soprano

19. Recitative Then Shall the Eyes of the Blind Be Opened ........ Mezzo-Soprano

20. Aria He Shall Feed His Flock Like a Shepherd ............... Mezzo-Soprano

and Soprano

21. Chorus His Yoke Is Easy, and His Burthen Is Light

TYLER NELSON, Tenor

Tyler Nelson is one of America’s most promising young tenors. His recent engagements include debuts with Utah Opera in L’enfant et les sortileges, Opera Naples as Alfred in Die Fledermaus, Opera Omaha as Trin in La fanciulla del West, Ireland’s Wide Open Opera as Almaviva in Il barbiere di Siviglia, and Le Festival Lyrique International de Belle-Île en Mer as Ferrando in Così fan tutte. He made his international debut in Mazatlan, Mexico, performing the role of Shallow in Gordon Getty’s Plump Jack, under the direction of the composer, and has won rave reviews for his comic roles with Chicago Opera Theater. The 2017–2018 season includes Don Ottavio in Don Giovanni with Opera on the James and Almaviva in Il barbiere di Siviglia with Opera Tampa. A frequent performer with Maestro Lorin Maazel’s Castleton Festival, he appeared in the role of Almaviva in Il barbiere di Siviglia at the festival and with the National Center for the Performing Arts in Beijing, China. Mr. Nelson has appeared as a soloist on the stages of the Kennedy Center and at Carnegie Hall. His concert performances include Handel’s Messiah with Augustana College, Beethoven’s Mass in C and Mozart’s Vesperae solennes de confessore with Le Festival Lyrique International de Belle-Île en Mer, Benjamin Britten’s Serenade with the Utah Valley Symphony, Beethoven’s Symphony no. 9 with the Saginaw Bay Symphony, Mozart’s Requiem with the Temple Square Chorale and Orchestra at Temple Square, and Carl Orff’s Carmina Burana with the California and Reno Symphonies.

TYLER SIMPSON, Bass-baritone

Bass-baritone Tyler Simpson appeared with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir as a guest soloist in the 2015 Christmas concerts and subsequent PBS special performing selections from Handel’s Messiah. That same year marked his sixth consecutive season at the Metropolitan Opera, where he has worked on 18 productions, having made his debut in Verdi’s Don Carlo in the 2010–2011 season. During his tenure, he has sung roles in Le Comte Ory, Tosca, The Enchanted Island, and Macheth and covered roles in Don Carlo, La traviata, Simon Boccanegra, Anna Bolena, Die Frau ohne Schatten, Lulu, and Billy Budd. Most recently, Mr. Simpson made his Pittsburgh Opera debut as Figaro in Le nozze di Figaro, returned to Atlanta Opera for La fille du Regiment opposite Stephanie Blythe, sang the role of Patsy McCall in Evan Mack’s Roscoe with the Albany Symphony, appeared with North Carolina Opera as Figaro in Le nozze di Figaro, and made his debut with the Teatro Massimo di Palermo. Career highlights include Basilio in Il barbiere di Siviglia with Fort Worth Opera, Don Alfonso in Così fan tutte with Le Festival Lyrique International de Belle-Île en Mer, Beethoven’s Mass in C, and Mozart’s Vesperae solennes de confessore. Previous engagements include performances with Lyric Opera of Kansas City, Dallas Opera, Florida Grand Opera, Detroit Symphony, Castleton Music Festival for L’heure espagnol and Roméo et Juliette, and a return to Le Festival Lyrique International de Belle-Île en Mer to sing Uberto in La serva padrona and Jesus in Bach’s Johannes-Passion.
PART II

22. Chorus Behold the Lamb of God
23. Aria He Was Despised ........................................ Mezzo-Soprano
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. Recitative All They That See Him, Laugh Him to Scorn .......... Tenor
28. Chorus He Trusted in God That He Would Deliver Him
29. Recitative Thy Rebuke Hath Broken His Heart ................ Tenor
30. Aria Behold, and See If There Be Any Sorrow ............. Tenor
31. Recitative He Was Cut Off out of the Land of the Living ...... Tenor
32. Aria But Thou Didst Not Leave His Soul in Hell .......... Tenor
33. Chorus Lift Up Your Heads, O Ye Gates
34. Recitative Unto Which of the Angels Said He at Any Time .. Tenor
35. Chorus Let All the Angels of God Worship Him
36. Aria Thou Art Gone Up on High ................................ Bass
37. Chorus The Lord Gave the Word
38. Aria How Beautiful Are the Feet ............................ Soprano
39. Chorus Their Sound Is Gone Out into All Lands
40. Aria Why Do the Nations So Furiously Rage Together? … Bass
41. Chorus Let Us Break Their Bonds Asunder
42. Recitative He That Dwelleth in Heaven .................... Tenor
43. Aria Thou Shalt Break Them .................................. Tenor
44. Chorus Hallelujah

