

Messiah

Saturday, December 16, 2023 • 2:30 p.m. • First Free Methodist Church

Sunday, December 17, 2023 • 2:30 p.m. • Bastyr Chapel

Harmonia Orchestra and Chorus

William White, conductor and harpsichord



Jocelyn Claire Thomas, soprano • **Soon Cho**, mezzo-soprano

Namarea Randolph-Yosea, tenor • **Zachary Lenox**, baritone

GEORG FRIDERIC HANDEL (1685–1759)

Messiah, HWV 56

Symphony

Accompagnato: "Comfort Ye"

Air: "Every valley shall be exalted"

Chorus: "And the glory of the Lord"

Accompagnato: "Thus saith the Lord"

Air: "But who may abide"

Chorus: "And He shall purify"

Recitative: "Behold, a Virgin shall conceive"

Air and Chorus: "O thou that tellest"

Accompagnato: "For behold, darkness"

Air: "The people that walked in darkness"

Chorus: "For unto us a child is born"

Pastoral Symphony

Recitative: "There were shepherds"

Accompagnato: "And lo, the angel"

Recitative: "And the angel said unto them"

Accompagnato: "And suddenly there was with the angel"

Chorus: "Glory to God in the highest"

Air: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion"

Recitative: "Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened"

Air: "He shall feed His flock"

Chorus: "His yoke is easy"

— intermission (15 minutes) —

Chorus: "Behold the Lamb of God"

Air: "He was despised"

Chorus: "Surely He hath borne our griefs"

Chorus: "And with His stripes"

Chorus: "All we, like sheep"

Accompagnato: "All they that see Him"

Chorus: "He trusted in God"

Accompagnato: "Thy rebuke hath broken His heart"

Arioso: "Behold, and see if there be any sorrow"

Accompagnato: "He was cut off"

Air: "But Thou didst not leave"

Chorus: "Lift up your heads"

Recitative: "Unto which of the angels"

Chorus: "Let all the angels"

Air: "Thou art gone up on high"

Chorus: "The Lord gave the word"

Air: "How beautiful are the feet"

Chorus: "Their sound is gone out"

Air: "Why do the nations"

Chorus: "Let us break their bonds asunder"

Recitative: "He that dwelleth"

Air: "Thou shalt break them"

Chorus: "Hallelujah"

— intermission (10 minutes) —

Air: "I know that my Redeemer liveth"

Chorus: "Since by man came death"

Accompagnato: "Behold, I tell you a mystery"

Air: "The trumpet shall sound"

Recitative: "Then shall be brought to pass"

Duet: "O death, where is thy sting?"

Chorus: "But thanks be to God"

Air: "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

Chorus: "Worthy is the Lamb"

Please silence cell phones and other electronics, and refrain from the use of cameras and recording devices during the performance.

Harmonia Orchestra and Chorus

William White, music director • George Shangrow, founder

1916 Pike Pl. Ste 12 #112, Seattle WA 98101 • 206-682-5208 • www.harmoniaseattle.org

Acclaimed by *The Source* for her “staggeringly brilliant” and “ethereal” voice, soprano **Jocelyn Claire Thomas** has engaged audiences with her haunting sound, musical intelligence and unusual versatility. Recent highlights include Barber’s *Knoxville: Summer of 1915* with Salem Philharmonia, Susanna in *Le nozze di Figaro* with Tacoma Opera, Amore in *Orpheus and Eurydice* with Inland Northwest Opera, Nedda in *Pagliacci* with Opera Bend, Bach’s Christmas Oratorio with Portland’s Bach Cantata Choir, Mozart’s *Exsultate Jubilate* with Central Oregon Symphony, Marzelline in *Fidelio* with Astoria Music Festival, and Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9, Mendelssohn’s *Elijah* and Handel’s *Messiah* with Bravo Northwest. She has also performed with Eugene Opera, Inland Northwest Opera, Brava Opera Theatre, Opera Theater Oregon, Portland Concert Opera, Bremerton Symphony, Beaverton Symphony, 45th Parallel, Cascadia Chamber Opera, Central Oregon Mastersingers and Portland SummerFest. Originally from Missouri, Ms. Thomas holds a B.M. from Oberlin and an M.M. and a Graduate Performance Diploma from Peabody. Currently based in Portland, she maintains a private studio in voice, piano and flute, and serves as artistic director for Ping & Woof Opera.



