



JEPHTHA

THE BROADWAY SYMPHONY/ SEATTLE CHAMBER SINGERS

The collaboration of the Broadway Symphony and the Seattle Chamber Singers has become a respected musical force in the Pacific Northwest. This company of volunteer artists is dedicated to the presentation of exciting and well polished musical performances. Each ensemble rehearses at University Unitarian Church, where they enjoy the status of artists-in-residence, and where they develop further musical skills and repertoire under the direction of conductor George Shangrow. Membership is by audition, and general auditions for vacant positions are held every August and September. On several occasions each season, smaller ensembles are formed from the main ensembles for the performance of chamber music. Especially important to the Broadway Symphony/Seattle Chamber Singers is the support and presentation of local performing artists and the work of local composers.

PAUL KARAITIS-LASH has performed with notable success throughout the Pacific Northwest in operatic and concert repertoires, singing everything from Abraham in Britten's *Abraham & Isaac* at St. James Cathedral to Alfred in *Fledermaus* for the Eugene (Oregon) Opera and Normanno in the recent run of Seattle Opera's *Lucia di Lammermoor*.

Originally from Los Angeles, Paul makes his home in Seattle, where is a regular soloist at the Saint James Cathedral and the Temple Beth-Am synagogue. He will be joining the St. James choir when they sing for All Soul's Day Mass at the Vatican in Rome this November 2nd.

GRETCHEN HEWITT is a graduate of the Oberlin Conservatory of Music in Oberlin, Ohio, and has resided in Washington for the past twelve years. Gretchen performed with the Broadway Symphony/Seattle Chamber Singers during the BACH YEAR as soprano soloist in their presentations of J.S. Bach's *Wedding Cantata* and *Christmas Oratorio*. She has also performed with the Seattle Pro Musica and is a preview artist for Seattle Opera.

MARCIA BELLAMY last appeared with the BS/SCS in their BACH YEAR presentation of the St. Matthew Passion. She has performed as soloist with the Seattle Pro Musica, Opus 1, The Contemporary Group, The Seattle Philharmonic, and Pacific Northwest Ballet. Marcia is currently completing her Master of Music degree at the University of Washington, where she recently portrayed the title roles in *Ariodante* and *L'Italiana in Algieri*.

GEORGE SHANGROW, Music Director and Conductor of the Broadway Symphony and the Seattle Chamber Singers, is a native of Seattle, who founded the chorus (in 1968) and the orchestra (in 1978) in order to give Seattle area artists and audiences an opportunity to hear and perform great works of music. In addition to acclaimed performances of the classic repertoire for both orchestra and chorus, he has brought to Seattle world premiers of operas, choral works and symphonies by Seattle's most gifted local composers. Mr. Shangrow has toured Europe as a conductor and keyboard artist; appeared as guest conductor with the Northwest Chamber Orchestra, the Seattle Symphony, and Eastern Texas University Opera; and lectures frequently for Seattle Opera and Symphony. As Director of Music for University Unitarian Church Mr. Shangrow is a leader in the performance of sacred music, and as the guiding producer of The Bach Year in Seattle he brought to our city in 1985 the world's most extensive celebration of the music of J. S. Bach.

WENDY ELLISON MULLEN attended college at Middlebury College, Vt., where she performed with the Vermont Opera Workshop and the Vermont Symphony Orchestra. She received her Masters in English from the University of Washington and is currently enrolled there as a Candidate in Philosophy. Wendy has appeared as a soloist with the University of Washington Chorale and has performed leading roles in several UW Opera productions, including *Ariodante* and *The Magic Flute*.

PETER KECHLEY has been performing as a featured soloist for the Seattle Chamber Singers for over fifteen years, and has also done a great deal of solo work for Seattle area churches and synagogues. No stranger to the operatic stage, Peter most recently performed roles in all three one-act operas that were premiered last spring by the Broadway Symphony. He was an instrumental part of the BACH YEAR, having programmed all twelve of the Cantata Sundays and having performed as a soloist in many of the cantatas as well as the major works.

