

FINCHLEY CHAMBER CHOIR

Price: 30p.

G.F. HANDEL (1685-1759)

MESSIAH

PART 1

.....

Interval of approximately 20 minutes
Refreshments available in the adjoining Hall

.....

PART 2

.....

Short break of approximately 5 minutes
The audience is requested to remain seated

.....

PART 3

.....

FINCHLEY CHAMBER CHOIR

LINDEN BAROQUE ORCHESTRA

(Leader: Nicola Hayston)

Continuo: John Winter (Organ)
Kate Kemp (Harpsichord)
Valerie Cullen (Cello)

CONDUCTOR: DAVID LARDI

7.15 p.m., SATURDAY, 14th NOVEMBER, 1987

Trinity Church, Nether Street, Finchley, N.12

This concert is subsidised by Greater London Arts with funds provided by the Arts Council of Great Britain. The Choir is affiliated to Barnet College and the National Federation of Music Societies.

Handel's "Messiah" has for many years been the best known and most popular of all oratorios. Handel turned to the form after the English public had grown tired of the stifling conventions of opera seria, and because theatrical entertainments were prohibited during Lent. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that many operatic elements are evident throughout - the bel canto aria ("I know that my Redeemer liveth"), the dramatic aria ("Why do the nations rage"), the bravura aria ("The trumpet shall sound") and the arioso recitative ("For behold, darkness shall cover the earth"). Handel's dramatic skill is evident in the overall structure of each of the three parts and this is also achieved by a very fine compilation of words. These were chosen by Charles Jennens, who drew on the appointed lessons in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer. Thus, Part 1 deals with the prophecy of Christ's coming and his Incarnation, Part 2 with his suffering, death and ultimate triumph, while Part 3 is a proclamation of that triumph.

"Messiah" was first performed in Dublin in 1742. The Dublin News-Letter of 10th April, 1742, declared that "yesterday morning ... there was a public Rehearsal of Messiah, Mr. Handel's new sacred Oratorio which, in the opinion of the best judges, far surpasses anything of that nature, which has been performed in this or any other kingdom".

Despite this original success, it's first London performances in 1743 and 1745 seem to have been virtually ignored. It was only from 1749 that it's triumph began and this was largely due to the fact that Handel rewrote sections of the solo work to accommodate the talents of the male alto Gaetana Guadagni, a handsome Italian who had arrived in London the previous year and had taken the opera-going public by storm.

This was followed in 1750 by the first of many annual performances at the Foundling Hospital and from then on its popularity has rarely decreased. "Messiah" has occasioned many large-scale performances, from the Handel Commemoration Festival in Westminster Abbey in 1784 with 525 performers to the Crystal Palace performances of 1859 with its orchestra of 400 and choir of nearly 3000!

"Messiah" is hardly typical of Handel's oratorios. The subject chosen is largely from the New Testament, the text entirely from the Bible, and the soloists do not represent individual characters, as was customary. Handel is reputed to have composed the work in a very short time and the fact that he drew upon some earlier compositions and, in the case of the "Pastoral Symphony" on a traditional melody, does not diminish the achievement. Handel's skill in an almost naïve depiction of events is obvious as the angels return to heaven at the end of "Glory to God" or in the pedantic mockery of "He trusted in God". His cosmopolitan upbringing led him to combine the styles of Germany, Italy and England and all may be seen in combination in the magnificent choruses which end Parts 2 and 3. The orchestration is remarkable, not only for its lightness, but for its restraint, but when trumpets and drums are used the effect is breathtaking. The popularity of "Messiah" has never waned; it is as much a part of Britain's sociological and religious traditions as it is a great piece of music, and its appeal seems unlikely to diminish.

AN AUTHENTIC "MESSIAH"?

Like our recent performances of Bach's "Mass in B minor", tonight's concert is an attempt to realise Handel's original intentions and to recreate, as closely as is possible, the sound and style of original performances. This is being attempted not only by utilising a small choir and an orchestra of authentic early-style Baroque instruments but, more importantly, by following the styles and conventions of performing practice of the period.

"Messiah" presents many more problems than does the "B minor". Not only was Bach much more exact in his requirements, leaving less scope for the performer (and was criticized for the same!), but his work effectively exists in only one "Urtext" manuscript. Handel, on the other hand, made many changes, alterations and substitutions to "Messiah" throughout his life thereby creating the possibility of many different, but still "authentic" versions.

These changes were occasioned by a variety of circumstances, but were mainly due to the large number of performances that the work received in England during the composer's lifetime, 56 in all. These are related mostly to the arias and while there is some genuine "improving" much is due to the availabilities and abilities of different singers at various performances necessitating a re-allocating and/or re-writing of solos. There are, for example, three similar, but not identical, "authentic" versions of "Thou art gone up on high" for Bass, Alto and Soprano. As Handel often introduced a version for a particular singer, especially Guadagni, these were rarely permanent substitutions, earlier ones often re-occurring in later performances. The best known selection, as found in the Prout/Novello edition, is based merely on what had become traditional in 1902 and can in no way be referred to as definitive.