PART III

45. Aria I Know That My Redeemer Liveth ..................... Soprano
46. Chorus Since by Man Came Death
47. Recitative Behold, I Tell You a Mystery ...................... Bass
48. Aria The Trumpet Shall Sound ............................... Bass
49. Recitative Then Shall Be Brought to Pass .................. Mezzo-Soprano
50. Duet O Death, Where Is Thy Sting? ................... Mezzo-Soprano and Tenor
51. Chorus But Thanks Be to God
52. Aria If God Be for Us, Who Can Be against Us? ........ Soprano
53. Chorus Worthy Is the Lamb That Was Slain

AMANDA WOODBURY, Soprano

Soprano Amanda Woodbury, making her debut appearance with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir in the 2014 performance of Messiah and the 2015 Christmas concerts featuring selections from the work. This season, she returns to the Metropolitan Opera for Die Zauberflöte, performs in concert with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, the National Symphony Orchestra, and the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic and appears in two special projects with Gustavo Dudamel; Carmina Burana with the Los Angeles Philharmonic; and the Fauré Requiem with the Alabama Symphony.

TAMARA MUMFORD, Mezzo-soprano

Mezzo-soprano Tamara Mumford appeared with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir in the 2014 performance of Messiah and the 2015 Christmas concerts featuring selections from the work. This season, she returns to the Metropolitan Opera for Die Zauberflöte, performs in concert with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, the National Symphony Orchestra, and the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic and appears in two special projects with Gustavo Dudamel; Carmina Burana with the Los Angeles Philharmonic; and the Fauré Requiem with the Alabama Symphony.
MACK WILBERG, Conductor

Mack Wilberg was appointed music director of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir on March 28, 2008, after serving as associate music director since May 1999. Dr. Wilberg is responsible for all musical and creative aspects of the Choir and Orchestra at Temple Square, as well as the Temple Square Chorale and Bells on Temple Square, in rehearsals, concerts, recordings, tours, and the weekly broadcast of Music and the Spoken Word.

Dr. Wilberg is a former professor of music at Brigham Young University and is active as a composer, arranger, guest conductor, and clinician throughout the United States and abroad. His compositions and arrangements are performed and recorded by choral organizations throughout the world, including the Choir of King’s College and St. John’s College, Cambridge, England, and the choruses of the Chicago, San Francisco, Cleveland, Dallas, and London Symphony Orchestras. His works have been performed by such artists as Renée Fleming, Bryn Terfel, Frederica von Stade, Deborah Voigt, Nathan Gunn, and the King’s Singers, along with narrators John Rhys-Davies, Tom Brokow, Walter Cronkite, Jane Seymour, Edward Herrmann, and Claire Bloom.

Mack Wilberg received his bachelor’s degree from Brigham Young University and his master’s and doctoral degrees from the University of Southern California.

LIBRETTO

PART I

1. (Overture)

2. 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. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill made low, the crooked straight, and the rough places plain.
   Isaiah 40:4

4. 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. 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 you delight in: behold, He shall come, saith the Lord of hosts.
   Malachi 3:1

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

8. 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. 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

10. Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.
    Isaiah 60:1
11. 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. 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)

14a. There were shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night.

Luke 2:8

14b. 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

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

Luke 2:13

17. Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth, good will towards men.

Luke 2:14

18. 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. 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

20. 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 labor, come unto Him ye that are heavy laden, and He will give you rest.

Isaiah 40:11

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. His yoke is easy, and His burthen is light.