CATHERINE HAIGHT is a graduate of Seattle Pacific University. She has appeared as soloist with several area ensembles including the Broadway Symphony/Seattle Chamber Singers and the Skagit Valley Bach Choir. During the BACH YEAR, Catherine performed as a soloist in the Cantata Sunday Series, including the performance of the solo cantata for soprano "Jauchzet Gott in Allen Landen." She currently holds the position of soprano soloist/section leader at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Seattle.

THE BROADWAY SYMPHONY
AND THE
SEATTLE CHAMBER SINGERS

George Shangrow, conductor

P R E S E N T

JEPHTHA
GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL

JEPHTHA
Paul Karaitis-Lash
Tenor

IPHIS
Gretchen Hewitt
Soprano

HAMOR
Marcia Bellamy
Mezzo Soprano

STORGE
Wendy Ellison Mullen
Mezzo Soprano

ZEBUL
Peter Kechley
Bass

AN ANGEL
Catherine Haight
Soprano

Sunday, September 28, 1986, 3:00 p.m.
Meany Theatre

PART I
SCENE 1

OVERTURE

Zebul, with his brethren, &c.

ZEBUL

It must be so — or these vile Ammonites,
(Our lordly tyrants, now these eighteen years,)
Will crush the race of Israel. —
Since Heaven vouchsafes not, with immediate
choice,
To point us out a leader, as before,
Ourselves must choose; and who so fit a man,
As Gilead's son, our brother, valiant
Jephtha? —
True, we have slighted, scorn'd, expell'd him
hence,
As of a stranger born: but well I know him;
His gen'rous soul disdains a mean revenge,
When his distressful country calls his aid.
And, perhaps, Heaven may favour our
request,
If with repentant hearts we sue for mercy.

AIR

Pour forth no more unheeded pray'rs
To Idols deaf and vain.
No more with vile unhallow'd airs
The sacred rites profane.

CHORUS

No more to Ammon's god and king,
Fierce Moloch, shall our cymbals ring,
In dismal dance around the furnace blue.
Chemosh no more
Will we adore
With timbrell'd anthems to Jehovah due.

SCENE 2

Enter Jephtha, Storgè, &c.

ZEBUL

But Jephtha comes. — Kind Heaven, assist
our plea. —
O Jephtha, with an eye of pity look
On thy repentant brethren in distress.
Forgetful of thy wrongs, redress thy sire,
Thy friends, thy country, in extreme despair.

JEPHTHA

I will: so please it Heaven; and these the
terms.
If I command in war, the like command,
(Should Heaven vouchsafe us a victorious
peace,)
Shall still be mine.

ZEBUL

Agreed; be witness, Heaven.

AIR

JEPHTHA

Virtue my soul shall still embrace,
Goodness shall make me great.
Who builds upon this steady base,
Dreads no event of fate.
Virtue my soul: *Da Capo.*

STORGÈ

'Twill be a painful separation. Jephtha,
To see thee harness'd for the bloody field.
But ah! how trivial are a wife's concerns,
When a whole nation bleeds, and groveling
lies,
Panting for liberty and life.

AIR

In gentle murmurs will I mourn,
As mourns the mate-forsaken dove:
And sighing wish thy dear return
To liberty and lasting love.
(*Exeunt.*)

SCENE 3

Enter Hamor and Iphis.

HAMOR

Happy this embassy, my charming Iphis,
Which once more gives thee to my longing
eyes.
As Cynthia, breaking from th'involving
clouds
On the benighted traveller; the sight
Of thee, my love, drives darkness and despair.
Again I live; in thy sweet smiles I live,
As in thy father's ever-watchful care
Our wretched nation feels new life, new joy.
O haste, and make my happiness complete!

AIR

Dull delay, in piercing anguish,
Bids thy faithful lover languish.
While he pants for bliss in vain.
Oh! with gentle smiles relieve me;
Let no more false hope deceive me,
Nor vain fears inflict a pain.

IPHIS

Ill suits the voice of love when glory calls,
And bids thee follow Jephtha to the field.
There act the hero, and let rival deeds
Proclaim thee worthy to be call'd his son:
And Hamor shall not want his due reward.

