

ORCHESTRA SEATTLE ■ SEATTLE CHAMBER SINGERS
GEORGE SHANGROW, MUSIC DIRECTOR
2001-2002 SEASON

Israel in Egypt

Saturday, April 6, 2002 ■ 8:00 PM

Meany Hall

University of Washington

Terri Richter, *soprano*
Julie Johnson, *mezzo-soprano*
Howard Fankhauser, *tenor*
Brian Box, *baritone*
Norman Smith, *bass*

Orchestra Seattle
Seattle Chamber Singers
George Shangrow, *conductor*

GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL *Israel in Egypt*
1685-1759

Part I (*Exodus*)

INTERMISSION

Part II (*Moses' Song*)

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Use of cameras and recording equipment is not permitted in the concert hall.

PROGRAM NOTES

GEORG FRIDERIC HANDEL

Israel in Egypt

Handel was born in Halle, Germany, on February 23, 1685, and died in London on April 14, 1759. He composed Israel in Egypt between October 1 and November 1 of 1738. The oratorio was first performed in London on April 4, 1739. In addition to five vocal soloists and double choir, the work is scored for 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 bassoons, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, 2 harpsichords and strings.

By the time of his death in London in 1759, Handel, a German musician, who had been trained in Italy, had become England's "national composer." This remarkable man had come to be both a musical master and a "personality" regarded with special awe and affection throughout the musical world, and so he remains to this day, although the list of works for which he is famous is very short: the oratorio *Messiah*, a "funeral march" from another oratorio, *Saul*, a chorus from a third oratorio, *Judas Maccabaeus*, an air from the opera *Serse*, the Water Music, and the Fireworks Music.

Handel was born Georg Friederich Händel in Halle, Germany, on February 23, 1685 to Georg, a surgeon, and his second wife, Dorothea, the daughter of a Lutheran pastor. As a young musician who played harpsichord, organ, violin, and oboe, Handel traveled, studied, and composed in the very cosmopolitan Italy of the early 1700s, where he met with considerable success.

In 1710, Handel journeyed to London, where he soon prospered as a composer of opera in the Italian style. Handel was employed by the Elector of Hanover as Director of Music, but he spent so much time enjoying his musical activities in London that his employer began to notice and to question his extended stays in England. This employer, however, also happened to be the great-grandson of James I of England, and when Queen Anne died in 1714, the Elector of Hanover succeeded her as George I of England. Thus, Handel's German employer arrived in London, and the composer was able to avoid discipline for his truancy from the Hanoverian court! Handel then embarked upon a successful twenty-year career as an opera composer, producing some forty operas altogether, and became a naturalized British citizen.

By about 1730, however, the English public was beginning to tire of opera in the Italian style. Sensing that his career as a composer of Italian opera might be in jeopardy, the astute Handel soon began to produce another form of dramatic musical entertainment equally suited to his talents: the oratorio, an "opera without action," which Handel sometimes called "musical drama."

The *Harvard Dictionary of Music* defines oratorio as "a composition with a long libretto (text) of religious or contemplative character that is performed in a concert hall or church without scenery, costumes, or action, by solo voices, chorus, and orchestra." In the oratorio, as opposed to the secular opera, the libretto is less dramatic; greater emphasis is placed on the role of the chorus; there is little or none of the opera's quick dialogue; and a narrator often introduces

the characters, connects their parts, and describes the action. Handel and his audiences found that this musical form had numerous advantages over Italian opera: no expensive staging and no overpaid, egotistical, quarreling Italian star sopranos; well-known, exciting plots, taken mostly from mythology and from the Old Testament of the English Bible; texts in English, the language of the London audience; and sweeping, dramatic choruses. Thus, after about 1742, Handel found a "second career" as an oratorio composer. Indeed, he is renowned today chiefly as the master of the English oratorio, his works in this form becoming the standard by which, for decades, all other choral and religious music was evaluated.