Tonight's performance includes a few rarely heard variants. Details are given below of a few of the more notable:

"But who may abide" - The original autograph has a similar aria for Bass which was extensively re-written, in 1750, to display the virtuoso talents of Guadagni. At later performances it was sung by a mezzo but never by a Bass though a brief Bass recitative version also exists.

"Rejoice greatly" - The original autograph 12/8 "Gigue" version rather than the better-known 4/4 revision written in 1749 for London.

"He shall feed his flock" - Superceeding solo versions for Soprano & Mezzo, the "duet" version was probably introduced by Handel for his later performances. Our ending has probably not been performed since the 18th century.

"How beautiful are the feet" - This section has the most complex history of all. The Soprano (or Alto) aria setting should be followed by the choral version of "Their sound is gone out". Perhaps our most contentious decision has been to perform tonight the virtually unknown alternative version for two Mezzi, followed by a Choral setting of "Break forth into joy" and a Tenor arioso of "Their sound is gone out".

TITLE - If any one thing is certain about this work, it is that the popular title of "THE Messiah" is incorrect. Originally simply known as "A Sacred Oratorio" (1743/45, when its success was assured) from 1749 onwards, it assumed the title of "An Oratorio called Messiah" (1749) or "Messiah or the Sacred Oratorio" (1757). What may be surprising is that of the performances during the composer's life-time, less than a quarter were held in sacred surroundings.

VERBAL TEXT - Not the place to discuss whether the author was the usually accepted Charles Jennens or Mr. Pooley or even Dr. Bentley! What is certain is that Handel's setting of it results in what seem to us today to have unusual stresses. This is probably due to changes in English usage and even more to the fact that, despite his long stay in England, the composer never fully learned the language and, to the end, spoke it with a heavy German accent. Tonight's text will mainly follow the composer's intentions without "improvements", the main exception being the occasional introduction of verbal repetition especially in "And with his stripes".

PITCH - "Standard" Baroque pitch of A = 415, a semi-tone lower than modern pitch; A = 440.

CHOIR - It was only the performance to commemorate the centenary of Handel's birth in 1784 (they couldn't even get the year correct!) that introduced the tradition of performing "Messiah" with massed forces. Handel's own performances used choirs numbering between 26 and 40 singers.

ORCHESTRA - The same is true of orchestral forces. Already by 1785 "Messiah" was deemed to be "Antient Music" (sic) and therefore old-fashioned. Its survival in performances was due to later composers "improving" Handel's orchestration to suit contemporary taste. This was frequently done with a lack of imagination and even Mozart's version of 1789 with additional parts for flutes, clarinets, trombones and horns and his exquisitely contrived inner parts to replace the obsolete continuo, was a long way from the original conception. "Messiah" is scored for strings, doubled by oboes and bassoons in the choruses, with restrained use of trumpets and drums in only three of them.

RHYTHM - The science of music notation was much less exact in the 18th century than it is today. A rhythm such as a dotted crotchet/quaver could be highly ambiguous, being interpreted as a triplet, literally, or double-dotted depending on context. While some questions have obvious answers, movements such as "Behold the Lamb of God" will always remain problematical and impossible to rationalise fully.

ORNAMENTATION - Most Baroque composers provided a musical skeleton which the performers were expected to "flesh-out" in rehearsal and performance. As in so much Jazz, seemingly spontaneous improvisation was frequently the result of hours of careful preparation and practice! A singer's training was based on a narrow repertoire including a thorough grounding in the vocabulary of "gracing". These graces ranged from obligatory appoggiaturas and cadential trills, through ornamenting a "da capo" aria to virtuoso final cadenzas. Contemporary scores contain added ornaments not only in the vocal, but also the instrumental parts. While much is conjectural and a matter of taste and one can never be certain of exactly what Handel would have wanted, one can only echo the words of Basil Lam - that not to ornament is wrong, whereas an attempt at a proper interpretation has at least a chance of being right.

SCHOLARSHIP - Credit must be given to the leading Handelian scholars for their researches into the complexities of this work. While they don't always provide all the answers, they normally manage to raise all the questions. Notable among these are Julian Herbage, Watkins Shaw, Basil Lam and John Tobin.

DAVID LARDI

October, 1987

DAVID LARDI was born in Manchester, originally studied at Trinity College of Music, London, and read a degree at King's College, London. He studied orchestral conducting with Bernard Keefe, choral conducting with Charles Proctor and Laszlo Heltay, and operatic conducting with Marcus Dods, and it was during this time that he was awarded the City Livery Prize and the Ricordi Conducting Prize.

During the next two years he continued his studies at the Academia Musicale, Siena, Italy, with Maestro Franco Ferrara, generally recognised as one of the world's leading teachers of conducting. Within weeks of his arrival he was invited to conduct concerts and was awarded the 'Diploma di Merito' before being asked by Maestro Ferrara to work with him in Rome.