Praised by *Opera News* for her “potent presence” and as “regal in bearing, with vocal endowments to match” by *The Cincinnati Post*, lyric mezzo-soprano **Soon Cho** has gained recognition for her sensitive artistry and winning execution on the recital, concert and opera stages, and has performed across the United States and in Australia, Belgium, Canada, China, France, Great Britain, Italy, New Zealand and South Korea. She has been featured as a soloist in works by Bach (*St. John Passion* with the Vocal Arts Ensemble), Mozart (Requiem at the Forbidden City Concert Hall in China), Beethoven (Choral Fantasy with the Cincinnati Symphony and May Festival Chorus), Dvořák (*Stabat Mater* with the Honolulu Symphony) and Mahler (*Kindertotenlieder* with the Breckenridge Music Festival). On the operatic stage, she has sung leading roles in *Ariadne auf Naxos*, *Così fan tutte*, *Dido and Aeneas*, *Norma*, *Gianni Schicchi*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *L’Enfant et les Sortilèges* and *Dialogues of the Carmelites*. An associate professor of voice at Pacific Lutheran University, Dr. Cho received a D.M.A. and Artist Diploma from the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, an M.M. from the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University, and a B.A./B.M. from the University of Washington.



South Sudanese–American tenor **Namarea Randolph-Yosea** completed his Bachelor of Music at Western Washington University in 2019 and in 2022 earned a Master of Music in Vocal Performance at the University of Houston under the tutelage of Melanie Sonnenberg. On the concert stage, he was recently featured as soloist in Bach’s BWV 141 with the Mercury Chamber Orchestra, and in Adolphus Hailstork’s cantata *I Will Lift Up Mine Eyes* with Choral Arts Northwest. He has sung the Mozart Requiem with the WWU Symphony and Margaret Bonds’ *The Ballad of the Brown King* with Seattle Choral Company, as well as Bach’s *Magnificat* and the Evangelist in Bach’s Christmas Oratorio with Kirkland Choral Society. On the operatic stage, Mr. Randolph-Yosea recently sang Ernesto in Donizetti’s *Don Pasquale* with Union Avenue Opera, in which he wowed audiences with his “velvet smooth and sweet, sweet, sweet” instrument (*Broadway World*). He was selected for the 2023 Gerdine Young Artist program at Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, singing the role of Cephus in *Treemonisha*, participated in the inaugural OTSL New Works Collective, performing the role of X in *Madison Lodge*, and was selected as an apprentice artist at Des Moines Metro Opera for its 50th anniversary season.



Praised for “a broad, resonant baritone that is exquisitely controlled throughout his entire range,” **Zachary Lenox** has performed across North America, including the roles of Silvio (*Pagliacci*), Marcello (*La Bohème*), Marullo (*Rigoletto*), Count Almaviva (*Le nozze di Figaro*), Guglielmo and Don Alfonso (*Così fan tutte*), Papageno (*Die Zauberflöte*), Father (*Hansel and Gretel*), Sid (*Albert Herring*), Gianni Schicchi and Betto (*Gianni Schicchi*), and Dick Deadeye (*H.M.S. Pinafore*). He has appeared with Portland Opera, Opera Parallèle, Pacific Music Works, Cascadia Chamber Opera, Portland Summerfest, Portland Chamber Orchestra, Portland Concert Opera, Eugene Concert Choir, Bravo Northwest and the Astoria Music Festival. Concert appearances include Handel’s *Messiah*, *Samson* and *Judas Maccabeus*, Haydn’s *Lord Nelson* Mass, Schubert’s Mass in G, the Mozart, Verdi and Fauré Requiems, Orff’s *Carmina Burana* and many works of J.S. Bach, including both the role of Jesus and the baritone arias (the latter on short notice) in the *St. Matthew Passion* with Harmonia. His engagements this season include Beethoven’s Ninth with the Oregon Symphony, the world premiere of William C. White’s *Cassandra* with Harmonia, and Elgar’s *The Dream of Gerontius* with Festival Chorale Oregon.