Matthew 11:30

MORMON TABERNACLE CHOIR AND HANDEL’S MESSIAH

Messiah choruses have long formed part of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir’s core repertory, going back well into the 19th century when the practice of large-scale oratorio performances took root in the United States as well. And the Choir has frequently led the way in making Handel’s celebrated music available to a wider public. Its first recording in 1910 included the “Hallelujah” chorus in what is almost certainly the first record of a Messiah excerpt made outside of England and the first recorded by a large, established choir. (The handful of earlier English recordings used small, ad hoc groups of singers.) In June 1927, the Choir recorded “Worthy Is the Lamb” on its first “electrical” recording (that is, with microphones) a week before Sir Thomas Beecham conducted the first complete electrically-recorded Messiah in London. The Mormon Tabernacle Choir’s 1959 Messiah with Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra earned a gold record and in 2005 was inducted into the National Recording Registry of the Library of Congress. Later recordings of Messiah choruses conducted by Richard Condie in 1974 and the complete oratorio under the direction of Sir David Willcocks in 1995 continued this legacy, and the “Hallelujah” chorus has appeared on more than a dozen of the Choir’s albums over the last century.

Tonight’s concert performance of Messiah continues the Choir’s dedicated advocacy of the work. In his edition of this celebrated oratorio, Mack Wilberg has created a Messiah that combines historical research into baroque practices with the rich, established traditions of larger-scale performances. Using Handel’s original orchestration of strings, oboes, and trumpets as a foundation, Wilberg has retained only the woodwind and brass parts from Mozart’s and Prout’s editions that are consistent with Handel’s compositional and timbral choices. He has refined the rhythms, phrasing, and articulations of the vocal and orchestral parts to reflect 18th-century principles of clarity and definition, while still preserving the ability to deliver impressive resonance and dynamic variety in the grander sections. Messiah could not have been performed this way even 20 or 30 years ago, when tastes were different and traditions were in flux. In that regard, these performances by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir and Orchestra at Temple Square constitute a new chapter in Messiah’s long and storied history, a century after Prout’s edition and two centuries after Mozart’s.

It’s tempting to wonder how Handel himself may have crafted his score for Messiah, had he known it would be performed by a celebrated 360-voice choir, four renowned opera soloists, and a modern symphonic orchestra. We’ll never know, of course. But there’s no doubt he would have leaped at the opportunity.

—Program notes by Dr. Luke Howard
PART II

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

   John 1:29

23. 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 the hair: He hid not His face from shame and spitting.

   Isaiah 50:6

24. 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

25. And with His stripes we are healed.

   Isaiah 53:5

26. 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

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

   Psalm 22:7

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

   Psalm 22:8

29. Thy rebuke hast 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

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

   Lamentations 1:12

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

   Isaiah 53:8

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

   Psalm 16:10

33. 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

34. Unto which of the angels said He at any time, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee?

Hebrews 1:5

35. Let all the angels of God worship Him.

Hebrews 1:6

36. Thou art gone up on high, Thou hast led captivity captive, and received gifts for men; yea, even for Thine enemies, that the Lord God might dwell among them.

Psalm 68:18

37. The Lord gave the word; great was the company of the preachers.

Psalm 68:11

38. How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!

Isaiah 52:7; Romans 10:15

39. Their sound is gone out into all lands, and their words unto the ends of the world.

Romans 10:18; Psalm 19:4

40. 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

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

Psalm 2:3

42. He that dwelleth in Heaven shall laugh them to scorn; the Lord shall have them in derision.

Psalm 2:4

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

Psalm 2:9

44. 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 forever and ever.

Revelation 11:15

King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.

Revelation 19:16

orchestration of Messiah, adding classical woodwinds and brass to the ensemble, heavily editing the dynamics and articulations, and even changing some notes and rhythms. Mozart’s goal was not at all to “improve” on what Handel had originally produced; he once remarked that “Handel knows better than any of us what will make an effect.” Rather, he merely hoped to arrange Handel’s work into a form more appropriate to the tastes and expectations of a late-18th century Viennese audience.

Mozart’s “additional accompaniments” (as they came to be known) also enabled the bigger performances that were becoming standard practice in England in the 19th century. With winds and brass doubling the choral parts, hundreds of amateur choristers could better hear their notes in the orchestra, and the additional instruments contributed greater weight and timbral variety than could be achieved merely by adding more strings.

By the middle of the 19th century, Messiah performances occasionally reached gargantuan proportions. At the Handel Festivals in London’s Crystal Palace, beginning in 1857, the choir numbered around 4,000 singers, with an orchestra of nearly 500, entertaining audiences of over 20,000.

