

Handel's *Messiah*



December 22nd 2016
St James's Church, Piccadilly



Helen Semple soprano
Carris Jones mezzo soprano
John Upperton tenor
Jon Stainsby bass

Peter Fender conductor

Six Centuries Chamber
Choir

Linden Baroque Orchestra

Theresa Caudle leader

George Frideric Handel (1685 – 1759), the great composer of Italian opera in London from his arrival in 1712, found by the 1730s that changing public taste and the crippling cost of mounting extravagant stage productions required a new approach. So he turned his creative genius to writing oratorios in English, telling dramatic biblical stories. *Messiah* was the sixth in the canon and though not the largest or most lavishly scored, has become one of the most popular of all works, never leaving the repertoire and being performed regularly, in all sizes and flavours, across the world. *Welcome to our performance tonight and festive greetings!*

Part I

Scene 1: Isaiah's prophecy of salvation

1. Sinfony (instrumental)
2. Comfort ye my people (tenor)
3. Ev'ry valley shall be exalted (air for tenor)
4. And the glory of the Lord (anthem chorus)

Scene 2: The coming judgment

5. Thus saith the Lord of hosts (accompanied recitative for bass)
- 6a. But who may abide the day of His coming (bass)
7. And he shall purify the sons of Levi (chorus)

Scene 3: The prophecy of Christ's birth

- Behold, a virgin shall conceive (alto)
8. O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion (air for alto and chorus)
 9. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth (bass)
 10. The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light (bass)
 11. For unto us a child is born (duet chorus)

Scene 4: The annunciation to the shepherds

12. *Pifa* ("pastoral symphony": instrumental)
There were shepherds abiding in the fields (secco recitative for soprano)
13. And lo, the angel of the Lord (accompanied recitative for soprano)
And the angel said unto them (secco recitative for soprano)
14. And suddenly there was with the angel (accompanied recitative for soprano)
15. Glory to God in the highest (chorus)

Scene 5: Christ's healing and redemption

15. Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion (soprano)
16. Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened (recitative)
- 17a. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd (alto)
18. His yoke is easy (duet chorus)

I n t e r v a l

Part II

Scene 1: Christ's Passion

19. Behold the Lamb of God (chorus)
20. He was despised and rejected of men (alto)
21. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows (chorus)
22. And with his stripes we are healed (fugue chorus)
23. All we like sheep have gone astray (duet chorus)

24. All they that see him laugh him to scorn (secco recitative for tenor)
25. He trusted in God that he would deliver him (fugue chorus)
26. Thy rebuke hath broken his heart (tenor or soprano)
27. Behold and see if there be any sorrow (tenor or soprano)

Scene 2: Christ's Death and Resurrection

28. He was cut off (tenor or soprano)
29. But thou didst not leave his soul in hell (tenor or soprano)

Scene 4: Christ's reception in Heaven

- Unto which of the angels (tenor)
31. Let all the angels of God worship Him (chorus)

Scene 5: The beginnings of Gospel preaching

- 34a. How beautiful are the feet (soprano, alto, chorus)

Scene 6: The world's rejection of the Gospel

36. Why do the nations so furiously rage together (bass)
37. Let us break their bonds asunder (chorus)
He that dwelleth in heaven (tenor)

Scene 7: God's ultimate victory

38. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron (tenor)
39. Hallelujah (anthem and fugue chorus)

Brief tuning / shuffling break (not an interval!)

Part III

Scene 1: The promise of eternal life

40. I know that my Redeemer liveth (soprano)
41. Since by man came death (chorus)

Scene 2: The Day of Judgment

42. Behold, I tell you a mystery (bass)
43. The trumpet shall sound (bass)

Scene 3: The final conquest of sin

- Then shall be brought to pass (alto)
44. O death, where is thy sting (alto and tenor)
45. But thanks be to God (chorus)

Scene 4: The acclamation of the Messiah

47. Worthy is the Lamb (chorus)
Amen (chorus)



Handel had his career mapped out for him as a lawyer by his prominent barber-surgeon father. Disappointingly for the father, his young son displayed precocious musical talent and a greater determination than he, who apparently loathed music, and who considered it a lowly career for the son of a man of his standing. With his mother's help the young Handel smuggled a spinet into the attic and with dampened strings could practice in secret for hours. He also bagged lessons from the church organist paying with wine stolen from his father's medicine chest. With pressure from the local Duke, who overheard the young boy playing his private chapel organ, his father relented and Handel started formal

lessons. He wrote his first opera at the age of 18 and according to his friend Mattheson, composed "really interminable cantatas" in the German style "which had neither the right kind of skill or taste".