On October 1, 1738, within four days of completing the score of the oratorio *Saul*, Handel began the composition of a large-scale, choral epic called *The Song of Moses*, which was perhaps planned originally as an anthem or a set of anthems. The text from Exodus XV celebrates the deliverance of the people of Israel from the anger of Pharaoh and the Egyptians by whom they had been enslaved. The sentiments of this text fit the contemporary political mood, as war with Spain was being urged by all sides.

As he wrote, drawing extensively for musical ideas upon works by some Italian composers (in fact, nearly half of the oratorio's numbers are "reworkings" of various composers' materials, including Handel's own), Handel saw an opportunity to reuse his own magnificent Funeral Anthem, which he had written the previous autumn upon the death of Queen Caroline. This music received a new text and, as "The Lamentations of the Israelites for the Death of Joseph," became Part I of the new oratorio, while "Moses' Song, Exodus, chapter XV," became Part III. The composer then began work on the central act (called "Exodus" today) of the oratorio, which describes the sufferings of the captive Israelites and the plagues visited by God upon their cruel Egyptian masters.

Within two weeks, on November 1, 1738, the entire oratorio, which appears to have been called *Exodus* at first, and which later became known as *Israel in Egypt*, was finished. As an oratorio, it was unusual in that it featured long sequences of choruses in four and eight parts instead of impressive orchestral effects; it was a drama of nations rather than of individuals; it had almost no solo arias; and its text was taken directly from the Bible. (*Messiah* is the only other oratorio by Handel whose text consists entirely of biblical passages.)

When *Israel in Egypt* was first presented at the King's Theatre, Haymarket, on April 4, 1739, with "several concertos for the organ," the reaction of the audience was mixed. Some listeners appreciated the "Sublimity of the great Musical Poet's Imagination," and the novelty of setting a completely scriptural text. Most people, however, seem to have been overwhelmed by the awesome, virtually unmitigated deluge of choruses, compositions whose variety, inventiveness, and pictorial power remain virtually unmatched in all of music. Some listeners were also offended by Handel's use of words from the Bible in the "profane" context of a theater "entertainment." The work was presented later in April in a version radically shortened and interspersed with songs in Italian, but it still became, in the

words of Julian Herbage, "Handel's most superbly magnificent failure;" during the twenty years he lived after writing *Israel in Egypt*, Handel heard it sung only eight times. In 1771, the oratorio was published for the first time, but only the newly composed Parts II and III (the present-day Parts I and II) were printed, and thus the work received the two-part form, unique among the oratorios, in which it was performed in the 19th century, and in which we present it this evening. In this form, *Israel in Egypt* began to be performed together with *Messiah* in the gigantic Handel Festivals held in the Sydenham Crystal Palace during the Victorian era, and it has remained a favorite with choral societies and their audiences ever since.

Part I of *Israel in Egypt*, called "Exodus," opens, not with a colossal chorus as one might expect, but with a tenor recitative announcing that a new ruler has arisen in Egypt who afflicts the Israelites with grievous burdens. From this point on, the chorus (often the double chorus) tells, with many remarkably graphic effects, the story of the ten plagues that befall the Israelites' oppressors and finally cause the Pharaoh to release the Israelites from their bondage. (The descriptive alto solo, "Their land brought forth frogs," with its almost comically leaping violin figures, is the only aria in this section of the oratorio.) In "They loathed to drink of the river," a ragged, chromatic fugue subject conveys the disgust of the Egyptians at the thought of drinking the bloody waters of the Nile. The "Hailstone chorus" pummels the listener with great chunks of choral sound hurled by one chorus and then by the other. The plague of darkness is depicted by means of a choral recitation featuring unsettlingly ambiguous harmonies, the shadowy sounds of low strings and bassoons, and fragmented choral lines that wander and stumble about helplessly in the instrumental blackness. The chorus "Egypt was glad when they departed" is an example of Handel's felicitous reworking of the music of other composers. It is borrowed almost verbatim from an archaic-sounding organ piece by a little-known German, Johann Caspar Kerll, but it fits Handel's conception of the Egyptians as dull, complacent, and apathetic; even the miraculous torments they suffer at the hands of Israel's God scarcely stir them from their torpor. The solemn procession of the Israelites through the Red Sea's wild waves is well illustrated in "He led them through the deep" (note the plunging of the vocal lines at the word "deep").