These extravagantly massed performances used a greatly expanded orchestration by the Handel Festival’s first conductor, Sir Michael Costa. But they weren’t necessarily intended as the “best” way to hear Handel’s masterpiece. Most musicians of the day understood perfectly well the disadvantages of trying to perform on such an exaggerated Romantic scale a work conceived in baroque style. But there were other considerations that, for a time, outweighed any impulse to re-create the exact proportions and sounds of Handel’s time. The Handel Festivals, for example, were intended mainly to honor the memory of “the great Saxon composer” and celebrate his Englishness, with performances of unprecedented—indeed, unsurpassable—magnificence. (As one critic noted at these Festivals, “Handel made England musical, and music made Handel English.”)

The smaller cathedral festivals, on the other hand, with performers numbering only in the hundreds, had dual goals: to improve all classes of society through exposure to great art, and to continue the revered tradition of performing Messiah as a charitable fundraiser for the poor and widowed. The more spectacular the performance, and the more people involved in it, the better the chances that those two goals would be met.

By the end of the 19th century, some music critics began to issue very public calls for a return to an authentically Handel-styled Messiah, indicating an imminent sea-change in tastes. An 1868 facsimile publication of one of Handel’s scores had revealed some stark differences between what Handel had originally written and
PART III

45. 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

46. Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.
   For now is Christ risen from the dead, the firstfruits of them that sleep.
   I Corinthians 15:20

47. 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

48. 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.
   I Corinthians 15:52–53

49. Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.
   I Corinthians 15:54

50. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?
    The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.
    I Corinthians 15:55–56

51. But thanks be to God, Who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.
    I Corinthians 15:57

52. If God be for us, who can be against us?
    Romans 8:31
    Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth.
    Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again.
    Who is at the right hand of God, Who makes intercession for us.
    Romans 8:33–34

53. 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 honor, and glory, and blessing.
    Blessing and honor, glory and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever.
    Amen.
    Revelation 5:12–14

leading Handel scholar of our day—has proposed that Messiah was perhaps never performed the way Handel originally intended it, at least not during the composer’s lifetime.

What might Handel have “originally intended” for the scale and instrumentation of Messiah if none of those early performances fully represented his vision? It’s a thorny question. But the subsequent 250-year history of Messiah proves that whatever Handel may have imagined, the work itself has held up remarkably well, even amid the sometimes extraordinary manipulations and multiplications of his original scoring.

In 1784, a performance of Messiah was staged in London’s Westminster Abbey for the 25th anniversary of Handel’s death. The choir on that occasion numbered nearly 300 singers, accompanied by an orchestra of corresponding size. We’ll never know if Handel would have approved of such epic proportions, but he was certainly not one to shy away from striking and dramatic musical effects in his own works when circumstances and budget allowed. His 1749 suite of Music for the Royal Fireworks, for example, employed an out-of-doors band of more than 50 wind instruments plus strings—potentially nearly 100 players. Handel’s opera and oratorio orchestras grew consistently in size as he added winds and brass and multiplied the number of string players beyond the minimum whenever he could. Even in the score of Messiah, among the intimate chamberistic passages there are places such as the “Hallelujah” chorus and “Worthy Is the Lamb” that call for as much grandeur and spectacle as possible, and sections (in “Glory to God” and “Lift Up Your Heads,” for example) where the composer seems to wish he had a double choir at his disposal. Perhaps the primary considerations that prevented Handel from planning Messiah for a grander-sized chorus and orchestra were simply the cost, the difficulty of assembling such ensembles at the time, and the lack of a hall big enough to accommodate them.

That would all soon change.

At the start of the 19th century, the conditions were ripe for even larger performances of Messiah. The advent of enthusiastic amateur choral societies in England, the Romantic focus on the “sublime,” and Messiah’s reputation by that time as a surefire audience favorite ensured that performances were frequently staged on an especially grand scale. And not only in London, where the newly built Exeter Hall could hold larger ensembles and crowds, but also at the cathedral choral festivals that took place in York, Worcester, Gloucester, Hereford, Birmingham, and other locations around the country.