Fortunately, a trip to Italy, with all expenses paid, was offered by a passing nobleman, a Medici no less; the Prince of Tuscany. Handel spent four years working in Rome, Naples, Florence and Venice and met Corelli and the Scarlattis. There, in Italy, Handel developed his immense skill of writing for the voice, as well as acquiring a new, highly expressive and melodic style to integrate with his rather more formal Germanic tradition.

It was in Rome that Handel had written his first oratorios; though these *Italian* oratorios are quite different to his later English counterparts. Papal edict prohibited opera productions and so Handel diverted his energy into these and many Italian style dramatic cantatas. Handel was developing into the foremost composer for the voice of his era, eventually writing 42 operas, 29 oratorios and hundreds of other vocal works.

Messiah departs from his other English oratorios in using the chorus, rather than the soloists, to drive forward the narrative and the soloists do not assume dramatic character roles.

Charles Jennens was a wealthy landowner, a devout Christian and a patron of the arts. He developed a friendship with Handel and wrote texts for several of his oratorios including Saul, Israel in Egypt and, most famously, Messiah. Jennens was not altogether happy with some of Handel's setting of his words. He wrote to a friend, "I shall show you a collection I gave Handel, called Messiah, which I value highly. He has made a fine entertainment of it, though not near so good as he might and ought to have done. I have with great difficulty made him correct some of the grossest faults in the composition".

The text is a reflection on the "Mystery of Godliness", Jesus as the Messiah; his Nativity, Passion, Resurrection and Ascension, beginning with prophecies of His coming and ending with Christ's glorification in heaven. Jennens employed a compilation of various biblical extracts - from the King James version - and from the Psalms. The three sections, equating to operatic acts, are divided into a number of scenes made up of individual musical numbers. To explain his choice of text, Jennens published a detailed pamphlet. **Part 1** depicts prophecies of the Messiah and His coming, **Part 2** concerns His passion, death, resurrection and ascension, with the spreading of the gospel signified by the Hallelujah chorus and **Part 3** predicts the day of judgment and the redemption of mankind.

The piece was intended for Lent but in the 19th century became an established fixture at Christmas; Easter already had its great Bach Passions but there were few major, large-scale compositions for Christmas and so it filled a void.

Handel wrote the work in a white heat of just 24 days at his house, just a 12 minute walk away from St James's, in Brook Street (now the Handel House Museum). The score, which resides at the British Library, shows remarkably few changes and errors, bearing in mind that this equates to writing 15 notes a minute for full 10 hour days, not counting necessary breaks. Composing during the August and September of 1741, at least the days were long and candle-power not so much relied on. This speed seems remarkable but Handel tended to work like this, often composing an opera in the few weeks' break between productions. One can excuse him for occasional borrowings from his and others' works.

The premiere, in Dublin, just before Easter 1742, in support of various charities, was a huge success. Around 700 people turned out and ladies were asked to remove the hoops in their skirts to allow for "more company". The proceeds were enough to facilitate the release of 142 indebted prisoners. In London the following year it got off to a more difficult start, with a series of repeat performances at Covent Garden cut short due to much criticism that the subject matter was inappropriate for a theatre. From 1750, a traditional annual charity performance took place for the Foundling Hospital in Bloomsbury. The first published edition was not until 1767, after Handel's death and it was from then on that the work travelled around the world and became a fixture in the repertoire.

Handel did make some revisions before the first performance and others for later productions to fit the requirements but the early performances were for orchestral forces similar to ours tonight. To fill bigger spaces, larger numbers of performers were employed, often with additional instrumental scoring. The tradition of huge choirs of hundreds actually started as early as 1784, for a series of performances at Westminster Abbey, under the patronage of King George III – 'The Band will consist of Eight Hundred Performers' stated the advertisement for one such concert. Many beefed up the scoring with additional brass and woodwind instruments, as did Mozart, though his edition was actually quite small-scale and merely decorated and elaborated Handel's intentions; "stucco ornaments on a marble temple", remarked one critic. By the time of the Great Exhibition in 1857, we see a choir of 2,000 with an orchestra of 500 and some even larger performances took place. Though the large scale Huddersfield Choral Society type performances are still enjoyed by many, in recent years there has been an appreciation of the more intimate scale and the clarification of the work, stripped of the extraneous clarinets, trombones, horns, tubas and other instruments and heard as Handel originally conceived it.

Helen Semple – Soprano



Helen Semple held a Choral Award at Cambridge University before studying at Trinity College of Music, where she sang the female lead in both years' opera productions and attended masterclasses with Emma Kirkby and Ian Bostridge. She completed English National Opera's performance course The Knack, and is currently taught by Arwel Treharne Morgan. Recent concert highlights include a 2014 programme combining Elgar *Spirit of England* and Brahms *Ein Deutsches Requiem* with Armonico Consort, and Beethoven *Missa Solemnis* with the Cheltenham Bach Choir and the Göttingham Stadtkantorei. In December 2015 she took part in the premiere of

Peter Fender's 'Bee Loud Glade' with the Blackheath Choir, with whom she also performed Will Todd's *Mass in Blue* earlier this year. Helen's operatic roles include Susanna, Musetta, Micaela, and Countess Adele in Rossini's *Le Comte Ory*: next year she will perform Donna Anna with Opera Piccolina. For the 2013 Britten centenary she performed Miss Jessel in *The Turn of the Screw* with Artwork Opera, as part of the London Horror Festival.