Three trombones, which reinforce the more commonly-used trumpets and drums, often provide the orchestral sound with a wonderful weight and grandeur in Part I. Other colorful instrumental touches in this section include the use of flutes to produce a radiant, pastoral mood at the words, "he led them forth like sheep," and the employment of furiously "buzzing" violins to paint the plagues of flies, lice, and locusts.

Part II, "Moses' Song," celebrates the miraculous escape of the Israelites across the Red Sea. In this section, the solo voices play a more important role, with three arias and three duets, but the chorus remains dominant. A striking orchestral introduction featuring unexpected changes of tonality is followed by the superbly Handelian double chorus, "I will sing unto the Lord," in which galloping horses can be heard in the choral rhythms. Equally powerful is the double chorus "The people shall hear," one of Handel's most exultant and dramatic. It builds successive towers of choral sound over a repeated dotted rhythm in the bass

line, and then climbs melodically above sustained bass notes as the chorus describes the weary wanderings of the Israelites through a desert of jagged dissonances on their way to the Promised Land. A particularly stunning effect is achieved at the close of the whirlwind chorus "And with the blast of thy nostrils," where "the depths congeal in the heart of the sea" into single, stark notes in the bass. The section concludes with a splendid finale, considered by some to be unsurpassed in the entire body of Handel's work, in which the opening music of the "I will sing" chorus returns to "triumph gloriously" in glittering grandeur.

If *Messiah* is generally considered the greatest of Handel's oratorios, *Israel in Egypt*, which Jonathan Keates describes as "an essay in interpreting the relationship between man and God," ranks a very close second. Though it has no dramatic plot and no individual characters, every possible choral device is employed in its endlessly expressive choral pieces, including choral recitative and arioso, fugue and double fugue, and dramatic narrative. R. A. Streatfeild writes of this work: "Handel might have said of Israel, as Wagner said of *Tristan und Isolde*, that it was an extravagance, not to be repeated or imitated, but of all his works it is the most completely out of reach of every other composer who ever lived." Indeed, *Israel in Egypt* remains one of the most incredible choral *tour de force* in music history. Revel in its tremendous, sweeping sonorities, and rejoice with the Children of Israel in their marvelous deliverance!

— Lorelette Knowles

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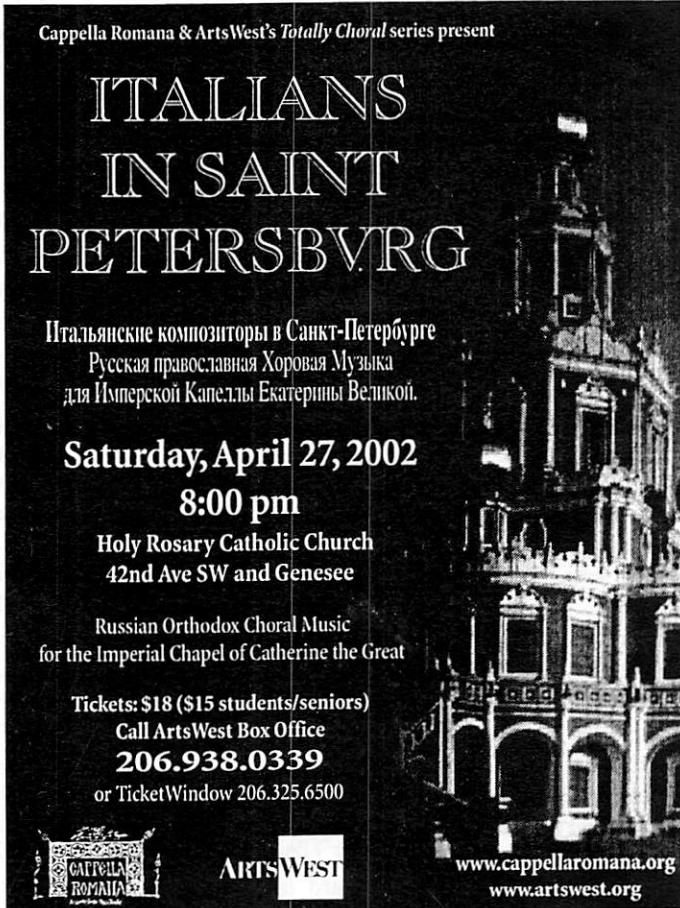
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SOLO ARTISTS