He currently holds the conductorship of Finchley Chamber Choir, Finchley Chamber Orchestra and Haringey Symphony Orchestra and is also a Professor at Trinity College of Music and on the staff of Middlesex Polytechnic at Trent Park. He has worked with many different orchestras and choirs as well as some of today's leading soloists, and already has an extensive repertoire of nearly 500 works.

THE LINDEN BAROQUE ORCHESTRA

1st VIOLINS

Nicola Hayston (Leader)

Robin Boothby

Lucy Kaner

Linda Martin

Hannah Patrick

2nd VIOLINS

Gertrude Evans

Penelope Goodare

Elizabeth Wells

VIOLAS

Deborah Johnson

John Medway

VIOLINCELLOS

Valerie Cullen

David King

Anna Theo

VIOLONE

Geoff Kemp

HARPSICHORD

Kate Kemp

John Winter

OBOES

Clare Galton

Simon Galton

Andrew King

Heather Skinner

BASSOONS

Mathew Dart

Renate Maria Wendel

TRUMPETS

William O'Sullivan

Julian Brewer

TIMPANI

Brian Booth

The Linden Baroque Orchestra was formed in 1984 by a group of enthusiastic London musicians who specialise in playing early-style instruments, either originals or modern copies.

It has given concerts throughout London in a wide and varied repertoire, featuring many composers, including music by Bach, Vivaldi and Telleman. The group has worked with some of London's leading early music players.

For more information please contact Simon Galton

(Tel. 01 223 3477)

FINCHLEY CHAMBER CHOIR

Concert 14th November, 1987

SOPRANOS

Celia Bangham	Helen Leigh
Linda Brett	Irena Olejnikowna
Suzanne Chadwick	Mair Riordan
Christine Draper	Penny Tate
Sally Edlund	Catherine Thomas
Judith Fielding	Christine Yeates
Molly Hunt	

ALTI

Heather Daniel	Pauline Harkness
Jackie Davey	Elspeth McCracken-Hewson
Carolyn Draper-Ford	Sarah Pope
Linda Foster	Joan Price
Eileen Goddard	

TENORS

Tim Brown	Roger Moon
Don Jennings	Jim Nelhams
Jim McLauchlan	Stuart Yeates

BASSES

Ian Anderson	Laurence Notley
Tim Edlund	John Parnwell
Graham Ford	Stephen Terry
Harvey Johnson	Tug Wilson
Anthony Lewis	

There are a few vacancies in some sections of Finchley Chamber Choir. Amateur singers of good ability are invited to audition, and are advised that opportunities for solo work also exist, since soloists are usually drawn from regular choir members.

If you would like further details, please contact Stephen Terry, St. John's Vicarage, 1163 High Road, N20 0PG.

.....

Old-style Messiah

THE Finchley Chamber Choir's *Messiah*, given on Saturday at Trinity Church, Nether Street, aimed to recreate as closely as possible the sound and style of performances heard in Handel's own time.

Since Handel himself effected many changes to the work, a single "authentic" version is impossible to achieve. In addition, modern scholars differ on details.

To the audience, it may well be irrelevant how closely the music approximates to an eighteenth century rendering. The important thing is whether it succeeds in entertaining and moving the minds and hearts of its audience whatever resources are employed.

Few, I think, would disagree that David Lardi did produce a performance of vitality and distinction. The small choir (fewer than 40 voices!) displayed admirable clarity of diction and fine phrasing. As usual, the choir supplied the soloists from within its ranks. A dozen choristers sang the solo recitatives and airs, apparently undaunted by the last-minute absence of two of their number through illness. The presence of so many at least adequate soloists within the choir obviously contributes to its beauty of tone. Yet no individual voice protrudes and the balance between the parts is excellent.

Similarly, the Linden Baroque Orchestra maintained a satisfactory balance with the choir. Certainly the thinner sound/quality of the old-style instruments allowed the choir and solo singers to shine. Some uncertain orchestral entries and moments of unhappy intonation jarred, but there were exciting sounds too; for example, the thrilling purity of "The trumpet shall sound".

Several of the choruses were lovely. There were effective interpretations where authenticity was irrelevant. "For unto us a child is born" was lyrical rather than triumphant; it was most exciting to hear the choral counterpoint resolve into the homophonic proclamation "Wonderful, Counsellor" etc. Each line's diminuendo pointed the meaning in "All we like sheep have gone astray." The a capella chorus "Since by man came death" was beautiful and very moving. Of the unfamiliar variants, I particularly enjoyed the version of "Rejoice greatly" in compound time. The staccato in a couple of the choruses achieved perhaps more jerk than bounce. However, the criticisms are slight within the context of a whole evening (the concert lasted three hours!) which was an enjoyable, satisfying and memorable experience.