Violin

Dean Drescher
 Jason Forman
 Stephen Hegg
 Jason Hershey
 Fritz Klein
 Gregor Nitsche
 Jean Provine
 Stephen Provine**
 Theo Schaad
 Chris Sheehy
 Kenna Smith-Shangrow*

Viola

Colleen Chlastawa
 Cristina Cruz-Uribe
 Stephanie Read
 Sam Williams*

Cello

Christy Johnson
 Katie Sauter Messick
 Matthew Wyant*

Bass

Jo Hansen*
 Steven Messick

Oboe

Yuh-Pey Lin*
 Margaret Siple

Bassoon

Jeff Eldridge

Trumpet

Nick Simko
 Janet Young*

Timpani

Daniel Oie

Harpichord

Paul Tegels
 William White

Organ

Wyatt Smith

Theorbo

Daniel Frizzell

** *concertmaster*

* *principal*

Soprano

Barb Anderson
 Ann Bridges
 Sue Cobb
 Karen Dunstan
 Beth Fineberg
 Peggy Hudson
 Alivia Jones
 Peggy Kurtz
 Veena Ramakrishnan
 Nancy Shasteen
 Cassie Van Pay

Alto

Sharon Agnew
 Anjali Chudasama
 Jennifer Chung
 Emily Crawford
 Susanna Erber
 Deanna Fryhle
 Nori Heikkinen
 Pamela Ivezić
 Natalia Johnson
 Ellen Kaisse
 Jan Kinney
 Theodora Letz
 Laurie Medill

Tenor

Juan Pablo Bustos
 Dan Charlson
 Ralph Cobb
 William Ekstrom
 Steve Kauffman
 Aaron Keyt
 Rick Thompson
 Jon White

Bass

Gus Blazek
 Stephen Carl
 Rabi Lahiri
 Jack Meyer
 Jeremy Pfister Schneider
 Gabe Salmon
 Steve Tachell
 Derrick White
 William Willaford
 Rick Wyckoff

Maestro's Prelude

Dear listeners,

Welcome to Harmonia's annual *Messiah* performances! Believe it or not, this Seattle tradition goes back nearly 50 years. But the unbroken tradition of this particular Handel oratorio extends all the way back to 1750, making it the oldest work of Western art music never to have fallen out of the repertoire. In fact, it's really *the* foundational work: the first piece of classical music.

I've been considering what it is about *Messiah* that has made it so durable to these 274 years. The appeal of the music is obvious, but Handel wrote lots of appealing music, most of which nobody listened to during the first 250 years following his death, and very little of which is presented with any regularity even today.

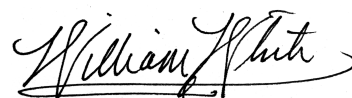
Pacing has a lot to do with it, and I'll offer a lesson by way of contrast: I recently attended a performance of a Handel opera, *Alcina*, and was struck by its unrelenting nature. *Alcina*, as with many Handel operas, consists of a parade of solo arias that, while individually beautiful, tend to bog down the evening in a certain monochromatism. *Messiah* does not suffer this problem: the arias, choruses and instrumental interludes are perfectly balanced and paced to magnificent effect so that the listener's attention is held rapt during the three-and-a-half hours it takes to perform.

Then there's *Messiah's* libretto, which, the more I think about it, seems to have played nearly as important a role in the work's centuries-long success. As you may know, *Messiah* recounts the three main episodes of Jesus' story as depicted in the bible (his birth, his passion and death, and his resurrection), but if you look closely, you'll notice that this story is told obliquely, not directly.