AIR

Take the heart you fondly gave.
Lodg'd in your breast with mine.
Thus with double ardour brave,
Sure conquest shall be thine.
Take the heart you fondly gave,
Lodg'd in your breast with mine.

HAMOR

I go: — my soul, inspir'd by thy command,
Thirsts for the battle. — I'm already crown'd
With the victorious wreath; and thou, fair
prize,
More worth than fame or conquest, thou art
mine.

DUET

IPHIS, HAMOR

These labours past, how happy we!
How glorious will they prove!
When gath'ring fruit from conquest's tree,
We deck the feast of love.
These labours: *Da Capo.*
(*Exeunt.*)

SCENE 4

Jephtha, alone.

JEPHTHA

What mean these doubtful fancies of the
brain?
Visions of joy rise in my raptur'd soul,
There play awhile, and set in darksome night.
Strange ardour fires my breast; my arms seem
strung
With tenfold vigour, and my crested helm
To reach the skies. — Be humble still, my soul.
It is the Spirit of God; in whose great name
I offer up my vow.

If, Lord, sustain'd by thy almighty pow'r,
Ammon I drive, and his insulting bands,
From these our long-uncultivated lands,
And safe return a glorious conqueror; —
What, or who ever shall first salute mine
eyes,
Shall be for ever thine, or fall a sacri-
fice.
'Tis said. —

(*Enter Israelites, &c.*)

Attend, ye Chiefs, and with united
voice,
Invoke the holy name of Israel's God.

CHORUS

O God, behold our sore distress,
Omnipotent to plague, or bless!
But turn thy wrath, and bless once more
Thy servants, who thy name adore.
(*Exeunt.*)

SCENE 5

Storgè, alone.

STORGÈ

Some dire event hangs o'er our heads,
Some woeful song we have to sing
In misery extreme. — O, never,
never
Was my foreboding mind distress before
With such incessant pangs.

AIR

Scenes of horror, scenes of woe,
Rising from the shades below,
Add new terror to the night.
While in never-ceasing pain,
That attends the servile chain,
Joyless flow the hours of light.
Scenes of horror: *Da Capo.*

SCENE 6

Enter Iphis.

IPHIS

Say, my dear mother, whence these piercing
cries,
That force me, like a frighted bird, to fly
My place of rest? —

STORGÈ

For thee I fear, my child;
Such ghastly dreams last night surpris'd my
soul.

IPHIS

Heed not these black illusions of the night,
The mocking of unquiet slumbers, heed them
not.
My father, touch'd with a diviner fire,
Already seems to triumph in success, —
Nor doubt I but Jehovah hears our pray'rs.

AIR

The smiling dawn of happy days
Presents a prospect clear,
And pleasing hope's all-bright'ning rays

Dispel each gloomy fear.
While ev'ry charm that peace displays
Makes spring-time all the year.
The smiling dawn: *Da Capo.*
(*Exeunt.*)

SCENE 7

Enter Zebul, Jephtha, &c.

ZEBUL

Such. Jephtha, was the haughty king's
reply:
No terms, — but ruin, slavery,
and death.

JEPHTHA

Sound then the last alarm; and to the field,
Ye sons of Israel, with intrepid hearts;
Dependent on the might of Israel's God.

CHORUS

When his loud voice in thunder spoke,
With conscious fear the billows broke,
Observant of his dread command.
In vain they roll their foaming tide;
Confin'd by that great pow'r,
That gave them strength to roar, —
They now contract their boist'rous
pride,
And lash with idle rage the laughing
strand.

INTERMISSION

PART II

SCENE 1

Enter Hamor, Iphis, &c.

HAMOR

Glad tidings of great joy to thee, dear Iphis,
And to the house of Israel I bring.
Thus then, in brief. — Both armies in array
Of battle rang'd, our general stept forth,
And offer'd haughty Ammon terms of peace.
Most just and righteous; these with scorn
refus'd,

He bade the trumpet sound: but scarce a
sword

Was ting'd in hostile blood, ere all around
The thund'ring heavens open'd, and pour'd
forth

Thousands of armed Cherubim: when straight
Our general cried: "This is thy signal, Lord,
I follow thee, and thy bright heav'nly host".
Then rushing on proud Ammon, all aghast,
He made a bloody slaughter, and pursued
The flying foe, till night bade sheathe the
sword,

And taste the joys of victory and peace.