For these ambitiously proportioned performances, Handel’s baroque scoring was simply inadequate, and numerous new editions tried to accommodate the developing fondness for amplitude. In 1789, Mozart created a notably richer
George Frideric Handel wrote *Messiah* in the late summer of 1741, when his future as a composer was in real jeopardy. The opera ventures he instituted, and which had thrived for nearly two decades, were waning in popularity and about to fail. To help pay the bills Handel turned to oratorio, a genre musically related to opera but without staging and costumes. Even with *Messiah*, though, Handel was still finding his footing in oratorio. He had penned only a handful of works in the genre, some of which (especially *Israel in Egypt*, from 1739) were initially failures. And *Messiah* was itself a risky project. Though the English audiences had for several decades embraced Handel as their favorite composer, that admiration was no guarantee of this work’s success.

Principally at issue was the oratorio’s theme. A number of critics and clergy considered it blasphemous for a “theatrical entertainment” to be based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Even more controversially, the lyrics for *Messiah* were drawn directly from scripture, in a collation by Charles Jennens, an aristocrat and musician/poet of modest talent who had worked with Handel on a couple of earlier oratorios. And having operatic singers and actors declaim scripture in a theater was, according to some, akin to sacrilege. (Handel couldn’t win—when *Messiah* was later scheduled to be performed in Westminster Abbey, other members of the clergy declared it blasphemous for a public entertainment to take place in a consecrated church!)

But Jennens outdid himself with *Messiah*, compiling a libretto with profound thematic coherence and an enhanced sensitivity to dramatic and musical structure. He sent the libretto to Handel in July 1741, and Handel began setting it to music the following month. Unusually for Handel, he started at the beginning of the texts and worked consecutively through them, tracing and accentuating through music the powerful dramatic arc that Jennens had created. In some places, Handel borrowed and modified music he had written for other occasions, adapting it to *Messiah*’s texts and framework.

Handel completed the entire score in only 24 days. Enthusiastic Romanticists of later eras would attribute this swiftness to divine inspiration, though Handel composed other works of comparable size, more secular in nature, just as swiftly. He was by nature a facile composer. The miracle of *Messiah*’s composition, then, is not how rapidly Handel wrote the music, but how comprehensively astute, finely-detailed, and consistently powerful it is.

The first performance of *Messiah* took place in Dublin on April 13, 1742, and though it was a stunning success, the work met with a lackluster reception in London the following season. Handel canceled half of the six scheduled performances and withdrew *Messiah* from the 1744 schedule. After a brief revival in 1745, *Messiah* wasn’t heard again in London until 1749 at a performance in Covent Garden.

But it was a midday fundraising concert in the still-unfinished chapel of London’s Foundling Hospital later that year that helped turn around *Messiah*’s fortunes. On that occasion, Handel ended the concert with the “Foundling Hospital Anthem,” an assemblage of newly-composed music with excerpts from some of his older pieces, including the entire “Hallelujah” chorus from *Messiah*, which was still relatively unknown among London audiences. The concert was so popular he was invited back the following year to conduct another benefit concert, and on that occasion Handel decided to perform the complete oratorio.

This charitable performance of *Messiah* in its entirety at the Foundling Hospital in 1750 was an unprecedented success, and a second performance was quickly arranged two weeks later. Easter-time performances of *Messiah* continued each year at the Foundling Hospital, and Handel conducted or attended every one of them until his death in 1759. In gratitude, he bequeathed to the hospital a conducting score and complete set of performance parts for *Messiah*.

Handel had originally composed this work with the intent of propping up his own flagging fortunes. But he discovered with the Foundling Hospital performances that *Messiah* attained its highest potential when employed for the benefit of those with needs greater than his own: the widowed, the sick, the orphaned, and the poor. The risk he took in writing a “theatrical entertainment” on the subject of Jesus Christ was recompensed many times over during the following centuries, when Handel’s masterpiece was universally hailed as “the sacred oratorio,” “a work consecrated by genius and dedicated by custom to the holy cause of charity.” *Messiah* had ultimately become, then, the means for enacting in practice the very principles of faith, hope, and love expressed in its sacred lyrics and inspiring music.

**A QUESTION OF SCALE**

As Handel was composing *Messiah*, he had no idea how many performers would be available to him. For the Dublin premiere, there were 30 or so cathedral-trained singers in the choir, accompanied by an equal-sized orchestra of strings, winds, trumpets, and timpani. But for that Dublin concert and all subsequent performances under his direction, Handel continued to make revisions to the score, customizing it to suit the available musicians while juggling the production costs and compensation for each singer and instrumentalist. Donald Burrows—the