A native of Washington, baritone **Brian Box** received his Master's degree in vocal performance from Western Washington University in 1985. Mr. Box performs frequently with many Northwest ensembles, including OSSCS, Seattle Choral Company, Seattle Pro Musica, Bellevue Chamber Chorus, and Choir of the Sound. He has performed with Rudolf Nureyev, singing Mahler's *Songs of a Wayfarer* to Mr. Nureyev's dance. Mr. Box has collaborated with OSSCS in such works as Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, *St. John Passion*, and Christmas Oratorio, the world premieres of Huntley Beyer's *St. Mark Passion* and *The Mass of Life and Death*, and is featured on their recording of Handel's *Messiah*. The regional winner of San Francisco Opera's 1988 Merola Opera Program, he made his Seattle Opera debut as the Corporal in Donizetti's *Daughter of the Regiment*. For Tacoma Opera, Mr. Box created the role of Franz in the world premiere of Carol Sams' *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*. He has also performed extensively with Seattle Opera's Education Program and Northwest Operas in the Schools. Earlier this season Mr. Box joined OSSCS for performances of Brahms' *German Requiem*, Poulenc's *Le bal masqué*, Stravinsky's *Pulcinella* and Handel's *Messiah*; he returns next month for Beethoven's *Missa solemnis*.

Mezzo-soprano **Julie Johnson**, a native of Oregon, received a Bachelor of Music degree from Willamette University and a Masters in Voice from the University of Iowa; while at Iowa she served as a graduate assistant and as an instructor at Grinnell College. Her musical studies continued at the American Institute of Musical Studies in Graz, Austria, and the Summer Vocal Institute in Salt Lake City. Ms. Johnson was a state and regional winner of the Metropolitan Opera Auditions, and national finalist in the National Federation of Music Clubs Young Artist Awards and the International Mozart Competition. She has performed with the Utah Symphony and with many groups in Washington including OSSCS, the Wenatchee Symphony, Rainier Chorale, and Northwest Opera in the Schools. Her repertoire includes works of Mozart (*Mass in C Minor*, *Coronation Mass*, *Requiem*, *The Magic Flute*, *The Marriage of Figaro*), Handel (*Messiah*), Haydn (*Lord Nelson Mass*, *Mass in Time of War*), Humperdinck (*Hansel and Gretel*), Dvořák (*Stabat mater*), Verdi (*Requiem*), Vivaldi (*Gloria*), Clausen (*A New Creation*), Copland (*In the Beginning*), and Pergolesi (*Stabat mater*). Ms. Johnson was last heard with Orchestra Seattle and the Seattle Chamber Singers during the 1998-1999 season in a performance of Dvořák's *Stabat mater*.