CHORUS

Cherub and Seraphim, unbodied forms,
The messengers of fate,
His dread command await:
Of swifter flight, and subtler frame,
Than lightning's winged flame,
They ride on whirlwinds, directing the
storms.

AIR

HAMOR

(to Iphis)

Up the dreadful steep ascending.
While for fame and love contending,
Sought I thee, my glorious prize.
And now happy in the blessing,
Thee, my sweetest joy, possessing,
Other honours I despise.
Up the dreadful: *Da Capo.*

IPHIS

'Tis well. —

— Haste, haste, ye maidens, and in richest
robes
Adorn me, like a stately bride, to meet
My father in triumphant pomp.
And while around the dancing banners play, —

AIR

Tune the soft melodious lute,
Pleasant harp and warbling flute,
To sounds of rapt'rous joy.
Such as on our solemn days,
Singing great Jehova's praise,
The holy choir employ.
Tune the soft: *Da Capo.*
(*Exeunt.*)

SCENE 2

Enter Zebul, Jephtha, Hamor, &c.

ZEBUL

Again Heav'n smiles on his repentant people,
And Victory spreads wide her silver wings,
To soothe our sorrows with a peaceful calm.

AIR

Freedom now once more possessing,
Peace shall spread with ev'ry blessing
Triumphant joy around.
Sion now no more complaining,
Shall, in blissful plenty reigning,
Thy glorious praise resound.
Freedom now: *Da Capo.*

JEPHTHA

Zebul, thy deeds were valiant; nor less thine,
My Hamor; but the glory is the Lord's.

AIR

His mighty arm, with sudden blow,
Dispers'd and quell'd the haughty foe.
They fell before him, as when through
the sky,
He bids the sweeping wind in vengeance
fly.
His mighty arm: *Da Capo.*

CHORUS

In glory high, in might serene,
He sees, moves all, unmov'd, unseen.
His mighty arm, with sudden blow,
Dispers'd and quell'd the haughty foe.

SCENE 3

Symphony.

Enter Iphis, Storgè, &c.

IPHIS

Hail, glorious conqueror! much-lov'd father,
hail!
Behold, thy daughter, and her virgin train,
Come to salute thee with all duteous love.

AIR

Welcome, as the cheerful light,
Driving darkest shades of night:
Welcome, as the spring that rains
Peace and plenty o'er the plains!
Not cheerful day,
Nor spring so gay,
Such mighty blessings brings,
As peace on her triumphant wings.

SEMICHORUS

Welcome thou, whose deeds conspire
To provoke the warbling lyre;
Welcome thou, whom God ordain'd
Guardian angel of our land!
Thou wert born, his glorious name
And great wonders to proclaim.

JEPHTHA

Horror! confusion! harsh this music grates
Upon my tasteless ears. — Be gone, my child,
Thou hast undone thy father. Fly, be gone,
And leave me to the rack of wild despair.

(*Exit Iphis.*)

AIR

Open thy marble jaws, O tomb,
And hide me, earth, in thy dark womb!
Ere I the name of father stain,
And deepest woe from conquest gain.
Open: *Da Capo.*

ZEBUL

Why is my brother thus afflicted? say,
Why didst thou spurn thy daughter's
gratulations,
And fling her from thee with unkind disdain?

JEPHTHA

O Zebul. Hamor, and my dearest wife,
Behold a wretched man;
Thrown from the summit of presumptuous
joy,
Down to the lowest depth of misery. —
Know then, — I vow'd, the first I saw should
fall
A victim to the living God — my daughter,
Alas! it was my daughter, and she dies.

STORGÈ

First perish thou; and perish all the world!
Hath Heaven then bless'd us with this only
pledge
Of all our love, this one dear child, for thee
To be her murderer? No, cruel man.

AIR

Let other creatures die;
Or heav'n, earth, seas, and sky
In one confusion lie,
Ere in a daughter's blood,
So fair, so chaste, so good,
A father's hand's embred.