Carris Jones – Mezzo-Soprano



Born in Surrey but largely raised in Southeast Asia, Carris Jones studied history at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, where she was also a choral scholar. Completing her postgraduate musical study at the Royal Academy of Music in London, Carris graduated a DipRam, the Academy's highest performance award. Other training includes English National Opera's programme Opera Works. Carris' operatic roles include Cornelia *Julius Caesar* (ENO, cover), Mother/Witch *Hansel and Gretel* (Co-Opera), Genevieve *Pelléas et Mélisande* (Grimeborn Festival), Susanna *Susanna* (Iford Arts, cover), Hippolyta *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Garsington, cover) and Filipyevna *Onegin* (Bury Court Opera/Southbank Sinfonia). Carris made her Royal Festival Hall debut in the role of Renee in the first European performance of Shostakovich's *Orango*, with Esa Pekka-Salonen and the Philharmonia. In 2013 Carris created the title role in Harvey Brough's new community opera *Ona's Flood* for Iford Arts. Carris' concert and recital highlights include Verdi Requiem at the Sheldonian Theatre in Oxford, Bach Magnificat for Laurence Cummings and the English Concert, and performances of Elgar Sea Pictures and Mahler Kindertotenlieder with the North London Symphony Orchestra. As a consort singer, Carris has sung across five continents. She was a founder member of Stile Antico, an unconducted early music vocal ensemble with whom she has won a ClassicFM Gramophone award, been twice nominated for the prestigious Grammy awards and collaborated with Sting on his Dowland lute song project, Songs from the Labyrinth.

John Upperton - Tenor



John was born in Co Durham, read Music at the University of Liverpool, then attended the Royal College of Music as a postgraduate singer. He studies with David Pollard and works closely with the conductor and keyboard player, David Roblou. Principal engagements include ENO and the ROH. He made his Purcell Room debut in a solo recital of Czech music in 1999 and 2004 saw his Queen Elizabeth Hall debut (Pirro in Rossini's *Ermione* to great critical acclaim). He has performed principal roles with many other British companies and has also worked in Israel, France and Italy. Progressing from the classical and high *bel canto* roles through the lyric tenor repertoire, John is now firmly established as a dramatic tenor. Current repertoire can be found on www.johnupperton.com and he has also created many new roles in contemporary opera. On the concert platform, John sings the standard repertoire (having performed the Verdi Requiem over thirty times) but also *The Kingdom*, *King Olaf*, *The Dream of Gerontius*, *The Spirit of England* as well as a rare performance of Mathias's *This Worlde's Joie*. With his passion for the Czech language and music, he sings many Janáček works (*The Eternal Gospel*, *The Lord's Prayer*, *Elegy on the death of Olga* and *The Glagolitic Mass*). Another significant work includes Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*. www.johnupperton.com

Jon Stainsby - Bass



Jon Stainsby completed a doctorate in English literature at the University of Oxford before turning to singing full time. He recently completed the postgraduate opera course at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, performing the roles of Mr Gedge (Britten, *Albert Herring*), Father Augustine (Prokofiev, *Betrothal in a Monastery*), Demetrius (Britten, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) and Herr Fluth (Nicolai, *Die Lustigen Weiber von Windsor*). He participated in Graham Johnson's Young Songmakers Programme, and has been a Britten Pears Young Artist three times, studying Schubert Lieder with Christian Gerhaher, Purcell with Christian Curnyn, and Bach with Mark Padmore. He sings with a number of Europe's foremost vocal ensembles, including the Choir of the Academy of Ancient Music, Dunedin Consort, EXAUDI, Collegium Vocale Gent, the Kings Consort, the Marian Consort and the Balthasar-Neumann-Chor, and has worked as a chorister at Bergen Nasjonale Opera, Wexford Festival Opera and the Festival Lyrique d'Aix-en-Provence. Recent highlights include the baritone role in of Claude Vivier's *Kopernikus* in Amsterdam for De Nationale Opera, an appearance with Ensemble Ictus and Les Cris de Paris, at the Opéra de Lille, for the première of Wolfgang Mitterer's *Marta*, and the roles of Demetrius and Bottom in *A Fairy Queen*, a new version of Purcell's semi-opera at Iford. Plans for 2017 include the title role in the Whitgift Foundation's *Eugene Onegin*, and covering the role of Figaro in *Le nozze di Figaro* at Garsington Festival Opera. www.jonstainsby.com