Tenor **Howard Fankhauser** is a frequent soloist with ensembles throughout the Northwest, including OSSCS, Northwest Sinfonietta, Northwest Chamber Orchestra, Seattle Youth Symphony, Early Music Guild, Lake Chelan Bach Feste, Bremerton Symphony, Everett Symphony, Opus7, Choral Arts Northwest, Tacoma City Ballet, Everett Chorale and Cascadian Chorale. Last season Mr. Fankhauser performed at cathedrals in France, including Notre Dame in Paris and Chartres and the Spanish cathedrals of Burgos, Leon and Santiago. During the past four seasons he has been heard in a number of performances with Orchestra Seattle and Seattle Chamber Singers, including Dvořák's *Stabat mater*, Handel's *Hercules*, *Theodora*, and *Messiah*, Mozart's *Requiem*, Bach's *Mass in B minor* and Robert Kechley's *Frail Deeds*. Mr. Fankhauser's other recent performances have included the world premiere of Jackson Berkey's *L'Ultima Amor*. Earlier this season he was heard in performances of the Mozart *Requiem*, in the critically acclaimed North American premiere of

Shigeaki Saegusa's *Requiem* at St. James Cathedral and in Orff's *Carmina Burana* with the Tacoma Symphony. His solo CD, *The Cathedral Tenor*, was reviewed last November by the *Seattle Times*, who noted that "Fankhauser's beautiful, unforced sound and his superb sense of musical style make his singing a consistent pleasure." Mr. Fankhauser is Cathedral Soloist at St. James Cathedral.

Soprano **Terri Richter** came to the Northwest in 1995 from Tennessee, where she received her Master's degree from Middle Tennessee State University. Since her arrival in Seattle, she has become firmly established as an outstanding young opera and concert artist. In October of 1997, she made her debut with Seattle Opera as Barbarina in *The Marriage of Figaro*, returning last season to sing Papagena in *The Magic Flute* and Xenia in *Boris Godunov*. This season she appears in their productions of Dvořák's *Rusalka* and Verdi's *Un Ballo in Maschera*. One of twelve young singers to be chosen for Seattle Opera's first national Young Artist Program, Ms. Richter received critical acclaim and a scholarship award for her portrayal of Despina in *Così fan Tutte*. In September of 1999, the *Seattle Times* named her one of Seattle's "Rising Stars." Ms. Richter is equally at home singing concert repertoire. She has been featured at Benaroya Hall with the Northwest Chamber Orchestra in Handel's *L'allegro, il penseroso, ed il moderato* and with the Seattle Symphony in concert versions of Deems Taylor's opera *Peter Ibbetson* and Strauss' *Die Fledermaus*. She has also appeared with the Spokane Symphony, Fort Collins Symphony, Walla Walla Symphony, Bellevue Philharmonic, Pacific Northwest Ballet, Northwest Sinfonietta, and Bremerton Symphony. With OSSCS, she has performed Handel's *Brockes Passion*, Bach's Christmas Oratorio, *Mass in B minor*, *St. John Passion* and *St. Matthew Passion*, Monteverdi's 1610 *Vespers* and Stravinsky's *Pulcinella*. Ms. Richter recently released her first CD, *Someone to Watch Over Me*, recorded with the Northwest Sinfonia.

Bass **Norman Smith** is a graduate of both Washington State University and the University of Washington, and did additional graduate work at Indiana University. For six years he sang leading bass roles in the opera theaters of Krefeld and Essen, Germany, where he was noted for roles in *Lohengrin*, *Tristan und Isolde*, *Tannhäuser*, *The Magic Flute*, and *Nabucco*. In the Northwest he has appeared on stage with Seattle Opera, Northwest Opera in Schools, Etc. and with Civic Light Opera, where his Emile DeBeque was greeted with enthusiastic critical acclaim. His performances with the Northwest Chamber Orchestra's "Royal Holidays at the Court of Versailles" inspired *The Seattle Times'* Melinda Bargreen to write, "He is an 18-karat bass in a world of pale imitations...rich tonal quality enhanced by a fine sense of comic acting...one of Seattle's real natural resources." Mr. Smith has appeared with the Seattle Symphony for performances of Mozart's *Requiem*, Bach's Cantata BWV 140, Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and *Choral Fantasy* and has sung Handel's *Carmelite Vespers* with the renowned English conductor Andrew Parrott. In Canada he has performed with the Saskatoon Symphony, the choirs of Trinity Western University and the Vancouver Symphony. In addition to his duties as Cathedral Soloist at Seattle's St. James Cathedral, Mr. Smith is bass soloist at Temple Beth Am, a Reformed Jewish synagogue. In Europe he recorded Beethoven's *Mass in C* for the Kirchenmusik label. He also appears on a Sierra On-Line CD-ROM video game entitled *Gabriel Knight: The Beast Within*.

