



George Frideric Handel (23 February 1685 – 14 April 1759) was a German-British Baroque composer, famous for his operas, oratorios, and concertos. He received critical musical training in Italy before settling in London and becoming a naturalised British subject. His works include *Messiah*, *Water Music*, and *Music for the Royal Fireworks*. He was strongly influenced by the great composers of the Italian Baroque and the middle-German polyphonic choral tradition. Handel's music was well-known to such later composers as Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. Handel's compositions include fifty operas, twenty-three oratorios, and a large amount of church music, not to speak of his superb instrumental pieces. After his death, Handel's Italian operas fell into obscurity, save the odd fragment, such as the ubiquitous aria from *Serse*, *Ombra mai fù*; his reputation throughout the 19th century and first half of the 20th century, particularly in the Anglophone countries, rested primarily on his

English oratorios, which were customarily performed by enormous choruses of amateur singers on solemn occasions. These include *Esther* (1720); *Saul* (1739); *Israel in Egypt* (1739); *Messiah* (1742); *Samson* (1743); *Judas Maccabaeus* (1747); and *Jephthah* (1752).

Since the 1960s, with the revival of interest in baroque music and original instrument playing styles, interest has revived in Handel's Italian operas, and many have been recorded and performed onstage. Of the fifty he wrote between 1705 and 1738, *Alcina* (1735), *Ariodante* (1735), *Orlando* (1733), *Rinaldo* (1711,1731), *Rodelinda* (1725), and *Serse* (also known as *Xerxes*) (1738) stand out and are now performed regularly in opera houses and concert halls. Arguably the finest, however, is *Giulio Cesare* (1724) which, thanks to its superb orchestral and vocal writing, has entered the mainstream opera repertoire.

Messiah (often but incorrectly called *The Messiah*) is an English-language oratorio and is one of the most popular works in the Western choral literature. The libretto by Charles Jennens is drawn entirely from the King James and Great Bibles, and interprets the Christian doctrine of the Messiah. Composed in London during the summer of 1741 and premiered in Dublin, Ireland on 13 April 1742, it was repeatedly revised by Handel, reaching its most familiar version in the performance to benefit the Foundling Hospital in 1754. In 1789 Mozart orchestrated a German version of the work; his added woodwind parts, and the edition by Ebenezer Prout, were commonly heard until the mid-20th century and the rise of historically informed performance. *Messiah* presents an interpretation of the Christian view of the Messiah, or "the anointed one" as Jesus the Christ. Divided into three parts, the libretto covers the Messianic prophecy, his birth, miracles, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and finally the End Times with the Christ's final victory over death and sin. Although the work was conceived for secular theatre and first performed during Lent, it has become common practice since Handel's death to perform *Messiah* during Advent, the preparatory period of the Christmas season, rather than in Lent or at Easter. *Messiah* is often performed in churches as well as in concert halls. Christmas concerts often feature only the first section of *Messiah* plus the "Hallelujah" chorus, although some ensembles feature the entire work as a Christmas concert. The work is also heard at Eastertide, and selections containing resurrection themes are often included in Easter services.

The work is divided into three parts which address specific events in the life of Christ. Part One is primarily concerned with the Advent and Christmas stories. Part Two chronicles Christ's passion, resurrection, ascension, and the proclamation to the world of the Christian message. Part Three is based primarily upon the events chronicled in the Book of Revelation. Although *Messiah* deals with Christ's life as told in the New Testament, a majority of the oratorio texts was selected from the Old Testament, such as the prophetic books of Isaiah, Haggai, Malachi.

PART I

OVERTURE.

RECITATIVE. (Accompanied - Tenor) *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.*

AIR (Tenor). *Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill made low, the crooked straight and the rough places plain.*

CHORUS. *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.*

RECITATIVE (Accompanied - Bass). *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. 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.*

AIR (Bass). *But who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth? For He is like a refiner's fire.*

CHORUS. *And He shall purify the sons of Levi that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.*

RECITATIVE (Alto). *Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call his name Emmanuel, God with us.*

AIR (Alto) and **CHORUS.** *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 you God! Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.*

RECITATIVE (Accompanied - Bass). *For Behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people; but the Lord shall rise 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.*

AIR (Bass). *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.*

CHORUS. *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.*

PASTORAL SYMPHONY

RECITATIVE (Soprano). *There were shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.*

RECITATIVE (Accompanied - Soprano). *And lo! the angel of the Lord cam upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid.*

RECITATIVE (Soprano). *And the angel said unto the, 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.*

RECITATIVE (Accompanied - Soprano). *And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying:*

CHORUS. *Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth, goodwill towards men.*

AIR (Soprano). *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.*

RECITATIVE (Alto). *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.*

AIR (Alto). *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.*

AIR (Alto). *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.*

CHORUS. *His yoke is easy and His burthen is light.*

PART II

CHORUS. *Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.*

AIR (Alto). *He was despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He gave His back to the smiters, and His cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: He hid not His face from shame and spitting.*

CHORUS. *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.*

CHORUS. *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.*

RECITATIVE (Accompanied - Tenor). *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.*

AIR (Tenor). *Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto His sorrow.*

RECITATIVE (Accompanied - Soprano). *He was cut off out of the land of the living; for the transgression of Thy people was He stricken.*

AIR (Soprano). *But Thou didst not leave His soul in hell; nor didst Thou suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption.*

CHORUS. *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 the 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 the King of Glory? The Lord of Hosts, He is the King of Glory.*

RECITATIVE (Tenor). *Unto which of the angels said He at any time, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee?*

CHORUS. *Let all the angels of God worship Him.*

AIR (Bass). *Thou art gone up on high; Thou hast led captivity captive, and received gifts for men, yea, even for Thine enemies, that the Lord God might dwell among them.*

CHORUS. *The Lord gave the word, great was the company of the preachers.*

AIR (Soprano). *How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things.*

CHORUS. *Their sound is gone out into all lands, and their words unto the ends of the world.*

AIR (Bass). *Why do the nations so furiously rage together, and who 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.*

CHORUS. *Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away their yokes from us.*

RECITATIVE (Tenor). *He that dwelleth in heaven shall laugh them to scorn; the Lord shall have them in derision.*

AIR (Tenor). *Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.*

CHORUS. *Hallelujah: for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth. The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign forever and ever. King of Kings, and Lord of Lords. Hallelujah!*

Part III

AIR (Soprano). *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. For now is Christ risen from the dead, the first-fruits of them that sleep.*

CHORUS. *Since by man came death,*

CHORUS. *By man came also the resurrection of the dead.*

CHORUS. *For as in Adam all die,*

CHORUS. *Even so in Christ shall all be made alive*

RECITATIVE (Accompanied - Bass). *Behold, I tell you a mystery; We shall not all sleep; but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.*

AIR (Bass). *The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.*

RECITATIVE (Alto). *Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written; Beats is swallowed up in victory!*

DUET (Alto and Tenor). *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.*

CHORUS. *But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

AIR (Soprano). *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.*

CHORUS. *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.*