

Handel's Messiah

by candlelight

conductor
Peter Fender

Helen Semple soprano
Cathy Bell mezzo
John Upperton tenor
Jon Stainsby bass

The Six Centuries
Chamber Choir

Linden
baroque orchestra

leader Ben Samson



Friday December 20th 2019 7.30pm

St James's Church, Piccadilly

George Frideric Handel (1685 - 1759), the great composer of Italian opera in London from his arrival in 1712, found that by the 1730s, 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 - effectively operas without the staging - in English, telling dramatic biblical stories. Messiah was 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, right across the world.

Welcome to our performance and festive greetings to you!

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

- 16a. Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion (soprano)
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 masterclasses 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 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.

Cathy Bell – Mezzo-Soprano



Cathy Bell studied English and Medieval Literature at Cambridge and singing at Birmingham Conservatoire. She is a former CREAR Scholar and was a member of Handel House Talent 2014-15. Baroque music continues to be a specialism: in the past year she has made solo debuts at the Valletta International Baroque Festival as Venus (Pepusch *Venus and Adonis*), at the Barbican as Second Witch (*Dido and Aeneas*) with AAM, and in the same role at the Nordland Music Festival with Barokksolistene Norway. Cathy particularly enjoys her work as a concert soloist. Recent highlights include Bach *Mass in B minor* with Cantemus; A. Scarlatti *Salve regina* at Wells Cathedral; Vivaldi *Introduzione e Gloria* for Montgomeryshire Music Festival; Handel *Messiah* at Cadogan Hall and Nottingham Royal Concert Hall; and Rachmaninov *Vespers* at the St Magnus International Festival in Orkney. Opera roles include Carmen for Barefoot Opera; Russian Nanny (*Death in Venice*) for Garsington; Third Lady/Third Boy (*Die Zauberflöte*) for Diva Opera and the Palestine Mozart Festival. 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, AAM, Philharmonia Voices, Sonoro, the Dunedin Consort, the Clerks' Group and EXAUDI.

John Upperton - Tenor



John Upperton is from Co Durham. He 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, Cadogan Hall, Snape Maltings, the QEH and Purcell Room (Janáček's *Zápisník Zmizelého*) which he recorded in 2010. A move into heavier repertoire brought 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 Spirit of England*, *The Kingdom*, Verdi's Requiem, Janáček's Glagolitic Mass, *Lord's Prayer* and *Eternal Gospel*. In 2017 he understudied Radamès for ENO's *Aida* and played the Narrator in Walton's *Henry V* - A Shakespeare Scenario for Midsummer Opera. Performances in 2018/2019 season included Rodolfo (*Luisa Miller*), Siegfried (*Götterdämmerung*) in Oslo, Macduff and Chénier, Harry Benn in *The Boatswain's Mate*, the world première of Jacob Bride's *The Thane and his Wife*, *The Dream of Gerontius* and *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 pursuing vocal and opera studies at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, and at Aldeburgh as a Britten Pears Young Artist. Through his work with several of today's foremost vocal ensembles, including the Choir of the Academy of Ancient Music, Dunedin Consort and Vox Luminis, he has appeared as a soloist at Wigmore Hall, the Barbican, and at a number of prestigious European festivals. His extensive experience in the field of contemporary music has included the baritone role in Claude Vivier *Kopernikus* in Amsterdam for De Nationale Opera, numerous appearances with EXAUDI, and the UK première performances of Anthony Ritchie's *Gallipoli to the Somme* with Southbank Sinfonia, following their award to him of the 2017 David Gosman prize for orchestral song. Recent operatic highlights include the roles of Demetrius and Bottom in *A Fairy Queen* at Iford, and the title role in *Le nozze di Figaro* for Garsington Opera's Alvarez Young Artists Programme. Further details of his work can be found at jonstainsby.com

Peter Fender – Conductor, Composer, Teacher



Trained as a violinist, Peter's focus shifted to conducting in 2006. In 2007 he founded the orchestra Philharmonia Britannica, keen to create interesting juxtapositions by mixing music with other art forms. Concerts of music alongside acting, poetry, dance, comedy and video have followed. As well as the 6 Centuries Chamber Choir and South London Sinfonietta, Peter is currently musical director of the Angel Orchestra, Camden Philharmonia Orchestra and Mid Sussex Sinfonia. Aside from his native England he has conducted in Austria, Bulgaria, Italy, and Romania.

Recent highlights have included Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* and Messiaen's *L'Ascension*. Forthcoming projects include the Verdi *Requiem*, Ethel Smyth's *Serenade* and the Marie Jaell 'cello concerto.

Peter leads conducting workshops in London - from days introducing conducting to non-musicians to advanced classes with full orchestra. 2020 will see the culmination of his courses on the Beethoven symphonies as the *Ninth* is reached. As a composer, arranger and editor Peter has recently been working on an edition of an overture by Imogen Holst, writing a series of songs on themes of life and death, and completing a piano trio. Two CD recordings of his music have been released – one of orchestral compositions (*Speechless*), the other of chamber music (*Loquacious*). Both are on sale this evening. A short film has been made about Peter which is available on his website, alongside lots of other information: 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
Claudine Rice
Millie Addington
Penny Davison
Fred Englund
Anne Bonwit
Liz Short
Anne-Marie Tilley
Gill Halifax
Anja Kuch

Alto

Janet Williams
Silvia Reseghetti
Deborah Tanner
Anna Brown
Adrienne Carr
Linda Pawson
Lucy Newark
Jane Jordan
Rebecca Rawlings
Sue Canderton
Sheila Poole

Tenor

Richard Williams
Peter Kendall
Tony Valsamidis
Terry Heard
Leonard Reilly
Alex Burmester
Weedon
John Whitehead
Gary Learmouth
Peter Skinner

Bass

Nicholas Armour
Kenneth Hoffman
Ian Paton
Tim Sanderson
Andrew Wiseman
Chris Brody
James Tilley
Simon Taube
Jonathan Fisher
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 more 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; www.lindenbaroque.org.

Leader: Ben Samson
Continuo Cello: David Winfield
Solo Trumpet: Sam Pierce

Violin 1: Ben Samson, Wendy Talbot,
Anthony Constantine, Ian Cutts,
Alan Selwyn, Hannah Patrick
Viola: Roger Mears, John Sutherland,
Kate Eden, Iulian Turicianu
Bass: John Mears
Oboes: Simon Galton, Peter Tsoulos
Trumpets: Sam Pierce, Louis Barclay

Violin 2: Michael Jenner, Gillian Taylor,
Barbara Grant, Linda McDonald,
Christine-Marie Louw
Cello: David Winfield, Mary Walton,
Helen Brauer
Keyboard: Michael Strange
Bassoon: Mathew Dart
Timpani: Feargus Brennan

Linden Baroque's forthcoming concerts:

Sat. March 7th
Bach St John Passion
Finchley Chamber Choir conductor David Lardi

Sunday May 10th
Bach Cantatas for Bass and orchestra
+ orchestral works
conductor Peter Fender

www.lindenbaroque.org