The text of Part I—the section dealing with the Christmas story—consists almost entirely of Old Testament prophecy foretelling the coming of a savior. There are brief selections from the gospel of Luke, but these are just quotations from the Old Testament. The same is true of nearly all of Part II (with the exception of the "Hallelujah" chorus, which comes from Revelation). Part III delves into the New Testament, but mainly quotes the epistles, not the gospels. In fact, the name "Jesus" is mentioned only once in the entire text of *Messiah*, and that comes in the brief "but thanks be to God" chorus near the end.

This was a very clever gambit on the part of Charles Jennens: For Christians well-versed in scripture, these passages present a well-known story in a new way, adding depth to the familiar. Meanwhile, non-believers are greeted by a text full of universal human emotions, while not being confronted with a gospel narrative that they find irrelevant.

That's all to say, *Messiah* is truly a piece for everyone, a delight from start to finish, whether you are hearing it for the first time this afternoon, or the fiftieth!



Part the First

Symphony

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.

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

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

Isaiah 40:1–5

Thus saith the Lord, 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 2:6–7

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.

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

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

Malachi 3:1–2

Behold, a Virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call His name Emmanuel, "God with us."

Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23

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 40:9

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

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 60:1–3

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

Isaiah 9:2

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 9:6

Pifa (Pastoral Symphony)

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

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.

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 Savior, which is Christ the Lord.

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

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

Luke 2:8–14

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee.

He is the righteous Savior and He shall speak peace unto the heathen.

Zechariah 9:9–10

Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped.

Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing.

Isaiah 35:5–6

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

Isaiah 40:11

Come unto Him, all ye that labor 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.

His yoke is easy, His burthen is light.

Matthew 11:28–30

Part the Second

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

John 1:29

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

Isaiah 53:3

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.

Isaiah 50:6

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.

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 53:4-6*

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

He trusted in God that He would deliver Him: let Him deliver Him, if He delight in Him. *Psalms 22:7-8*

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 69:20*

Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto His sorrow. *Lamentations 1:12*

He was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgressions of Thy people was He stricken. *Isaiah 53:8*

But Thou didst not leave His soul in hell; nor didst Thou suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption. *Psalms 16:10*

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.

The Lord of Hosts, He is the King of Glory. *Psalms 24:7-10*

Unto which of the angels said He at any time, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee?

Let all the angels of God worship Him. *Hebrews 1:5-6*

Thou art gone up on high, Thou hast led captivity captive, and received gifts for men; yea, even from Thine enemies, that the Lord God might dwell among them. *Psalms 68:18*

The Lord gave the word: great was the company of the preachers. *Psalms 68:11*

How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! *Romans 10:15*

Their sound is gone out into all lands, and their words unto the ends of the world. *Romans 10:18*

Why do the nations so furiously rage together: 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.

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

He that dwelleth in heaven shall laugh them to scorn: the Lord shall have them in derision. *Psalms 2:1-4*

Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. *Psalms 2:9*

Hallelujah, for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth, Hallelujah! *Revelation 19:6*

The Kingdom of this world is become the Kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever, Hallelujah! *Revelation 11:15*

King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, and He shall reign for ever and ever, Hallelujah! *Revelation 19:16*

Part the Third

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 19: 25-26*

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

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 15:20-22*

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.

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.

Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

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.

But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. *I Corinthians 15:51-57*

If God be for us, who can be against us? *Romans 8:31*

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 8:33-34*

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 honor, and glory, and blessing.

Blessing and honor, glory and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever. Amen. *Revelation 5:12-13*

Program Notes

Georg Frideric Handel

Messiah, HWV 56

Handel was born in Halle, Germany, on February 23, 1685, and died in London on April 14, 1759. He composed Messiah between August 22 and September 14 of 1741. The oratorio was first performed in Dublin on April 13, 1742, under the direction of the composer. In addition to SATB soloists and choir, the work calls for 2 oboes, bassoon, 2 trumpets, timpani, strings and continuo.