TEXT

PART I (Exodus)

Recitative

Now there arose a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph; and he set over Israel taskmasters to afflict them with burthens, and they made them serve with rigour.

Chorus

And the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and their cry came up unto God. They oppressed them with burthens, and made them serve with rigour; and their cry came up unto God.

Recitative

Then sent He Moses, His servant, and Aaron whom He had chosen; these shewed His signs among them, and wonders in the land of Ham. He turned their waters into blood.

Chorus

They loathed to drink of the river. He turned their waters into blood.

Air

Their land brought forth frogs, yea even in their king's chambers. He gave their cattle over to the pestilence; blotches and blains broke forth on man and beast.

Chorus

He spake the word, and there came all manner of flies and lice in all their quarters. He spake; and the locusts came without number, and devoured the fruits of the ground.

Chorus

He gave them hailstones for rain; fire mingled with the hail ran along upon the ground.

Chorus

He sent a thick darkness over the land, even darkness which might be felt.

Chorus

He smote all the first-born of Egypt, the chief of all their strength.

Chorus

But as for His people, He led them forth like sheep; He brought them out with silver and gold; there was not one feeble person among their tribes.

Chorus

Egypt was glad when they departed, for the fear of them fell upon them.

Chorus

He rebuked the Red Sea, and it was dried up.

He led them through the deep as through a wilderness.

But the waters overwhelmed their enemies, there was not one of them left.

Chorus

And Israel saw that great work that the Lord did upon the Egyptians; and the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord and His servant Moses.

PART II (Moses' Song)

Chorus

Moses and the children of Israel sung this song unto the Lord, and spake, saying: I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea.

Duet

The Lord is my strength and my song;
He is become my salvation.

Chorus

He is my God, and I will prepare Him an habitation;
my father's God, and I will exalt Him.

Chorus

The depths have covered them:
they sank into the bottom as a stone.

Chorus

Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power;
Thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy.

Chorus

And is the greatness of Thine excellency
Thou hast overthrown them that rose up against Thee.

Chorus

Thou sentest forth Thy wrath,
which consumed them as stubble.

Chorus

And with the blast of Thy nostrils
the waters were gathered together,
the floods stood upright as an heap,
and the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea.

Air

The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake,
I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them;
I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them.

Air

Thou didst blow with the wind, the sea covered them;
they sank as lead in the mighty waters.

Chorus

Who is like unto Thee, O Lord, among the gods?
Who is like Thee, glorious in holiness,
fearful in praises, doing wonders?
Thou stretchedst out Thy right hand,
the earth swallowed them.

Duet

Thou in Thy mercy hast led forth Thy people
which Thou hast redeemed;
Thou hast guided them in Thy strength
unto Thy holy habitation.

Chorus

The people shall hear, and be afraid:
sorrow shall take hold on them:
all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away:
by the greatness of Thy arm they shall be as still as a stone;
till Thy people pass over, O Lord,
which Thou hast purchased.

Air

Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain
of Thine inheritance, in the place, O Lord, which Thou hast
made for Thee to dwell in, in the Sanctuary, O Lord,
which Thy hands have established.

Chorus

The Lord shall reign for ever and ever.

Please turn page quietly...

Recitative

For the horse of Pharaoh went in with his chariots and with his horsemen into the sea, and the Lord brought again the waters of the sea upon them; but the children of Israel went on dry land in the midst of the sea.

Chorus

The Lord shall reign for ever and ever.

Recitative

And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam answered them:

Solo and Chorus

Sing ye to the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea.

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