

The Chantry Singers

MESSIAH

George Frideric Handel

Soprano Helen Groves

Mezzo-soprano Rachel Lambert

Tenor Mervyn Collins

Bass Michael Bundy

Leader Timothy Callaghan

Conductor Peter Coulson

Holy Trinity Church, Guildford
Tuesday 21st March, 1995 at 7.45 p.m.

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Messiah, a Sacred Oratorio George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

Words compiled from Holy Scriptures by Charles Jennens (1700-1773).
This performance uses the New Novello Choral Edition (Shaw).

“Handel says he will do nothing next Winter, but I hope I shall persuade him to set another Scripture Collection I have made for him, and perform it for his own Benefit in Passion Week. I hope he will lay out his whole Genius and Skill upon it, that the Composition may excell all his former Compositions, as the Subject excells every other Subject. The Subject is Messiah.”

(letter of Charles Jennens to Edward Holdsworth, 10th July, 1741)

Handel was ‘persuaded’, and he began the composition of *Messiah* on 22nd August, and by 14th September he had completed more than 250 pages of the original autograph. This concentration of work is an impressive achievement, but it was not unusual: Handel frequently used to write a couple of new operas or oratorios every year in a brief burst of activity in preparation for his next season of theatre performances.

George Frideric Handel was born in Halle, the son of a barber-surgeon who opposed the idea of music as his son’s chosen career. Handel studied law at Halle University, and turned to full-time music when his father died. At the age of eighteen he went to Hamburg to join the opera house, where he played second violin in the orchestra. He wrote his first opera *Almira* while he was in Hamburg, and it was produced there in 1705. In 1706 he went to Italy and met Corelli and the Scarlattis; it was not long before he mastered the Italian style in opera, chamber music, and vocal music. He was soon to be hailed as a genius, and he became the rival of his Italian contemporaries. In 1710 he was appointed court conductor in Hanover, and was also asked to write an opera for London, where he was soon to settle permanently.

In 1734 Handel moved to the new Covent Garden Theatre, but he realised that the popularity of Italian opera was declining, and he began a little reluctantly to develop the genre of dramatic oratorios. Ironically Handel's dramatic gifts found more expressive outlets in oratorio form than they had done in opera. In 1737 he fell ill through the strain of his operatic work. On his recovery he wrote a series of oratorios, including *Messiah*.

The first performance of *Messiah* took place at the New Musick-Hall, Dublin on 13th April 1742. The proceeds from the performance were shared by the Society for Relieving Prisoners, the Charitable Infirmary and Mercer's Hospital, and it took place on the Tuesday in Holy Week. Handel did not perform the work for his own benefit, but he followed the general intention of Jennens' original proposal.

Jennens wrote or arranged some of Handel's most successful English language libretti - *Saul*, *L'Allegro and Belshazzar*, as well as *Messiah*. For *Messiah* Jennens put together and adapted a Scripture Collection of diverse texts into a good and dramatic shape. However *Messiah* is an unusual oratorio in that it has no dramatic 'characters'. The three-part division of the text descended directly from the conventions of baroque Italian opera. Part One is concerned with prophecies and the Nativity; Part Two deals with the progression from Passiontide through Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension and Whitsun to the eventual triumph of God's Kingdom in the Hallelujah Chorus; and Part Three is a commentary on the theme of Resurrection with references to the Day of Judgment.

Handel was not a religious composer in the accepted sense, and this work is something of an oddity. However the lyricism and profundity of the work make it an outstanding example of devotional art.

The orchestra for tonight's performance appears by arrangement with Orchestral Management Services (tel. 01483 714550).

MESSIAH
An Oratorio

PART ONE

Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God; speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned. The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness: prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Isaiah XL, 1-3

Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill made low: the crooked straight and the rough places plain. Isaiah XL, 4

And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. Isaiah XL, 5

Thus saith the Lord of hosts: yet once a little while, and I will shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land, and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come. Haggai II, 6,7

The Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant whom ye delight in, behold he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. Malachi III, 1

But who may abide the day of his coming? And who shall stand when he appeareth? For he is like a refiner's fire. Malachi III, 2

And he shall purify the sons of Levi, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. Malachi III, 3

Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel: GOD WITH US. Isaiah VII, 14

O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion, get thee up into the high mountain; O thou that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah behold your God. Isaiah XL, 9

Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. Isaiah LX, 1

For behold darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee, and the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. Isaiah LX, 2,3

The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light, and they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined. Isaiah IX, 2

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Isaiah IX, 6

There were shepherds, abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. Luke II, 8

And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid. Luke II, 9

And the angel said unto them, fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people: for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. Luke II, 10, 11

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Luke II, 13

Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth, good will towards men. Luke II, 14

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion, shout O daughter of Jerusalem, behold thy king cometh unto thee. He is the righteous Saviour and he shall speak peace unto the heathen. Rejoice greatly, etc.

Zechariah IX, 9,10

Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing. Isaiah XXXV, 5,6

He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: and he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom and gently lead those that are with young. Isaiah XL, 11

Come unto him all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and he will give you rest. Take his yoke upon you, and learn of him, for he is meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

Matthew XI, 28, 29

His yoke is easy, and his burden is light. Matthew XI, 30

INTERVAL OF FIFTEEN MINUTES

PART TWO

Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world.

John I, 29

He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

Isaiah LIII, 3

He gave his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off his hair; he hid not his face from shame and spitting. He was despised, etc.

Isaiah L, 6

Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him. And with his stripes we are healed.