Handel, renowned in his day as an organist and as a highly prolific writer of Italian operas and English oratorios, was born in Germany in 1685 about a month before J.S. Bach. He received his musical training in Italy, and later became 18th-century England's "national composer." Between February and November 1741, Handel—suffering at the age of 56 from various ailments, both financial and physical—withdraw increasingly from public life. At some point that year, the composer received from the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland and the governors of Dublin's three major charitable institutions an invitation to travel to that city to aid the charities through the performance of his music. Handel was well known in Dublin as a church-music composer, and his works were often played there to benefit charities. It may thus have been this invitation that provided the incentive for Handel to compose "a new sacred Oratorio." In July of 1741, Charles Jennens, who was responsible for the texts of Handel's oratorios *Israel in Egypt* and *Saul*, gave the struggling Handel the libretto of *Messiah*, a compilation of biblical texts from both the Old and New Testaments.

On August 22, Handel began to set Jennens' text to music. He finished the first part of his new oratorio (which deals with the prophecy of Christ's coming and his nativity) in six days, the second part (which describes Jesus' suffering, death, resurrection and ascension, the spread of his gospel, the resistance of the heathen, and the vision of the ultimate triumph of the gospel in the establishment of God's kingdom) in nine days, and the third part (which celebrates the gift of resurrection and eternal life offered to all through Christ's victory over death) in six more days, with two or three additional days for completing the orchestration. Regarding Handel's state of mind during *Messiah's* composition, biographer Jonathan Keates observes in his 1992 book *Handel: The Man and Music* that "etherealized visions of the elderly master refusing food, weeping into the semiquavers and having angelic hallucinations are mostly moonshine."

In the autumn of 1741, Handel accepted the invitation to visit Dublin, arriving on November 18 with the completed score of *Messiah* in his traveling bags, but it was not until April 13, 1742, that the oratorio received its premiere. Seven hundred people squeezed into Dublin's Musick Hall in Fishamble-street to hear the work performed by the choirs of Dublin's two cathedrals (totaling fewer than 40 men and boys) and the string band (reinforced occasionally by trumpets and timpani—oboe and bassoon parts were added later), all directed from the keyboard by Mr. Handel himself. The work created a sensation: "Words are wanting

to express the exquisite Delight it afforded to the admiring crouded Audience," exulted *Faulkner's Journal*. "The Sublime, the Grand, and the Tender, adapted to the most elevated, majestick and moving Words, conspired to transport and charm the ravished Heart and Ear." Handel divided his share of the proceeds (about £400), as did the other performers, among Dublin's three most important charities.

Messiah is unique among Handel's works, being his only biblical oratorio using texts from the New Testament, and his only "Christian-contemplative" oratorio. Although the text is not a dramatic narrative but an epic-lyric poem celebrating Christian redemption, Handel's musical approach in setting Jennens' libretto was decidedly dramatic. The work's three parts recall the three acts of Italian operas, and the oratorio is indeed a piece designed by a seasoned operatic professional to "entertain," in the best sense of the word, listeners in a concert room, not chiefly to instruct or edify a congregation or to be used in any sort of worship.

Handel synthesizes the best elements of the three musical traditions in which he was steeped: the Italian, the German and the English. He makes use of Italian forms of musical expression, borrowing, rearranging and transforming into "duet-choruses" (such as "And he shall purify") some passages from his own Italian love duets. In the "Pastoral Symphony" (entitled *Pifa*) that introduces the shepherds, Handel alludes to the music of the *pifferari*, the country bagpipers who descend the Italian mountains during the Christmas season to play in village streets. Handel employs German musical ideas, particularly in the music describing Jesus' suffering and death, where the jagged dotted rhythms and forceful harmonies have a particularly German expressive quality. In that great "coronation march," the "Hallelujah Chorus," melodic fragments echoing the German chorale "Wachet auf" may be heard in "The kingdom of this world" and in "And he shall reign for ever and ever." Handel's melodic shapes, vocal treatment, grand anthem-like choruses, and text-setting display the "English character" that has ensured *Messiah's* unchallenged supremacy in the English choral repertoire: in such arias as "He was despised" and "I know that my Redeemer liveth," the rhythms of the music grow out of the natural speech rhythms of the words, so that the music expresses the text directly and powerfully, and then illustrates it almost visually (e.g., "Every valley shall be exalted," "The people that walked in darkness," and "All we, like sheep").