HAMOR

If such thy cruel purpose; lo! your friend
Offers himself a willing sacrifice,
To save the innocent and beauteous maid.

AIR

On me let blind mistaken zeal
Her utmost rage employ!
'Twill be a mercy there to kill,
Where life can taste no joy.

QUARTET

ZEBUL

O spare your daughter!

STORGÈ

Spare my child!

HAMOR

My love!

JEPHTHA

Recorded stands my vow in Heaven above.

STORGÈ

Recall the impious vow, ere 'tis too late.

HAMOR

And think not Heaven delights

ZEBUL

In Moloch's horrid rites.

JEPHTHA

I'll hear no more; her doom is fix'd as fate.

SCENE 4

Enter Iphis.

IPHIS

Such news flies swift; — I've heard the
mournful cause

Of all your sorrows. — Of my father's vow,
Heaven spoke its approbation by success:
Jephtha hath triumph'd. Israel is free.

For joys so vast, too little is the price
Of one poor life — but oh! accept it, Heaven,
A grateful victim, and thy blessings still
Pour on my country, friends, and dearest
father!

AIR

Happy they! this vital breath
With content I shall resign,
And not murmur or repine,
Sinking in the arms of death.
Happy they: *Da Capo*.

JEPHTHA

Deeper and deeper still, thy goodness, child,
Pierceth a father's bleeding heart, and checks
The cruel sentence on my falt'ring tongue.
Oh! let me whisper it to the raging winds,
Or howling deserts; for the ears of men
It is too shocking. — Yet — have I not vow'd?
And can I think the great Jehovah sleeps,
Like Chemosh, and such fabled deities?
Ah no; Heaven heard my thoughts, and wrote
them down —
It must be so. — 'T is this that racks my brain,
And pours into my breast a thousand pangs,
That lash me into madness. — Horrid thought!
My only daughter! — so dear a child,
Doom'd by a father! — Yes, — the vow is
past,
And Gilead hath triumph'd o'er his foes.
Therefore, to-morrow's dawn — I can no
more.

CHORUS

How dark, O Lord, are thy decrees!
All hid from mortal sight!
All our joys to sorrow turning,
And our triumphs into mourning,
As the night succeeds the day;
No certain bliss,
No solid peace,
We mortals know
On earth below.
Yet on this maxim still obey:
Whatever is, is right.

INTERMISSION

PART III

SCENE 1

Jephtha, Iphis, Priests, &c.

JEPHTHA

Hide thou thy hated beams, O sun, in
clouds
And darkness, deep as is a father's woe:
A father, offering up his only child
In vow'd return for victory and peace.

AIR

Waft her, angels, through the skies,
Far above yon azure plain —
Glorious there, like you, to rise,
There, like you, for ever reign.
Waft her: *Da Capo*.

IPHIS

Ye sacred priests, whose hands ne'er yet were
stain'd
With human blood, why are ye thus afraid
To execute my father's will? — The call
Of Heaven
With humble resignation I obey.

AIR

Farewell, ye limpid springs and floods,
Ye flow'ry meads and leafy woods;
Farewell, thou busy world, where reign
Short hours of joy, and years of pain.
Brighter scenes I seek above,
In the realms of peace and love.

CHORUS OF PRIESTS

Doubtful fear and reverent awe
Strike us, Lord, while here we bow:
Check'd by thy all-sacred law,
Yet commanded by the vow.
Hear our pray'r in this distress,

And thy determin'd will declare.
Symphony.

ANGEL

Rise, Jephtha. And ye reverend priests,
withhold
The slaught'rous hand. — No vow can
disannul
The law of God: — nor such was its intent,
When rightly scann'd: yet still shall be
fulfill'd. —
Thy daughter, Jephtha, thou must dedicate
To God, in pure and virgin-state for ever,
As not an object meet for sacrifice,
Else had she fall'n an holocaust to God. —
The Holy Spirit, that dictated
thy vow,
Bade thus explain it,
and approves thy faith.