Isaiah LIII, 4,5

All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way. And the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Isaiah LIII, 6

All they that see him laugh him to scorn; they shoot out their lips, and shake their heads, saying,

Psalms XXII, 7

He trusted in God that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, if he delight in him.

Psalms XXII, 8

Thy rebuke hath broken his heart, he is full of heaviness: he looked for some to have pity on him, but there was no man, neither found he any to comfort him.

Psalms LXIX, 21

Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto his sorrow.

Lamentations I, 12

He was cut off out of the land of the living, for the transgression of thy people was he stricken. Isaiah LIII, 8

But thou didst not leave his soul in hell, nor didst thou suffer thy holy one to see corruption. Psalm XVI, 10

Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts. The Lord of hosts: he is the King of glory. Psalm XXIV, 7-10

The Lord gave the word, great was the company of the preachers. Psalm LXVIII, 11

Their sound is gone out into all lands, and their words unto the ends of the world. Romans X, 18

Why do the nations so furiously rage together, and why do the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth rise up, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed. Psalm II, 1,2

Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away their yokes from us. Psalm II, 3

He that dwelleth in heaven shall laugh them to scorn: the Lord shall have them in derision. Psalm II, 4

Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron, thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Psalm II, 9

Hallelujah, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Revelation XIX, 6

The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever. Revelation XI, 15

King of Kings, and Lord of Lords. Hallelujah. Revelation XIX, 16

PART THREE

I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God. Job XIX, 25, 26

For now is Christ risen from the dead, the first fruits of them that sleep. I Corinthians XV, 20

Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead; for as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. I Corinthians XV, 21, 22

Behold I tell you a mystery: we shall not all sleep, but we shall be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. I Corinthians XV, 51, 52

The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. I Corinthians XV, 52, 53

Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, death is swallowed up in victory. I Corinthians XV, 54

O Death, where is thy sting? O Grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law, I Corinthians XV, 55, 56

But thanks be to God who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ. I Corinthians XV, 57

If God be for us, who can be against us? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again, who is at the right hand of God, who makes intercession for us.

Romans VIII, 31, 33, 34

Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God by his blood, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. Blessing and honour, glory and power be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever. Amen.

Revelation V, 9, 12-14

Helen Groves studied with Heather Harper at the Royal College of Music, where she won the Clytie Mundy Prize. She works throughout the United Kingdom and Europe as a soloist in opera and oratorio, and she gives recitals. She sings regularly with New London Consort and the Musicians of the Globe, and recently joined The Sixteen and The King's Consort. Last year Helen took a role in Jonathan Miller's semi-staged production of Bach's St. Matthew Passion, which was broadcast at Easter on BBC2. She is joining the Passion Project for their forthcoming performances this year. This Spring she will join The King's Consort on a European tour of Purcell's The Indian Queen.

Rachel Lambert studied at Bristol University and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. She took the role of Filipyevna in the 1994 British Youth Opera production of Eugene Onegin with performances in the Edinburgh Festival Theatre and Sadler's Wells Theatre in London. Most recently she has recorded Mozart's Requiem with Les Arts Florissants in Paris under the direction of William Christie. Rachel's oratorio performances include the Bach Passions, Bach's Magnificat, Vivaldi's Gloria, Brahms' Alto Rhapsody and Handel's Messiah. Future engagements include concerts in Paris, Lisbon, Aix-en-Provence and Vienna with Les Arts Florissants.

Mervyn Collins, after receiving an honours degree in music, studied at the Guildhall School of Music and the Rotterdam Conservatoire. He is now in demand as a concert and recital singer, performing an extensive repertoire throughout Britain, Ireland, Europe and North America. Notable broadcasts have included *The Songs of Tom Moore* with Seamus Heaney (BBC), *Moeran's English Lyrics* (BBC), *Howell's Requiem*, *Britten's St. Nicolas* (American Radio), as well as solo appearances on Canadian, Dutch and Independent Television. Recent engagements include *Bach's St. John Passion* and *St. Matthew Passion*, *Stainer's Crucifixion*, *Maunder's Olivet to Calvary*, *Mendelssohn's Elijah*, and *Vaughan Williams' Sancta Civitas* with Vernon Handley.

Michael Bundy was educated at Trinity College, Cambridge where he was a choral exhibitioner, and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. As a professional singer, he has worked extensively as a freelance soloist, appearing with ensembles as varied as *The Sixteen* and *The Futurum Ensemble of Sweden*, and was for over four years a member of the *BBC Singers*. He frequently broadcasts for *BBC Radio 2*, and has already this year performed the roles of *Olin Britt* in *Music Man* and *Mr. Lindquist* in *Stephen Sondheim's A Little Night Music*, as part of their series of *Great American Musicals*.

Peter Coulson has been conductor of *The Chantry Singers* since 1992. After graduating from *Durham University* he moved to his present position as a *Lay Clerk* at *Guildford Cathedral*. As a conductor he has worked with orchestras and soloists, performing much of the symphonic and concerto repertoire, including *Sibelius' 2nd Symphony*, *Dvorak's 8th Symphony* and *Grieg's Piano Concerto*. He has also conducted opera, including staged performances of *Gilbert and Sullivan's Patience*. With *The Chantry Singers* he has conducted an eclectic programme including *Haydn's Theresa Mass*, *Brahms' Ein Deutsches Requiem*, and much unaccompanied repertoire ranging from *Tavener* to *Tippett*.

The Chantry Singers' next concert will take place on 1st July 1995 in Tormead School, Guildford. The programme will include Brahms' Liebeslieder Waltzes and Tippett's Five Negro Spirituals.

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