

Handel's Messiah

by candlelight

conductor
Peter Fender

Helen Semple soprano
Cathy Bell mezzo-soprano
John Upperton tenor
Thomas Coltman bass

The Six Centuries
Chamber Choir

Linden
baroque orchestra
Leader Sarah Walsh



Thursday December 20th 7.30pm
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)
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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 10 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, and afterwards trained at Trinity College of Music. At Trinity she won the Lilian Ash Duo Prize for French Song and attended master classes with Emma Kirkby and Ian Bostridge.

After leaving Trinity, Helen completed English National Opera's performance course The Knack, with Mary King and Rufus Norris. She is currently taught by Arwel Treharne Morgan.

Solo concert highlights include Dvořák's *The Spectre's Bride* in a new English translation, in association with the Dvořák Society. Collaborations with the Cheltenham Bach Choir include Beethoven *Missa Solemnis* (with the Göttingham Stadtkantorei) and *'Til Earthly*

Passions Turn by Swiss composer Carl Rütti, an extract of which was chosen to appear on Radio 3's 'Private Passions' by Edward Gillespie in 2008. She appeared alongside Sir Willard White in two performances of the Verdi Requiem in Warwick and Great Malvern in 2011.

Her most recent operatic role was Mozart's Donna Anna in Tynney 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.

Cathy Bell – Mezzo-Soprano



Cathy studied English and Medieval Literature at Cambridge and singing at Birmingham Conservatoire. Now based in London, she specialises in baroque and contemporary repertoire and was a member of Handel House Talent 2014-15. Recent oratorio highlights include Bach *Mass in B minor* with Cantemus; Bach *St John Passion* with Leicester Bach Choir; Vivaldi *Gloria* at Bath Abbey; Handel *Messiah* at Cadogan Hall; Mendelssohn *Elijah* with the Bach Choir at the Royal Festival Hall; and Rachmaninov *Vespers* at the St Magnus International Festival in Orkney.

Opera roles include Second Witch (Purcell *Dido and Aeneas*) with the Academy of Ancient Music at the Barbican; Carmen for Barefoot Opera; Arsamenes (Handel *Xerxes*) for Hampstead Garden Opera; Russian Nanny (Britten *Death in Venice*) for Garsington Opera; Third Lady/Third Boy (Mozart *Die Zauberflöte*) for Diva Opera and the Palestine Mozart Festival; Arasse (Hasse *Siroe*) for the London Handel Festival; and roles in contemporary operas and recordings for Tête à Tête, Grimeborn, Opera North and WNO MAX. Chorus work includes Scottish Opera, Garsington, Grange Park, Bergen Nasjonale Opera and the festivals in Aix-en-Provence and Beijing.

Cathy also works regularly with groups including the BBC Singers, the Academy of Ancient Music, Philharmonia Voices, Sonoro and the Clerks.

John Upperton - Tenor



John 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 *Zpísňík 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*. Last autumn, he understudied Radamès for ENO's *Aida* and played the Narrator in Walton's *Henry V* - A Shakespeare Scenario for Midsummer Opera.

2018 also saw Rodolfo in Verdi's *Luisa Miller*, Siegfried (*Götterdämmerung*) in Oslo, Harry Benn in Ethel Smyth's *The Boatswain's Mate* and Macduff.

Performances for 2019 include: the title role in *Giordano's Andrea Chénier*, *Choral Symphony*, B Minor Mass, *Winterreise*, *The Dream of Gerontius* and *Das Lied von der Erde*, and at Snape Maltings, Verdi's Requiem. www.johnupperton.com

Thomas Coltman - Bass



Thomas Coltman's diverse musical career has seen him involved in notable engagements as a baritone, pianist, musical director, and vocal-coach. After a year working as a professional chef he continued his solo piano studies with Yekaterina Lebedeva at RWCMD and as a Britten Pears Young Artist, winning awards and performing in UK and Europe as keyboard soloist and accompanist.

As a Bass he sang in choirs, international consorts and in the chorus of British Youth Opera and Grange Park Opera as well as extensive solo oratorio work. He is now pursuing a career as a baritone soloist singing the title role *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Father (Hansel and Gretel), Morales and el Dancaire (Carmen), Samuel (Pirates of Penzance), Count Robinson (The Secret Marriage). Other roles include Il Conte (Le Nozze di Figaro), Dandini (La Cenerentola), Posà

(Don Carlo). He sang in the Glyndebourne Chorus for Festival and Tour 2016 and 2017 and has broadcast on BBC Radio 4, BBC Television, and sung at Westminster Abbey as a guest soloist. He continues studies with Nelly Miricioiu and also with Sir John Tomlinson at the London Masterclasses.