AIR

Happy, Iphis, shalt thou live,
While to thee the virgin choir
Tune their harps of golden wire,
And their yearly tribute give.
Happy, Iphis all thy days,
(Pure, angelic, virgin-state.)
Shalt thou live: and ages late
Crown thee with immortal praise.

ARIOSO

JEPHTHA

For ever blessed be thy holy name,
Lord God of Israel!

CHORUS

Theme sublime of endless praise,
Just and righteous are thy ways;
And thy mercies still endure,
Ever faithful, ever sure.

SCENE 2

Enter Zebul, Storgè, Hamor, &c.

ZEBUL

Let me congratulate this happy turn,
My honour'd brother, judge of Israel!
Thy faith, thy courage, constancy and truth,
Nations shall sing; and in their just
applause,
All join to celebrate thy daughter's name.

AIR

Laud her, all ye virgin train,
In glad songs of choicest strain!
Ye blest angels all around,
Laud her in melodious sound:
Virtues that to you belong,
Love and truth demand the song.

STORGÈ

O let me fold thee in a mother's arms,
And with submissive joy, my child, receive
Thy designation to the life of Heaven.

AIR

Sweet as sight to the blind,
Or freedom to the slave,
Such joy in thee I find,
Safe from the grave.
Still I'm of thee possess'd,
Such is kind Heaven's decree,
That hath thy parents bless'd,
In blessing thee.

HAMOR

With transport, Iphis, I behold thy safety,
But must for ever mourn so dear a loss:
Dear! though great Jephtha were to honour me
Still with the name of son.

AIR

'Tis Heaven's all-rising pow'r
That checks the rising sigh;
Yet let me still adore,
And think an angel by.
While thus each charm and beauteous line
With more than human lustre shine.
'T is Heaven's: *Da Capo*.

IPHIS

My faithful Hamor, may that Providence
Which gently claims or forces our submission,
Direct thee to some happier choice.

QUINTETTO.

Iphis.

All that is in Hamor mine,
Freely I to heav'n resign.

Hamor.

All that is in Iphis mine,
Freely I to heav'n resign.

Iphis.

Outeous to the will supreme,
Still my Hamor I'll esteem.

Hamor.

Outeous to Almighty pow'r,
Still my Iphis I'll adore.

Storgè—Jephtha—Zebul.

Joys triumphant crown thy days,
And thy name eternal praise.

CHORUS

Ye house of Gilead, with one voice,
In blessings manifold rejoice!
Freed from war's destructive sword,
Peace her plenty round shall spread,
While in virtue's path you tread.
So are they blest who fear the Lord.
Hallelujah. Amen.

PROGRAM NOTES

by Kay Verelius

By the time George Frideric Handel had reached the respectable age of 65, he was the leader of London's musical life. His deliberate appeal to the middle class audience was achieved through the art form of oratorio — a non-staged musical drama which used virtuoso vocalists, chorus and orchestra and — so important to the London success — used English language librettos. The years 1729 to 1741 were the height of Handel's creative career. It was during these years that he wrote *Israel in Egypt*, *L'Allegro ed il Penseroso*, *Saul*, and *Messiah* (all have been presented by the BS/SCS in Seattle). These works all took bold strides to achieve drama in music and to involve the full chorus in the action of the story. The works that followed: *Semele*, *Theodora*, and today's offering, *Jephtha*, were a consolidation of the concepts Handel had developed, a synthesis of what Handel liked best about his own work. He wrote into his last oratorios more character development, and was more conscious of tonalities and text working together to stress central ideas and themes. This departure from the flashy, obvious battle scenes and heroic deeds of the above-mentioned oratorios (*Messiah* excepted) cost him public favor. In several sources is mention that *Theodora* was Handel's personal favorite oratorio among all that he wrote, but *Theodora* died miserably at the box office. It had just a single performance. *Jephtha*, the last major work Handel composed, fared little better, though it did receive a total of six performances in Handel's lifetime. Mrs. Delaney — a contemporary and fan of Handel's — has been quoted as saying she enjoyed Mr. Handel's newest achievement very much, "but it is certainly different than his others!" *Jephtha* may not be so popular as *Messiah* or *Samson* or *Judas Maccabaeus*, but it is certainly deserving of both admiration and performance.