The easy accessibility and glorious variety of the music that results from the confluence of these elements (and which often conceals the exalted art underlying it) has helped to guarantee *Messiah's* survival, through a seeming infinitude of "arrangements," versions and types of presentation, as one of the most popular pieces ever composed. As R.A. Streatfeild observes, "*Messiah*, if not Handel's greatest work, is undoubtedly the most universal in its appeal" because it continues to sing to "high and low, rich and poor, wise and foolish alike" a magnificent song of salvation, fresh, vital and full of aesthetic and spiritual grace.

— Lorelette Knowles

Harmonia and *Messiah*

The Seattle Chamber Singers first presented (the Christmas portion of) *Messiah* in December 1970, on a holiday program that included the world premiere of a cantata by the group's founder, George Shangrow. In those early years George led annual sing-along *Messiahs* at University Unitarian Church, a tradition that began in 1969. And in 1975 he played harpsichord ("superbly," according to *The Seattle Times*) in a Seattle Symphony performance of the work.

The following year George (described as a "young man of much hair" by a *Times* reviewer) conducted the first complete SCS *Messiah*, billed as "almost a duplicate of the first performance of *Messiah* as Handel first heard the work" and the Seattle premiere of this "Dublin version" of the score. KUOW-FM broadcast the concert live from Meany Hall and the *Times* critic praised the "crisp, clean, good sound, a chorus together in joyous harmony."

The group presented *Messiah* almost every season that followed — except for 1983, 1985 (the Bach Year), 1993 and 1996 — until George's death in 2010. The ensemble performed it that year in tribute to its founder, but took a break for the next two seasons, returning to the work during Clinton Smith's first year as music director.

One decision the conductor of any Baroque oratorio must make is which keyboard instrument(s) to use for the continuo section of the orchestra: organ, harpsichord, both? The earliest SCS performances generally featured a single harpsichord, invariably played by composer and keyboardist Robert Kechley, a founding member

of the group. In 1984 he was joined by a second harpsichordist, but then continued solo until 1990, when George began playing and conducting from a second harpsichord, much as Handel himself would have done.

In 1998, the organization (with support from the PAC-CAR Foundation, King County Arts Commission, Visio Corporation and other generous donors) commissioned Michael Reiter of Tacoma to build a pair of instruments for use in *Messiah* and other Baroque works. Starting from kits made by Hubbard Harpsichords of Massachusetts, he created two instruments modeled on the French double-keyboard harpsichords of the 18th century. One contains three choirs of strings, while another has four sets of jacks instead of three. The first made its debut at our 1999 *Messiah*, and was joined by its companion the following year.

George and Bob played these harpsichords for *Messiah* thereafter until George's death, when this practice subsided. Our orchestra continued to employ one of the instruments for Baroque works, while the other has resided at Benaroya Hall in recent years, used by the Seattle Symphony and distinguished guest artists for many of their Baroque performances (along with some 20th- and 21st-century works requiring harpsichord).

In 2019, Seattle-based harpsichord builder David Calhoun overhauled both instruments to his exacting specifications and we welcomed Bob Kechley back to the keyboard that year for our *Messiah* concerts, sitting opposite Will White at the second harpsichord. These days, Will is joined by Sheila Bristow at the harpsichords, with additional support from a portative organ and a theorbo.



BUXTEHUDE: MEMBRA JESU NOSTRI

FRIDAY, MARCH 1
7:30 PM

Dietrich Buxtehude's rarely performed *Membra Jesu Nostri* is a sacred choral masterpiece consisting of seven cantatas, each dedicated to a different part of Christ's crucified body.

Five soloists will join baroque instruments and chamber choir to present a unique opportunity to hear this deeply expressive and beautiful work.



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