

Handel's Messiah

by candlelight

conductor
Peter Fender

Helen Semple soprano
Carris Jones contralto
John Upperton tenor
Bartholomew Lawrence
bass

The Six Centuries
Chamber Choir

Linden
baroque orchestra
Leader Kirra Thomas



Saturday December 16th 7.00pm
St James's Church, Piccadilly

Georg 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 opportunity (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 St Catharine's College, Cambridge, before going on to postgraduate performance studies 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 Dvořák's *The Spectre's Bride* in a new English translation, with the Blackheath Choir in association with the Dvořák Society; and Beethoven *Missa Solemnis* with the Cheltenham Bach Choir and the Göttingham Stadtkantorei.

Her most recent operatic production was as Mozart's Donna Anna in Tylney Hall, Hampshire. Other favourite operatic roles include Susanna, Mimi, Micaela, and Countess Adele in Rossini's *Le Comte Ory*. For the 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 with a DipRam, the Academy's highest performance award. Other training includes English National Opera's programme Opera Works.

On the operatic stage, Carris has performed and covered roles at English National Opera, Iford Arts, Garsington Opera and Bury Court Opera. 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.

Carris' concert and recital highlights include Britten *Phaedra* with members of the Philharmonia, 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, with whom she won a ClassicFM Gramophone award, was twice nominated for the prestigious Grammy awards, and collaborated with Sting on his Dowland lute song project, *Songs from the Labyrinth*.

In 2017, Carris joined the Choir of St Paul's Cathedral, the first female Vicar Choral to be appointed in its one thousand year history.

John Upperton - Tenor



originates from Co Durham, read Music at Liverpool University as first study pianist and continued as postgraduate singer at the RCM. His principal appearances include ROH, ENO, Garsington and Birmingham Opera the QEH and Purcell Room (Janáček's *Zápisník Zmizelého*) which he recorded in 2010. He moved into heavier repertoire with Idomeneo, Tito, Pollione, Florestan, Edgardo, Enzo, the major Verdi, Puccini and Wagner dramatic tenor roles, Herodes, Bacchus, Apollo, Peter Grimes, Aschenbach and Walter *The Passenger*. Concert repertoire includes Liszt's *Tre Sonetti di Petrarca*, Dvořák and Poulenc song cycles, *Les nuits*

d'été, *Dies Natalis*, Duparc songs and Simon Milton's *Fallen Idols* (world première), Dvořák's *Stabat Mater*, Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius*, *The Kingdom*, Verdi's Requiem, Janáček's Glagolitic Mass, *Lord's Prayer*, *Eternal Gospel*, and *Das Lied von der Erde*. This autumn, he understudied Radamès for ENO's *Aida* and he recently played the Narrator in Walton's *Henry V* - A Shakespeare Scenario for Midsummer Opera. Future plans include Rodolfo in Verdi's *Luisa Miller*, Siegfried (*Götterdämmerung*) in Oslo, Macduff and Chénier. On the recital and concert platform, performances for 2018 include Schubert, Korngold and Ullmann songs with David Roblou and the world première of Jacob Bride's *The Thane and his Wife* with the mezzo-soprano, Siân Woodling. www.johnupperton.com

Bartholomew Lawrence - Bass



As a boy he was a chorister at Canterbury Cathedral, and joined both the National Youth Choir of Great Britain and its chamber choir offshoot, Laudibus.

From 2005 he studied for a BMus at the RSAMD in Glasgow under George Gordon. After graduating in 2009, He moved to the Royal Academy of Music to do an MA under Glenville Hargreaves, and completed that course in 2011. He then returned to Glasgow to study for a Master of Music in Opera at the RCS. In London he sang Somnus in *Semele* with Hampstead Garden Opera, and joined the Glyndebourne Chorus for the 2012 Festival.

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 mammoth Resurrection Symphony, a rare performance of Alice Mary Smith's 2nd symphony and Haydn's Creation in aid of Music Fund. Forthcoming projects include Holst's The Planets, Verdi's Requiem, Bach's St John Passion with the Six Centuries Chamber Choir and returning to south-eastern Sicily to lead an orchestral course in the Summer. Peter also directs conducting workshops in London, including days to introduce conducting to non-musicians. As a composer Peter recently had his overture Benedetta & Bartolomea premièred and is looking forward soon to premières of songs for soprano/harpsichord and his first string quartet. Peter has released a recording of his 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 concerts: Verdi Requiem: Philharmonia Britannica, St John's Church, Waterloo Rd, London SE1 8TY. **Sat 13 January 2018, 5.30pm.**
Holst The Planets: Angel Orchestra, St Silas Church, Risinghill Street, N1 9UL. **Sun 4 March, 6pm.**

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 Relter, 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: Kirra Thomas, Gillian Taylor, Christine-Marie Louw, Ian Cutts, Anthony Constantine, Clive Letchford

Viola: John Sutherland, Simon Hill, Eleanor Walton

Bass: John Mears

Oboes: Simon Galton, Peter Tsoulos

Trumpets: Louls Barclay, Sam Pierce

Violin 2: Michael Jenner, Jocelyn Slocombe, Barbara Grant, Alan Selwyn, Linda McDonald

Cello: Mary Walton, David Winfield

Harpsichord: Christine Thornton

Bassoon: Mathew Dart

Timpani: Stefan Beckett

Linden Baroque's next concerts:

Feb 17th 7pm, Bach St Matthew Passion All Saints' Church, Grange Road, Eastbourne, BN21 4HE

May 13th 6.30pm St Stephen's, Hampstead - Music for the London Stage directed by Theresa Caudle

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