Like most of Handel's successful oratorios, *Jephtha's* story is based on an Old Testament heroic figure. The biblical account is from the Book of Judges, chapter 11:

The warrior *Jephtha* was cast out of Gilead by his half-brothers. While he was in exile, the Ammonites made war against Israel. The elders of Gilead sought out *Jephtha* for his courage and strength, and offered to him the leadership over Israel if he would lead the fight against the Ammonites. *Jephtha* agreed, but to insure victory, he made a vow to God that, if victorious, he would sacrifice the life of the first one to meet him upon his return home. *Jephtha* and his army were victorious — but by a cruel twist of fate — it was his only child, his beloved daughter, that met him on his way home. With extreme sorrow, *Jephtha* declared he could not withdraw his vow to God. His daughter must be sacrificed. She said to her father to let the deed be done, but to first allow her two months to wander with her companions in the mountains to bewail her virginity. *Jephtha* granted her this, and after two months, she returned and was put to death.

Quite a grim story! Far too grim to be an acceptable plot for the "enlightened" society of 1751 London. Handel chose his librettist Thomas Morell, and Morell quite re-wrote the story. He gave a name to the daughter of *Jephtha* where none appeared in the bible: *Iphis* (some think this was intended to bring *Iphigenia* to mind). He added characters that were never in the bible at all: *Storgé*, *Jephtha's* wife; *Hamon*, the young love of *Iphis*; and *Zebul*, a soldier and messenger who sort of gets things rolling story-wise. And, crucial to its public acceptance, Morell changed the ending! Not only is *Iphis* spared, but seraphim intercede on her behalf. High priests declare that a life for *Iphis* lived out in celibacy is sacrifice enough.

It may have been accidental that Handel chose the story of *Jephtha* for his last work, but there is strong argument that so fatalistic a story was deliberate. He wrote *Jephtha* under the worst possible conditions. He began with his usual vigor on January 21st of 1751. Luckily for music history buffs, the manuscript score of *Jephtha* reads quite like a diary — throughout are personal notes in Handel's hand (in German, though he was totally at home in English) that describe his condition. He wrote that he was experiencing trouble in his left eye and had considerable pain in his face. He was able to get only to the close of Act II, with the great chorus "How dark, O Lord are thy decrees" when he noted that he had lost sight in his left eye. He stopped

working in mid-February, but on his 66th birthday he noted in his score that he was feeling better and was moved to finish the work. However, four days later he had to stop again — this time for four months. His left eye remained blinded, despite a curious surgical technique called "couching" performed on him (the cornea is pierced and tilted back — a supposed cure for cataracts). On April 18th of 1751 he resumed writing *Jephtha*, because his health had improved even though his vision had not. By July 15th, he had completed the chorus "Theme sublime . . ." in Act III. He probably should have ended the work here, but in order to give balance to the oratorio, and a length to which his audiences had become accustomed, he continued. With great difficulty, Handel finished *Jephtha* on August 30. The first performance was given the following February 26, 1752. Handel was forced to stop composing original works from that point on — blindness had invaded his right eye as well. He did dictate re-workings of his older works to his assistants, and he was constantly conducting his own works, and displaying his creative powers at the harpsichord and organ. Blindness certainly did not cause inactivity. By 1759, just after his 74th birthday, he opened the oratorio season by conducting 10 major oratorios in little over a month to packed houses — *Messiah* closed this impressive effort. Handel collapsed after this performance, and 10 days later he died.

Knowing the circumstances which held Handel while he wrote *Jephtha* give much more effect to the oratorio. That his own world had grown dark at the very point of composing "How dark, O Lord are Thy decrees" makes one feel how closely Handel must have been involved with the work. He opened the oratorio with the recitative announcement by *Zebul* "It must be so!" — rather like a pronouncement or motto for the whole work. Morell had used the phrase "Whatever God ordains, must be so". Handel changed this text himself to read "What ever is, is right". The real theme of *Jephtha*, as Handel presents the story, is one of humanity being at the hands of unalterable fate.



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