He has accompanied and taught voice extensively at prestigious learning centres and festivals in all education sectors. His work as Musical Director and Choral Leader has seen him co-lead performances at venues including Lowry Centre Manchester, Belfast Grand Opera House, and The Royal Festival Hall.

Thomas enjoys running (a highlight being the London Marathon in 2015), drinking wine, baking, and has also taken clowning classes in the past!

Peter Fender – Conductor, Composer, Teacher



Apart from his work with the 6 Centuries Chamber Choir Peter is also currently musical director of the Angel Orchestra, Chamber Academy Orchestra and Mid Sussex Sinfonia and Philharmonia Britannica (which he formed in 2007). Recent highlights for Peter have included a concert to celebrate the widening of suffrage in 1918, Vaughan Williams symphony no.6, and Lili Boulanger's *D'un soir triste*, plus the first UK concert with the Sicilian *Denner Clarinet Ensemble*.

Forthcoming projects include Mozart's *Requiem* and *Mass in C minor*, and the première of his own violin concerto. Peter also leads conducting

workshops in London – from days introducing conducting to non-musicians up to advanced classes with full orchestra.

As a composer Peter's first string quartet has recently been premiered in England and Spain and he has just completed music for flute duet. He is also working on an edition of an overture by Imogan Holst. Peter has released a recording of his own orchestral compositions entitled 'Speechless'. A recording has recently been made of some of Peter's chamber music and will be available early next year.

A short film has been made about Peter – available on his website: www.peterfender.co.uk

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

Soprano

Tessa Henderson
Nicola Gunn
Claudince Rice
Millie Addington
Donna Seale
Penny Davison
Fred Englund
Carrie Andrews
Hilary Bates
Elaine Dauncey
Anne Bonwit

Alto

Camilla Withington
Janet Williams
Silvia Reseghetti
Lynn Lacey
Julie Harrison
Deb Tanner
Anna Brown
Adrienne Carr
Kathy Henderson
Linda Pawson

Tenor

Richard Williams
Peter Kendall
Tony Valsamidis
Matthew Marks
Terry Heard
Tim Thirlway
Margaret Jackson-
Roberts
John Whitehead
Clive Seale

Bass

Nicholas Armour
Richard Burbury
James Tilley
Simon Taube
Jonathan Fisher
Mark Wilkinson
Martin Warren
Michael Larbalestier

Linden Baroque Orchestra

The band started life around 1984 with a group of early music enthusiasts in the front room of a house in Linden Gardens, Chiswick. Unusually- and uniquely at the time- it brought together the talents of young professionals, teachers, amateurs and postgraduate students and many of the members have moved on to successful 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. Walter Reiter, the well-known baroque violinist was our following MD and Steven Devine, our most recent MD, is Emeritus Director.

The orchestra has played at venues from Norfolk to Rome (where it gave the first performances of Purcell's King Arthur) and recently in Berlin.

The instruments are either 18th century originals or modern copies - some made by the players themselves and play at 'baroque pitch' Hz 415. Together with the Linden Baroque Choir, we gave several first performances of works 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 played on Radio 3 and Classic FM. It can still be bought on Amazon.

Linden Baroque is a registered charity (No 1014921) and is self-supporting. We are available for hire - check our website.

Leader: Sarah Walsh

Continuo Cello: Mary Walton

Solo Trumpet: Tom Freeman-Atwood

Violin 1: Sarah Walsh, Wendy Talbot,
Anthony Constantine, Ian Cutts, Alan Selwyn

Viola: John Sutherland, Deborah Miles-
Johnson, Roger Mears

Bass: Martin Johnson

Oboes: Simon Galton, Peter Tsoulos

Trumpets: Tom Freeman-Atwood, Louis

Barclay

Violin 2: Gillian Taylor, Barbara Grant,
Linda McDonald, Michael Jenner

Cello: Mary Walton, David Winfield

Keyboard: Michael Strange

Bassoon: Mathew Dart

Timpani: Stefan Beckett

Linden Baroque's next concert:

March 1st 6.30pm St Stephen's, Hampstead - Music for Lent with the ladies' choir, *Gloriana*,
Director Deborah Miles-Johnson. Programme includes music by Hasse, Vivaldi, Bach

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

www.lindenbaroque.org

Peter Fender's next concert:

January 12th Philharmonic Britannica, St John's Waterloo Road SE1 8TY: Mozart Requiem