Peter Fender – Conductor & Composer



Having studied in London Peter is currently musical director of the Angel Orchestra, Mid Sussex Sinfonia, Chamber Academy Orchestra, the Six Centuries Chamber Choir and Philharmonia Britannica (which he founded in 2007, particularly keen to mix music with other art forms - such as acting, poetry, dance, comedy and video). Aside from his native England he has conducted in Austria, Bulgaria, Italy, and Romania. Recent highlights for Peter have included conducting Mahler's 4th and 5th symphonies, the première of his piece 'Blow, Blow' for choir and smartphones and Laura Rossi's score to the silent film 'Battle of the Somme'. Forthcoming projects include the St Matthew Passion with the Six Centuries Chamber Choir, convening a course on Italian Bel Canto singing and returning to south-eastern Sicily to lead an orchestral course. Peter also directs conducting workshops in London, including days to introduce conducting to non-musicians. As well as 'Blow, Blow' Peter recently composed 'In the Bee-Loud Glade' - songs based on four poems by WB Yeats for choir, soloists and orchestra, commissioned and performed by the Blackheath Choir. Peter has also released a recording of his own orchestral compositions. Entitled 'Speechless' it includes works with solo parts for cello, sax, and mezzo-soprano. See his website for details. A short film has been made about Peter – also available on his website: www.peterfender.co.uk

Forthcoming concert Haydn's Creation on **Sunday 26 February**, St Silas Church, Risinghill Street, N1 9UL, Angel Orchestra & Choir (a fundraising performance in aid 50/50 of the Angel Orchestra and the wonderful charity Music Fund which provides instruments for music schools in areas of conflict and deprivation around the globe).

Six centuries Chamber Choir

Was formed by conductor and composer Peter Fender for its first concert in June 2015. Peter sang a lot as a child, mainly in church choirs. However as an adult he quickly discovered it was no longer as easy to sing as it had been back then ... as a treble he didn't have to think about it, it just happened (and apparently happened quite well!). So, since 2013 he has been having singing lessons, sung in opera choruses with Midsummer Opera, and has joined a local choir (Blackheath Choir). All of this is with a view to understanding singing better. This led to a desire to form a choir, and here we are with the 6CCC. The choir is doing exactly what its name suggests: performances of music spanning six centuries. They are joined in every concert by professional instrumentalists to both accompany the choir and to perform instrumental music in between the choral works, and for some concerts there will also be a poet, to give an even wider mix of material to a concert. Anyone interested in joining the choir should make contact: www.the6ccc.co.uk

Linden Baroque Orchestra

Started life some time around 1984 with a group of early music enthusiasts in the front room of a house in Linden Gardens, Chiswick. Unusually - and uniquely anywhere at that time – it brings together the talents of young professionals, teachers, amateurs and postgraduate students and many members have moved on to have prominent careers in the early music field. Some original members still play. The founding musical director was the well-known baroque oboist Paul Goodwin. Now pursuing a busy international conducting career, Paul is Honorary President and Steven Devine, following Walter Reiter, is the present Musical Director. The orchestra has played at venues from Norfolk to Rome (where it gave the first performances there of Purcell's King Arthur) and last year in Berlin. The instruments are either 18th century originals or modern copies - some made by the players themselves and we play at "baroque pitch" of 415Hz. Together with the Linden Baroque Choir we gave first modern performances of music by Jean Gilles and J F Fasch. Our first CD, issued in 2001 on the Meridian label of music by Fasch, was well received and was played on Radio 3 and Classic FM. Linden Baroque is a registered Charity (No 1014921) and, apart from receiving a National Lottery grant in 1999, is entirely self-supporting.

Violin 1: Theresa Caudle, Judy Taylor, Diane Wyatt, Ian Cutts, Barbara Grant, Anthony Constantine

Viola: Kate Eden, Andrew Spencer, Simon Hill, Michael Blee

Bass: John Mears

Oboes: Lysander Tennant, Simon Galton

Trumpets: Tom Harrison, Kaitlin Wild

Violin 2: Michael Jenner, Gillian Taylor, Claire Sharpe, Jocelyn Slocombe, Alan Selwyn, Nick Hardisty

Cello: Christine Draycott, Mary Walton

Harpsichord: Claire Williams

Bassoon: Mathew Dart

Timpani: Robert Howes

Linden Baroque's next concerts:

March 5th 6.30pm, St Stephen's Hampstead - Bach and Telemann cantatas and a Telemann Suite for viol and orchestra directed by Ibi Aziz

April 1st 7.30pm St Paul's, Covent Garden - Bach St Matthew Passion directed by Peter Fender

To keep in touch, please fill in the attached email list application or visit our website:

www.lindenbaroque.org